CSPE: Democracy

Junior cycle videos – class activities

Lesson plan

Resources

Introduction
Use these class activities with the Oireachtas junior cycle videos available on the Houses of the Oireachtas website.

The Oireachtas in our community

Use this activity before showing the videos.

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

1. What Dáil constituency do we live in?
2. What areas does our Dáil constituency include?
3. How many seats does our constituency now have?
4. How many will it have at the next general election?
5. Who are our local TDs?
6. What political parties do our local TDs belong to?
7. What are the backgrounds of our local TDs?
8. What roles/functions do our local TDs have in Dáil Éireann?

The Oireachtas in our country

Use this activity before showing the videos.

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

1. Which political parties are represented in the Dáil and Seanad?
2. How many TDs and Senators does each party have?
3. How many Independent TDs were elected in the last general election?
4. Who is the leader of each political party and what is their background?
What is democracy?
Show the *What is democracy?* video.

Inform the class that the following decision is to be made:

> 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, a select group, or should everyone affected by the decision have a say?
- What does the class think and why?

If everyone has a say, 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.

Democracy and the Constitution
Show the *Democracy and the Constitution* video.

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

1. Your right to an education
2. The work that should be done by the President
3. The system of voting in Ireland for elections to Dáil Éireann
4. How the Constitution can be changed
5. Who appoints judges to the courts
Your vote
Show the *Your vote* video.

Divide students up into groups to create the following:

- A tweet (up to 280 characters, including spaces, commas and full stops) encouraging people to vote
- A Facebook page encouraging people to vote
- A poster encouraging people to vote
- A script (up to 100 words) for a radio advertisement encouraging people to vote

Divide students into groups to research the following struggles:

- Saudi Arabia
- Burma
- South Africa
- The Suffragettes in Britain and Ireland
Why vote?
Show the Why vote? video.

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 were to cast their vote.

Instructions
Download and print the Learner Driver Permit Vote Cards and cut them into individual role cards. Give each student a card 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 or against the motion according to their voting role card and then count the votes. The motion is passed.

Ask the students to declare their voting behaviour and the reason.

Ask the students to vote again, as themselves, based on their own opinions. 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.

The need for rules and laws
Show *The need for rules and laws* video.

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:

- A law to ensure fairness
- A law to protect people’s rights
- A law to keep people safe
- A law about people who break the laws

How laws are made
Show the *How laws are made* video.

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
Show the *How the Houses of the Oireachtas work* video.

In the [Debates section of the Houses of the Oireachtas website](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/content/debates), 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?
Show the Seanad Éireann video.

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

Show The Committee system video.

Go to the Committees section of the Houses of the Oireachtas website. Choose an Oireachtas committee, go to its dedicated web page and find the transcript of its most recent meeting. Answer the following questions:

1. What topic did the committee discuss?
2. How many committee members attended the meeting?
3. Did any non-members attend the meeting, and if so, who were they?
4. What was the result of the meeting?

Show The role of the media video.

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.