



# Parliamentary Education Office

## Parliamentary Lesson Plans

The Parliamentary Lesson Plans encourage investigation of parliamentary principles, concepts and processes. They use highly interactive, student-focused activities such as parliamentary role-plays, teamwork, speeches and debate. They are designed to make teaching the core functions of federal Parliament an enjoyable and easy exercise.

The series includes 12 lessons across five themes: Representation, Transparency, Executive government, Legislation and the Constitution.

### OUTCOMES

These may be matched against state and territory curricula in Studies of Society and Environment, Human Society and Its Environment, Legal Studies, Civics Education, Politics, Commerce and History.

### DURATION

These lesson plans can be conducted over one to two lessons but are designed to be flexible to suit your needs.

### RELEVANCE

The lesson plans are designed to be topical and relevant to middle to upper secondary students. However, you may wish to modify aspects to take advantage of your students' particular interests and/or current political, community or school issues.

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVELS:** ● Less challenging ● Moderate ● Advanced

#### Representation

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**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Less challenging

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Representation: Political parties

Political parties embody shared views and are formed with the intention of being elected to parliament and influencing Australian governance. In this lesson students explore concepts of collective action and representation; identify issues of national concern; form parties; develop party platforms; and deliver an election speech.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- list current federal parliamentary parties
- consider the role of political parties
- practise party based representation
- state the relationship between parties, elections and Australian policy
- define specific parliamentary terms.

### Focus questions

- Why do political parties form?
- What is a party platform? (*a public statement of principles and aims of a political party usually presented at an election*)
- What is a party policy? (*a plan of action or principle agreed or chosen by a political party*)
- What is the difference between a political and parliamentary party? (*a parliamentary party is a subset of a political party*)

### Concept words

Party • Ideology • Election • Political party • Campaign • Platform • Policy  
Parliamentary party discipline • Voting • Agenda • Social movement  
Member of parliament • MP

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Party:** from Middle English *partie*, from Old French *partir* to divide

1. a person or group taking one side of a question, dispute or contest
2. a group of persons organised for the purpose of directing the policies of government
3. a person or group participating in an action or affair e.g. a group of soldiers.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Fact Sheet:**

Political Parties  
[www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)

**Parliament NOW**

[www.peo.gov.au/learning/parliament-now.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/parliament-now.html)



## Getting started

1. Initiate discussions by asking students: How do groups form in parliament? (*common ideologies may lead to the formation of political parties and election to parliament*)
2. Discuss the benefits of collaborating with like-minded people. (*greater skill base, range of experience, support and influence e.g. compare the influence of a single protester to a street rally of 100 protesters*)
3. List the main political parties in Australia. Who do these parties represent? (*their constituents*) Why do they form? (*to represent and advocate shared views for the purpose of influencing Australian governance*)
4. Discuss the difference between the smaller parliamentary party and the larger political party. (see 'How to form a parliamentary party' diagram)

## Main activity

1. Ask students: What's your cause? What big issues do you care about? (*climate change, youth wages, university entrance, cost of music CDs, terrorism etc.*)
2. Group like issues under 3 or 4 subject headings. (*environment, youth affairs, economic growth, national security etc.*)
3. Group students into parties based on shared views and concerns. Parties may vary in size. Retain two students to act as Independents (*members of parliament who do not belong to a party*)
4. Ask students to determine a party name, to select a spokesperson, to develop a party platform which reflects the party's priorities and to present an election campaign speech of 2 to 5 minutes.
5. Hear each presentation and allow time for peer review.

## Debrief

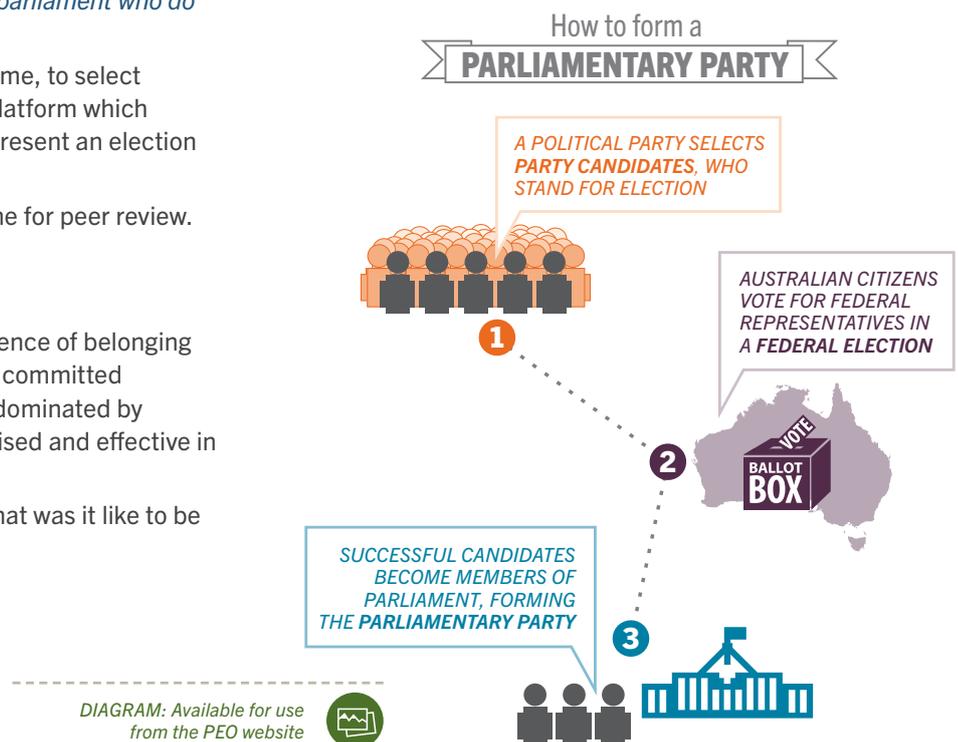
1. Ask students to describe their experience of belonging to a party. Ask: Were party members committed and motivated? Was input shared or dominated by individuals? Was the party well organised and effective in communicating its philosophy?
2. Did experiences vary? How? Why? What was it like to be an Independent and to act alone?

## Parliamentary context

- Why does a political party need a clear and effective platform? (*to express alternative views and policies*)
- How does a party platform influence how people vote? (*by mobilising support for the platform*)
- How do political parties influence change in Australia? (*successful parties form government and implement law; unsuccessful parties form opposition and scrutinise the actions of the government*)
- What might happen in the Australian Parliament if there were no parties, just Independents? (*many views and perspectives, less predictable voting patterns, more fractured power*)
- How well do you think parliamentary parties represent sectors of the Australian community?

## Extension activities

- Ask students to create a poster which outlines their party's political principles.
- Ask students to create a 30 second video advertisement promoting their party's political principles.
- Ask students to research an issue and to create a policy statement to address the problem. Include a five point outline, a rationale and an implementation plan.



**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Less challenging

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Representation: Elections

Elections are an integral part of our democracy. Elections attempt to translate public opinion into parliamentary representation. In this lesson students compare and utilise systems of voting: first-past-the-post and preferential voting. Proportional voting is also considered.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- examine why and how elections are conducted in Australia
- compare first-past-the-post, preferential and proportional systems of voting

### Focus questions

- Why are elections held in Australia?
- What is a preference?
- What is a proportion?
- Do Australians get who they vote for?

### Concept words

Preferential • First-past-the-post • Ballot paper • Secret ballot • Plurality

Proportional • Electioneering • Scrutineer • Distribution • Democracy • Represent

## Getting started

1. Initiate discussion by asking for the name of Australia's system of governance.  
(*representative democracy under a constitutional monarchy*)
2. Brainstorm the names of elected representatives in the current federal Parliament.
3. Name other Australian representatives elected to their positions (*state premiers, mayors and aldermen, students serving on school representative councils etc.*)
4. Explore the concept of 'three levels of government' (*federal, state and local government*).  
*What are levels of government? What do they do? How do they work?*
5. Discuss federal elections. Is a vote once every three years an effective way of contributing to the decision making process? If not, what is the alternative?

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

#### VOTING SYSTEMS

**First-past-the-post:** the candidate who gets the largest number of votes wins, even if it is less than half the votes cast.

**Preferential voting:** the voter indicates an order of preference for candidates, giving the number one for their first choice and the last number for their last choice (used for the House of Representatives).

**Proportional voting:** designed for multi-member electorates to make sure the number of successful candidates from each party closely reflects the total vote for that party as a proportion of all the votes cast (used for the Senate).

### Documents and resources

#### PEO Fact Sheet:

Federal Elections  
[www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)

#### Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)

Counting the Votes  
[www.aec.gov.au/Voting/counting/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/counting/index.htm)

## Main activity

### First-past-the-post

1. Tell students that they will vote for a representative of the Australian music industry to advance the interests of one music genre with recording contracts, air time and live performances in big venues.
2. Brainstorm music genres and list on the board (e.g. *rock, pop, country, jazz, hip-hop etc.*)
3. Ask students to determine their music genre preference and to vote accordingly with a show of hands.
4. Tally the votes for each music genre on the board. The genre with the most votes wins (*first-past-the-post*)
5. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of first-past-the-post voting (*a simple system, but minority interests cannot win*)

### Preferential voting

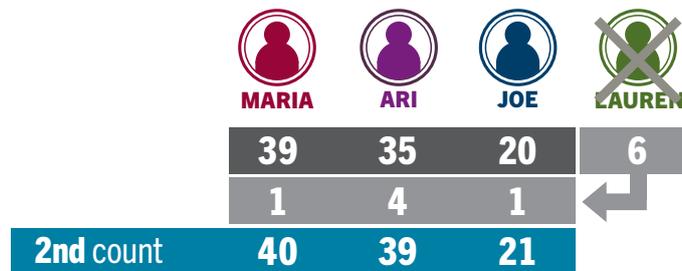
1. Ask students for an alternative to first-past-the-post selection. Introduce the preferential voting system. (*rank preferences in order; first preference to last*)
2. Distribute voting slips and instruct students to number the music genres listed on the board in order of preference.
3. Ask two students to collect, group and count the ballot papers and two students to act as scrutineers.
4. Record the total votes for each genre on the board. Re-distribute the least votes according to subsequent preferences until one genre receives more than 50% of the total vote (see *Preferential voting diagram*)
5. Discuss the outcome. Did the winning genre win because of the distribution of preferences or because of an initial majority?

