CHANGING THE CONSTITUTION

Does Australia need a new head of state?

Hold a referendum and let your class decide.

Activity materials

- Coloured paper
- Box (for the ballots)

Getting started

❶ Explain to the class the meaning of the terms "constitutional monarchy" and "republic".

❷ As a class discuss the powers of the Governor-General.

GG Governor-General's powers

- Giving Royal Assent to bills that have been agreed to by the Parliament
- Announcing federal elections
- Being Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Defence Force
- Opening the Parliament after elections
- Swearing in the Prime Minister and ministers
- Representing Australia at international meetings
- Giving out awards like the Order of Australia

❸ As a class, 'think, pair, share': Should Australia remain a constitutional monarchy, with the Queen as our head of state OR should we become a republic by replacing the Queen with a president?

❹ Explain that to make this change, our Constitution would need to be rewritten. This is done by a referendum in which the people of Australia make the decision.

❺ Explain to students that a committee has investigated options and has recommended that **IF** Australia were to become a republic, the best option is:

Parliamentary republicanism

After talking to the community, a committee makes a list of possible presidents. The Prime Minister chooses one person from the list, then Parliament votes to confirm the choice. The new president would have the same powers as the Governor-General and Australia would no longer have a Queen or King.

Referendum

❶ Divide the class into 3 groups to vote, assigning each group a colour—red, blue or yellow.

❷ Using the referendum ballot paper template, create a ballot paper for your referendum. If you have access to coloured paper, you could make each group a different colour.

❸ Hold a secret referendum. Keep the ballots of each group separate from the others.

❹ Count the votes 1 group at a time with 2 scrutineers—people checking the count.

❺ Using the voting table, tally the number of "yes" and "no" votes for each group. Then the yes/no result for each group. Then work out the overall yes/no result.

❻ Complete the table to determine if the referendum was successful.

What happened?

❶ Discuss with the class what happened in your referendum. Has the Constitution now been changed? Will the new system be adopted?

❷ Using the double-majority graphic, explain that in Australia, a double majority is needed to change the constitution—that is, a majority of voters in a majority of states as well as a majority of all Australians.

❸ Explain that in Australia's history only 8 of 44 proposed changes to the Constitution have been agreed to. As a class discuss:

- Why have most referendums been unsuccessful?
- Should there be another way to change Australia's Constitution? If so, what should it be?
- What other changes could be made to Australia's Constitution?

Curriculum links

Year 7　(ACHCK049)

Year 9　(ACHCS089)

How to change the Constitution

The Australian Constitution can only be changed with the support of the majority of Australian voters **and** a majority of voters in at least four states. This is known as a **double majority**.

SCENARIO ONE
- ✓ Majority of Australian voters
- ✓ Majority of voters in at least four states
- ✓ **CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION**

SCENARIO TWO
- ✗ Majority of Australian voters
- ✓ Majority of voters in at least four states
- ✗ **DON'T CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION**

SCENARIO THREE
- ✓ Majority of Australian voters
- ✗ Majority of voters in at least four states
- ✗ **DON'T CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION**

Referendum result tally

	Yes	No	Winner
Blue			
Red			
Yellow			
Total			

Double majority? Yes / No

Commonwealth of Australia
Parliamentary Education Office

BALLOT PAPER

State or Territory

Referendum on an idea to change the Constitution

DIRECTIONS TO VOTER
Write "YES" or "NO" in the space provided.

A PROPOSED LAW:
To change the Constitution to make Australia a republic.

Do you agree with this proposed change?

WRITE "YES" OR "NO"

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