

LESSON PLAN

Strengths and weaknesses of democracy

Learning outcome 3.5

Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the democratic process

Students will learn to

- ▶ Examine and understand the role of Oireachtas Committees
- ▶ Consider both the strengths and weaknesses of democracy
- ▶ Debate different opinions about democracy

Materials

- ▶ Slide show
- ▶ Worksheet: Strengths and weaknesses of democracy – one for each student
- ▶ Quote cards – one set for each group
- ▶ Debate opinion posters – one of each
- ▶ Case study: Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs – one for each pair of students

Assessment for learning/Key skills

- ▶ Managing information and thinking
- ▶ Case study analysis
- ▶ Card ranking activity
- ▶ Walking debate



1 Strengths and weaknesses of democracy

SLIDE 3

Give each student a copy of the **Worksheet: Strengths and weaknesses of democracy** (see page 4). Ask students to form small groups and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of democracy. Students can write their ideas on the worksheet.

SLIDE 4

Show the slide to give students some suggestions and add their own ideas into the table.

2 Card ranking activity

SLIDE 5

Distribute a set of **quote cards** (see page 5) to each group.

Ask the groups to compare their own ideas with the quotes and decide which ones they agree and disagree with. They should then take the cards with which they agree and rank them, placing the one with which they agree most at the top.

Ask the groups to say which quotes they agreed with most and discuss the reasons.

3 Walking debate

SLIDE 6

Pin the **Debate opinion posters** (see pages 6 and 7) at opposite ends of the classroom. Read out each of the following statements and ask students to move to the sign that reflects their opinions. Ask students to explain why they took that position.

1. Voting should be compulsory.
2. Citizens should be fined if they do not vote.
3. Voting machines should be introduced in Ireland.
4. Filibustering* stops democracies from making progress.
5. In democracies, everyone has a say.
6. "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." – Winston Churchill
7. Democracies should be represented by 50% women and 50% men.
8. A fair dictatorship would be more effective than a democracy.
9. The Seanad is not democratic as Senators are not directly elected by the people of Ireland.

* Filibuster: to make a long speech in parliament in order to delay a vote.

4 Case study: Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

SLIDE 7

Give each pair of students a copy of the **Case study: Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs** (see pages 8 and 9). Ask each pair of students to read the case study together.

You could also open the Committee's web page from the link on the slide and show the Committee's latest report, press release and debate.

SLIDE 8

Ask the students to consider the questions on the slide.

Take feedback on how the Committee is an exercise in democracy.

➔ Extension activities

Focus on a politician

Research the career of one politician.

Ask your local TD, Senator, councillor or MEP for their thoughts on democracy.

Case study of the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

Identify three subjects discussed by the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs.

Identify three people or organisations who have presented to the Committee.

Watch part of a sitting of the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs.

Do a profile of one of the members of the committee.



Worksheet: Strengths and weaknesses of democracy

Strengths

Weaknesses

Quote cards

“ The people of England deceive themselves when they fancy they are free; they are so, in fact, only during the election of members of parliament: for, as soon as a new one is elected, they are again in chains, and are nothing.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

“ There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard. There cannot be true democracy unless women are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own lives.

Hillary Clinton

“ I do not know if the people of the United States would vote for superior men if they ran for office, but there can be no doubt that such men do not run.

Alexis de Tocqueville

“ If pigs could vote, the man with the slop bucket would be elected swineherd every time, no matter how much slaughtering he did on the side.

Orson Scott Card

“ The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy.

Montesquieu

“ Democracy is the least bad of all forms of government because it attempts to find a healthy balance between legitimacy and efficiency.

David Van Reybrouck

“ Climate breakdown presents a real conundrum because it requires a long-term solution, one that goes beyond an election cycle.

David Farrell

“ The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.

Winston Churchill

“ The flood of money that gushes into politics today is a pollution of democracy. **Theodore White**

“ No man is good enough to govern another man without the other's consent. **Abraham Lincoln**

“ A free press is one of the pillars of democracy.

Nelson Mandela

“ Democracy is four wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. **Ambrose Bierce**

Tà | **Agree**

Nil | **disagree**

Case study:

Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

The Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs is concerned with the interests of children and young people.

The Committee:

- ▶ **Promotes** the interests of children and young people
- ▶ **Investigates** issues that affect children and young people
- ▶ **Scrutinises** the work of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- ▶ **Debates** proposed laws



Students attending a Committee meeting

Recent issues the Committee has investigated include:

- ▶ The impact of homelessness on children
- ▶ Tackling childhood obesity
- ▶ Cyber security for children and young adults
- ▶ Foster care services



Members of the Committee launching its report on childhood obesity

Case study: Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs



The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs speaking at a Committee meeting, 2019



Members of the Committee holding copies of a Committee report outside Leinster House



Students attending a Committee meeting

When the Committees investigate an issue, it invites Government and non-Government agencies to send submissions giving their views on it. Sometimes, the Committee also asks members of the public to send in submissions on an issue. Members of the public can also send submissions to a Committee on any matter at any time.

The Committee may invite agencies and members of the public to discuss the issue at a meeting. Videos and reports of these meetings are published on the Houses of the Oireachtas website.

The Committee considers all the information it has gathered and makes recommendations to the Government. It publishes these recommendations in a report.

The screenshot shows a webpage from the Houses of the Oireachtas. The header includes the Oireachtas logo and the text "Tithe an Oireachtais Houses of the Oireachtas". The main heading is "Committee on Children and Youth Affairs invites submissions on Tackling Childhood Obesity." Below this is a "Share this page" link. A section titled "See all calls for submissions" contains the text: "The Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs invites written submissions from interested groups or individuals on tackling childhood obesity." Below this is a link "Go to the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs (32nd Dáil)". A "Closing date" section states: "The closing date for receipt of submissions is 12 noon on Friday, 11 May 2018." A "How to send your submission" section says: "Please email an electronic document (PDF/MS Word or equivalent) to childhoodobesity@oireachtas.ie."

Invitation from the Committee to the public to take part in a consultation on childhood obesity



Find out more about the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs at www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/32/children-and-youth-affairs/