

Young people influencing government

Lesson Overview

Introduction – discuss and create a class list of ways in which people can influence government policy in a democracy.

Core Activity – students reflect and explore the issue of young people's involvement in demonstrations.

Extension Activity 1 – working in groups, devise a collage of public gatherings.

Extension Activity 2 – in pairs, and as a whole group, students consider why people gather together collectively in public.

Resources

A copy of the handout 'Young People Demonstrating against the War in Iraq 2003', one per student.

A selection of local and national newspapers, large sheets of paper, pens, scissors and glue (for Extension Activity 1).

A copy of the handout 'People meeting collectively', one per student (for Extension Activity 2).

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the lesson. Ask the students to consider ways in which people, within a democracy, can attempt to influence government policy. Create a class list, or a class web diagram (alternatively, work in small groups and feedback).

Teacher's notes:

Ways in which people can influence government policy in democracies:

- Voting for Members of Parliament
- Writing to Members of Parliament and government ministers
- Providing Members of Parliament and government ministers with information

- Demonstrating to raise public awareness and to show the strength of feeling about issues

Raising awareness about an issue by:

- Writing letters to newspapers
- Talking on radio programmes
- Attending public meetings
- Leafleting other citizens
- Direct action – this usually involves demonstrations, sit-ins, marching

Reasons why people meet together in public:

- For a sense of solidarity
- To raise public awareness about an issue, often through media coverage
- To express feelings
- To try to influence the opinion of people in power; such as local councillors, Members of Parliament
- To celebrate
- To promote a sense of community

As a class, discuss:

- Why do people do these things?
- What do they hope to achieve?
- How do they hope they will achieve this?
- Have you ever been involved in any of these actions? What was the issue? Why did you feel that you had to take some action?

Core Activity

Provide each student with a copy of the handout 'Young People Demonstrating against the war in Iraq, 2003'. Read through the handout with the class.

Ask students to address the following questions, either in writing or by discussion, individually or in small groups:

- Where and when did young people demonstrate?
- Give three reasons that young people gave for attending demonstrations.
- Give three reasons why some people were concerned about young people attending these demonstrations.

Take feedback, then ask students to consider these questions:

- What political issues would you like to express your views on?
- Are there any issues that you feel strongly enough about to go on a demonstration?
- What would be your concerns about attending a demonstration?
- What do you think should be the rules that demonstrators should stick to when protesting?

In pairs, discuss the following statements. Ask students to express their opinions and give reasons for their opinion. Read out each statement in turn, and allow time for the pairs to discuss, and write down, their responses:

- 1 Young people should not be allowed to attend political demonstrations until they are old enough to vote.*
- 2 If young people feel strongly enough about a political issue, and are willing to face the consequences, they have a right to be absent from school to demonstrate.*
- 3 Public demonstrations are pointless. The cost of policing demonstrations is a waste of tax payers money, which would be better spent on fighting crime, health or education services.*
- 4 People's right to demonstrate in public is a fundamental civil right in democracies. It should be open to people of all ages.*

Complete this activity by asking the students to vote on whether they agree or disagree with each of the statements.

Young people demonstrating against war in Iraq 2003

In March 2003, thousands of school and college students took to the streets in towns and cities across the UK to demonstrate against Britain's involvement in the war on Iraq. Four thousand students left their schools and colleges in Birmingham to demonstrate in the city centre. Similar demonstrations took place in other countries including Spain, Germany, the USA and France.

Why did the young people take to the streets?

"Everyone was determined to find a channel for the outrage they felt about the war"
(18-year-old student in London)

"People generally feel outraged that the government is not listening"
(Helen Salmon, National Union of Students)

"Many of us are now at school with the children of asylum seekers who have seen the effects of war. We've got 52 languages in our school and can see that people integrate well, yet we see on television the government saying it cannot take more people" (Student from North London)

"Kids want to be heard. We are questioning the whole way the government works but are finding that it lies, stinks and is hypocritical"
(Sixth form student from West London)

"Mobile telephones and text messaging have made it easier for people to communicate. The interesting thing, though, is that no one is really organising these demonstrations. The word just goes out and passes from school to school. Some of it is fashion, and a lot of kids are just here for the ride, but most of it is genuine anger" (South London student)

(Source: EducationGuardian.co.uk Saturday 22nd March)

What do older people think and feel about these demonstrations?

"We must balance freedom of expression against the risk of serious disorder and disruption to the normal running of the city and take account of the safety of potentially vulnerable young people" (Chief Inspector Mick Mills, of Leicestershire Police)

"Pupils who attend such an unplanned demonstration are clearly putting their safety at risk, and we are therefore urging them to attend school as usual and asking for their parents' support to achieve this" (Paul Livock, Leicester City Council's Education Director)

"I felt encouraged to see so many young people taking an interest in what's happening to people in other parts of the world and pleased that they felt confident enough to express their views.

