

Our Class Constitution

Lesson Plan

Purpose:

Democracies like Germany and the United States work because citizens participate in the political process. Two important civic virtues are participation and commitment. Participation by citizens helps ensure that our elected and appointed government officials make decisions that reflect the voters' wishes. Commitment to the democratic process fosters the resolve to change the government if it isn't responsive to the wants of the voters. Our democracies also require the willingness of citizens to compromise their own self-interest by obeying our governments' rules and laws. Citizens in a democracy understand that although laws and rules certainly limit our freedoms, they protect us from others who would take some, or all, of our rights and freedoms away altogether. This complicated concept can be introduced to young students through self-governance activities like creating a class constitution

The purpose of this activity is to help students understand that rules both limit freedom and give freedom; to encourage students to consider the effect their individual actions have on the group; to introduce students to "brainstorming"; to develop ideas about why it's important to have rules that benefit only some of their classmates.

Key Concepts: The learner will:

- understand what a rule is
- understand what a constitution is
- understand the benefits and limitations that rules provide
- explain why classroom rules are important
- create a set of class rules and interpret them

Materials: lined paper, pencils, crayons or markers, construction paper, one copy of the Constitution activity sheet for each student (found on the Module Index)

Procedure:

Write each vocabulary word on the board. Ask students to help define each word and write a simple definition after each word. Ask students to copy each word into a sheet of paper and then copy the definitions.

Vocabulary

Rule - tells us how to act and what to do

Constitution - a written list of the rules we all agree to live by

Benefit - something that helps us, or is good for us

Democracy - where every citizen is free and equal, the majority wins, the rights of the minority are protect

Government - people with the power to make rules and force others to obey the rules

Majority - the most

Citizen - someone who is a legal member of a group

Equal - the same

Right - freedom or privilege to do something

Explain that the class is going to develop a set of classroom rules, called a Class Constitution.

1. Ask students to offer definitions for the word "rule" and write them on the board.
2. Ask students to list some of the features and benefits that rules provide and write them on the board.
 - Important ideas to include are:
 - a. rules tell us how we should treat each other and how to behave (Liberty): Provide examples
 - b. rules tell us when someone else isn't treating us fairly (Equality) Provide examples
 - c. rules tell us what punishment we can expect if we break a rule (Equality) Provide examples
 - d. rules limit the actions of everyone in many ways (Rule of Law) Provide examples



e. rules also provide each of us a great deal of freedom (How? By preventing others from interfering with what we want to do - Pursuit of Happiness) Provide examples

3. Explain that a classroom isn't a democracy because students are children. However, to make sure that the rules are fair and that they are understood, the class will help to create a class constitution - which is a set of rules that will help us how we should treat each other so we can all have fun and learn.

4. Pair students and ask them to "brainstorm" - to think of one or two rules they think will help make a better learning environment, will provide more safety, and will make the class more fun. Ask students to state their rules in a positive manner, stating what each student should do, not what they shouldn't do. (We will walk in the halls, versus, no running in the halls.) If they can, ask them to write their ideas down.

5. After the students brainstorm ideas, write their "rules" on the board, making sure the rules are stated in language the students understand. Each rule should be a short phrase. As each rule is discussed, ask how a rule would limit freedom or change how they act. Then ask how the rule will help or benefit individuals or the class. Do not edit or eliminate any rules, but ask for clarification.

6. Ask the students to **vote** on whether to include each rule in the class constitution. In some cases you may want to discuss if a rule is "fair" for everyone. There may be an opportunity to include a rule that protects or specifically benefits a minority of students, like those handicapped. Make a point of counting the votes and emphasizing what the **majority** wants. Erase those rules that are voted down.

7. It is likely that you will want rules included in the Class Constitution that the class has voted down or not thought of. This is a fine opportunity to discuss what a representative democracy is. A representative is someone who votes or acts for others. Long ago, parents were their children's teachers. Today, teachers represent parents, are paid to deliver education to children and are given certain powers by parents. Those powers include making rules that create a safe learning environment that enables students to become educated. You can say. . . "Therefore, by the power given to me by your parents and the school, I will include these additional rules . . ." "Make sure you explain the purpose and benefit of each rule you add.

8. Pass out the activity sheet (found on the index) and ask each student to copy the constitution from the board.

Copy the Class Constitution onto a chart and display it in classroom. If possible, draw a picture of the rule next to each statement. Periodically review the Constitution and discuss if any rules should be removed or new ones added. Take a vote. Majority Rules.

Assessment

Ask each student draw a picture of how one of the rules in their Class Constitution will help of benefit him or her. Students should title their paper with the name of the rule. Some students may need help spelling the words, however, this activity will show whether students grasps the concept that rules both limit behavior/freedom and provide benefits.

