The people rule @ your.gov.au

Notes for teachers

Overview
This unit is designed to teach students in the middle secondary years about the nature of representative government in Australia. Students explore a number of topics, primarily through the use of Parliament @ Work and other online resources. The unit consists of student handouts, which contain focus questions, background information and activities. The activities are designed to be completed in groups and to take around 24 x 50-minute lessons to complete. All handouts have been provided in HTML and Word format, the latter allowing teachers to modify activities if they wish.

The unit is structured as follows; suggested times for each activity are provided in brackets.

Introductory activities
Student handout 1: Representation and democratic values (50 minutes)
Student handout 2: Representation at three levels (100 minutes)

Topic 1: Federal representation
Student handout 1: Federal Parliament at a glance (50 minutes)
Student handout 2: Your Federal electorate (50 minutes)
Student handout 3: The Australian Electoral Commission and redistributions (50 minutes)
Student handout 4: Political parties and representation in the House of Representatives (100 minutes)
Student handout 5: Political parties and representation in the Senate (50 minutes)

Topic 2: Representation in States and Territories
Student handout: State and Territory parliaments (200 minutes)

Topic 3: Local representation
Student handout: Local government (150 minutes)

Topic 4: Our representatives – how representative are they?
Student handout: Profiling our representatives (200 minutes)

Extension activities
Student handout (200 minutes)
About Parliament @ Work as a teaching and learning resource

Parliament @ Work is an interactive database that provides a range of information about current Federal, State and Territory parliamentarians and electorates. The site provides a powerful search facility that allows students to search for information about parliamentarians and electorates using a number of categories at the same time or separately, including name, parliament, party, position, former occupation, locality, postcode and products or industries. The site contains a number of menus.

Parliament @ Work menus

Parliaments at a Glance provides information on the history and composition of each parliament, voting, local government and Commonwealth, State and Territory symbols.

 Parties at a Glance provides information on all political parties in Australia and includes hotlinks to party websites.

Parliamentarians provides information on all parliamentarians in Federal and State and Territory parliaments and includes information on their parliamentary service, party positions, former occupations, qualifications and date of birth.

Electorates contains maps of electorates and information on the history, the size, the boundaries, products and industries, location, area, population and numbers of enrolled electors.

wwwlinks provides a gateway to the websites of all parliaments in Australia as well as electoral commissions and offices, political parties and local governments. Students may access the websites of all local governments in Australia through this menu.

Profiles on all Members of Parliament come from the parliamentarians themselves as well as from the Australian Parliament and Parliamentary Library.

Electoral information is based on the 2001 census data provided by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). Further profile information about electorates may be found on the AEC website: http://www.aec.gov.au/

Other resources for teaching and learning about representative government

Discovering Democracy resources

Discovering Democracy Middle Secondary Units, Curriculum Corporation, 1998
'Parties Control Parliament' (pp 7–41). This unit is also available online at: http://www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/ddunits/units/units.htm
(Sections on roles of political parties in parliament and government, who political parties represent, and party policy and election campaigns.)

Discovering Democracy Lower Secondary Units, Curriculum Corporation, 1998
'Should the People Rule?' (pp 26–35 in particular). This unit is also available online at: http://www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/ddunits/units/units.htm
(Sections on representation and the Australian Parliament, why we have two Houses of Parliament, and how we vote in Australia.)
From the Discovering Democracy Secondary Kit
The Commonwealth Government poster.

CD-ROMs

Parliament at Work CD-ROM – see Secondary Activities: 'Voting Counts', 'Draw the Boundaries', 'Pass the Bill', 'Opal Bay'.
One Destiny: The Federation Story CD-ROM. See the following themes:
• 'The Road to Federation' – Teachers notes and student slide show and activities contain material on the factors influencing the movement to Federation in the nineteenth century, the important events in the Federation movement that finally resulted in the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia and some of the significant people who helped lead and shape the Federation movement.
• 'An Australian Constitution' – Teachers notes contain material and teaching ideas on the origins and features of the Australian Constitution, the characteristics of the Federal Parliament, the powers of the Commonwealth Government and the States, and the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens. Students view an animated slide show and play the constitution game.

From the Discovering Democracy Primary Kit
Three Levels of Government poster.

Discovering Democracy through Research, Curriculum Corporation, 2000
'Who Represents Us?' (pp 77–92).
In this research investigation students use the Internet, newspaper research and interviews to look at the responsibilities of local councils and local representatives, and the issues that are important in their local area.

'Citizens Have a Say' (pp 111–28).
This research investigation might be used as an extension activity. It covers referendums and plebiscites in Australia.

Australian Readers Discovering Democracy Middle Secondary Collection, Curriculum Corporation, 1999
Section on 'Political People' (pp 1–20).

