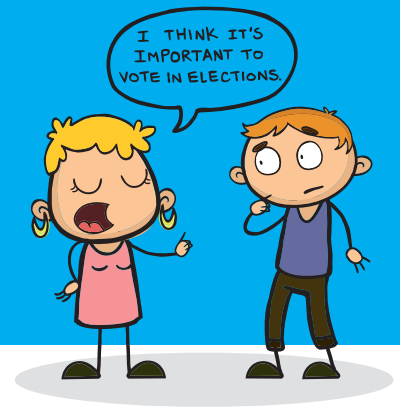




Parliament and Elections: Part 2

Every vote makes a difference



Introduction

This unit is the second in a two-part series that examines our parliamentary system and the importance of voting. Part 1, which considered elections and their importance to government in Australia, was included in the last issue of *Teachers' Toolkit* (if you missed it, the unit may be downloaded free of charge from the Teachers' Toolkit website). In Part 2 we take a closer look at the federal parliamentary system and the forthcoming federal election. The election is likely to be held before the end of the year, but it can take place up until 19 January 2008.

The Australian Constitution provides for two houses in the national Parliament: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each house is directly elected by the people. Voting is compulsory for Australian citizens 18 years of age and over. However there are exceptions—for example, those in custodial sentences are not allowed to vote.

For Australia to continue to enjoy a fair and democratic system of government, a fair and well-run election must be conducted. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) operates to ensure that federal elections are fair and follow the correct procedures.

Curriculum focus

HSIE: Living in Communities, Roles, Rights and Responsibilities

English: Reading, Writing, Researching, Reporting, Presenting

Visual Arts: Design

Mathematics: Mapping

Science and Technology: Using technology, Design and make

PDHPE: Decision making

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- investigate different roles within the federal government
- describe the electoral processes used in Australia
- explain how laws are developed and passed
- explain the major structures, roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes of the federal government
- investigate rights, responsibilities and decision-making processes in the school community
- demonstrate an understanding of representation and democratic processes by participating in class and school decision-making.

Website resources

www.aec.gov.au

(Australian Electoral Commission)

www.peo.gov.au

(Parliamentary Education Office)

www.eca.gov.au/systems/index.htm

(Electoral Council of Australia)

www.ifes.org

(IFES, an international organisation that works to give people a voice in the way that they are governed)

Discussion Questions

1. What is an electorate? Find out the name of your federal electorate (the electorate in which your home is located).
***Democracy Rules pg 16 and BLM 2 pg 27**
2. What are the names of the candidates for your electorate? (Hint: you may need to consult the local newspaper or use the internet to find out the names of all of the candidates. Try the website resources listed above.) Have you seen any advertising on behalf of these candidates? Try to find out what each candidate says in support of their bid for election.
***Democracy Rules pg 67 and BLM 7 pg 79**
3. What issues are important to you or your family in the forthcoming federal election? What do the major political parties have to say about these issues? Do you agree with them?
***Democracy Rules pg 68 and BLM 8 pg 80**
4. How can people from a non-English speaking background gain information about how to vote in the federal election? (Have another look at the AEC website to answer this question.)
5. At what time do federal polling places open on election day? At what time do the polling places close?
***Democracy Rules CD-ROM Election Day**
6. What is a postal vote? What is an absentee vote?
7. In Australia, voting is conducted by 'secret ballot'. What does this mean? How do polling places ensure that an elector's vote is kept secret?
***Democracy Rules BLM 5, 6, 7 from pg 30**
8. What are the main functions of the AEC? Consult the AEC website to make a list of its most important functions.
***Democracy Rules pg 1 Introduction**
9. How does the federal Parliament make laws? Can a law be changed by the Parliament?
10. How are rules made in your classroom? Compare this to the process by which Parliament makes laws.
***Democracy Rules pg 11**

* Throughout this unit reference is made to
Democracy Rules
– An electoral education resource.

Classroom Activities

Different systems of election

Read to students the following explanation of different voting systems (for further information consult www.peo.gov.au/teachers/):

First-past-the-post: the candidate who gets the largest number of votes wins, even if the candidate has received less than half the votes cast.

Preferential voting: voters indicate an order of preference for candidates. This is the system used to choose members of the House of Representatives.

Proportional voting: members are chosen based on the total vote for the member's party as a proportion of all the votes cast. This is the system used to choose members of the Senate.

After discussing these processes, ask the students to write down the advantages and disadvantages of each system and some interesting facts about each system. For example, students should discuss the prevalence of each system in democratic systems around the world. Ask each student to decide which voting system they prefer and why.

* *Democracy Rules CD-ROM Counting Your Vote*

Jobs on the day

Investigate what each of the following groups of people do on election day. Allow the students to use books, brochures and the Internet to find out about:

- polling officials
- scrutineers
- party workers
- candidates

Have the students write or type a brief job description for each role. Which role might the student prefer, and why?

* *Democracy Rules Page 107 Running an election in your school, CD-ROM Election Day*

Voting on time

Investigate why it is so important to adhere to strict opening and closing times for polling places. What are some of the reasons why a voter might not be able to attend a polling place on election day? What are some of the names given to votes made outside normal polling times? What happens if a voter does not vote? Hold a classroom debate on the topic of whether voting should be compulsory.

* *Democracy Rules Page 107 Running an election in your school*

Counting the votes

Explain to students how votes are counted after an election. Encourage students to use the Internet to find out how much of the vote can be counted immediately and why it sometimes takes days or weeks for all votes to be counted. Tell students that on election night, results are not announced for at least two hours after the polling booths close in the eastern states. Ask students why this might be.

* *Democracy Rules CD-ROM Counting Your Vote*



Democracy Rules the School

Looking for ideas to stimulate your students' interest in the election process? Look no further than *Democracy Rules*, a new electoral education resource developed by the Australian Electoral Commission and recently delivered to all primary and secondary schools.

Democracy Rules uses investigations that stimulate students by connecting with broader themes such as participation, representation and developing democracies.

Democracy Rules comprises a print-based resource for teachers and a fun, interactive CDROM for students. The resource is aligned with the *National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship*.

With the federal election likely to occur in the second half of 2007, there is no better time to introduce *Democracy Rules* into your classroom.

If you can't locate the resource in your school, email education@aec.gov.au. Also, for lots more, check out our website www.aec.gov.au



Students can meet the 'Professor' and many other lively characters in the *Democracy Rules* interactive CDROM