## PREFERENTIAL VOTING

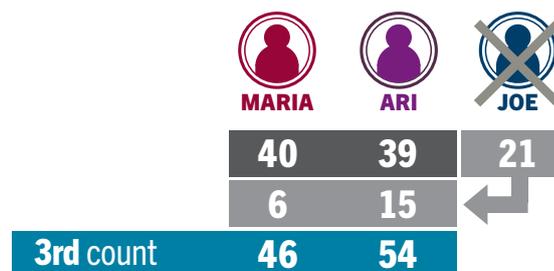
To be elected, a candidate must have an absolute majority of votes (more than 50% of the total votes). In the example below using 100 votes, the absolute majority is 51 or more.



No one has 51 or more votes, so *Lauren's votes are transferred (distributed) according to second preferences.*



No one has 51 or more votes, so *Joe's votes are transferred (distributed) according to the next preferences.*



*Ari is elected with 54 votes.*

DIAGRAM: Available for use from the PEO website





## Debrief

1. Discuss: Which genre/s were successful in each vote?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both systems of voting?
3. Did anyone try to influence the outcome of the vote?  
*(e.g. by cheating, coercing other voters, voting more than once, or changing their vote between the public show of hands and the secret ballot etc.)*
4. Discuss: which music genre best reflects student preferences?

## Parliamentary context

- Members are appointed to the federal House of Representatives using the preferential voting method. Can you work out why this system is used in the lower house? *(elects major parties and supports efficient government)*
- Senators are appointed to the federal Senate using the proportional voting method. Can you work out why this system is used in the upper house? *(leads to a strong voice for minor parties that helps to keep a government 'on its toes')*
- Voting in the Parliament is public. Why is this so?
- How closely do you think elected representatives reflect the views and interests (preferences) of Australians?



## Extension activities

- Write 200 words outlining the strengths and weaknesses of first-past-the-post, proportional and preferential voting. Which do you favour for the selection of members of parliament? Why?
- Voting in Australia is compulsory. Argue for or against.

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Less challenging

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Representation: Majority rule

Most decisions in parliament are based upon the principle of majority rule—the rule that requires more than half of the members who cast a vote to agree in order for the entire group to make a decision on the measure being voted on.

In this lesson students explore various forms of decision making including majority rule, executive, consensus and autocracy (as well as exploring the power of veto), when they debate a bill in a class parliament.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- understand why majority rule is used in parliament
- participate in a role-play in which a bill is used to explore four different methods of decision making
- understand the terms consensus, majority rule, veto and autocracy.

### Focus questions

- Why do many governing bodies use majority rule to make decisions? *(to ensure support for the decision)*
- Why do some decision making bodies seek consensus? *(to hear all opinions and to maintain relations)*
- Why might autocracy succeed? *(to limit power to an individual or small group)*

### Concept words

Majority rule • Autocrat • Autocracy • Consensus • Two-party system

Veto • Bill • Compromise • Decision • Polity • Body politic

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Autocracy:** a system of government where one person, the autocrat, has complete power.

**Veto power:** a person or group having power to turn down a proposal or make executive decisions one way or another.

**Consensus:** general agreement among the members of a given group or community, each of which exercises some discretion in decision making and follow-up action.

**Executive:** a branch of government or local authority.

**Compromise:** a mutual promise to abide by a decision.

**Decision:** a resolution, making up one's mind.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Fact Sheets:**

- House of Representatives
  - Federal Elections
- [www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)



## Getting started

1. Start the discussion by eliciting different forms of decision making. (*majority rule, consensus, autocracy, power of veto etc.*)
2. Brainstorm several examples of each. (*majority rule may be used by sporting clubs, consensus by some families and classrooms, autocracy by some countries and many private businesses and veto by the American President and some families and classrooms etc.*)
3. What form of decision making does the federal Parliament use? (*majority rule*)

## Main activity

1. Tell students that they will debate a bill to introduce military conscription in Australia and use four decision making systems to decide the issue.
2. Define military conscription and discuss related issues.
3. Arrange classroom chairs in a circle and appoint a chairperson to manage the debate.
4. Have the chairperson select speakers by asking students who wish to speak to stand.
5. Conclude the debate, and lead the quick decision making scenarios in the table over the page.

## Debrief

1. What form of decision making was most efficient?
2. Was it difficult to reach a consensus? Why? What difference would 60 students or 120 students make to this method?
3. What form of decision making was most fair? Least fair?
4. What justification might the vetoer or autocrat have for their roles?
5. Is there a best decision making system? Why? Why not?

## Parliamentary context

- How is government formed in the Australian Parliament? (*the party or coalition of parties with the support of the majority of seats in the House of Representatives*)
- Why does the Parliament use majority rule rather than consensus for passing laws?
- After the 2010 election a minority government was formed. How did this occur? How does a minority government change decision making?
- Is it acceptable that, on occasion, nearly half the representatives in a given assembly oppose laws that are passed?
- Are there grounds for enforcing a consensus or perhaps a 2/3 majority in parliament? What decisions might warrant this?
- Are there national issues that should be decided by consensus? Are there issues that should be decided by a smaller group?



## Extension activities

- Majority rule tends to lead to a two-party system. Discuss in 300 words the advantages and disadvantages of this method of forming government and opposition.
- In 300 words, argue for greater consensual decision making in Australia.

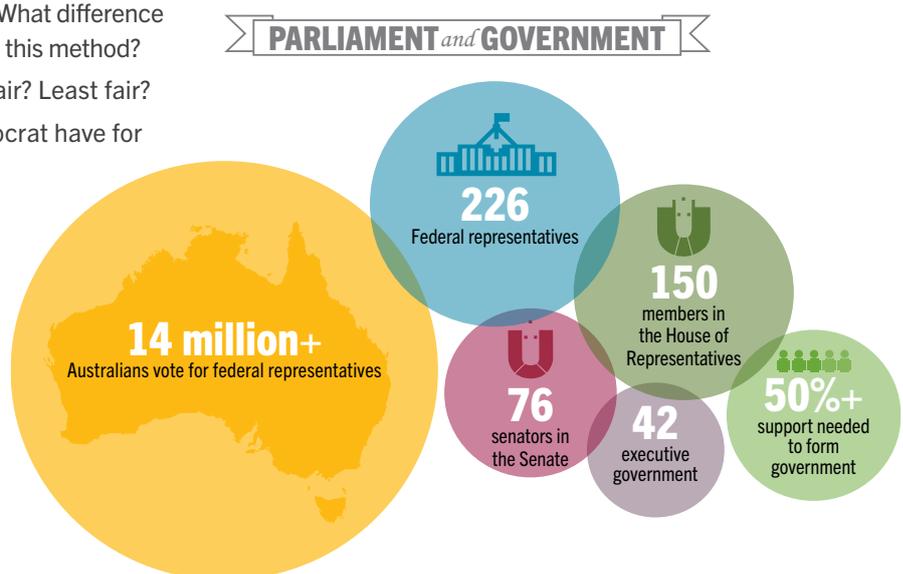


DIAGRAM: Available for use from the PEO website





### DECISION MAKING SCENARIOS

Decision method	Scenario action	Result
Autocratic decision	Randomly select an autocrat to decide.	
Executive decision	Determine a small executive (two or three people) to decide.	
Majority decision	<b>Open ballot:</b> Conduct a vote with a show of hands. The majority decides.	
	<b>Secret ballot:</b> Conduct a vote by writing on a piece of paper. Then have someone count the votes and declare the outcome.	
Consensus decision	Elicit compromise positions until the most favourable is determined. Consensus decides.	
Veto decision	Give yourself (as the teacher) the power to veto the consensus decision!	



**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Moderate

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Executive government: Three levels of government

This lesson investigates the three levels of executive government—federal, state and local—that operate in Australia. Students explore this topic through various disaster scenarios and write and deliver a disaster relief plan utilising various federal, state and local emergency services.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- name and broadly classify the powers and duties of each level of executive government
- identify and examine areas of overlap and cooperation between various executive levels
- examine the nature of disaster relief decision making.

### Focus questions

- What is meant by executive government?
- What powers and responsibilities do federal, state and local executive governments hold?
- What written authorities enact and divide these powers and responsibilities? (*federal and state constitutions*)
- Why do you think we have three levels of executive government? (*size of country, federal system, need to respond to local and national issues separately, representation etc.*)

### Concept words

Majority rule • Local • State • Federal government • Governance

Federation • Constitution • Representative democracy • Balance of power

Checks and balances • Executive • Jurisdiction

## Getting started

1. Initiate discussion by asking students to brainstorm as many services as possible provided by government in Australia. (*immigration, health, education, transport, welfare, library, building regulations etc.*) List on the board.
2. Categorise the list of services according to the level of government that provides the service and has responsibility for its management. (*see diagram below*)

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Executive government:** the branch of government which administers the law; the group of people from the governing party who make policy and control government departments, and who are answerable to the Parliament for the way they run the government; a group or person who manages.