Other information
Australian Electoral Commission publications
The following resources are available free to all schools in Australia and most can be downloaded as PDF files from the Australian Electoral Commission website:
http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/resources.htm
• History of the Indigenous Vote
• Australian Democracy Magazine
• Federation Brochure
• Every Vote Counts (video)
• Democracy the Australian Way
• The Electoral Pocketbook

**Electoral Council of Australia**  
Contains information on all of the voting systems used in Australia.

**Newspapers and local government directories**  
Collect local and national newspapers to look at issues and levels of government. Your local council will be able to provide you with local government directories and other information about services in the local area.

**Speakers and visits**  
The Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory electoral commissions provide speakers who will talk to students about electoral processes and electoral geography.

You could also arrange for school visits by representatives of your local government and State or Territory and Federal Members of Parliament.

Similarly, visits to local government authorities will provide students with opportunities to find out about the issues affecting your community. State, Territory and Federal parliaments also welcome school visits.

**Knowledge, skills, concepts and values developed in this unit**
- Understanding of the values that underpin the Australian electoral system.
- Understanding the powers and responsibilities of the three levels of government in Australia.
- Understanding some of the characteristics of the Federal system of representation, electorates and voting systems.
- Understanding the role of political parties in representing the people.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of characteristics of the electoral system in terms of fulfilling democratic values.
- Skills in using databases including: locating and sorting information, collecting and recording information, and analysing and presenting information.
- Internet inquiry and research skills.

**Materials and preparation**  
Students need access to the online [Parliament @ Work](http://www.parliament.curriculum.edu.au/) database to complete most activities. Teachers should familiarise themselves with the structure of this site before beginning the unit. The activities are designed for group work, with some activities requiring students to interrogate data separately and contribute information to the group response.

**Specific information on activities**

**Introductory activities**

**Student handout 1: Representation and democratic values**  
Begin this lesson by brainstorming with students their understanding of the term 'democracy'.
- What is 'democracy'?
- What rights do we have in a democracy?
- What responsibilities do we have in a democracy?
- What is the role of the government in a democracy?
- What do we mean by the term 'representative democracy'?
Ask students to come up with as many examples to illustrate democratic rights and responsibilities as they can; for example, freedom of speech – a free press that is able to criticise the government.

**Representation at three levels**
Collect local and daily newspapers as well as directories. Begin this activity by discussing with students issues that are in the news nationally and locally and ask them whether they know the level of Australian government that deals with each. For example:
- The war on terrorism
- Use of the local recreation reserve
- Teachers' working conditions

**Topic 1: Federal representation**

**Student handout 1: Federal Parliament at a glance**
This activity is designed to give students an understanding of the origins and basic features of the Commonwealth Government. Students complete this activity from Parliament @ Work.

**Student handout 2: Your Federal electorate**
Students complete this activity from Parliament @ Work. They may also need access to a map or street directory to label electoral boundaries.

**Student handout 3: The Australian Electoral Commission and redistributions**
Information for this activity comes from the AEC website which is hotlinked off the Parliament @ Work site. Teachers may also extend this activity by looking at other roles of the AEC.

**Student handout 4: Political parties and representation in the House of Representatives**
Read through the early section of this activity with students and make sure they are able to understand the background information and read the table. Some teachers may wish to do further work on voting systems. Resources from the AEC listed under the 'Resources' heading contain further information about Federal voting systems.

**Student handout 5: Political parties and representation in the Senate**
The activities in this handout are self-explanatory but again some students may need some assistance with reading the table.

**Topic 2: Representation in States and Territories**

**Student handout: State and Territory parliaments**
Activity 1 provides students with the background and history of their State or Territory government. Teachers may wish to extend it by looking at the material on other States and Territories.

For research on issues in Activity 2, teachers could arrange a visit from an MP or use the contact information on Parliament @ Work to contact representatives with particular questions about issues.
Topic 3: Local representation

*Student handout: Local government*
As an alternative to these activities teachers may choose to have students complete the research activity in *Discovering Democracy through Research*, Curriculum Corporation, 2000 'Who Represents Us?' (pp 77–92). This research investigation also provides valuable background material for teachers.

Contact your local government and arrange for speakers to come to the school or students to visit the council.

Topic 4: Our representatives – how representative are they?

*Student handout: Profiling our representatives*
These activities have been designed for students to consider how representative of the electorate our parliamentary representatives are.

For Activity 2, teachers could also use *Australian Readers Discovering Democracy Middle Secondary Collection*, Curriculum Corporation, 1999, section on 'Political People' (pp 1–20) to discuss qualities of political leaders.

For Activity 3, invite local MPs to your school to talk to students. Contact details for MPs are available in the *Parliament @ Work* database. Alternatively, arrange for groups of students to visit the electorate offices of local MPs to conduct an interview. Many State and Territory Parliamentary Education Offices arrange to have MPs present during school visits.

**Extension activities**
These are designed to allow students to choose a topic of interest. Teachers may also wish to negotiate other topics.