



## Create a new federation

Explore why the authors of the Australian Constitution designed our Parliament to have both a House of Representatives—with representation based on population—and a Senate—with equal representation for the states. Invite students to think critically and creatively to write a new constitution.

This lesson plan is suitable for classes ranging from Years 5 to 12. Depending on the level of preparation you do, this activity should take one to two lessons.

### Activity

1. Organise the class into groups according to the group organisation information. Each group will represent a different colony.
2. Ask each group to decide between proposed projects (listed below). Which one will most benefit the people in its colony? The federal government will only be able to afford to undertake one of these, and each group must vote as a block.
  - a. A high-speed rail line between Melbourne and Sydney; or
  - b. A hydro-electric dam in Tasmania; or
  - c. Desalination plants for Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth.
3. Vote, tally the votes and announce which project will go ahead.
4. Discuss with the class what happened in the activity. If project B or C was chosen, were all the representatives voting to benefit their colony? If project A was chosen, who benefits from it, and why was it chosen? Then discuss how the students felt about the vote.
  - Was everyone's voice heard?
  - Was it fair?
5. Tell the students how the authors of the Australian Constitution solved this dilemma -between basing representation on population and ensuring that the rights of the smaller states would be protected - by having a bi-cameral parliament with a House of Representatives and a Senate. Law-making power was also divided between the states and the federal Parliament, and they included a High Court to resolve disputes. Ask your students to share their opinions of our current parliamentary organisation.
  - What are the pros and cons?
  - What could be improved?
6. Organise the class into pairs or small groups. Ask the students to imagine that they are writing a constitution for a new federation. Using the New constitution scaffold, ask students to design a constitution for a new federation.
7. Invite students to share the key points of their new constitution with the class.



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8. If you have time, organise the students into their original groups from step 1. Ask them to discuss the merits of each new constitution and to vote on their preferred one. Then discuss why each group chose a particular constitution and how they believe it will benefit the people of the new nation.



## Group organisation

Use these facts and figures to help organise your class into groups for the Create a new federation classroom activity.

Organise the class into 6 groups according to the numbers below:

1. New South Wales: 35% of the class
2. Victoria: 30% of the class
3. Queensland: 15% of the class
4. South Australia: 10% of the class
5. Western Australia: 5% of the class (or at least one student)
6. Tasmania: 5% of the class (or at least one student).

For example, in a class of 20 students, the groups would look like this:

1. New South Wales: 7 students
2. Victoria: 6 students
3. Queensland: 3 students
4. South Australia: 2 students
5. Western Australia: 1 student
6. Tasmania: 1 student.

If your class is too small, you can either ensure a majority of students are representing New South Wales and Victoria, or you may choose to put students into six roughly equal groups, but give each group a vote value according to the above numbers. For example, New South Wales would have 35 votes and Tasmania would have 5.

The above percentages are based on the population of each colony in 1901. You may wish to explain that these figures, from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, did not include Indigenous Australians or non-white immigrants, as they were not counted in the census at that time.

You can find more information about the population of Australia at federation in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' [A Snapshot of Australia, 1901](#).



## New constitution scaffold

	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Option 3</b>	<b>Create your own</b>
Levels of government	Three levels – federal, state, and local	Two levels – federal and local	Two levels – federal and state	
Head of State	Hereditary monarchy	Appointed by parliament	Elected by the people	
Executive government	Appointed by the Prime Minister from among elected representatives in their party	Appointed by the Head of State, may or may not be elected representatives	Made up of the Head of State, the Prime Minister and elected representatives from across the parliament	
Parliamentary structure	Bi-cameral – two chambers	Single chamber	Two chambers plus an advisory body appointed by the parliament or the head of state	
Parliamentary powers	Power to make laws on a limited number of topics, with remaining issues left to the other levels of government	Power to make laws on any topic, but also to delegate power to the other levels of government	Power to allow or disallow laws made by the other levels of government	
Election frequency	Elections to be held on a regular schedule	Elections to be held when decided by the head of state	Elections to be held when decided by the parliament or government	