People being able to express their views collectively is essential to social democracy. I think it offers us hope for the future" (Policy Adviser and parent)

"It is not right for young people to leave school to demonstrate. If they want to demonstrate they should do it in their own time after school or at weekends"
(Nurse and parent)

"I'm concerned that many of these young people are being swept along with the crowd. They do not necessarily understand all the relevant issues"
(Shopkeeper and grandparent)

(Source: EducationGuardian.co.uk Saturday 22nd March and Tuesday 18th March 2003)



The world as a village: human rights

Lesson Overview

Introduction – remind students of key human rights declarations [NB it is recommended that you read Background Paper 1: ‘Human rights – the universal perspective of education for citizenship?’ prior to the lesson.] Discuss the right to life and the additional care and support children need to protect their right to life. Introduce Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (see opposite).

Core Activity – read and discuss the handout ‘The World as a Village’. Students work in small groups to consider their responsibilities, both locally and globally, to protect human rights.

Extension Activity 1 – working in pairs/small groups, students consider the feelings and thoughts of those affected by child soldiers. Class discussion about the role of national and international organisations.

Extension Activity 2 – research using websites.

Resources

A copy of the handout ‘The world as a village’, one per student (optional).
A copy of the handout ‘Child soldiers’ (for Extension Activity 1), one per student.

Introduction

[NB if the students have done very little work on human rights issues, it would be useful for them to begin by completing the Core Activity from Lesson 1: ‘Human rights’ before moving onto the following activities.]

Explain the purpose of the lesson and remind students of the key human rights declarations and conventions. [NB refer to Lesson 1 for Teacher’s notes and general background.]

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Human Rights Act 1998
- European Court of Human Rights
- Convention on the Rights of the Child

Explain that ‘the right to life’ is a fundamental universal right. Discuss with the students what they understand by this term, and create a list of things that people require to enable them to have the right to life e.g. food, shelter, water, healthcare,

protection from conflict and violence. Ask them what they feel may be additional needs of children in particular to ensure that their right to life is protected (e.g. care, protection, love).

Present Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’:



Core Activity

It is difficult for young people (and older people!) to appreciate the scale of wealth and poverty in the world. Ask the students to imagine the world shrinks to a village of 100 people (optional: initially ask the students to ‘guesstimate’ the figures

for each of the main points below). Read out the text ‘The world as a village’ (optional: provide each student with a copy of the handout ‘The world as a village’ and read through it with them). Ask the students to listen carefully to each point.

THE WORLD AS A VILLAGE

If you could shrink the earth to a village with a population of 100 people, there would be:

