



Classroom Constitution: Our Class Democracy

Overview:

Use the following activity as a way to get students thinking about the ways that they would like this class to be conducted. This lesson is a great way to help your students begin thinking about how a democracy works and how those principles are applicable in all different situations and groups. This classroom constitution that they create will also be something that you and the students can reference throughout the course when you want to highlight expectations and ensure respectful and productive progress.

Facilitator's Guide

Explain that in this class, during this process, you're going to be co-creating a democratic community that allows all voices to be heard. Ask if anyone can define "democracy," and write all ideas on the board. After brainstorming the definition, read the following definition of democracy: A government in which power is with the people and is used by them directly, or indirectly through elected officials.

Sample Sentence: We all have the chance to make our community better by actively participating in our democracy. Discuss with students how this relates to their definitions and discussion of democracy.

Explain that today they will create a 'Classroom Constitution.' Explain to students that a constitution outlines fundamental laws and principles people in a country live by. Just like a country's constitution, this will be a set of principals or guidelines that all members of this classroom will follow each day during class.

Pose to students the questions:

- How can we create a classroom environment that looks like a democracy?
 - *Probing question if stuck: Think about a country that does not have a democracy. Are those citizens asked to participate and have a voice? What do we as citizens of a democracy 'get to do' that other may not elsewhere?*
- How must we treat each other and behave?
 - *Probing question if stuck: Reflect on any past activities in this class or another class where students participated in groups and/or discussion. What were some of the really positive ways you all interacted during those interactions?*

Give students one minute to think, and then invite suggestions for the class to adopt while they're collaborating together in this course. Write these, or use a student scribe, on poster paper to be referenced moving forward with the title "Our Democratic Classroom" at the top.

Suggested norms include:

- Everyone has a voice and should express their ideas
- Everyone should be a part of decision making
- Everyone should listen to each other - Take turns talking ("One mic")
- Question and debate each other to bring about new and improved ideas
- Participate and allow others to do the same ("Step up, step back")
- Assume best intentions in each other's comments
- Use "both/and" thinking to build on each others' ideas

Encourage students to refer to their Classroom Constitution throughout the program and to applaud their peers and themselves when they see these norms in action. They can also add to it if new ideas arise in future classes.

