

UNIT 9 Government and politics

How should society be governed?



9.1. Who is in charge?

What is the best way to govern a country?

9.2. If you were the president

What is government for?

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What should a country expect of its citizens?

9.4. Student parliament

How should schools be governed?

UNIT 9: Government and politics

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Politics is the process by which a society of people with different opinions and interests reaches collective decisions about the way their life together should be organised. It involves persuasion and negotiation, and some kind of mechanism for reaching a final decision, such as voting. It involves power and authority, and an element of coercion – if only to ensure that collective decisions are made binding on the group as a whole.

Politics is defined, therefore, in terms of the institutions of a state and the relation between a state and its citizens. This relation takes different forms under different types of political system, for example monarchies, democracies and totalitarian regimes.

In a democracy, citizens enjoy political equality. Collective decisions are made in terms of some form of majority voting, either by the citizens themselves or by their elected representatives. But democratic politics is not just about voting. It is also about discussion and debate, and opportunities for citizens to make their voices heard on issues of public importance.

An important question in a democracy is the proper function of the institutions of state and the corresponding duties of citizens. Another is the extent to which individual institutions within a democracy should be governed democratically (schools, for example).

Learning for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights

Through this series of lessons students will:

- develop an understanding of different forms of government and their implications for citizens;
- have a greater understanding of the responsibilities and functions of government, and the corresponding duties of citizens;
- become more familiar with democratic processes;
- find out more about the political system in their country.

The reader will notice that in the following lesson plans a piece of homework is suggested that will support the students' learning and understanding. Ideally, the following lessons should then begin with an input by the students. This takes time and often gives rise to questions in class, showing the need for repetition or explanation, or spontaneous discussions may be triggered off. It is for the teacher to decide whether the time budget allows an additional lesson to be added to the unit to account for the students' learning needs and interests. Obviously, there are limits to extending a unit, so alternatives are necessary. If the time budget is limited, the teacher could collect some or all written pieces of work and give feedback or, in some cases, also mark the students' work. The students may also hand in their work voluntarily. Finally, homework may serve as repetition or follow-up to prepare for a test. As a matter of principle, the teacher should always consider the function of the students' homework and decide whether to integrate it in his/her future lesson planning and if so, how.

An example of this kind of planning is discussed in the description of the fourth lesson.

UNIT 9: Government and politics

How should society be governed?

Lesson title	Objectives	Student tasks	Resources	Method
Lesson 1: Who is in charge?	The students learn about different forms of government, e.g. democracy and dictatorship.	The students reflect upon the fairness of the system of government in place in an imaginary society.	Copies of student handout 9.1 for each student, paper and pens.	Story, pair work, whole class discussion, formal debate.
Lesson 2: If you were the president	The students can explain the functions and responsibilities of government.	The students imagine that they form a government and have to decide how government money should be spent. They consider the sort of social ideals they would like to achieve.	A large piece of paper, marker pens and prompt sheet for each group of 4-6 students.	Posters, presentations, small group work and whole class discussion.
Lesson 3: Me and my role	The students learn about the duties of citizens in a democratic society.	The students consider the kinds of responsibilities that citizens have and how they can be encouraged to take their responsibilities more seriously.	Set of discussion cards (student handout 9.2), large piece of paper and marker pens for each group of 4-6 students.	Presentations, small group work and whole class discussion.
Lesson 4: Student parliament	The students can define criteria relating to how school should be governed and the role of the student body in this process.	The students consider how their ideal student parliament would work.	A questionnaire for each student (student handout 9.3) and a large piece of paper and marker pens for each group of 4-6 students.	Presentations, individual, small group and whole class discussion.

Lesson 1

Who is in charge?

What is the best way to govern a country?

Learning objective	The students learn about different forms of government, e.g. democracy and dictatorship.
Student tasks	The students reflect upon the fairness of the system of government in place in an imaginary society.
Resources	Copies of student handout 9.1 for each student, paper and pens.
Method	Story, pair work, whole class discussion, formal debate.