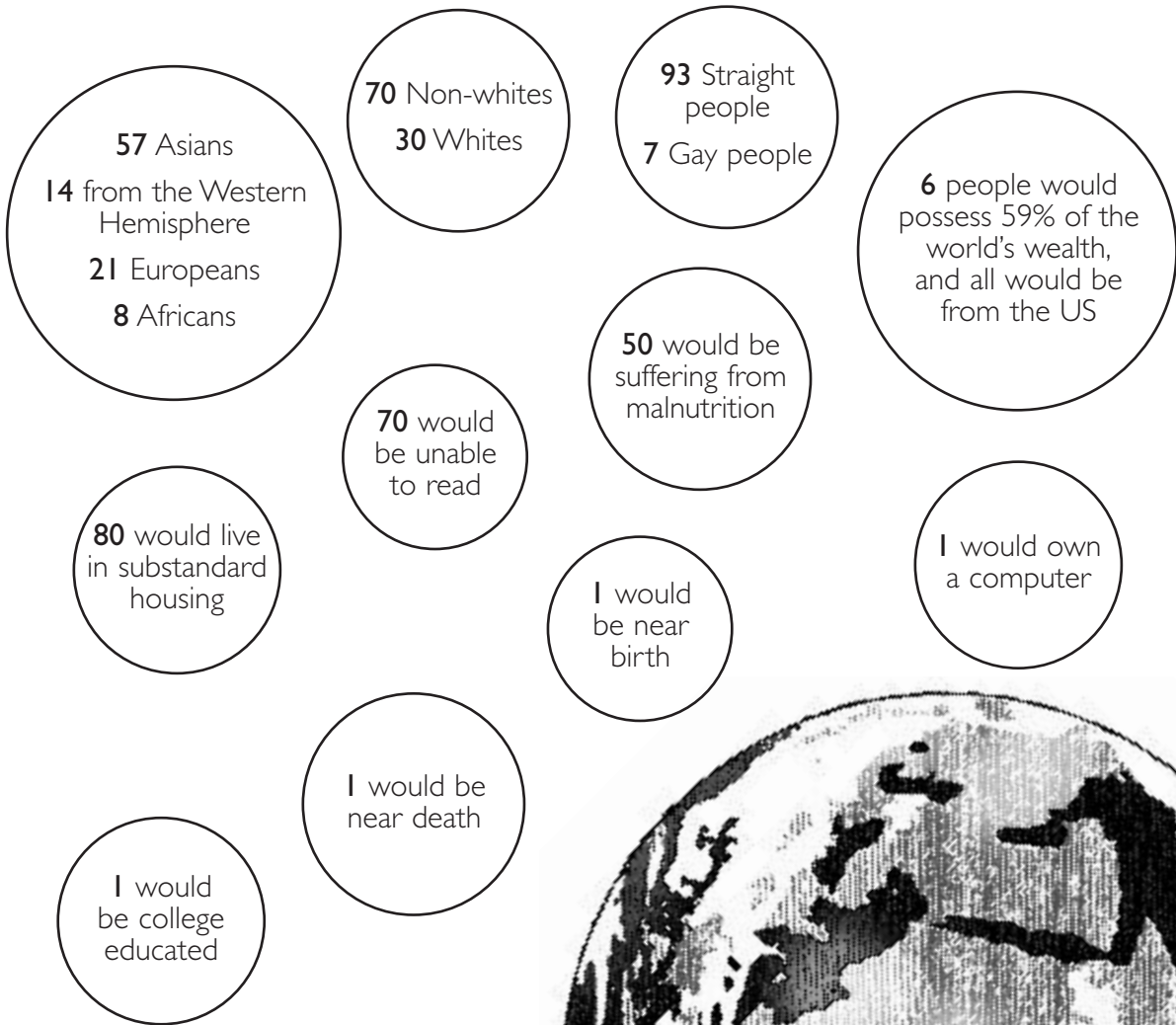
57 Asians	14 from the Western Hemisphere
21 Europeans	8 Africans
70 Non-whites	30 Whites
93 Straight people	7 Gay people
6 people would possess 59% of the world’s wealth and all would be from the US	
80 would live in substandard housing	70 would be unable to read
50 would be suffering from malnutrition	
1 would be near death	1 would be near birth
1 would be college educated	1 would own a computer

(Source: information adapted from the Eden Project, Cornwall)

The world as a village

The world as a village

If you could shrink the earth to a village with a population of 100 people, there would be:



(Source: information adapted from the Eden Project, Cornwall)

Child soldiers

- Worldwide there are about 300,000 child soldiers in 30 areas of conflict.
- Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch campaign to highlight the plight of child soldiers.
- These children are taken without their parents' consent, stolen from their homes, schools and villages.
- Child soldiers are often horrifically abused as part of their initiation into the army.

'One boy tried to escape, but he was caught... his hands were tied, and then they made us, the other new captives, kill him with a stick. I felt sick... I refused to kill him (but) they pointed a gun at me, so I had to do it. The boy was asking me, "Why are you doing this?" I said I had no choice. After we killed him, they made us smear his blood on our arms... they said we had to do this so we would not fear death and so that we would not try to escape. I still dream about the boy I killed. I see him in my dreams, and he is talking to me and saying I killed him for nothing, and I am crying.'

Testimony of Susan, aged 16, a Ugandan child who escaped from the rebel army

(Source: 'Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda' published by Human Rights Watch)

- Children are forced to carry heavy loads, to be servants of older senior members of the army.
- Girls are forced to have sex with other soldiers.
- The children are also sent into battle, often with very little training and poor equipment.

'I went for several battles in Sudan... the commanders... would tell us to run straight into gunfire. The commanders would stay behind and would beat those of us who would not run forward... I remember the first time I was in the front line. The other side started firing and the commander ordered us to run towards the bullets. I panicked. I saw others falling down dead around me. The commanders were beating us for not running, for trying to crouch down.

I don't know why we were fighting... we were just ordered to fight.'

Testimony of Timothy, aged 14, a Ugandan child who escaped from the rebel army

(Source: 'Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda' published by Human Rights Watch)

- How might the young people forced to be soldiers be feeling?
- What might be their fears and concerns?
- What could they do about this?
- What might the older soldiers and generals be feeling and thinking?
- Who else might be affected by this situation (E.g. parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and friends)?
- How might these people be feeling and what might they be thinking?

