

Democracy Packet

Topics covered:

1. Definitions of democracy and parts of a democracy
2. Ways to get involved in a democracy; drawbacks of democracy
3. Connecticut systems and engagement with democracy and government

Important vocabulary:

- Democracy
- Voter
- Government

Grade level(s):

- 6-8
- 9-10
- 11-12

Description of activities:

- Reading on how to exercise the three pillars of democracy: vote, speech, protest
 - ◆ 6-8 grade reading level (Level I)
 - ◆ 9-10 grade reading level (Level II)
 - ◆ 11-12 grade reading level (Level III)
- Do Now
- CT Voter Turnout Data Analysis
- Building Female Leadership in Connecticut
- Reflection Question

Teacher tips:

- While these lessons are always relevant, during election season they can be paired up with what the students hear on the news or at home.
- Clearly defining the word democracy and its pillars is very helpful for future use and for their understanding of why actions like voting are important.

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Readings

What is Democracy?

(Level III Reading)

The word "democracy" (*duh·maa·kruh·see*) comes from the Greek words *demos*, meaning 'people', and *kratos*, meaning 'power'. Democracy is a type of government where the people have the power to help make decisions. Generally speaking, when someone refers to a democracy, they are talking about a group of people, such as a club or union, or a government. In a democracy, the goal is empowering citizens to shape the society they live in. It provides avenues for citizens to express their views, elect representatives, and contribute to the decision-making process. It upholds fundamental values of equality, freedom, and participation, fostering inclusive decision-making processes.

The opposites of democracy are power structures like monarchy, oligarchy, or dictatorship. In these structures of power, the opinions and wellbeing of the population are considered much less. All power and decision lies with the person or group in charge. There are several "levels" of democracy, ranging from healthy and functional democracies, to those with flaws, all the way to a complete lack of democracy in an authoritarian system.

To fully appreciate democracy, we must understand its pillars and embrace our role as active participants. So, what does "power to the people" mean in practice? Some pillars of democracy include:

- ★ Rule of Law: Democracy thrives on the principle that all people, including government officials, are subject to the law. This means that the law applies to everyone. This ensures the protection of human rights and promotes accountability within the system. If someone in power within a democracy breaks the law, they should be held accountable too.
- ★ No "One Party" States: Democracy embraces diverse viewpoints and allows for the existence of multiple political parties, encouraging healthy debates and competition among different ideologies. When voting, you are able to vote for whichever party you want.
- ★ Fundamental Rights and Freedoms: Democracy safeguards individual liberties, such as freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and the press. These rights empower citizens to express their opinions without fear of persecution, or being oppressed or targeted.
- ★ Free and Fair Elections: Through voting, individuals exercise their right to influence governance. This could be voting for a particular candidate, on an issue, or for a political party that they feel best represents their interests. Key elements of free and fair elections include universal suffrage (one person, one vote), transparency, and access to information. The important thing to remember with elections is that whoever wins, wins. In order for democracy to thrive, elections must be honored, even if people are upset about losing.
- ★ Free and Independent Groups: in democracies, it's not just the government doing work and interacting with the community. Democracies also must include organizations that aren't a part of the government, movements led by people who are not elected officials, and an independent media. These groups keep the people informed, active, and able to get involved in important ways.

What can you do to make sure you are participating in democracy? There are many ways, including:

1. **Voting:** Exercise your right to vote in elections. Stay informed about candidates, their policies, and their track records to make an informed choice that aligns with your values. Depending on where you live, the requirements to register to vote are different.
2. **Participate in Civic Organizations:** Join local community groups, advocacy organizations, and non-governmental organizations that promote causes you care about. Collaborate with others to influence public opinion, raise awareness, and effect positive change.
3. **Stay Informed:** Stay up-to-date with current affairs, diverse perspectives, and reliable news sources. Critical thinking and media literacy are essential to do this properly.
4. **Engage in Dialogue:** Foster healthy and respectful discussions with others, even those with differing viewpoints. Engaging in constructive dialogue can help bridge divides, seek common ground, and promote understanding.
5. **Hold Elected Officials Accountable:** Contact your elected representatives to express your opinions, concerns, or support for specific issues. Participate in public consultations, town halls, and community meetings to ensure your voice is heard. Oftentimes, your elected officials have emails or addresses that you can send emails and letters to.