**Cabinet:** the key group of decision making ministers in executive government.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Fact Sheet: Three Levels of Law-Making**  
[www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)



## Main activity

1. Tell students several disasters have occurred in the country and that their job is to form task forces that will devise plans of action.
2. Form groups of 4 to 6 students and distribute the Table of Government Services to each. (*see next page*)
3. Groups determine the type of disaster that has occurred (*natural, human, biological, military etc.*) and formulate a disaster relief plan of up to 15 points. As part of this process groups discuss the disaster, gather information, identify services required, identify the level of government that can provide that service and consider all aspects of administration including communication, coordination and human resourcing.
4. Spokespersons for each group present the relief plan to the whole class and invite student comments, questions and criticism.
5. After all plans have been presented, the class votes on the best plan.

## Debrief

1. What, if any, is the relationship between the type of disaster and level of government responsible?
2. What level of government has responsibility for disaster relief in Australia? Why? (*states normally administer relief through police departments*)
3. Who determines whether a disaster is a state or national disaster? (*the relevant commissioner, followed by the relevant head of government e.g. premier or prime minister*)
4. What type of decision making characterises disaster relief? (*democratic, consensus, executive etc.*)

## Parliamentary context

- Which body in state and federal parliaments would normally make disaster relief plans? (*federal and state Cabinets, emergency services*) Can you think of a disaster/s which would require federal Cabinet intervention?
- Can you give examples of cooperation between federal and state governments?
- What is the role of executive government in Australia?
- Which federal and state departments are likely to be important in emergency situations? What other non-government organisations might also play an important role? (*Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Country Fire Authorities, state police departments etc.*)



## Extension activities

- Over a week, identify and count newspaper articles which relate to a level of government. Collate the articles by level of government and interpret your findings.
- Name and count the number of disasters around the world covered by a national newspaper over a given week or month. What other organisations tend to lend assistance to national governments? Why might some countries be unable to adequately provide their own emergency services?
- By what authority can one country offer assistance in times of political crisis or catastrophe to another? (*United Nations approval, recipient leader's signed request, treaty etc.*) Describe three examples of this process.

### TABLE OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Federal goods and services	State goods and services	Local goods and services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• defence</li> <li>• immigration</li> <li>• foreign affairs</li> <li>• justice and customs</li> <li>• trade</li> <li>• taxation</li> <li>• communications</li> <li>• agriculture, fisheries and forestry</li> <li>• industry, tourism and resources</li> <li>• health and ageing</li> <li>• transport and regional services</li> <li>• environment</li> <li>• education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• health and hospitals</li> <li>• schools and education</li> <li>• employment and training</li> <li>• transport and roads</li> <li>• police and justice</li> <li>• emergency services</li> <li>• environment and heritage</li> <li>• agriculture, mining and natural resources</li> <li>• family and community services</li> <li>• primary industries</li> <li>• industry and tourism</li> <li>• excise duties and state taxes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building regulations</li> <li>• waste disposal</li> <li>• drains and water supply</li> <li>• libraries</li> <li>• signs</li> <li>• sports grounds</li> <li>• dog control</li> <li>• child care regulation</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Moderate

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Executive government: Executive decision making

The centre of power in the federal government is the Executive. In this lesson, students identify situations where executive decision making is necessary and form ministries and a Cabinet to plan and present a proposal for a year-level formal.



### Outcomes

Students will:

- explore executive decision making in the federal Cabinet
- understand the need for executive decisions
- explore how executive decisions are implemented through government departments.



### Focus questions

- What is an executive? (*a person or group with the authority to act*)
- What is an executive decision? (*a decision taken to act upon an issue without conference or reference to other participants whom they might represent*)
- Why do governments need to make executive decisions?
- What powers should the Executive have?



### Concept words

Administer • Authority • Cabinet • Executive decision • Executive powers  
Executive Council • Separation of powers • Ministers • Departments • Constitution  
Responsibility • Responsible government • Portfolio

### Getting started

1. Ask students to imagine playing a game of chess in which half of the class is playing the other half.
2. How would each side decide how to move? What factors might affect the quality of the decisions? (*degree of experience, leadership, argument, indecision etc.*)
3. What if a time limit were set at three minutes per move? Would fewer people make more effective decisions?
4. What if a time limit of one minute per move were set? Who, from each side, might make the most effective decisions? Why?
5. Ask students to consider a situation that needs critical attention (*e.g. a natural disaster, threat of war, outbreak of disease etc.*)

### USEFUL TOOLS



#### Definitions

**Executive (the):** branch of government which administers the law; the group of people from the governing party who make policy and control government departments, and who are answerable to the Parliament for the way they run the government; a group or person who manages.

**Executive decision:** having the authority to put important laws and decisions into effect without recourse to governing bodies or other entities.

**Cabinet (the):** key group of decision making ministers in executive government.



#### Documents and resources

##### PEO Fact Sheets:

- Cabinet
- Ministers and Shadow Ministers
- Separation of Powers: Parliament, Executive and Judiciary

[www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)



## Parliamentary Lesson Plan

### Executive decision making

6. Lead a discussion about how best to manage the crisis including making an effective course of action. Ask: What decisions need to be made and who should make them?
7. What are these decisions called? (*executive decisions*)
8. What is the government body that makes executive decisions? (*the Cabinet*)

### Main activity

1. Ask students to imagine that the class is a government responsible for planning and implementing a year-level formal. The budget for the event is \$2,000 and Cabinet ministers must present proposals for expenditure to the teacher (*acting as the wider school community*).
2. Brainstorm the portfolios (*areas of responsibility*) required to implement the formal (*project leader, venue officer, treasurer, designer, music coordinator, food officer etc.*)
3. Now select ministers to fill each role and create appropriate titles. (*e.g. Prime Minister, Minister for Design, Minister for Hospitality, Minister for Sound, Admin Minister, Security Minister etc.*)
4. Divide the remaining students among the ministers to form government departments.
5. Set a time limit for ministers to meet with their departments to write a brief proposal stating what goods and services will be provided by the department for the formal. (*e.g. Department of Hospitality: what refreshments, cost, caterer etc.*)
6. Ask the ministers to meet as the Cabinet. Present the following hypothetical situations for the relevant minister to respond to:
  - a. The manager of the selected venue calls one week prior to the formal and says the venue has burnt down.
  - b. The food does not arrive on the night and the caterer is not contactable.
  - c. The Minister for Sound is taken sick early in the process and unable to implement the music proposal.
  - d. The Treasurer loses the class funds (\$50/student) one week after Cabinet is formed.
  - e. Issued tickets include incorrect information.
  - f. Students from another school gatecrash the social and vandalise the school grounds.

### Debrief

1. How well did the ministers respond to the hypothetical situations?
2. How well did the ministers represent the interests of their departments?
3. What type of decision making did the Cabinet use across the whole activity? Was this process similar to the chess example?
4. Should (or did) ministers consult their departments during the hypothetical? On which issues? Did they need the support of their departments at any time?

### Parliamentary context

- What critical situations require executive decisions? (*disasters, call for elections, decisions to go to war etc.*)
- What on-going executive decisions might the Cabinet commonly make? (*decisions related to legislation proposals, the national agenda, government policy, crisis management etc.*)
- What decisions should not be left to the Executive? (*changing the Constitution, choosing federal representatives etc.*)



### Extension activities

- Essay 1: 'Executive power is necessary for effective governance.' Discuss in 300 words or more.
- Essay 2: Cabinet meetings are secret. Explain in 200 words why this is so.
- Essay 3: The Executive sits in the Legislature (*the Parliament*). What, if any, are the problems of having ministers contributing to law-making in the Parliament and then implementing laws through their departments? Is this a strength or weakness of the Westminster system?
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**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Advanced

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Executive government: Ministerial responsibility

In this lesson students explore ministerial responsibility through Question Time in the Senate and an estimates committee role-play. This activity demonstrates how committees and the federal executive operate. This lesson plan adopts a hypothetical situation, but any situation of ministerial neglect, real or imagined, could be applied.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- understand the principle of ministerial responsibility
- identify ways of determining responsibility
- identify how ministers account for their actions (*denial, resignation, reassurance, confirmation etc.*)

### Focus questions

- What is responsibility?
- How is responsibility determined? (*scrutiny, testimony, reference to job description, investigation*)
- How does the federal Parliament investigate and scrutinise ministerial actions?

### Concept words

Ministerial responsibility • Accountability • Transparency • Scrutiny • Blame  
Question Time • Portfolio • Department • Senate Estimates committee • Judgement  
Ministerial code of conduct • Responsible government • Parliamentary committee

### Getting started

1. What does it mean to be responsible? (*to be accountable for one's actions*)
2. Brainstorm positions of responsibility within a sporting team. (*players, team manager, physiotherapists, coach etc.*)
3. Draw a pyramid of responsibility on the board. Place people with the most responsibility at the top of the pyramid and those with least responsibility at the bottom.
4. Discuss how players and coaches are held accountable if they fail.
5. Draw an equivalent responsibility pyramid of executive government. (*prime minister at top, followed by ministers, department secretaries and then the public service*)

### USEFUL TOOLS

#### Definitions

**Responsibility:** bearing a particular burden or obligation. Responsible – answerable or accountable for something within one's power, management or control.