Conceptual learning

Forms of government can be classified in different ways, for example, in terms of who holds power, how power is conferred on people, where sovereignty lies and how rule is enforced. In practice, the principal types are: democracy, monarchy, theocracy and tyranny or dictatorship. These should be thought of as “ideal types”, because in reality they can co-exist in the same country – for example, a parliamentary democracy may contain within it elements of dictatorship or may co-exist with a ruling royal family.

The lesson

The teacher begins the lesson by reading the story, “The Kingdom of Sikkal” (student handout 9.1). The students should each have their own copy of the story, so they can follow it whilst the teacher is reading.

The teacher should stop reading part way through the story and ask:

- What do you think of life in Sikkal from what you have heard so far?

At the end of the story, the teacher should ask:

- What do you think of life in Sikkal now?

The teacher divides the students into pairs and asks them to reflect upon the quality of life in Sikkal. Students are given a piece of paper on which they should write down what they think are the advantages and disadvantages of living in Sikkal.

The teacher asks the pairs to present their ideas to the class as a whole and writes up the main points for all to see.

Then the teacher asks the class as a whole to reflect on the way that Sikkal is governed:

- Do you think Sikkal is run in a fair way? Why or why not?
- If you think it could be run in a fairer way, what sort of things would you need to change for it to be fairer?

Next the teacher asks the class to imagine that they are inhabitants of Sikkal. The class is divided into two large groups for a debate: one group is asked to argue in favour of the country continuing to be run by the king; the other group is asked to argue that every inhabitant – not just the king – should have a say in the running of the country. The teacher gives the groups a few minutes to think of and write down arguments they can use in the debate. The two different groups are seated facing each other on opposite sides of the classroom and the debate begins. Students from each side take it in turns to express their views – perhaps aided by a “talking stick”, that is, a stick used as a microphone.

The teacher asks the students to give their opinions on which of the two sides had the best arguments.

The students are now ready for a brief explanation (inductive approach). The teacher writes down the names of five types of government and explains how they are different, referring to the students’ inputs where possible:

- monarchy;
- democracy;
- dictatorship;
- theocracy;
- anarchy.

The lesson ends by asking the students about the system of government in their country. For homework, the students are asked to find out more about this and to formulate a quiz – of 5-10 questions – to test the knowledge of the rest of the class in the next lesson.

Lesson 2

If you were the president

What is government for?

Learning objective	The students can explain the functions and responsibilities of government.
Student tasks	The students imagine that they form a government and have to decide how government money should be spent. They consider the sort of social ideals they would like to achieve.
Resources	A large piece of paper, marker pens and a prompt sheet for each group of 4-6 students.
Method	Posters, presentations, small group work and whole class discussion.

Conceptual learning

The duty of the government in a democratic society is to promote the common good. This is more than the good of the majority. It is what is of ultimate benefit to all members of the society. What this means in practice is often the subject of debate. A number of different – sometimes conflicting – social ideals have been suggested, such as welfare, security, justice, social harmony, human rights or prosperity. Prioritising these in actual spending plans can be difficult, especially as the resources available to a government are always limited.

The lesson

The teacher begins the lesson by dividing students into groups of 4-6 and giving each group a large piece of paper and marker pens.

The teacher asks the groups to imagine that they are living at some point in the future and find they have been put in charge of running the country – in other words, they are the government. As the government, they have \$6 billion to spend. The teacher may adapt this figure to the annual budget of the government of the country.

The task for the groups is to decide how they will spend this money over the coming year. Using the paper and marker pens, each group creates a poster explaining how, as the government, it will spend its money and then gives a presentation setting out its ideas to the rest of the class. At the end of each presentation, the other students are given an opportunity to question the group about its spending plans.

The teacher also questions the groups as a way of introducing new information about the economy and the way that governments function, for example:

- Have you thought about using some of the money to pay off foreign debt?
- Should you use some of that money to create jobs?
- How important is it for a government to spend money on education?