While democracy is widely regarded as favorable, it is not without its drawbacks. Decision making can be slow, as decisions often involve extensive debates and compromises. There are also many levels of government, which can lead to more delays and confusion. The majority of voters and determined interest groups hold significant power in a democracy, potentially leading to the marginalization or neglect of minority beliefs and interest groups. Those who win the elections might not always be the best fit for the position, lacking expertise or the skill set necessary to do the job effectively. As these and other

issues persist in a democracy, many grow weary and tired. With this, you can see a lack of participation and sense of apathy.

In Connecticut, between 2016 and 2020, voter turnout increased among all demographic groups. 67 percent of eligible voters went to the polls in 2020, compared to 64 percent in 2016 and 67 percent nationwide in 2020.

Democracy thrives when individuals embrace its principles and actively participate in the democratic process. By understanding the pillars of democracy and engaging in various ways, we contribute to

a vibrant, inclusive, and responsive system. Whether it is an informed population that regularly votes, a social group that protests for their voices to be heard, or a government official who runs for reelection, democracy plays a key role in ensuring the power rests with the people.

FIGURE 8A
Voter turnout increased from 2016 to 2020 among all demographic groups in Connecticut, especially among young people and people of color
SHARE OF ELIGIBLE CONNECTICUT VOTERS WHO VOTED IN THE 2016 AND 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP



What is Democracy?

(Level II Reading)

The word "democracy" (*duh-maa-kruh-see*) comes from the Greek words *demos*, meaning 'people', and *kratos*, meaning 'power'. Democracy is a type of government where the people have the power to help make decisions. In a democracy, the goal is to give power to people to shape the community they live in. It lets people express their views, choose who is in charge, and help out with the decision making process.

The opposites of democracy are power structures like monarchy (rule by a king or queen), oligarchy (the total rule by a small group of wealthy people), or dictatorship (a country ruled harshly by one person). In these types of leadership, the opinions and wellbeing of the population are considered much less. All power and decision lies with the person or group in charge.

To fully appreciate democracy, we must understand the important things that make a democracy work well. What does "power to the people" mean in practice?

- ★ **Rule of Law:** Rule of law means that all people, including those in charge, are subject to the law. This means that the law applies to everyone. If someone in power within a democracy breaks the law, they should be held responsible too.
- ★ **Multiple Options:** a political party is a group of people that agree with how the government should work and how the community should be run. Democracy needs to have many viewpoints and political parties present, encouraging healthy debates and competition among different beliefs. When voting, you can vote for whichever party you want. When there is only one party in a government, there is no chance for other viewpoints to be heard. This can silence lots of people and their opinions or needs.
- ★ **Basic Rights and Freedoms:** democracy protects individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech, protest, religion, and the press (or media, like a newspaper or journalist). These rights give power to people to say what they think without fear of those in power or of being targeted. When people have a voice in the government and how the community is run, they are much more likely to have their rights protected. If a group of people feel like their rights are being violated or broken, they have options to make changes. For example, they can vote for a leader who promises to protect their rights. They could talk about the issues openly or on the news. They can continue to be themselves and embrace important parts of their identity like their race, religion, or gender.
- ★ **Free and Fair Elections:** when someone votes, they are showing that they support a particular candidate, solution for an issue, or for a political party that they feel best represents their interests. Voting is often done by someone casting a ballot that says who or what you want to receive your vote. The important thing to remember with elections is that whoever wins, wins. In order for democracy to grow and do well, elections must be honored, even if people are upset about losing.
- ★ **Free and Independent Groups:** in democracies, it's not just the government doing work and interacting with the community. Democracies also must include organizations that aren't a part of

the government, movements led by people who are not elected officials, and an independent media. These groups keep the people informed, active, and able to get involved in important ways.