**Ministerial responsibility:** responsibility to the parliament for actions taken by a minister or on that minister's behalf; the doctrine that the ministers in a government, individually or collectively, depend for their continuance on maintaining the support of the parliament.

**Estimates committee:** estimates committees are Senate committees which meet during two periods each year to scrutinise executive government spending, actions and decisions.

#### Documents and resources

##### PEO Fact Sheets:

- Ministers and Shadow Ministers
  - Question Time
  - Parliamentary Committees
- [www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)

**Standards of Ministerial Ethics:** [www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/ministerial-ethics.pdf](http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/ministerial-ethics.pdf)



## Parliamentary Lesson Plan

### Ministerial responsibility

6. Discuss how the actions of ministers are scrutinised. (*Question Time, estimates committees, departmental reports and correspondence, the media etc.*)
7. How may a minister respond to an accusation of misconduct? (*accept or deny; inform or be silent; apologise or refute; resign or stay put; call for an inquiry or refuse an inquiry etc.*)
8. Who are ministers accountable to? (*the Prime Minister, the Parliament and ultimately, the Australian people*)

## Main activity

### Setting the scene

1. Tell the class they will role-play a hypothetical situation and help determine the degree of responsibility of a minister in the Senate.
2. Ask the class to imagine they are senators attending Question Time. (*the regular session in both chambers where the Parliament scrutinises government activity*)
3. Nominate an individual to put a question. (*see either the feedlot or battleship scenarios below*)
4. Explain that due to parliamentary and public interest in the issue, the Senate has undertaken to investigate the issue during Senate Estimates. (*a committee set up to scrutinise executive government spending, actions and decisions*)

### Senate Estimates committee

1. Brainstorm witnesses to attend the estimates committee and list on board. (*e.g. RSPCA, feedlot owners, Minister for Agriculture, Department Secretary etc.*)
2. Form witness groups based on the board list and assign other roles including a committee chair, committee senators and representatives of the media. (*see table*)
3. Give the committee time to frame questions and the witnesses time to prepare for questions from the committee.
4. The Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and media discuss the issue separately.
5. Set up the classroom with two rows of tables facing each other. Senators sit on one side, witnesses on the other.

### Conduct role-play

1. The committee chair runs the committee by asking each witness or witness group to answer questions from the committee senators.

2. The committee chair concludes the committee by thanking participants and by reminding all that the evidence has been recorded and will be available to the public.

### Parliament's response

1. Ask the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister to speak separately to the media and to recommend a consequence for the minister.
2. Ask representatives of the media to make statements.

## Debrief

1. What role did Question Time have in this process?
2. How else might this issue come to the Parliament's attention? (media, Matters of Public Importance, petitions etc.)
3. Discuss the department's responsibility.
4. How effective was this process in calling the minister to account?
5. How might the investigation be different if the minister was a major shareholder in the feedlot or shipyard?

## Parliamentary context

- Do you think the principle of ministerial responsibility is adequately applied in the federal Parliament? Why/why not?
- Is it reasonable that ministers accept ultimate responsibility for the actions of their department?



## Extension activities

- Continue the exploration of the role-play scenario by interviewing, cartooning, videoing or reporting upon the parliamentary process.
- Investigate a ministerial dismissal of a recent government. What principle did the minister allegedly breach?
- Identify a minister who you believe should have resigned and justify your reasoning.
- Record Question Time on video and lead a class analysis and discussion.
- Consider the following quote: 'Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.' ~Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What does it mean?



## Lesson resource

### Role-play scenario

#### Feedlot scenario

**Opposition senator:** I have read in the newspapers that a feedlot has a record, a proven record as pictures in the newspapers illustrate, of animal cruelty. I want to ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—a friend of the President of the Feedlot Association—to explain why his/her department has not suspended the feedlot's licence. This has got to be an example of corruption. I can't wait for Senate Estimates to investigate this one! I ask the minister to explain why he/she shouldn't resign.

#### Battleship scenario

**Opposition senator:** I have read a number of academic reports stating clearly that the battleships commissioned by the Minister for Defence are not needed by the defence forces. These ships are nothing more than white elephants! This is bad enough and demonstrates utter incompetence, but it just so happens that these ships have been built in marginal government electorates. This is surely an abuse of power, and I think warrants a Senate Estimates committee investigation. I ask the minister to explain why he/she shouldn't resign.

### Role descriptions

**Prime Minister:** You learn of the allegations in the newspapers and are very concerned. Do you support your minister or demand that he/she resign?

**Leader of the Opposition:** You have read the reports in the newspapers and are eager to call the minister to account. You have had little opportunity to pressure the government until now and are eager to make the most of it during Question Time and at the committee hearing through your senators.

**Minister:** You are intent on clearing your good name. Do you admit a wrongdoing or dismiss the accusations as muckraking?

**Departmental secretaries:** What is the best course for your future? Do you investigate the issue within your department? Do you side with the minister?

**Government senators:** You want to defend the reputation and good record of the minister. What questions do you frame at the committee hearing to highlight this? Don't forget the witness groups. How might they have been at fault?

**Opposition senators:** Your leader has instructed you to frame as many challenging questions at the minister and witness groups as possible. You wish to implicate the minister.

**Witnesses:** What is your interest in relation to the investigation? What do you know about this issue?

**Media:** You have found a good story and seek to expose many individuals at each stage of the process.

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Moderate

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Transparency: Accountability

Question Time is part of the sitting day in both chambers when ministers are required to explain the decisions and actions made in their portfolio.

In this lesson students use a Question Time role-play to pressure ministers to justify their actions and to investigate accountability in the federal Parliament. Other mechanisms of parliamentary accountability are also explored. For detailed instructions on how to run a Question Time role-play see DIY Role-play in the Classroom: Question Time (link in *Useful tools*).

### Outcomes

Students will:

- review issues of current and national interest
- experience Question Time through role-play
- reflect on the effectiveness of Question Time as a method of public accountability
- consider other mechanisms of accountability.

### Focus questions

- What is accountability? (*being called to account for one's actions*)
- Why is it important that people with power and responsibility be accountable? (*so the quality and effectiveness of their decisions and actions can be assessed*)
- What are examples of issues of public importance as distinct from issues of personal importance?
- What is Question Time? (*a part of the sitting day when the Parliament questions ministers about the administration of their portfolios*)

### Concept words

Performance • Sitting day • Power and privilege • Responsibility • Scrutiny

Executive government • Questions without notice • Questions on notice • Committee

Ministerial responsibility • Media • Dorothy Dix • Checks and balance • Hansard

Censure motion • Gaffs • Portfolio

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Accountable:** liable to be called to account; to explain; responsible to a person or entity for an act.

**Responsible:** answerable or accountable for something within one's power, management or control.

**Questions without notice:** questions of which ministers have no foreknowledge.

**Censure motion:** whereby a chamber declares a lack of confidence in a minister.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Fact Sheets:**

- Question Time
- Parliamentary Committees
- Press Gallery

[www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)

**Role-play lesson plans**

- Question Time in the House of representatives
- Question Time in the Senate

[www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans.html)

**Standards of Ministerial Ethics**

[www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/ministerial\\_ethics.pdf](http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/ministerial_ethics.pdf)



## Getting started

1. Commence a discussion about part-time jobs that students hold. Ask ‘How do employers assess employee workplace performance?’ (*observation, client evaluation, formal review, indices of success e.g. sales, output etc.*)
2. Brainstorm how employers and customers may give performance feedback (*praise or reprimand, continued or discontinued patronage, reward or penalty, promotion or demotion etc.*)
3. Ask students to apply this concept to government performance. How does the general public assess government action? (*scrutiny of government policy, statements and actions—especially through the media*)
4. Ask: How does the Parliament scrutinise government performance and call the government to account for its action? (*through the operation of Question Time, parliamentary committees and the public record*)
5. Ask: How may the public demonstrate dissatisfaction with government performance? (*through change of government at election, demands for resignations, public demonstrations, unflattering editorial comment etc.*)

## Main activity

### Preparing for Question Time in the House of Representatives

1. Ask students to identify issues of national importance that require a solution. (*e.g. water salinity, obesity, climate change, youth depression, skill shortages*)
2. Explain that the class (as a parliament) will scrutinise executive government’s performance by running a Question Time role-play in the House of Representatives.

### Turning your room into a chamber

1. Arrange chairs into a ‘U’ shape with government (majority) facing opposition (minority) and 2 or 3 independents between the two large parties.
2. Select a Speaker and Prime Minister (from government), a Leader of the Opposition (from opposition) and a Clerk and Serjeant-at-Arms (unelected officials).

## Holding a party meeting

1. Hold a government party meeting to determine the ministers responsible for each portfolio. (e.g. Minister for Environment, Health and Ageing, Youth Affairs and Employment etc) Hold an opposition party meeting to determine corresponding shadow portfolios. (*e.g. Shadow Minister for Environment, Health and Ageing etc.*)
2. Use the party meeting to plan questions in secret. Advise government backbenchers to plan friendly questions which highlight positive government activity (Dorothy Dixers). Advise the opposition and independents to plan challenging questions which highlight government weakness.

