

Building Bridges for Kids: Politics

Activity (ask a grownup or teen to please act as facilitator)

Everyone close your eyes. Pretend you are stranded on a desert island. Open your eyes. What do you see?

What do we need? (write down ideas w/name)

When all ideas are out there, ask “What do we need first?”

Assign group members to “campaign” for their ideas: “the drinking water candidate” “the shelter candidate” etc.

(to grownups) Let this part of the discussion get heated if necessary, there is no “right” answer for what the group does first, but most, if not all of the activities require more than one person to complete. You only have the people in the room so the group can’t just split and each do their own thing.

How do we get everyone to agree? How do we decide what to do?

What you just did is how politics works.

Topic Overview:

Politics is how people figure out what is best for the group.

Can that get messy? Yes. Why do you think that happens? Yes, because people have different ideas about what is best. What do we call it when people have different ideas? Yes, a disagreement. On top of that, all sides of a disagreement want what they think is best for the group. This leads to conflict.

In *The Art of the Possible* Edward Keenan says “Conflicts can be a good thing if they can be solved peacefully. That’s exactly what a good political system is for: successfully navigating conflicts.” (p35)

Review what happened in the activity. What were the conflicts? How did we work them out? How did that activity relate to politics?

People use politics every day because people make decisions as a group every day.

When you decide what to eat for dinner, what movie or TV show to watch, what game to play, you are engaging in politics.

When a large enough group starts making decisions, things get complicated quickly. This is what we normally think of as politics and why lots of people don’t like thinking about it.

But decisions made for your school, your town, state, and country still make a difference in your life, just like what you watch on TV or eat for dinner.

What are some big decisions that influence, or make a difference, in your life right now?

(ideas for grownups: cool parks to play in, libraries near your house, clean air to breathe and water to use, safe roads, wearing seatbelts, what your teachers teach in school and how much money they make).

How can you, a kid, make a difference in these big decisions? You can contact people in your government with ideas, you can volunteer to help out with projects like building a new playground or feeding families who need help. You can talk with your neighbors about ways to solve problems. When you grow up, you can vote for new laws and leaders.

***See the green handout for books to read on this topic

Further Discussion

Is there another way can we help people make decisions fairly? How can we help organize things to keep things as safe and fair as possible?

A government.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines 'government' as a system by which a state, nation or community is governed.

<https://mocomi.com/what-is-government/> https://kids.wordsmyth.net/we/?rid=17699&ent_l=government

This means who is in charge, what rules do people have to follow (laws), and **how the group makes decisions**.

Basic rundown of types of government: autocracy, oligarchy, democracy <https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Government>

Connect each form of government back to the island exercise. As we define, ask for examples of how each would play out in our island community.

Autocracy = one person in charge (supreme power)

Absolute monarch

Dictator

Constitutional monarchy usually has a form of representative democracy attached

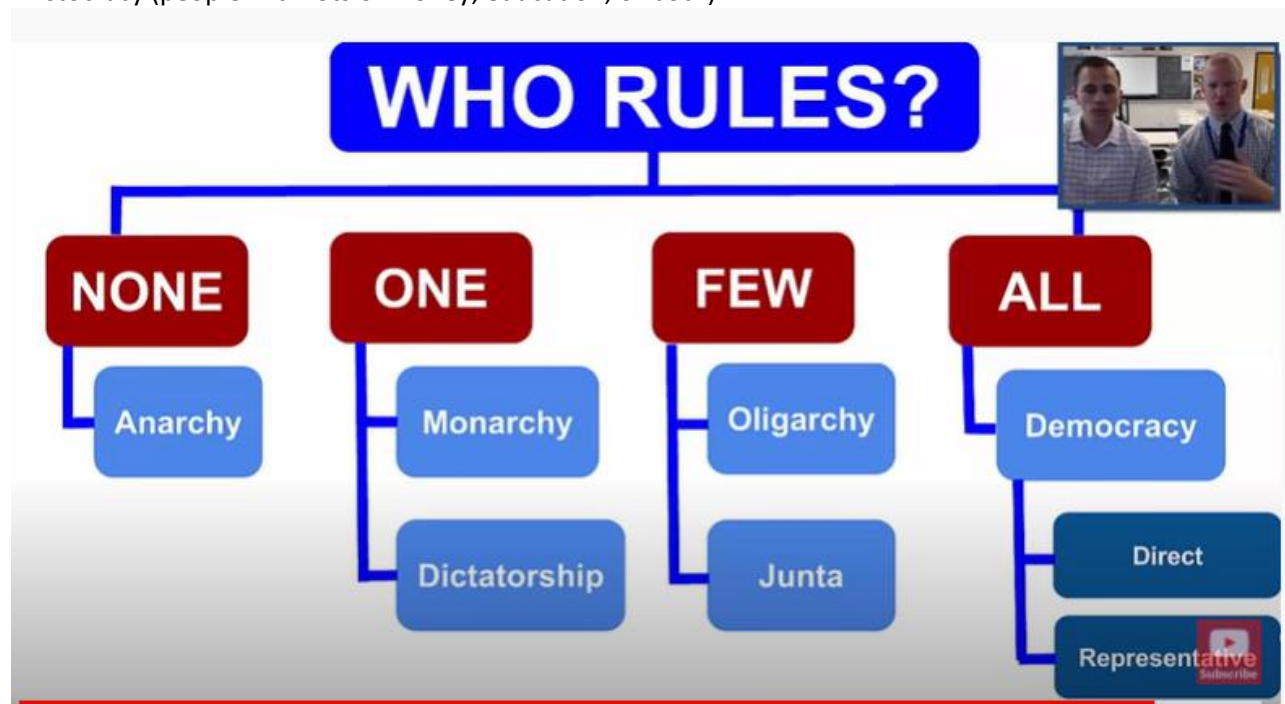
Democracy= most of the people (citizens) make decisions (rule of the people)

Direct vs. representative

Oligarchy= small group of people in charge (rule of the few)

Junta (military leaders)

Aristocracy (people with lots of money, education, or both)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvPCYqKZP3Y>

“Which one do you think we live in?” Why?

We live in a representative democracy (republic), with laws based on our constitution. This makes the United States of America a **constitutional republic**.

Sources

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<https://tricitymacaronikid.com/articles/5acbc3cb989f65f861ca6e1/politics-101-for-your-kids>

Mia Academy: Types of Government <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfcNP7mMiZ4>

<https://www.onepoll.us/do-you-discuss-politics-with-your-children/>