Then the teacher works with the class as a whole to draw up a list, visible to everyone, of all the things they think a government should spend money on.

Next, the teacher asks the students to return to their groups and gives each group a prompt sheet containing a list of the kind of social ideals that a government of a democratic society might be trying to achieve, for example:

- welfare;
- security;
- justice;
- social harmony;
- human rights;
- prosperity.

The groups have to try to match the ideals on the list to the areas of spending they have already outlined by considering which of the ideals are achieved by each of their spending headings.

The teacher asks the groups to present their ideas to the class as a whole and finishes the lesson by asking all the students in turn:

- What do you think is the most important responsibility a government is meant to carry out?

For homework, the teacher asks the students to find out some of the ways in which government money in their country is spent. They might do this by watching TV or looking at a newspaper. The students present what they have found out at the beginning of the next lesson and consider whether their own priorities would be the same.

Lesson 3
Me and my role
What should a country expect of its citizens?

Learning objective	The students learn about the duties of citizens in a democratic society.
Student tasks	The students consider the kinds of responsibilities that citizens have and how they can be encouraged to take their responsibilities more seriously.
Resources	Set of discussion cards (student handout 9.2), large piece of paper and marker pens for each group of 4-6 students.
Method	Presentations, small group work and whole class discussion.

Information box

Citizens in a democratic society should expect to be granted certain rights such as civil rights, political rights, social rights, cultural rights and environmental rights. What these rights should be is a matter of debate. So is the question of the responsibilities that go with these rights. Some people think that citizens should just have one responsibility – to obey the law. Others think that society requires citizens to have a much wider range of responsibilities.

The lesson

The teacher begins the lesson by dividing the students into groups of 4-6 and giving each group a set of discussion cards (student handout 9.2). Each of the cards contains a suggested citizen's duty.

The teacher asks the groups to sort out the cards into three categories – depending on whether they think the suggested duty on the card should apply to:

1. ALL citizens;
2. SOME citizens; or
3. NO citizens.

The teacher asks the students to present their decisions to the class as a whole and to explain the thinking behind them.

The students return to their groups and are given large pieces of paper and marker pens. The teacher tells the groups that their task is to draw up a “citizens’ charter”. They should divide up their large piece of paper into two columns. In the first column they should write what they think every citizen in their country should be able to expect from their country (under the heading “RIGHTS”), and in the second, what citizens should be expected to do in return for this (under the heading “RESPONSIBILITIES”).

When they have finished, the groups should present their ideas to the rest of the class, and give the other students an opportunity to question them about their work.

Finally, the teacher should ask the class as a whole:

- Do you think the citizens in your country always carry out their responsibilities as citizens as they should? Why or why not?
- What sorts of things do you think could be done to encourage people to take their responsibilities as citizens more seriously?
- Do you think that citizens should have some of their rights taken away if they do not carry out their responsibilities as citizens properly? Why or why not?

For homework, students should conduct a survey of family and friends, asking them what they think the responsibilities of a citizen should be. They should present their findings to their class at the beginning of the next lesson.

Lesson 4

Student parliament

How should schools be governed?

Learning objective	The students can define criteria relating to how school should be governed and the role of the student body in this process.
Student tasks	The students consider how their ideal student parliament would work.
Resources	A questionnaire for each student (student handout 9.3) and a large piece of paper and marker pens for each group of 4-6 students.
Method	Presentations, individual and small group work and whole class discussion.

Information box

Young people are citizens too. They have a right to have a say in things that affect them and their communities. This includes their school. Mechanisms that allow students to have a say in the running of their school not only help to ensure that young people enjoy this right, they also help them to learn about democratic processes. What these mechanisms might be is a matter for debate, however. Some people think that it is important for every school to have its own separate student parliament, others say that this is not necessary and that there are other ways of creating opportunities for students to contribute to the running of their school.

The lesson should begin with the students' inputs that they have prepared as homework. Depending on the richness of their material and the need for discussion, the time budget may need to be extended by a further lesson. As there are limits to this option, the teacher may also collect the students' work and give them written feedback. The teacher should make sure, however, that the students' work is given attention.