Representation	Based on population, with each representative responsible for a similar number of voters	Proportional, with each representative sharing an electorate with a number of other representatives	Based on state or local government areas, with each electorate having the same number of representatives regardless of population	
Courts	Judges and justices appointed by the government or the parliament	Judges and justices appointed by the Head of State	Judges and justices elected by the people	
Changing the constitution	Referendum of the people	Decision of the parliament	Decision of the Head of State	



## Explore decision making

Explore various forms of decision-making in your classroom with this activity. Investigate majority rule, executive, consensus, autocracy, and the power of veto.

This lesson plan is suitable for classes ranging from year 5 to year 12. This activity should take 1 lesson.

### Activity

#### Decisions for ourselves and others

1. Divide the class into pairs. Show students pictures of the strawberries, the ham salad sandwich and the chocolate cupcake.
2. Ask pairs to discuss which snack they would like for themselves, and to explain how they arrived at this decision. Ask the students to decide:
  - Which would they prefer as a snack, and why.
  - What snack they would provide for their pair, and explain how they arrived at this decision.
  - What snack they would provide for the whole class, and to explain how they arrived at this decision.
  - What snack they would provide for the class every week at school and to explain how they arrived at this decision.
3. Discuss whether students have different answers and why this might be. Did the students make different decisions for themselves than they did for others? Why might this be? Explain that representation involves making decisions for other people.

#### Types of decision making

4. Ask the class to come up with a practical idea which might improve your school in some way, but which might not be popular with all students, for example:
  - No unhealthy food in the school canteen
  - First fifteen minutes of every school day is for exercise and stretching
  - Students should have to wear school uniform/stop wearing school uniform.
5. Tell the students that this is an important decision and that there are a number of ways that they could make this decision. Use the Decision-making table to tell the class about the 4 different decision-making methods they will undertake.
6. Ask students to use each of the 4 decision-making methods to decide the outcome. Record the decision made using each method.



7. Tell the class that as a teacher you have a right to veto any decisions that were made. Decide whether you would have vetoed any of these decisions and give your reasons for doing so.
8. Discuss the following questions with your class
  - Which form of decision-making was most efficient?
  - Was it difficult to reach a consensus? Why? What difference would 60 students or 120 students make to this method?
  - Which form of decision-making was most fair? Least fair?
  - What justification might the vetoer or autocrat have for their roles?
9. Tell the students that the federal Parliament uses majority rule rather than consensus for making decisions. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this method.

## Decision making table

Decision method	Instruction	Result
Autocratic decision	Randomly select an autocrat to decide.	
Executive decision	Determine a small executive—2 or 3 people—to decide.	
Majority decision	Open ballot: Conduct a vote with a show of hands. The majority decides.  Secret ballot: Conduct a vote by writing on a piece of paper. Then have someone count the votes and declare the outcome.	
Consensus decision	Negotiate until the class agrees.	

## Pictures





## Hold a referendum

Explore how the Constitution can be changed through a referendum in this classroom activity. Investigate the role of Australia's Head of State and decide, as a nation, whether or not to change it.

This lesson plan is suitable for classes ranging from year 5 to year 12. Depending on the level of preparation and extension activities you do, this activity should take 1 to 2 lessons.

### Activity

#### Getting started

1. Explain to the class the meaning of the terms constitutional monarchy and republic.
2. As a class discuss the powers of the Governor-General, using the Governor-General fact sheet.
3. As a class, 'think, pair, share': Should Australia remain a constitutional monarchy, with the Queen as our head of state **OR** should we become a republic by replacing the Queen with a president?
4. Explain that if this change were to occur, our Constitution would need to be changed. This is done by a referendum in which the people of Australia make the decision.
5. Explain to students that a committee has investigated options and has recommended that **IF** Australia were to become a republic, the best option is:

Parliamentary republicanism—a committee compiles a list of candidates for president, via community consultation, narrowed to one by the Prime Minister. Parliament would vote and a two-third parliamentary majority is required for approval. The President would be the new head of state and all ties to the British monarch cut. The President would have the same powers as the current Governor-General with a 5 year term.

