



DEMOCRACY: WHAT IS IT AND WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

(30-35 minutes)

OBJECTIVE

Students learn the characteristics of a democratic society and how they can make their community a better place by solving problems in a way that promotes the common good.

MATERIALS

Ways I Can Participate in Our Community and Our Democracy

GET READY

- ✓ Copy the *Ways I Can Participate in Our Democracy* handout for each student.
- ✓ Have lined paper available for students (if they are not responsible for supplying their own).

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Ask students, *How many of you have heard of the word “democracy”? Does anyone know what it means? What other words do you think of when you hear the word democracy?* List the students’ ideas on the board.
- ✓ Read to students the following simple definition: *A democracy is a society where the people are involved in making many of the decisions about what happens in communities, states, and the country.*
- ✓ Ask students, *How do people in the United States help make decisions about the government, schools, laws and other important aspects of our lives?* (Possible answers include attending public meetings, writing letters to public officials, running for public office, and serving on a local board. If the students do not mention voting, make sure to tell them it is a major way people can help make decisions in our country.)
- ✓ Ask students, *Is democracy just for adults? Does it have anything to do with kids?* Accept all responses. Then ask, *How many of you ride a bike? Wear pajamas? Use a local park? Drink water? Breathe the air?* Point out to students that the laws made by our local, state, and federal governments determine what is and what isn’t acceptable when doing things such as riding a bike, using a local park, etc. They affect most of our everyday activities, including the fact that the students are required at this moment to be in school!
- ✓ Give students, individually or in small groups, the *Ways I Can Participate in Our Democracy* handout and ask them to circle all of the ideas that kids can do. Are the students surprised that they can contribute to our democracy in so many ways? While elementary students are not old enough to vote, they can influence how adults vote and contribute to improving society in many other ways.
- ✓ After completing the handout, ask the students to compose a paragraph about how they plan on improving their community. This can be based on one of the ideas they circled on the handout or it can be a new idea they come up with. They should not only write about what they plan on doing but also how they plan on carrying through on their idea.
- ✓ Ask students who wish to share their idea to present it to the class.

**DEMOCRACY: WHAT IS IT AND
WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH ME?** (continued)**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- ★ *Who can share how they already participate in our democracy?*
- ★ *Who came up with ideas that were not on our “Ways I Can Participate in Our Democracy” handout? What are some of these ideas?*
- ★ *What other ways will you be able to participate in democracy when you are an adult?*

SUGGESTED ASSESSMENTS:

- ★ *List three ways that you already participate in your community.*
- ★ *Write a letter to a city council member of your town government listing ideas of how students can improve your community.*



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WAYS I CAN PARTICIPATE IN OUR COMMUNITY & OUR DEMOCRACY.

Directions: Circle the ideas listed below that are ways kids can help their community.

Picking up trash

Writing to an elected official

Following the laws

Voting in public elections

Listening to or reading the news

Donating money

Attending a public meeting

Talking to an adult about voting

Visiting someone who is lonely

Writing a letter to a newspaper

Talking to friends about a
community problem

Calling the mayor about a
community problem

Speaking at a public meeting

Distributing flyers

Raising money for a good cause
in the community

Making get well cards for
children in the hospital

Volunteering at a nursing home

Creating artwork that teaches

Donating food or clothing

Recycling

Can you think of any other ways kids can participate in democracy?

Write them here...