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

ABC 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

Parliament NOW

STUDENTS: Middle to upper secondary
LEVEL: • Less challenging
Parliamentary Lesson Plan
Political parties

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 protestor 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.

How to form a PARLIAMENTARY PARTY

A POLITICAL PARTY SELETS PARTY CANDIDATES, WHO STAND FOR ELECTION

AUSTRALIAN CITIZENS VOTE FOR FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES IN A FEDERAL ELECTION

SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES BECOME MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, FORMING THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY

DIAGRAM: Available for use from the PEO website