

Houses of the Oireachtas

Class activities – the Houses of the Oireachtas

The Oireachtas in our community

Ask students to find out the answers to the following questions:

What Dáil constituency do we live in?

What areas does our Dáil constituency include?

How many seats does our constituency now have?

How many will it have at the next general election?

Who are our local TDs?

What political parties do our local belong to?

What are the backgrounds of our local TDs?

What roles/functions do our local TDs have in Dáil Éireann?

The Oireachtas in our country

Ask students to find out the answers to the following questions:

Which political parties are represented in the Dáil and Seanad?

How many TDs and Senators does each party have?

How many Independent TDs were elected in the last general election?

Who is the leader of each political party and what is their background?

Class activities - CSPE videos

What is democracy?

Inform the class that there is a decision to make. The issue to be decided is:

That Saturday will be a normal school day from now on and pupils will be expected to be at school at 9 a.m. next Saturday.

Who should make this decision?

Should it be just one person or should everyone affected by the decision have a say?

What does the class think and why?

If everyone has a say then that is an example of democracy in action.

If only one person or a small group of people decide, that isn't democracy. The term for that type of decision-making is dictatorship.

If the class decides that they should have a democratic say in the decision to open the school on Saturday ask them to vote on the issue by a show of hands. At this stage students should have decided that democracy is a good idea compared to the alternatives.

How democracy works in Ireland and the Constitution

Identify the specific Article of the Constitution that you would have to read to find out about:

- (a) Your right to an education
- (b) What work should be done by the President
- (c) The system of voting in Ireland for elections to Dáil Éireann
- (d) How the Constitution can be changed
- (e) Who appoints judges to the courts

Your vote

Divide students up into groups to create the following:

- 1) A Tweet (up to 140 characters, including spaces, commas and full stops) encouraging people to vote
- 2) A Facebook page encouraging people to vote
- 3) A poster encouraging people to vote
- 5) A script (up to 100 words) for a radio advertisement encouraging people to vote.

Divide students into groups to research the following struggles:

- a) Saudi Arabia
- b) Burma
- c) South Africa
- d) The Suffragettes in Britain and Ireland

Who can vote and types of elections

Hold a vote on the following motion:

The age at which a person can apply for a Learner Driver Permit is to be raised from 17 to 21 years of age.

Aim: The aim of this activity is for students to realise just how important it is for them to use their vote at the time of an election or referendum. This activity demonstrates what can happen if a large number of young people do not vote. It shows the difference in the result if everybody was to cast their vote.

Instructions: Download and print the Learner Driver Permit Vote Cards and cut them into individual role cards. Distribute these role cards making sure that there are enough Yes votes to pass the motion on the first ballot. This activity is based on a class of 30 students, but can be adapted for any number of students as long as the motion gets passed initially.

Ask the students to vote for/against the motion according to their voting role card and then count the votes. The motion is passed. Ask the students to declare their identity and if and why they voted or not. Once this has been

done ask the students to vote again, as themselves, based on their own opinions and see what happens. The chances are that the motion will be rejected if everybody votes.

Reflections: Discuss with the students their thoughts and opinions of both ballots and what they have learned about voting.

Follow up: When everyone has a say in decision-making this is an example of democracy in action. If only one person or a small group of people make all the decisions this isn't a democracy, it's a dictatorship.

(Adapted from *The Driving License Activity in Phelan, D. (2005) Vote! Exploring Democracy, Equality, Participation and Elections*)

The need for rules and laws

You and your classmates are stranded on a deserted island. You are the only people on the island and it's unlikely that you are going to be rescued for some time. Think about what types of rules or laws you will need to make sure that everyone gets on, is treated fairly and is safe.

In groups decide upon four laws that you would want to have, using the following headings:

- 1) A law to ensure fairness.
- 2) A law to protect people's rights.
- 3) A law to keep people safe.
- 4) A Law about people who offend.

How laws are made

Ask students to take a look at their school rules. Ask students to discuss each of their school rules and to state why they think these rules are necessary and what might happen if they did not exist.

Ask students to find out about some laws that are being debated by the Houses of the Oireachtas. Why do they think these new laws are necessary?

How the Houses of the Oireachtas work

In the Debates section of the Houses of the Oireachtas website, look at the most recent vote in Dáil Éireann and answer the following questions.

- What was the vote about?
- Did the Government side win or lose the vote?
- Which parties voted for and against the question?
- Did any Members abstain from the vote?

Seanad Éireann

Go to the Debates section of the Houses of the Oireachtas website and find out what business the Seanad discussed on its most recent sitting day. The class could divide into teams to present a summary of the issues debated under the following categories:

- Commencement matters
- Order of Business
- Motions
- Bills
- Statements

The committee system

Choose an Oireachtas committee from the list on the Houses of the Oireachtas website, then go to the Debates section and find the transcript of its most recent meeting.

What topic did the committee discuss?

How many committee members attended the meeting?

Did any non-members attend the meeting, and if so, who were they?

What was the result of the meeting?

The role of the media

Choose an issue being discussed in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Compare the way the story is reported by the different media outlets. You could include broadsheet newspapers, tabloids, online news sources, TV and radio.