

This is what democracy looks like

Instructions

Goal: To write a one sentence definition of “democracy” on the board

Time: 15 minutes

Method:

- Divide into four groups
- Review the attached packet of resources
- You can divide up the packet. Each person doesn't have to read everything
- Discuss, debate, dialogue the meaning of democracy
- Work together to craft a one sentence definition
- Write the sentence on the board
- Choose a spokesperson to read your sentence
- Choose someone else to describe your rationale

Definitions and Origins

Democracy - late 16th century: from French *démocratie*, via late Latin from Greek *dēmokratia*, from *dēmos* 'the people' + *-kratia* 'power, rule.'

Fascism - a political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition

Totalitarianism – centralized control by an autocratic authority OR the political concept that the citizen should be totally subject to an absolute state authority

Communism - a way of organizing a society in which the government owns the things that are used to make and transport products (such as land, oil, factories, ships, etc.) and there is no privately owned property

Socialism - any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods

Anarchism - a political theory holding all forms of governmental authority to be unnecessary and undesirable and advocating a society based on voluntary cooperation and free association of individuals and groups

Republic - a government having a chief of state who is not a monarch and who in modern times is usually a president OR a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to them and governing according to law

Presidents

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

President Abraham Lincoln. *Gettysburg Address*
November 19, 1863

The American experiment in democracy rests on this insight. Its discovery was the great triumph of our Founding Fathers, voiced by William Penn when he said: "If we will not be governed by God, we must be governed by tyrants." Explaining the inalienable rights of men, Jefferson said, "The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time." And it was George Washington who said that "of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

And finally, that shrewdest of all observers of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, put it eloquently, after he had gone on a search for the secret of America's greatness and genius--and he said: "Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the greatness and the genius of America. America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

President Ronald Reagan, 1983

Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns in to universal, rather than religion-specific, values... it requires that their proposals be subject to argument and amenable to reason.

Now I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, to take one example, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

— President Barack Obama

I can tell you that in the United States, the fact that we have free Internet — or unrestricted Internet access is a source of strength, and I think should be encouraged. Now, I should tell you, I should be honest, as President of the United States, there are times where I wish information didn't flow so freely because then I wouldn't have to listen to people criticizing me all the time. I think people naturally are — when they're in positions of power sometimes thinks, oh, how could that person say that about me, or that's irresponsible, or — but the truth is that because in the United States information is free, and I have a lot of critics in the United States who can say all kinds of things about me, I actually think that that makes our democracy stronger and it makes me a better leader because it forces me to hear opinions that I don't want to hear. It forces me to examine what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis to see, am I really doing the very best that I could be doing for the people of the United States. And I think the Internet has become an even more powerful tool for that kind of citizen participation.

— President Barack Obama

Constitutional Prose

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

- Preamble to the *Constitution of the United States of America*

We, the people of South Africa,

Recognise the injustices of our past;

Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;

Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and

Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

May God protect our people. Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso. God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa. Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika

- Preamble to the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*

Political Publications

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*, 1776

SOME writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness POSITIVELY by uniting our affections, the latter NEGATIVELY by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher.

Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one: for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries BY A GOVERNMENT, which we might expect in a country WITHOUT GOVERNMENT, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer...

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776

Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations...In democratic countries knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all other forms of knowledge; on its progress depends that of all the others.

Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840

Quotes from Modern Leaders

Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.

- Winston Churchill

The best argument against democracy is a five minute conversation with the average voter.

- Winston Churchill

Democracy is the canal through which bolshevism lets its poisons flow into the separate countries and lets work there long enough for these infections to lead to a crippling of intelligence and of the force of resistance.

- Adolf Hitler

Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich – that is the democracy of capitalist society. If we look more closely into the machinery of capitalist democracy, we see everywhere, in the "petty" – supposedly petty – details of the suffrage (residential qualifications, exclusion of women, etc.), in the technique of the representative institutions, in the actual obstacles to the right of assembly (public buildings are not for "paupers"!), in the purely capitalist organization of the daily press, etc., etc., – we see restriction after restriction upon democracy. These restrictions, exceptions, exclusions, obstacles for the poor seem slight, especially in the eyes of one who has never known want himself and has never been in close contact with the oppressed classes in their mass life (and nine out of 10, if not 99 out of 100, bourgeois publicists and politicians come under this category); but in their sum total these restrictions exclude and squeeze out the poor from politics, from active participation in democracy.

— Vladimir Lenin, *The State and Revolution*

My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence. No country in the world today shows any but patronizing regard for the weak..... Western democracy, as it functions today, is diluted Nazism or Fascism. At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi and the Fascist tendencies of imperialism.....

Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1940

Democracy must in essence ... mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all.

Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1939

Civil Rights

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."²

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,
From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.
Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.
Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that:

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., March on Washington, 1963

You don't scare Negroes today with no badge or no white skin or no white sheet or no white anything else. The police the same way; they put their club upside your head and turn around and accuse you of attacking them. Every case of police brutality against a Negro follows the same pattern. They attack you, bust you all upside your mouth and then take you to court and charge you with assault. What kind of democracy is that? What kind of (uh) freedom is that? What kind of social or political system is it when a black man has no voice in court? Has no nothing on his side other than what the white man chooses to give you? My brothers and sisters we have to put a stop to this and it will never be stopped until we stop it ourselves. They attack the victim and then the criminal who attacked the victim accuses the victim of attacking him. This is American justice. This is American democracy and those of you who are familiar with it know that in America democracy is hypocrisy. Now if I'm wrong put me in jail, but if you can't prove that in democracy is not hypocrisy then don't put your hands on me. Democracy is hypocrisy. If democracy means freedom why aren't our people free? If democracy means justice why don't we have justice? If democracy means equality then why don't we have equality?

Malcom X

Academic Debate

Eight criteria for a democracy:

- the right to vote
- the right to be elected
- the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes
- elections that are free and fair
- freedom of association
- freedom of expression
- alternative sources of information
- institutions for making policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference

- Robert Dahl, Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale University

“Pragmatically, our inclination for justice makes democracy possible, but our capacity for injustice makes it necessary.”

- Professor Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*

There are a variety of definitions people give for democracy:

- One person, one vote
- Majority rule
- Protection of individual rights against the state
- Success based on effort and/or merit
- Government through representative institutions
- A way of life that affects all aspects of life
- Choice

Professor Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*