## Running a Question Time role-play

1. Download the Question Time script (DIY role-play link in *Useful tools*)
2. Run the role-play encouraging the opposition to pressure ministers to account for their actions (*e.g. by calling for answers in detail; a censure motion; changes to policy, an apology or resignation etc.*)

## Debrief

1. Did the government delay, equivocate, side-step, agenda shift or take questions on notice? (*commit to providing a written answer at a later date*)
2. What (if any) questions should ministers not be required to answer? (*questions that do not relate to their portfolio responsibilities*)
3. Based on this Question Time performance, which group do you think would win the next federal election?
4. Based on this Question Time role-play, how effective do you think Question Time is in calling the government to account?



## Parliamentary context

- Question Time is often the media focus of a sitting day. Why? (*packed chamber, controversial questions, ministers pressured, gaffs anticipated*)
- What effect does media attention have on the dramatic nature of Question Time? (*gains and losses are more extreme with potentially greater consequences*)
- How can the Parliament check that the government is doing what was agreed by the Parliament? (*annual reports, Hansard, budgets and estimates committees*)
- What are the consequences of repeated poor performance in Question Time? (*adverse media comment, poor polling, declining morale, infighting etc.*)
- Imagine Parliament without Question Time. What would be different? (*consider checks and balances*)

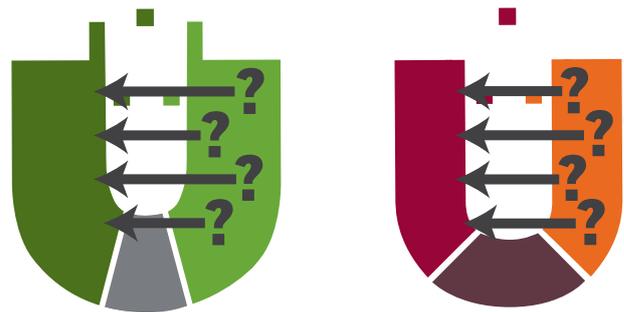


## Extension activities

- Record via radio, TV or web cast, a session of federal Question Time. Decide whether or not Question Time is an effective form of accountability. Support your answer with examples.
- Regular elections discipline a government. Discuss in 300 words.
- Media commentary provides an accurate record of what happens in the Parliament. Discuss in 300 words with reference to Question Time.

## OPPOSITION SCRUTINY

The opposition scrutinises government actions, decisions, policy, spending and statements



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SENATE

DIAGRAM: Available for use  
from the PEO website



**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Moderate

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Transparency: Scrutiny

This lesson investigates parliamentary scrutiny (*careful examination*) through a committee role-play. Other means of scrutinising government actions and decisions such as Question Time, the media and Hansard are also dealt with. For an overview of the parliamentary committee role-play see DIY Role-play in the Classroom: Committee (link in *Useful tools*).

### Outcomes

Students will:

- understand the nature of parliamentary scrutiny
- investigate mechanisms of parliamentary scrutiny
- distinguish between scrutiny and accountability.

### Focus questions

- What is scrutiny and why is it necessary?
- How does the federal Parliament scrutinise government activity?
- What is a parliamentary committee?

### Concept words

Accountability • Scrutiny • Vigilance • Question Time • Estimates  
Committee of inquiry • Hearing • Witness group • Submissions • Transparency  
Government • Opposition • The media • Hansard • Government department  
Annual report • Executive • Minister • Checks • Balances

## Getting started

1. Begin by asking students to share times when they or their families have been cheated or deceived in a commercial transaction. (*e.g. faulty goods, poor workmanship, overcharging etc.*)
2. Ask students to consider the following scenario: a family has commissioned a builder to construct a beach house. The builder has the plans, has received a 25% deposit and has started work.
3. How does the family know that the building will conform to the plans and that the money will be spent accordingly? (*inspections to check quality of work, materials and progress; talking of receipts: verification of builder's credentials etc.*)

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Scrutiny:** a searching investigation, minute inquiry. A searching look.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Fact Sheets:**

- Question Time
- Parliamentary Committees
- Press Gallery
- Senate Estimates

[www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)

**Role-play Lesson Plan – Committee:**

[www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans/committee.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans/committee.html)



## Parliamentary Lesson Plan Scrutiny

4. What might happen if the family did not scrutinise or review the work?
5. Who and what does the federal Parliament scrutinise? (*bills, expenditure, executive activity—especially that of the Prime Minister and Cabinet*)
6. Brainstorm ways in which the Parliament can investigate or scrutinise government activity. (*committees, Question Time, Hansard, departmental reports, budget papers etc.*)
7. How do members of parliament scrutinise the activity of executive government? (*consider Question Time, media coverage, Senate Estimate committees etc.*)

### Main activity

1. Download the DIY Role-play in the Classroom: Committee instructions and the Role-play Toolkit scripts (see links in *Useful tools*)

### Background to committees

1. Tell the class that the House of Representatives and the Senate often form smaller groups of members and senators known as parliamentary committees to investigate community issues or bills in detail.
2. Brainstorm issues of national importance. (*e.g. carbon tax, conscription, ethanol subsidy, obesity, drug use etc.*) Choose an issue for the role-play.
3. Write the issue as a bill using the words 'A Bill for an Act to ...' (*e.g. A Bill for an Act to establish a national carbon tax to reduce greenhouse gas emissions*)
4. Identify which groups might have an interest in the bill. (*petroleum industry, consumers, transport industry, welfare groups, tax office, environmental groups etc.*)
5. Out of the list of groups with an interest, select four witness groups to deliver a submission to a Senate committee.
6. Create groups of 3 or more for each witness group and a committee of 5-6 senators including a committee chair.
7. Committee senators discuss the topic and formulate questions to pose to each witness group, while witness groups write a statement on the bill. Do they support it or oppose it? Why?
8. Set up the classroom using the committee seating plan.

### Committee role-play

1. Conduct committee role-play using the committee script.
2. The committee recommends to the Parliament that the bill be accepted, rejected or changed. (*a report could be written*)

### Debrief

1. Ask the committee to explain its decision to the class.
2. How effectively did witness groups represent their organisation's interests?
3. What techniques did the committee use to scrutinise the witnesses? (*asked incisive questions, asked for more evidence and details, identified inconsistencies etc.*)
4. What important issues were not raised?

### Parliamentary context

- Why are some bills and issues referred to parliamentary committees? (*provides for thorough examination of issues, relieves pressure from the chamber, accesses special interests and skills of members etc.*)
- The Parliament is not bound by committee recommendations. How useful, therefore, do you think they are?
- How do the public and community groups find out about committee hearings? (*advertisements in newspapers, requests from committee secretariats to make submissions, ministers, parliamentary websites*)
- How else can the public and the media scrutinise government activity? (*Hansard, departmental reports, media commentary, the Budget etc.*)
- What is the relationship between scrutiny and accountability? (*without scrutiny there can be no accountability*)



### Extension activities

- Research Question Time, parliamentary committees and the media. Compare and contrast and determine which offers the most effective form of scrutiny. Justify your answer.
- Are all the means of scrutiny sufficient to form a comprehensive inquiry into government activity? If not, what other powers might the Parliament enact to achieve this?
- 'The media provides an accurate commentary on what happens in the Parliament.' Discuss.
- Ask the parliamentary committee (from the role-play) to write a report to the Parliament explaining the committee's recommendations.

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Advanced

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Legislation: Passing a bill in the House of Representatives

This lesson explores how legislation is introduced to the House of Representatives with special emphasis on how issues of national importance arise and how bills move through the chamber. Students debate an urgent bill and direct chamber proceedings. The function of the House of Representatives as a forum for new ideas and issues is examined. See DIY Role-play in the Classroom: Law-making (see link in Useful tools) for instructions and resources to assist this lesson.

(Note: This lesson is paired with Lesson 11 Legislation: Passing a Bill in the Senate. The script supplied with this lesson is an abridged version of what normally takes place in the chamber. It is designed to demonstrate decision making under severe time constraints.)

### Outcomes

Students will:

- recognise why and how bills are introduced to the House of Representatives
- identify how decisions are made in the chamber
- understand why compromise is a part of drafting a bill and frequently a part of its passage through a chamber
- identify how a bill is scrutinised in the House of Representatives.

### Focus questions

- How is government formed? (*the party which wins the majority of seats in the House of Representatives becomes government*)
- What are the characteristics of the House of Representatives?
- Why are there two chambers in federal Parliament?
- How do urgent issues enter the House? (*Question Time, Matters of Public Importance, committee reports, media stories etc.*)

### Concept words

Legislation • Compromise • Forum • Bicameral • Bill • Clause • Act of Parliament

Executive government • Consideration in detail • First reading • Second reading

Third reading • Division • Vote on the voices • Private member's bill

### USEFUL TOOLS

#### Definitions

**Bill:** a proposal for a new law or to modify an existing law that has been presented to a parliament.

**Act of Parliament:** a law made by the federal Parliament or state parliaments.

**Second reading stage:** the second stage that a bill must go through in order to become an Act of Parliament. This is the stage in either house when debate on the principle or purpose of the bill takes place.