What can you do to participate in democracy? Democracy relies on people participating and trying to make it better. Democracy is hard work, but it has great benefits. Some ways to get involved are:

1. **Vote:** Exercise your right to vote in elections. Learn about the candidates (the people trying to win the election), their plans, and what they've done to make a choice based on your knowledge. You should vote for someone that matches up with your values and that you think will help your community. Depending on where you live, the needed things to become a voter are different.
2. **Participate:** Join local community groups and causes you care about. Work together with others, raise awareness (knowledge) about important things, and be a part of the change you want to see.
3. **Stay Informed:** Stay up-to-date with what is happening in your community, listen to many diverse (different kinds of people) opinions or points of view, and get your information from reliable sources. Critical thinking is super important in staying informed. Critical thinking requires you to look at the facts, evidence, and arguments to come to your own conclusions. It means you cannot just automatically believe everything you hear, or lie about the truth.
4. **Talk:** Have healthy and respectful discussions with others, even those with different or disagreeing viewpoints. This can help find common ground and understanding. You can also contact your elected representatives to talk about your opinions, concerns, or support. Participate in public discussions (with other people), town halls, and community meetings to have your voice heard.

While democracy is believed to be good and helpful by many, it is not without its drawbacks (bad results or effects). Decision making can be slow, as many people are heard instead of just one person making the decision. There are also many levels of government, such as president, governor, and mayor. This can lead to even more time spent and frustration happening. There is also not a guarantee that your opinion or need will win. For example, someone who you do not like may win an election, or a project you want to get approved doesn't get enough votes. As these and other issues continue in a democracy, many people grow tired and impatient. With this, they no longer participate in democracy. When people don't participate, democracy grows weaker.

By understanding the parts of democracy, we can encourage a community that is full of life, equality, and a responsive (able to reply or react or change) system that gives people what they want and need. Whether it is an informed (based on knowledge and learning) population that regularly votes, a social group that protests for their voices to be heard, or a government official who runs for reelection, democracy plays an extremely important role in making sure the power rests with the people.

What is Democracy?

(Level I Reading)

The word "democracy" (*duh-maa-kruh-see*) comes from the Greek words *demos*, meaning 'people', and *kratos*, meaning 'power'. Democracy is a type of government where the people have the power to help make decisions. People living together in a country, state, city, or community live with rules and have people in charge. Those in charge and who make those rules are known as a government. In a democracy, the goal is to give power to people to shape the community they live in by picking those in charge and having a say in what the rules are. It lets people say what they think, help build the community, and live life how they want.

In a democratic country, the people choose their leaders through voting. The leaders then make decisions for the people. It's like when you and your classmates vote for the class monitor or when you have a say in choosing a game to play during recess. One of the great things about democracy is that everyone's voice matters. It doesn't matter if you're big or small, young or old, rich or poor. Every person has the right to express their opinions and ideas.

The opposites of democracy are governments like monarchy (rule by a king or queen), oligarchy (the total rule of something by a small group of people), or dictatorship (a country ruled harshly by one person). In these types of leadership, the opinions and wellbeing of the population are considered much less. All power and decision comes from the person or group in charge and what they want.

So, what does democracy look like, and how can people *do* democracy?

- ★ **Basic Rights and Freedoms:** In a democracy, people have certain freedoms and rights. Freedom of speech means you can say what you think without getting in trouble. Freedom of religion means you can believe in and practice any religion you choose. There are also other rights like the right to be safe, the right to go to school, and the right to be treated fairly. When people have a voice in the government and how the community is run, they are much more likely to have their rights protected. If a group of people feel like their rights are being violated or broken, they have options to make changes. For example, they can vote for a leader who promises to protect their rights.
- ★ **Free and Fair Elections:** when someone votes, they are showing that they support someone running for office or a solution for an issue. Voting is often done by someone casting a ballot that says who or what you want to receive your vote. Learn about the candidates (the people trying to win the election), their plans, and what they've done to make a choice based on your knowledge. Voting is an important way to have a say in how things are run. It's like picking your team captain or choosing what toppings to put on your pizza. Depending on where you live, the needed things to become a voter are different. The important thing to remember with elections is that whoever wins, wins. In order for democracy to grow and do well, elections must be honored, even if people are upset about losing.
- ★ **Multiple Options:** A political party is a group of people that agree with how the government should work and how the community should be run. Democracy needs to have many viewpoints and political parties present, encouraging healthy debates and competition among different beliefs. It's

like a menu at a pizza restaurant that has many options for toppings! When there is only one party in a government, there is no chance for other viewpoints to be heard. This can silence lots of people and their opinions or needs.

