
Lesson Overview

This lesson offers students the opportunity to take the role of voters with special interests. Students draw up initiatives for new classroom or school rules. Working in groups of four or five, students share their ideas and rationale for new rules. Students experience listening to other students’ interests, justifications for new rules, and reaching a consensus by majority vote. Each group submits its priority initiative for ballot consideration. Schedule this lesson to give students sufficient time to discuss their initiatives before the simulated election.

Suggested Grade Level

Elementary (Grades 5–6)

Estimated Time to Complete

50 minutes

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to

• learn the requirements for a good rule,
• understand that a rule on a ballot is an initiative,
• develop clear and understandable wording for an initiative,
• explain the need for supportive information for an initiative, and
• explain prioritizing ideas.

Materials Needed

Supplies

• Chart paper
• Scratch paper
• Markers
Teacher Resources

• Characteristics of a Good or Useful Rule (Teacher Resource 6), an initiative requirement chart

Student Handouts

• Building Our Vocabulary (Student Handout 2)
• Is This a Good Rule? (Student Handout 10)

Before the Lesson

• Communicate again with the registrar’s office to reconfirm the date for the simulated election and the delivery of voting materials.
• Check that each student has completed the assignment to create a proposed initiative with justifications for their classroom ballot simulated election.

Lesson Procedure

1. What Is a Good Rule?

Explain to students that they now have the opportunity to create new rules. These new rules will be initiatives placed on the class ballot. They will be exercising direct democracy by creating these initiatives.

• Begin by asking a student to read the definition for an initiative (Student Handout 2).
• Ask another student to read the definition for direct democracy (Student Handout 2).
• Ask if their proposed rules are the same as an initiative.
  o Students should recognize their right as citizens to create these policies for a general vote.

Tell the class that each student has created a proposed initiative for the class ballot. Groups will consider every member’s proposal but first the class must learn what makes a good rule.

• Project Teacher Resource 6 on a screen or the classroom board.
• Explain to the class that every new rule must meet all of these qualifications.
• Ask students for their explanations for each requirement.

Using the following hypothetical classroom policy, ask students to apply each rule requirement to your classroom policy.
Policy: Any student who is late to class must stay after school for two hours every day for a month.

- Reason: to get students to class on time. Too many students are coming in late.
- Fair: No. Two hours is too long a penalty for being late to class. Some students may arrive only one or two minutes late.
- Understandable/Clear: Yes
- Possible to Obey: Yes, students can take the late bus home or have parents pick them up later.
- Legal: Yes, a teacher can set discipline rules for a class.

2. Exercising Citizen Power: Creating an Initiative

Explain to the class that they will be working in groups to listen to, evaluate, and vote on new rule proposals by group members. They have 20 minutes to complete their considerations.

- Have students move into groups of four or five for this exercise.
- Ask that one group member pick up a Student Handout 10 for each member of his/her group.
- Review the handout with the class and instruct the groups to listen to member proposals and apply the Good Rule requirements for each proposal.
  - Each student will explain his or her suggested rule and offer reasons for the rule to their group.
  - Group members should jot down opinions for the rule requirements as each proposal is presented.

3. Reaching a Majority Vote

After the group hears all the suggested rules, they will take a vote and prioritize the rules.

- Tell students that they may need to take several votes in order to reach a majority vote on their group’s final number-one initiative.

If a rule earns a majority vote, have students keep a list of the other rules considered and the number of votes each received.

- Remind students that their secondary rules may be other groups’ chosen rule for the ballot.
  - Ask what this might mean for the class vote.
    - Students may respond that one of their own secondary rules may win the vote.
- Have students refocus on the Good Rule chart (Student Handout 10) and ask the following:
  - Have you applied to your rule each requirement for a good rule?
If not, have you changed the suggested rule to meet the requirement?
Did you reach a majority vote?
Is your suggestion for a new rule realistic?
What do you think the possibility is for this new rule to pass?
Will your teacher or principal accept it as a new rule?

Give groups an additional few minutes for final consideration of their initiative.

4. Informing the Voters: Initiative Charts

When groups have reached the goal of identifying their choice for a good rule, distribute chart paper and markers to each group.

• Instruct the groups to write their initiative entry for the ballot on the chart paper.
  o Tell them not to include the reasons for the rule.
    ▪ They should use their free time to explain their proposal to classmates.
  o Have them put all group member names on the initiative poster.
    ▪ Explain that the class will have several days to ask group members’ questions about their initiative.
• Have groups post their initiative charts around the room.

5. Concluding the Lesson: Becoming an Informed Voter

• Have one person from each group read their initiative to the class.

• Tell the class that the initiatives will remain up until the simulated election, and that during their free time, they should ask other group members questions they might have about an initiative.