#### Documents and resources

**Role-play lesson plans:** [www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans.html)

**Daily Bills List:** [www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation)



## Getting started

1. To initiate discussion, ask students to name the two chambers in federal Parliament.
2. Ask the students why they think the framers of the Australian Constitution included two chambers? *(to provide local and state representation, to encourage all states—especially small ones—to join the federation, to protect state sovereignty and constitutions and to provide a sober second view of legislation)*
3. Brainstorm characteristics of the House of Representatives *(where government is formed, the Prime Minister tends to sit, 150 members represent 150 electorates, more issue-based committees occur and more legislation originates)*

## Main activity

### Choosing a bill

1. Tell the class they are elected members of the House of Representatives about to frame and debate an urgent and contentious bill that the opposition has agreed to pass in the House, but has foreshadowed amendments to in the Senate. *(see Lesson 11 Legislation: The Senate)*
2. Tell students that the event that has precipitated this urgent action is outbreaks of bird flu in parts of Australia. *(or other similar disaster)* The Australian Parliament must act swiftly and legally to contain the potential disaster.
3. Write the problem on the board as a bill in its short title e.g. The Asian Bird Flu Bill, 2006 and in its long title e.g. A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Asian Bird Flu.
4. Write the details of the bill which should outline how the bill will achieve its goal e.g.
  - Increase Commonwealth Serum Laboratory spending by 100%.
  - Double personnel numbers in Health Department infectious disease divisions.
  - Triple humanitarian medical aid to regional neighbours combating Asian Bird Flu.

## Preparing for debate

1. Select a Speaker and two clerks to direct proceedings and ask them to study the Path of a Bill diagram *(over the page)* and the law-making scripts. *(attached)*
2. Break the remainder into a government and opposition of roughly equal size but with a slight government majority, plus 2 or 3 Independents.
3. The government selects a minister to introduce the bill.
4. Party groupings discuss the bill separately and determine their position. *(the government will argue for the bill; the opposition and Independents will make some critical comments but choose to vote for the bill given its urgency)*

## Debate

1. A bell is rung to start the proceedings and the Speaker and clerks direct the debate.
2. When the debate is exhausted the chamber votes on the bill. *(see script)*

## Debrief

- Did the idea to solve the problem (the bill) change much from its inception to entry to the chamber?
- Why do you think the passage of a bill is divided into definite stages?
- Why are the Speaker and clerks so important in chamber proceedings?

## Parliamentary context

- Where do bills come from? (*government departments, interest groups, committees of inquiry, private members, petitions, the prime minister, ministers, treaties, responses to major issues and events, the states, private citizens etc.*)
- Name a number of recent bills passed by the government and explain why the bill was introduced and where it came from.
- How are decisions made? (*compare the vote on the voices to a division—a counted and recorded vote*)



### Extension activities

- Identify 2 or 3 controversial bills currently being debated in the House of Representatives. Why and how were the bills introduced? What is their current status? (see *Daily Bills List*, link in *Useful tools*)

## THE PATH of a BILL

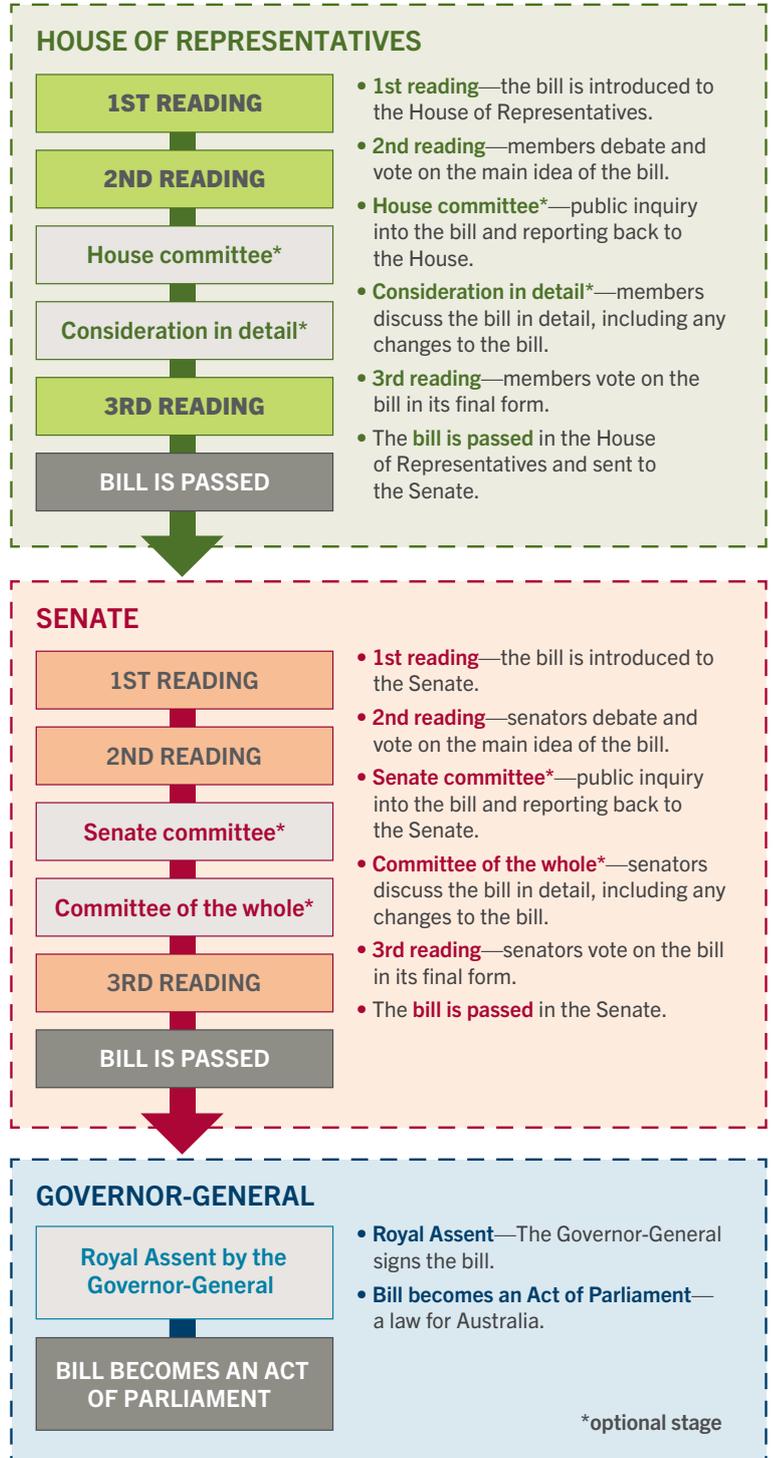


DIAGRAM: Available for use from the PEO website





<b>AN URGENT BILL IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Script</b>
<b>Serjeant-at-Arms</b> escorts the <b>Speaker</b> into the chamber and says:	<b>Honourable members, the Speaker of the House</b> (all stand and resume seat after the Speaker sits down).
When the <b>Serjeant-at-Arms</b> has introduced the <b>Speaker</b> and put the Mace on the table, the <b>Speaker</b> says:	<b>Members, please sit down.</b> <b>The House is now in session.</b> <b>I call the Clerk.</b>
<b>Clerk</b> reads next item of business:	<b>Notice No. 1: Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_.</b>
<b>Minister for Health</b> reads the short title and hands copy to Clerk:	<b>I present the Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_ and move that the Bill be read a first time.</b>
<b>Clerk</b> reads long title:	<b>First reading: A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Asian Bird Flu.</b>
<b>Minister for Health</b>	<b>I move that the Bill be read a second time.</b>
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Is leave granted for the second reading debate to continue immediately?</b> (Members remain silent to signify agreement) <b>Leave is granted for the debate to continue immediately.</b> <b>I call the Member for _____</b> (first name) <b>to speak.</b> (Members speak in turn, until the debate is exhausted.) <b>Order! The question is that the Bill be read a second time.</b> <b>Those of that opinion say Aye, to the contrary No.</b> <b>I think the Ayes have it.</b>
<b>Clerk</b>	<b>Second reading: A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Avian Bird Flu.</b>
<b>Minister for Health</b>	<b>I ask leave to move the third reading forthwith.</b> (Members agree given the urgent nature of the bill. In other circumstances consideration in detail may be requested).
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Is leave given for the third reading to be moved forthwith?</b> (Members say nothing signifying agreement for the bill to move to the third reading.) <b>Leave is granted. I call the Minister for Health.</b>
<b>Minister for Health</b>	<b>I move that the Bill be read a third time.</b>
<b>Speaker</b> (This script assumes no division.)	<b>The question is that the Bill be read a third time.</b> <b>Those of that opinion say Aye, to the contrary say No.</b> <b>The ayes have it.</b>
<b>Clerk</b>	<b>Third reading: A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Avian Bird Flu.</b>
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>I call the Minister for Health.</b>
<b>Minister for Health</b>	<b>I move that the House do now adjourn.</b>
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Those of that opinion please say Aye, to the contrary say No.</b> <b>I think the Ayes have it. Order! The House is now adjourned.</b>

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Advanced

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## Legislation: Passing a bill in the Senate

This lesson explores how bills are modified and how compromises are made in the Senate. Students debate a bill that has passed the House of Representatives and has now reached the amendment stage in the Senate. In addition, students examine how the Senate acts as a house of review and scrutinises the actions and decisions of the government. See DIY Role-play in the Classroom: Law-making (link in *Useful tools*) for instructions and resources to assist this lesson.

(Note: This lesson is paired with Lesson 10 Legislation: Passing a Bill in the House of Representatives. The script supplied with this lesson is an abridged version of what normally takes place in the chamber. It is designed to demonstrate decision making under severe time constraints.)

### Outcomes

Students will:

- examine the passage of a bill in the Senate with particular attention to amending bills
- recognise the potential for minor parties and Independents to hold the balance of power in the Senate
- identify how decisions and compromises are made in the Senate
- evaluate the significance of the Senate.

