

University of Virginia Center for Politics



Democracy Corps Lesson Plan 2: Basic Concepts of Democracy

Purpose: This lesson is a part of YLI's Democracy Corps service learning program. It explores core concepts of American democracy such as majority rule, the equality of all persons and the need to compromise.

Materials:

- Board/markers
- Large newsprint, Post-Its
- Video: *The American Promise Acts 1-5, Responsibility in a Democracy* (call The American Promise at 1-800-204-7722 for a free copy).
- Student Guide 1: *Democratic Concepts*
- Student Guide 2: *Responsibility in a Democracy*

Central Questions:

- What is democracy?
- What are central concepts in the American Democratic System?

Procedure:

1. Warm Up - Complete the following steps prior to class.
 - Prepare a list of key concepts related to democracy. Suggestions follow.
Fundamental Worth of the Individual
Majority Rule with Minority Rights
Necessity of Compromise
Individual Freedom
Equality of All Persons
 - Write each concept on a piece of newsprint or large Post-It and place them around the room. Place a magic marker with each poster.

Begin class by asking students to think about how each of the concepts listed on the board relates to democracy. Then ask students to rank the concepts in order of importance to a democratic society. Reinforce that there is no correct answer.

2. Distribute Student Guide 1: *Democratic Concepts*. After students rank the concepts, show them that each concept is written on a piece of paper posted around the room. Using their list as a guide, ask them to physically move to the concept they ranked first. Once there, students are to discuss the importance of this idea to a democracy as a group and explain why they ranked it as the most important. Ask one student from



- each group to record their ideas on the large poster. Give students about 3-5 minutes at the first poster.
3. When students complete this task, direct them to move to their second choice. Once at the new station, guide students to discuss and record why this idea is essential to our democracy. Students are to move to each concept poster until they have visited and discussed all of them.
 4. Then move all posters to a central area. Ask students to use the information on the posters to write a paragraph defining democracy. The paragraph may begin with Democracy is... Exceptional work will include information from each concept poster. Ask volunteers to read their paragraphs.
 5. Deliberate
Discuss what it means to live in a democracy and briefly explore the benefits/challenges.
 6. Distribute Student Guide 2: Responsibility in a Democracy. View videotape Responsibility in a Democracy and ask students to respond to questions on the guide. Discuss answers.
 7. Close session with deliberation.
 8. Deliberate
Ask students to respond to the quote, “No Government demands so much from the citizens as democracy and none gives back so much.”—James Bryce

Tip: Teachers may use the General Deliberation Rubric accessible from the Democracy Corps webpage to assess student participation in this discussion.



Democratic Concepts

Step One

Think about each of the concepts listed below.

How do they relate to democracy? After defining each idea, rank them according to how important you believe they are to our democracy. (This is your opinion. There is no right or wrong order.)

- Fundamental Worth of the Individual
- Majority Rule with Minority Rights
- Necessity of Compromise
- Individual Freedom
- Equality of All Persons

Ranking Definition

_____ Fundamental Worth of the Individual

_____ Majority Rule with Minority Rights

_____ Necessity of Compromise

_____ Individual Freedom

_____ Equality of All Persons

Step Two

After working in teams to evaluate the concepts listed above, write a paragraph defining democracy.

The paragraph may begin with Democracy is.... Exceptional work will include information from each concept poster.



Responsibility in a Democracy

Step One

Answer the question below.

We have discussed some of the privileges of living in a democracy. With privileges come responsibilities. What are some of the responsibilities of citizens living in a democracy?

Step Two

View the video *The American Promise: Responsibility in a Democracy*.

For each community profiled, identify the issue discussed and describe the solution.

1. Eskimo Community

A. Issue: _____

B. Solution: _____

2. California High School

A. Issue: _____

B. Solution: _____

3. Hispanic Community, San Antonio, TX

A. Issue: _____

B. Solution: _____

4. Homeless Persons

A. Issue: _____

B. Solution: _____

Deliberate

Consider the quotation below and explain if you agree or disagree with the historian.

“No Government demands so much from the citizens as democracy and none gives back so much.” —James Bryce, *Modern Democracies* (Macmillan, 1921), Vol. II, p. 608.