#### Referendum

1. Divide the class into three groups to vote, assigning each group a colour—red, blue and yellow.
2. Using the referendum ballot paper template, create a ballot paper for your referendum. If you have access to coloured paper, you could differentiate the ballot papers of each group by colour.
3. Hold a secret referendum ballot one group at a time and keep the ballots of each group separate from the other groups.
4. Count the votes one group at a time with two scrutineers—people checking the count.



5. Using the voting table, tally the number of yes and no votes for each group.
6. Determine the yes/no result for each group.
7. Determine the overall yes/no result.
8. Complete the table to determine if the referendum was successful.

### **What happened?**

1. Discuss with the class what happened in your referendum. Has the constitution now been changed? Will the new system be adopted?
2. Using the double-majority graphic, explain that in Australia, a double majority is needed to change the constitution—that is, a majority of voters in a majority of states as well as a majority of all Australians.
3. Explain that in Australia's history only 8 of 44 proposed changes to the Constitution have been agreed to.
4. As a class discuss:
  - Why have most referendums have been unsuccessful?
  - Should there be another way to change Australia's Constitution? If so, what should it be?



## Ballot paper template

Use this template to make your ballot papers. You may like to print them on coloured paper—red, blue and yellow—for the different groups.

<p>Commonwealth of Australia</p> <p>Parliamentary Education Office</p> <p><b>BALLOT PAPER</b></p> <p>State or Territory</p> <hr/> <p><b>Referendum on an idea to change the Constitution.</b></p> <p><b>DIRECTIONS TO VOTER</b> Write “YES” or “NO” in the space provided.</p> <p><b>A PROPOSED LAW: To change the Constitution to make Australia a republic.</b></p> <p><u>Do you agree with this proposed change?</u></p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>Write “YES” or “NO”</p> <p></p>	<p>Commonwealth of Australia</p> <p>Parliamentary Education Office</p> <p><b>BALLOT PAPER</b></p> <p>State or Territory</p> <hr/> <p><b>Referendum on an idea to change the Constitution.</b></p> <p><b>DIRECTIONS TO VOTER</b> Write “YES” or “NO” in the space provided.</p> <p><b>A PROPOSED LAW: To change the Constitution to make Australia a republic.</b></p> <p><u>Do you agree with this proposed change?</u></p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>Write “YES” or “NO”</p> <p></p>	<p>Commonwealth of Australia</p> <p>Parliamentary Education Office</p> <p><b>BALLOT PAPER</b></p> <p>State or Territory</p> <hr/> <p><b>Referendum on an idea to change the Constitution.</b></p> <p><b>DIRECTIONS TO VOTER</b> Write “YES” or “NO” in the space provided.</p> <p><b>A PROPOSED LAW: To change the Constitution to make Australia a republic.</b></p> <p><u>Do you agree with this proposed change?</u></p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>Write “YES” or “NO”</p> <p></p>
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## Voting table

Use this table to tally the votes in your referendum.

	BLUE	RED	YELLOW	TOTAL
YES				
NO				
WINNER				
DOUBLE MAJORITY?				



## CHANGING *the* AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION

The Australian Constitution can only be changed with the support of the majority of Australian voters and a majority of voters in at least four states.



### SCENARIO ONE CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

- ✓ Majority of Australian voters
- ✓ Majority of voters in at least four states



### SCENARIO TWO DON'T CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

- ✗ Majority of Australian voters
- ✓ Majority of voters in at least four states



### SCENARIO THREE DON'T CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

- ✓ Majority of Australian voters
- ✗ Majority of voters in at least four states