### Focus questions

- Why are there two chambers in federal Parliament?
- What are the characteristics of the Senate?
- How do bills enter and move through the Senate?
- What is committee of the whole?
- What is an amendment?
- How does proportional representation affect the composition of the Senate?

### Concept words

Checks and balances • Compromise • Proportional voting • House of review

Bicameral • Private bill • Committee of whole • Bill • Clause

First, second and third reading • Division • Vote on the voices • President

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Amendment:** a change to a bill, Act of Parliament or the Australian Constitution.

**Committee of the whole:** an optional stage in the passage of bill when all members of the Senate may meet as a committee to consider a bill in detail.

### Documents and resources

**Role-play lesson plans:**  
[www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans/html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans/html)

**House Committees of the current Parliament:**  
[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House\\_of\\_Representatives/Committees?url=committee.htm#select](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives/Committees?url=committee.htm#select)



## Getting started

1. To initiate discussion, ask students to name the two chambers in federal Parliament.
2. Ask students why they think the framers of the Constitution included two chambers. *(to provide local and state representation, to encourage all states—especially small ones—to join the federation, to protect state sovereignty and constitutions and to provide a sober second view of legislation)*
3. Brainstorm characteristics of the Senate. *(the chamber of proportional representation, six year terms, 76 senators representing six states and two territories, government or opposition majorities, more legislative committees and more amended legislation etc.)*

## Main activity

### Choosing a bill

1. Tell the class they are senators and will amend an urgent, contentious bill—The Asian Bird Flu Bill 2006 (or a similar disaster bill) that has already passed the House.
2. Write the title of the bill in its short title e.g. The Asian Bird Flu Bill, 2006 and in its long title e.g. A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Asian Bird Flu.
3. Write the details of the bill (clauses) as passed by the House, underneath the long title: e.g.
  - Increase Commonwealth Serum Laboratory spending by 100%
  - Double personnel numbers in Health Department infectious disease divisions
  - Triple humanitarian medical aid to regional neighbours combating Asian Bird Flu.
4. Critically consider the appropriateness of the bill as it stands and consider possible improvements to the clauses of the bill e.g.
  - Increase Commonwealth Serum Laboratory finance for the manufacture of anti-viral medicine
  - Freeze all cross-border movement in and out of Australia
  - Quarantine anyone showing cold or flu symptoms and ban visits.

### Preparing for debate

1. Select a President and two clerks to direct proceedings and ask them to study the Path of a Bill diagram *(over the page)* and the law-making scripts. *(attached)*

2. Divide the class so that the government and opposition are equal in numbers and the smaller remainder make up the Independents and minor parties. *(e.g. 11 government, 11 opposition, 2 independents and 5 minor party senators)*
3. Party groupings discuss the bill separately and determine their position. *(the government will argue for the bill; the opposition, minor parties and Independents will seek to amend the three clauses of the bill)*

### Debate

1. A bell is rung to start the proceedings and the President and clerks direct the amendment debate.
2. When the debate is exhausted the chamber votes on the bill.

## Debrief

1. What changes to the bill were made and how did the non-government senators achieve this?
2. Why do you think the passage of a bill is divided into definite stages?
3. Despite the urgency of the bill, why is it important the Senate deliberated as it did?
4. Why are the President and clerks so important to chamber proceedings?

## Parliamentary context

- Why are amendments more likely to occur in the Senate than the House of Representatives? *(proportional voting, more minor party representation, House of Review)*
- Name a bill recently amended by the Senate. Why was it amended and how did non-government senators do it?



### Extension activities

Identify a current Senate legislative committee. Why are some pieces of legislation investigated at length? See House Committees of the current Parliament. (link in *Useful tools*)



AN URGENT BILL IN THE SENATE	
Action	Script
Usher of the Black Rod escorts President into the chamber and says:	Honourable senators, the President of the Senate (all stand and resume seat after the President sits down).
When the Usher of the Black Rod has put the Black Rod in its stand, the President says:	Senators, please sit down. The Senate is now in session. I call the Clerk.
Clerk reads the next item:	Government Business Order of the day No. 1: Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_.
Minister representing the Minister for Health reads the short title and hands the copy of the Bill to Clerk:	I present the Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_ and move that the Bill be read a first time.
Clerk reads long title:	First reading: A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Avian Bird Flu.
Minister representing the Minister for Health	I move that the Bill be read a second time.
President	Leave is granted for the debate to continue immediately. I call Senator _____ (surname) to speak.  (Senators speak in turn, till the debate is exhausted.)  Order! The question is that the Bill be read a second time.  Those of that opinion say Aye, to the contrary No.  I think the Ayes have it.
Clerk	Second reading: A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Avian Bird Flu.
President	Is leave given for the third reading to be moved forthwith?  (Senators say no—signifying a desire for committee of the whole to occur and for the clauses of the bill to be considered in detail.)
Deputy President sitting between the clerks say:	The committee will now consider The Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_. Could senators with an amendment please stand.  I call Senator _____ (surname) to propose an amendment to the Bill.
Senator	The opposition believes that the bill can be improved. I move the following amendment to the Bill. The amendment reads as follows: _____ _____
Deputy President makes sure that the senators only debate the proposed amendment and says:	I call Senator _____ (surname) to speak. (Senators speak in turn, till the debate on the amendment is exhausted.)
Deputy President	I call the Minister representing the Minister for Health.
Minister representing the Minister for Health	I declare this Bill an urgent Bill and move that the Bill be considered urgently.



Action	Script
Deputy President	<p>The question is that the Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_ be an urgent bill.</p> <p>All those in favour say Aye</p> <p>All those opposed say No</p> <p>I think the Ayes have it. (Senators agree given the urgency)</p> <p>I call the Minister representing the Minister for Health.</p>
Minister representing the Minister for Health	<p>I move that the Senate complete its consideration of this Bill within the next ten minutes.</p>
Deputy President	<p>The question is that time for consideration of the Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_, be limited to the next ten minutes.</p> <p>All those in favour say Aye</p> <p>All those opposed say No</p> <p>I think the Ayes have it. (Senators agree given the urgency)</p>
Deputy President (In reality the amendment may or may not be accepted by the Senate. In this scenario the presumption is that the amendment improves the Bill.)	<p>The question is that the amendment moved by the opposition be agreed to.</p> <p>All those in favour say Aye</p> <p>All those opposed say No</p> <p>I think the Ayes have it.</p> <p>There being no other amendments, the question is that the amendment that has been agreed to be reported to the Senate.</p> <p>All those in favour say Aye</p> <p>All those opposed say No</p> <p>I think the Ayes have it.</p>
President	<p>The Deputy President has reported to me that the committee has considered the Avian Bird Flu Bill 200_ and has agreed to it with an amendment.</p> <p>The question is that this report be agreed to.</p> <p>All those in favour say Aye</p> <p>All those opposed say No</p> <p>I think the Ayes have it.</p> <p>I call the Minister representing the Minister for Health.</p>
Minister representing the Minister for Health	<p>I move that the bill, as amended, now be read a third time and I thank the Senate for the speedy passage of this most important Bill.</p>
President	<p>The question is that the Bill be read a third time.</p> <p>All those in favour say Aye</p> <p>All those opposed say No</p> <p>I think the Ayes have it.</p> <p>I call the Clerk.</p>
Clerk	<p>Third reading: A Bill for an Act to protect Australia from Avian Bird Flu.</p>

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Advanced

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## The Constitution: A new federation

The Australian Constitution establishes a federal system of Australian governance in which the states control their internal affairs and a federal parliament addresses the national agenda.

This lesson investigates possibilities for future representation. Students develop and present proposals for a new division of powers within the Australian federation including new regional or state boundaries and conduct a quasi referendum to determine whether the proposal is supported or defeated.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- describe the relationship between state and federal parliaments
- identify responsibilities shared between federal and state and territory governments
- explore an alternative federal structure by creating new state boundaries and redistributing power
- explain and justify the new federal model.

### Focus questions

- What is a federation?
- Why did the Australian colonies federate?
- What are federal powers?
- What are state powers?
- Do you think the Australian federation needs revision? Why/why not?

### Concept words

Governance • State government • State rights • Federation • Federalism

Commonwealth • Constitution • Referendum • Governor-General • Head of state

High Court of Australia • Representative democracy • Jurisdiction • Legislative powers

Geopolitical • Checks and balances • Economies of scale • Efficiency • Regions

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Federation:** a nation formed by the union of a number of states which give up some of their powers to the national parliament.

**Commonwealth:** an association of states or nations which are self-governing and share a common purpose.

**Constitution:** a written set of rules by which a nation or state within a nation is governed.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Fact Sheets:**

- Australian Constitution
  - Federation
- [www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/fact-sheets.html)



## Getting started

1. Begin by asking: What is meant by the term federation?
2. Provide students with a relief map of Australia. Ask students to imagine they have been given the task of dividing the country into new political regions. What are the possibilities?
3. Invite students to brainstorm possible regional powers and possible federal powers. Put the lists under the heading 'A new Australian federation—state and federal powers'.
4. Lead a discussion about what such a proposal would involve (*formation of new states; a referendum; amendment to the Constitution*)
5. Tell the students that a referendum is required to change the Constitution.

