

# Every Vote Counts

*But do they all count for the same?*



Complexity



8-13 years



90 minutes



8-30



Democratic  
Citizenship



Participation



Human Rights

## Type of activity

Discussion, planning, simulation

## Overview

Children design a democratic voting process and then hold a mock vote.

## Objectives

- To understand the meaning of fair and democratic elections
- To practise holding a fair election and learn the mechanics of democratic voting
- To recognise the importance of civic participation

## Preparation

Print a copy of the Situation Card for each group

## Materials

- One copy of the Situation Card for each group
- Paper and pencils for ballots
- Board or flipchart and markers

## Instructions

This activity consists of two parts. In Part One, the children discuss and decide on a democratic voting process they will use to make a decision about how to spend a sum of money. In Part Two, the group will hold a mock vote using one of the suggested processes.

1. Introduce the activity by explaining that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees everyone the right to participate in government, either by holding an office or by electing someone that represents them, and that "governments should be elected regularly by fair and secret voting" (Article 21). Ask the children what they think this means by asking questions such as these:
  - What is a 'fair' election?
  - Why does voting need to be secret?
  - Who gets to vote? Who cannot vote?
  - What does it mean for someone to 'represent' you? What are their responsibilities?
  - What do we call people who represent all of us – at national level and at local level?
2. Point out that, although children may not be allowed to vote for government yet, they may still participate in various forms of elections to decide things in their own lives.
  - Do you have examples of where you can decide or influence decisions?
  - Are these processes 'fair'?

- Is there any secret voting?
- Who decides whether you should have a vote or take part in the decision?

## Part One

3. Divide the children into small groups of four or five, and give each group a Situation Card. Explain that they will have 10 minutes to design a democratic decision-making process about how to use money that has been gifted to a group.
4. After 10 minutes, ask each group to present the decision-making process they propose. After each presentation, ask the rest of the children to discuss the proposal. Use some of the following questions:
  - Is it fair? Why, or why not?
  - Is everyone concerned able to influence the outcome?
  - If there is going to be voting, is it secret? Is this important?
  - Is it clear to everyone how the decision will be taken?
5. Explain that they are going to hold a mock vote in the larger group, using this scenario. However, to do so, they need to choose one voting process that the whole group will follow. Ask them to compare the different processes they developed:
  - What are the similarities between the processes? What are the differences?
  - Can we use any of these processes for our mock vote? Will it be fair?
  - Would you like to make any changes?
  - What 'roles' or people are involved in the voting process, besides those casting a vote?
6. Write a title or summary of the various group proposals on a flipchart or board, and ask the group to decide on which proposal they would like to use in the mock vote. To do this you can use a majority vote where the proposal with the most votes wins. If there is a tie, you can include the facilitator in the vote and run it again until there is a majority for one of the proposals. This should not be a secret ballot.

## Part Two

7. After the voting process has been decided on, assign the various roles, according to the process that was chosen, to different people in the group and hold the mock vote. One of the roles needs to include someone leading the process (an Election Manager or Group Leader); ensure the person who is assigned this role is comfortable leading the process.
8. Hold the mock vote.

## Debriefing and evaluation

1. Bring the group back together and discuss the activity using questions such as these:
  - Do you think the vote in the simulation was fair? Why, or why not?
  - Are you happy with the result?
  - Was the example familiar: can you think of similar examples in real life?
  - Was the Election Manager / Group Leader fair? Are there other roles that would be needed to

ensure a fair process?

- How are decisions like this usually made? Are the children able to express their opinion, or influence the final decision? Do you think that is fair?
- Are there any decisions that only adults should be able to make?
- What can you do to ensure that decisions that affect you are made in a fair way?
- How did you feel about making a decision on which proposal to use in the mock vote? Could this have been done in a fairer way? How?
- Where there any new terms used during the activity that you are still unfamiliar with? Which ones?

2. Relate the activity to human rights by asking some of the following questions:

- What do we mean when we talk about 'government'? What do we mean by 'democracy'?
- What are some of the ways in which people can participate in their government?
- How old must you be in your country before you can vote?
- How are the mayor and the city council elected?
- Why do you think that the right to participate in government is a human right?
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children the right to have their own opinion and for it to be taken into account. Are there ways in which this also applies to the governance of your school or public facilities for children in your community / city / town?
- Why is it important to use your human rights?

## Suggestions for follow-up

The activity 'A Constitution for Our Group' provides a real-life opportunity to practise voting skills and take part in a democratic debate about how the group will behave. The activity 'Who Decides?' looks at the evolving capacity of children and how they participate in decisions affecting them.

## Ideas for action

Take every opportunity that arises with your group to model democratic decision-making, whether about small matters (e.g. what kind of snacks to have, whether to play inside or outside) or large matters. Children learn democratic procedures best by practising them. They also benefit from being asked to consider whether everyone concerned by a particular decision has had a chance to be consulted.

You could organise a mock election process to run in parallel with elections at local, national, or regional level. See, for example, [www.u18.org/en/the-project-u18](http://www.u18.org/en/the-project-u18).

## Tips for the facilitator

This activity can bring up terms that may be unfamiliar to children (e.g. nominations, candidates, campaign speeches, debates, run-off election, proportion of the vote, ballot). Make sure you explain what these terms mean.

For younger children, use simpler terms where relevant – for example, use 'more than half' or 'a simple majority' rather than speaking about 'proportional representation'.

Make up other situations based on decisions faced by the children in your group, and adapt the simulation accordingly.

## Adaptations

To focus on the issue of who gets to vote, you could pose additional questions, such as those below. Read these out at the beginning of the simulation and ask the children to debate whether these children should have a vote. This decision itself might be the basis of a decision by vote, and will extend the time needed for the activity.

### Optional Roles

You are 6 years old and in the first grade. You can't read yet and don't know much about the group. Should you have a vote?

You are 13 and have a learning disability, so your reading age is only 9. Should you have a vote?

You have just moved to this area and don't really know anyone yet. Should you have a vote?

You are a bully. You push younger children around outside and encourage your friends to join you in calling some people nasty names. Should you have a vote?



## Handout

### Situation Card

There are 30 children in your group; the group has been given a gift of about EUR 500. You should propose a method for deciding democratically how to use this money. Some children want to have a party with nice food. Others want to go on a field trip. Some want to buy new games and art supplies. One person wants to put it aside for emergencies. Another wants to buy an electric keyboard. How should you decide democratically?

Consider, for example:

- Will all the children in the group vote or decide, or just some of them? Who will vote?
- Will all suggestions be voted on or just some of them? How many will you vote on?
- How will you decide which ones?
- How many votes in favour must a proposal have to be decided? Can people abstain?
- What happens if two proposals get the same number of votes?
- Will all the money be spent on one suggestion or can it be split up proportionally?
- How will everyone know who or what suggestions they are voting for? Will you ask people to make campaign speeches or have debates?