

Lesson 4

Sharing the power

Which criteria define the system of representation?

Learning objectives	The students become acquainted with the concepts of re-election and deselection. They reflect on criteria for defining the system of representation.
Student tasks	The students discuss and define criteria which allow them to control the work of the head of the class.
Resources	Flipchart, pencils.
Methods	Plenary discussion.

Lesson description

The students bring their parents' answers about elections to the class. They sit in groups of four and exchange the answers their parents gave to the questions.

Next, the teacher reads the students a story about the head of a small town.

There once was a small town called Boretown where the people were rather unhappy. There were several reasons for this. Boretown was not very interesting and there was nothing to do, apart from going to the local park. There were no interesting shops there, no concerts and no places in which to hold any sports activities. There were not even any playgrounds for the children in the kindergarten and the school. The people of Boretown just walked to the park, sat down and looked at the pond. The children came home from school, did their homework and went to the park as well, then sat down or ran around the pond. In the evenings, the people in Boretown had no stories to tell, no experiences to relate and no memories to share. One day was just like another for the people of Boretown.

Why was it like that? Was Boretown too poor to build new facilities? Were the people in Boretown too lazy to do anything? No, definitely not. There was just nobody in charge of organising things, nobody who wanted to take responsibility for Boretown and somehow start changing things. Unlike a lot of other small towns, Boretown did not have a head of town – a mayor.

Because the situation in Boretown had become unbearable, one Sunday a group of people in the park decided to hold elections and to elect someone to be in charge of Boretown – they decided to elect a mayor. Something had to change! And quickly!

There weren't very many people who wanted to do this job. Only two candidates stood for election. One was the local teacher, Mr Knowles, who had wanted to change things in the school and outside of it for years. He had some ideas on how to do this, but when people asked him what he would change in Boretown he said that he didn't know at the moment and that he would first have to ask the people what they thought would be needed. A lot of people were disappointed. They had thought that Mr Knowles would come up with ideas for a big shopping centre with a cinema and a food hall. They had thought that they would finally get their huge adventure swimming pool. They had thought that Mr Knowles would promise to build a concert hall. What a disappointment this was for the people of Boretown!

When the second candidate, Mr Slimington, stepped onto the stage, the people of Boretown did not expect much. "This is a waste of time; nothing will change in Boretown in any case", said one of the old men. "I guess you are right", whispered an old woman next to him. Mr Slimington, a handsome young man, started his speech. He spoke and he spoke. He spoke of Boretown as his hometown, he mentioned the school he went to and he mentioned the park he grew up in. He mentioned how things had to change in Boretown. He talked about the playgrounds that were needed for the children, he

talked about the new swimming pool that everyone wanted, he mentioned the long-awaited concert hall and he even mentioned a roller skating park for the teenagers. As Mr Slimington's speech went on, the faces of the Boretown people lit up in delight. Suddenly everybody was smiling. "Well, maybe we were wrong", whispered the old woman again. "Yes, maybe", answered the old man, already long-ing for a swim in the new pool.

"How we will pay for this?", Mr Slimington asked the audience. "No problem! I suggest we all put our savings together and I'll get the things built one after the other. That way we'll all get something." This sounded very fair to the people of Boretown. When the elections took place on the following Sunday, only two people out of the whole of Boretown didn't vote for Mr Slimington. He was the clear winner. The only two people who voted for Mr Knowles were Mr Knowles himself and his mother. But now things would change in Boretown. Everybody knew it. There was finally somebody who had clear ideas on what to do and even an idea how to pay for it all. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that everyone in Boretown would give Mr Slimington all the money they had saved over the years – and he happily took the money that people gave him.

For a long time after the elections, the people of Boretown remained cheerful, as they knew that they would soon have all the things they wanted. Month after month went by, but still no building sites could be seen in Boretown; no diggers were seen starting construction work and no workers were seen working on the new buildings.

One afternoon, a machine rolled into Boretown carrying a big, funny-shaped blue thing on top. "Our swimming pool has arrived", shouted one of the young boys in the school playground as it rolled by. "Cool", shouted everybody else. What they discovered only days later was that the swimming pool had been delivered to Mr Slimington's house and had been built in his garden. People were starting to wonder. Some started to doubt his promises, but some still believed that their own pool would soon arrive and so remained patient.

Only a week later, a group of old men saw a huge, expensive car driving by, gold and shiny in the sunlight. "Ha!ha!, I didn't know we were going to have a visit from the Queen", joked one of the old men. The others joined in the laughter, until they saw who sat behind the wheel: Mr Slimington. Instead of using the money for new playgrounds, he had bought himself a new car. People in Boretown became very upset.

There was another incident the week after, when Mr Letterman, the Boretown postman came back from his daily rounds and told his friends what had happened to him that day. "Imagine, when I was driving past Mr Slimington's villa, I heard a funny noise, something like the sound an elephant makes. So I decided to stop and take a closer look." "And, what did you see?", asked his friends curiously. "That's the unbelievable thing: when I peeped through the metal fence I saw that it was a huge elephant that was making the noise." "Really?", his friends asked in disbelief. "Yes, really, until I discovered that it was only a film. But I've never seen such a huge cinema screen before! I'm telling you that Mr Slimington has built himself the biggest open air cinema in the world." Nobody could believe this. What had happened to their concert hall? People in Boretown became even more upset. But what could they do? After all, they had voted for him.

"It's none of MY business", said Mr Knowles, the teacher, when the group of people who had decided to hold the elections in the first place came to ask him for advice. "You voted for him and now he's the Mayor of Boretown", Mr Knowles remarked. "But this is unfair", the people said. "He's even used up the rest of the money that was meant for the roller skating park to build himself his favourite fast-food restaurant in his garden. Now he can eat as many hamburgers and doughnuts as he wants to all day long. And we still all sit in the park and get bored, and our children still sit in the park and get bored." "I know", said Mr Knowles and closed his eyes and rubbed his chin with his hand. "I know, and we have to do something ... "

In their groups, the students then discuss how the story could continue, focusing on three questions:

- What could the people of Boretown have done beforehand?
- What could they do now? After all, they had voted for Mr Slimington in the first place.

- How could something like this be prevented in the future?

They write down their answers on a piece of flipchart paper and present them to the class in the plenary discussion.

Once all the groups have presented their ideas, the teacher shifts the discussion to the situation in their class and asks the following questions:

- How can we make sure that the class head does what we agreed on?
- What mechanisms can we think of that would make sure of this?
- Who could do this?
- What will happen if we find out something is wrong?
- Who can decide on a change of class head?

The students discuss this in the plenary session and come up with suggestions. They vote on their suggestions and decide on a joint solution. The agreement is written down and signed by everyone, including the head of class and his or her deputy.