The lesson

The students begin the lesson by presenting the results of their surveys showing what their families and friends think about the responsibilities of a citizen. The students discuss their results.

The teacher introduces the new topic by referring to the students' material, as appropriate, and by asking students how well they think their school council or student parliament is working. If there is no form of student representation in the school at present, the teacher should ask the students if they know of any schools that have this and, if so, what form it takes.

The teacher tells the students that their task is to imagine the ideal student parliament – that is, a group of democratically elected students representing the interests of the student body in their school as a whole.

The teacher then gives out a questionnaire (student handout 9.3) which students fill in by themselves.

The teacher then divides up the students into groups of 4-6. The students in the groups have some time to compare their answers to the questionnaire and to ask each other further questions. Next, the teacher gives each group a large piece of paper and some marker pens. The task for the groups is to draw up a constitution for their ideal student parliament. The teacher should explain what a constitution is, and give some examples of the kinds of rules they might expect to find in the constitution of a student parliament.

When the groups have finished, they present their work to the rest of the class and consider the issues raised, for example:

- How much power should students have and how much should the school principal and the teachers have?
- Who should have the last word in decisions that affect the running of a school?
- Can a school be a democracy?

Finally, the students should make a class presentation to the school principal and, if they wish, make some concrete proposals for their own school parliament.

For homework, students should carry out a survey of family and friends, asking them:

- Do you think every school in the country should have a student parliament?
Why (or why not)?

The students should present the results of their survey at the beginning of the next lesson.

Student handout 9.1

The Kingdom of Sikkal

Sikkal is a country situated high in the mountains. For centuries it has had little contact with the rest of the world.

Although Sikkal is only a tiny kingdom, it has attracted a lot of interest lately. This is mainly because of the unusual way in which society is organised there.

To begin with, no one in Sikkal ever goes hungry. The Sikkalese people produce all their own food and it is shared out to whoever needs it. A house is provided rent-free for every family. The size of the house depends on the number of people in the family. Fuel for heating and cooking is provided free of charge, as is a regular repair service. Should anyone ever fall sick, a doctor is always at hand. Everyone is given a free medical check-up every six months and care-workers make regular visits to old people, families with young children and anyone else who needs extra attention.

In Sikkal the good things in life are available to all. Each family is given a book of vouchers which they exchange each year for different luxury items, such as scent, furniture or spices. The vouchers can be traded in right away or saved up over a period of time for something special.

How have the people of Sikkal been able to organise all these things? As far back as anyone can remember, Sikkal has been ruled by a royal family. The present ruler is King Sik III. He decides on the number of workers needed for each kind of work, such as growing food, building houses or medical care. The people who do these jobs are selected at five years of age and sent to special schools for training. Farmers are sent to agricultural school, house-builders to technical school, health-workers to medical school, and so on. Everyone else of working age is employed by King Sik in one of his royal palaces.

The most amazing thing about Sikkal is that there is no such thing as money. No one needs to be paid because everyone already has everything they need!

You may be asking yourself whether anyone in Sikkal ever complains about these arrangements. In fact, this very rarely happens. The few people that do complain are looked after in secure mental hospitals. After all, you would have to be mad to complain about life in a society like this, wouldn't you?

Student handout 9.2**Discussion cards**

Pay taxes	Be a member of a political party
Fight to defend your country	Vote in elections
Report crime to the police	Support your family
Obey the law	Help your neighbours
Speak up for your country when it is criticised	Something else... ?

In your ideal student parliament:

1. How many student representatives would there be?
2. How exactly would the representatives be chosen?
3. How often would the student parliament meet?
4. Where would the student parliament meet?
5. How, if at all, would teachers or parents be involved?
6. What issues would the student parliament be allowed to discuss, and what issues would it not be allowed to discuss?
7. What kind of decisions would the student parliament be allowed to make, and what decisions would it not be allowed to make?