- ★ **Respect:** Democracy is all about respecting differences. People have different opinions, beliefs, and ideas. It's like having different favorite colors or liking different flavors of ice cream. In a democracy, we listen to each other, even if we disagree. We try to find common ground and make decisions that are fair for everyone.
- ★ **Groups:** In democracies, it's not just the government doing work and working with the community. Democracies also must include organizations that aren't a part of the government, movements led by people who are not elected officials, and a way to talk about what is going on (like a journalist who doesn't work for the government). These groups keep the people informed, active, and able to get involved in important ways. Join local community groups and causes you care about. Work together with others, raise awareness (knowledge) about important things, and be a part of the change you want to see.
- ★ **Stay Informed:** Stay up-to-date with what is happening in your community, listen to many diverse (different kinds of people) opinions or points of view, and get your information from reliable sources that you trust. Critical thinking is super important in staying informed. Critical thinking is when you look at the facts, evidence, and arguments to come to your own conclusions. It means you cannot just automatically believe everything you hear, or lie about the truth.

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Democracy is a way of making decisions where everyone has a chance to be heard. It's about freedom, rights, and respecting each other's differences. Remember, even though you're young, your voice matters too. So, speak up, listen to others, and be part of creating a better world together!

Activities

Democracy Do Now

Why vote?

Voting and the ability to vote has been very important for our country since its founding. However, this right has been denied, taken away, and fought for by many groups of Americans since the very beginning.

1. In a few words, describe what *voting* means to you:
2. Turn to a classmate and ask them what voting means to them, then write their words:
3. Why is the right to vote so important?
4. Why would something like your right to vote be attacked?

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Types of Elections and Voter Turnout

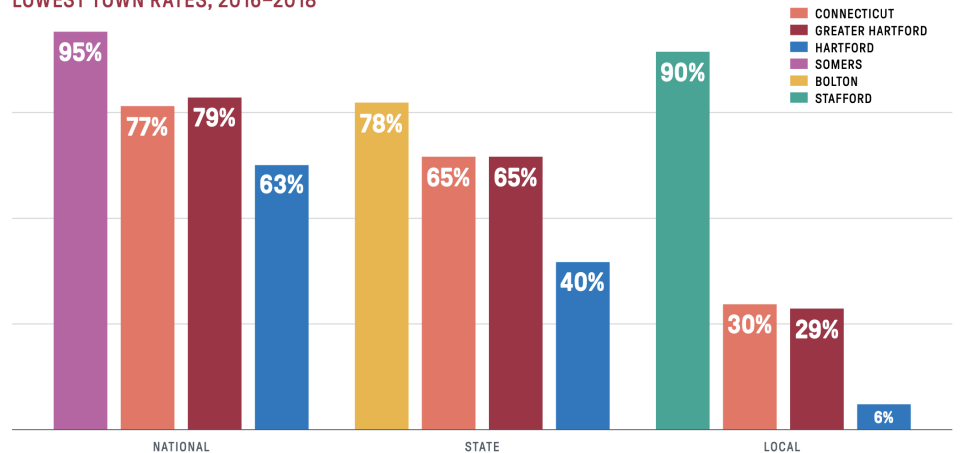
Democracy, or the power to choose your leaders by vote, is a very important part of American history and life. There are several different elections that take place in the United States on the local, state, and national level. Each type of election takes place in a cycle of a certain amount of years, decides on an individual to perform a certain role, and has different voter turnout — the number of people who “turn out” to vote compared to the total people who are eligible. For example, every four years there is a country-wide presidential election. There are also midterm elections, which take place at the halfway mark of a president’s four-year term. These elections decide the members of the House of Representatives and a third of the Senate. In most states, governor elections (or gubernatorial elections) also take place every four years.

As is the trend nationally, voter turnout in regions like Greater Hartford

varies by type of election, with greater turnout for state and national elections. The region’s turnout rate was 79 percent in the 2016 presidential election, 65 percent in the 2018 midterm election, and only 29 percent in the 2017 municipal (local) election. Nationally, turnout in the 2018 midterms was the highest in four decades, reversing a trend of declining interest in midterm elections and likely reflecting the tumultuous political landscape following the 2016 presidential election and vast efforts to

Voter turnout is high for national and state elections, but much lower in municipal ones

PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS WHO VOTED IN ELECTIONS, WITH GREATER HARTFORD HIGHEST AND LOWEST TOWN RATES, 2016-2018



encourage voter turnout. Low voter turnout is driven by a range of factors, including a lack of basic information on elections, access to polling stations and hours of operation, inflexible work schedules, limited transportation, and other barriers that disproportionately affect economically distressed communities and communities of color.