## Main activity

### Defining new borders

1. Divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 students. Ask each group to select a spokesperson.
2. Distribute 4 Australian data maps to each group for analysis. (*population, rainfall, resource, topographic map etc.*)
3. Ask each group to establish criteria for the redefined regions. (*consider aspects of representation, size, land use, river catchments, landforms, population, regional identity, climate, proposed capitals etc.*)
4. Groups draw alternative borders on a blank map of Australia including a capital city where each parliament will meet.

### Defining new powers

1. Ask each group to select a second spokesperson.
2. Draw up a list of current federal and state powers e.g.
  - Federal: trade, taxation, immigration, defence, welfare, foreign affairs etc.
  - State: natural resources, transport, police, housing, emergency services, water etc.
3. Ask each group to establish criteria for a new division of power and responsibility. (*consider aspects of cost, infrastructure, administration, efficiency, identity, scale, scope, revenue, responsibility, accountability, equity etc.*)
4. Groups create a list of federal and state powers to match the needs of the new federation.

### Holding a quasi referendum

1. Groups/spokespeople present and justify their proposals to the whole class.

2. Students vote to determine the most popular model and hold a quasi referendum on it. Tell students that in a referendum, voters would vote 'yes' or 'no' to the proposed model, and that to be approved 4 of 6 Australian states and a majority of voters overall must approve the change. (*this could translate to a 2/3 majority of the class*)

## Debrief

1. Reflect on the group activities. Were any issues difficult to agree on? If so, what were they? Why?
2. What criteria were central to decisions about how to form new regions?
3. What criteria were central to decisions about how to divide power and responsibility?
4. Was there a conflict between how to provide adequate representation and how to distribute power equally?
5. What powers, if any, did all groups say should be controlled by the Commonwealth? Why?
6. What powers, if any, did all groups say should be controlled by the regions?

## Parliamentary context

- What are some of the characteristics of the Australian federation? (*written constitution, power distributed between states and the Commonwealth, parliaments to create the law, executive governments to administer the law and a judiciary to interpret the law and to settle disputes*)
- If enough citizens wanted a new federal system, what steps could they take to achieve this? (*petition federal Parliament for a referendum or parliamentary committee; organise a constitutional convention, lobby state and federal members of parliament; create an organisation promoting the cause etc.*)



## Extension activities

- Write a report of recent issues which illustrate conflict between state and federal governments. (*euthanasia, nuclear waste and energy, wilderness and heritage, Mabo, gay union, industrial relations*)
- Write a report demonstrating state and federal cooperation. Illustrate with examples. (*Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme, social services, defence installations, commonwealth acquisition of state debt, natural disasters etc.*)
- In 500 words trace the changing distribution of power between state and federal governments since Federation.

**STUDENTS:** Middle to upper secondary

**LEVEL:** ● Advanced

# Parliamentary Lesson Plan

## The Constitution: The head of state

Australia is a constitutional monarchy and our head of state is the Queen. Some have argued Australia should become a republic with a president as the head of state. This lesson explores constitutional monarchy and the two major republican models established in the 1990s leading up to the 1999 referendum. These models will be examined through a round-table debate which culminates in a class referendum.

### Outcomes

Students will:

- experience round table debate
- understand the role of a head of state
- explore constitutional monarchy and republican governments in general
- examine parliamentary and popular republican government
- explore referenda as a mechanism for constitutional change.

### Focus questions

- What is a constitutional monarchy?
- What is a republic?
- What is a head of state?
- What is the role of the Governor-General?
- What is a president?
- What is a referendum?
- What is the prime minister's role?

### Concept words

Sovereign • Monarch • Head of state • Governor-General • President • Constitution  
Convention • Executive government • Legislative • Separation of powers • Veto  
Reserve powers • Commander-in-chief • Royal assent • Referenda • Donkey vote

## USEFUL TOOLS

### Definitions

**Sovereign:** King or Queen of a country. One person having supreme rank, authority or power, being above all others in importance, character or excellence. The physical embodiment of a monarchy.

**Republic:** a state in which the supreme power rests in the body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by representatives chosen directly or indirectly by them. Often this state is headed by an individual president whose title is almost never inherited.

### Documents and resources

**PEO Quick Answers**  
[www.peo.gov.au/quick-answers.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/quick-answers.html)



## Parliamentary Lesson Plan

### The head of state

## Getting started

1. To initiate discussion, ask the students what is the highest position of political authority in Australia? (*create a list on the board and identify the Queen, Governor-General and Prime Minister*)
2. Ask who is our head of state? (*distinguish between political power and constitutional authority. The prime minister has, in practice, greater political power, but the Queen is our head of state and her representative, the Governor-General, carries out her duties in Australia according to the Australian Constitution and conventions, including giving bills final approval.*)
3. Ask students to identify Australia's current head of state and Governor-General. (*Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC*)
4. Given these facts, what then is Australia's system of government known as? (*a constitutional monarchy*)
5. Ask students what they understand by the term republic and define this term on the board.

## Main activity

### Getting started

1. Tell the students that they will participate in a constitutional convention to debate whether Australia should become a republic.
2. Ask the students to identify a number of questions concerning the role of President. (*powers, appointment, term etc.*)
3. Brainstorm answers to these questions and list on the board. (*President chosen by general election, by the Parliament, by the Prime Minister or some other way; reserve powers, explicit powers, veto power, fixed or unfixed terms etc.*)
4. From these ideas, identify the two major models identified at the last constitutional convention and list on the board. They were as follows:
  - Parliamentary republicanism (*people nominate; parliament appoints*)—a committee compiles a list, via community consultation, of candidates narrowed to one by the Prime Minister to be voted by a joint sitting of the Parliament. A two-third majority is required for approval. The President would be the new head of state and all ties to the British monarch cut. The President would have the same powers as the current Governor-General.

- Popular republicanism (*parliament nominates; the people elect*)—the people elect a President from several nominated by state and federal parliaments. This person has codified reserve powers, that is, clearly stated powers to resolve conflicts between the houses (*e.g. trigger general elections in the event of a hung Parliament, dismiss the Prime Minister under specific circumstances etc.*)
5. Identify 3 to 5 students to advocate for parliamentary republicanism, popular republicanism and constitutional monarchy—the status quo—at the constitutional convention. (*around half the class should comprise these groups*)
  6. Ask each group to choose a speaker to represent their position and the remaining half of the class to attend the convention as voting citizens.
  7. Give groups time to prepare their speeches and citizens time to research each model and to devise appropriate questions.

### Constitutional convention

1. Form a semi-circle of chairs/tables in the front half of the class for the advocates and rows for the citizens facing them.
2. Ask each group to speak and to take questions from the citizens.

### Referendum

1. Tell the class a referendum to decide the model will occur and all participants will vote either yes or no as private citizens. (*independent of any particular group*)
2. Conduct a preferential vote of the three models to determine an option to pose for the referendum. (*hand out paper slips and ask citizens to mark a 1, 2 & 3 beside each model*)
3. Ask two students to count and another two to scrutinise the tally.
4. List the votes on the board and circle the option with the least votes. Eliminate this option and redistribute the second preferences to the other two. Which got the majority? (*if the status quo there will be no referendum; but if it is one of the republican models, record its name on the board*)
5. Conduct the referendum with a secret ballot marked with the question and a yes and no box. Count the votes with two scrutineers. Will a new model be adopted? (*a 2/3 majority is needed for a referendum to pass*)



## Debrief

1. Did one of the republican options pass into law? If so why, if not, why not?
2. If so, which republican model was favoured? Why?
3. Did any advocates vote for an option other than the one they spoke for? Why?
4. Which option was most preferred after the first round of preferential voting? Did this win? If not why?

## Parliamentary context

- What are reserve powers? If Australia were to become a republic, should the president have explicit powers or just reserve powers? (*a popular republican model*)
- Does Australia need a single individual with the power to resolve conflict between houses of parliament and states or is the High Court sufficient?
- Queen of Australia: since the Royal Title and Styles Act of 1973, the Queen's full title has been, 'Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God Queen of Australia and Her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth.'



## Extension activities

- Although the Governor-General normally takes advice from the Prime Minister and does not play a political role, identify why the Governor-General of the day intervened in the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975. What wider implications for republicanism does this provide?
- Why do you think a figurehead or ultimate leader is seen as necessary for a state? Could a system of government be devised without a single leader at the top?

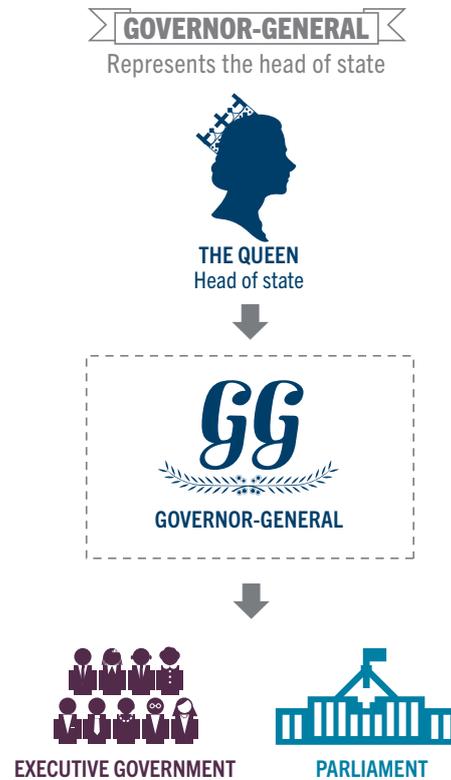


DIAGRAM: Available for use  
from the PEO website