Between 2016 and 2020, voter turnout increased among all demographic groups. 67 percent of eligible voters went to the polls in 2020, compared to 64 percent in 2016 and 67 percent nationwide in 2020.

FIGURE 8A
Voter turnout increased from 2016 to 2020 among all demographic groups in Connecticut, especially among young people and people of color

SHARE OF ELIGIBLE CONNECTICUT VOTERS WHO VOTED IN THE 2016 AND 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP



Reflection Questions

1. What are some of the different elections that take place in the United States? Do they all take place at the same time?
2. Look at the graph; what are at least three conclusions you can make based on the data on voter turnout?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What have the recent voter trends been in Connecticut? For both state and national elections?
4. Why might voters be more inclined to vote in the national elections? How is the attitude about influence on local government decision-making changing?
5. What are some factors that contribute to voters not voting in an election? How can those factors be addressed?
6. How can we use this data to encourage voter turnout?

Building Female Leadership in Connecticut

Directions: Read and annotate the following article on cultivating female leadership and the various approaches that are needed for female empowerment. Then, answer the thought questions.

[“Count Her In: A Status Report on Women & Girls in Fairfield County, Connecticut”](#)

June 2019

Supporting organizations that help girls find their voices and gain self-confidence at an early age was underscored by stakeholders (these stakeholders possessed expertise in women and business, education, immigrant issues, employment, health, aging, leadership development, childcare, legal advocacy and social justice).

One stakeholder reflected that young women more often require greater persuasion to run for office or seek leadership roles than their male counterparts. This concern was bolstered by statements from the high school girls that expressed a variety of fears, including fear of failing, of public speaking, and applying to college and being rejected. The middle school girls also felt unworthy of being listened to and understood as many shared that adults in their lives, including some mothers, did not give them adequate attention or support.

Educating men and boys also is part of the solution. Since men currently are more likely to be in organizational leadership roles, it is important that the image of female leadership is not foreign to them either. Men can do their part to increase gender equality in the workplace. Teaching boys the importance of feminism early on is especially important in cultivating female leaders. The middle school girls shared that boys in their classes are already making comments about “boys being better than girls in spelling, sports, math and science.” The young girls also reported that when they stand up for themselves, male classmates call them “feminists” in a derogatory way.

While these comments are potentially lighthearted in nature, they express exactly the beliefs that are harmful to developing equally self-confident boys and girls. From as early as possible, girls need not only more moral support than they currently receive, but also to be told more often that they matter, not just at school, but at home too.

Reflection Questions

1. What in the article stuck out to you the most? It can be something you learned, something that surprised you, something that made you upset, or something you have heard of before.
2. According to the article, what are some ways we can cultivate female leadership and empowerment?
3. What role do men and boys play in empowering women? Do you agree with this?
4. Why is having female leadership fundamental?
5. How can *you* help cultivate female leadership and empowerment?

Protecting Democracy Reflection

A Fight Worth Fighting

Directions: Pick 3 of the 5 options below to answer. **Highlight** your choice prompts. Make sure your answers have evidence based on what we have discussed, watched, played, and analyzed in regards to **democracy and human rights**. Answer in complete sentences that show me your understanding of democracy.

Then, answer the essential question and turn it in!

1. What does democracy mean to you personally, and why is it worth protecting?
2. In your opinion, what are some of the largest posed threats to democracy? How can we help protect our democracy from those threats? List at least 3 or draw them.
(You can use a person, action, belief, or pattern as an example of a threat. Like, people not being able to vote because the lines are too long is a threat.)
3. How do the rights to free speech and protest protect democracy? How can they be used to give power to the people? Are there ways that free speech and protest should be limited? What are those limits and why? Give examples.
4. Reflect on the role of young people in protecting democracy. How can young people become active participants in a democracy? What can you do with school groups, by using your voices, and by harnessing your power to protect democracy? It doesn't have to be something "big" or "extreme", but please give examples
5. Americans measure pretty low in civic education, and most schools don't offer a human rights course. How can schools and communities better prepare citizens to participate in democracy? Pitch a plan.
(Your plan could be in list form or a speech that could be read to one of our Secretary of Education, an example of someone with governmental power.)