

OBJECTIVES

- To provide the children with an opportunity to get involved with collective decision making through a School Council.
- To understand the concept of democracy and collective responsibility.

RECOMMENDED TEXT

www.schoolcouncils.org

WHOLE-CLASS INTRODUCTION

You may already have a School Council, in which case these activities will still be useful to you as a starting point for reviewing the role of the School Council and assessing its effectiveness.

- If the concept of a School Council is new to the children, you could begin by asking them who they think makes the decisions that affect everyone in school. How are the children's opinions and ideas for change expressed and who listens to them?
- As citizens living in a democracy, we all have a responsibility for creating and maintaining a community in which we are happy to live and where we feel secure. Point out to the children that they are an essential part of the school as a community. What responsibilities do they think they have (to abide by the rules, to work hard, to not bully others, etc)?
- Would the children like to play a more active role in deciding what sorts of things happen in their school? A School Council is an effective way of having their views considered and allows them to exert basic political pressure.
- Tell the children that the website you are about to look at together explains what Schools' Councils are all about and how they can get involved.
- Help the children to access the site and read through the pages together. Focus on the positive ways the schools mentioned on the website have helped make decisions – such as Colby Primary School in Norfolk getting involved with training other children to run successful School Councils and the school in Essex where the pupils have been involved in selecting new teachers.
- Print out the pages that interest you and which will help the children to complete the group/individual activities.

GROUP/INDIVIDUAL WORK

- The first step is to decide whether a School Council would be a good idea in your school. A group of children could prepare a list of pros and cons. The information on the website, especially the page entitled 'benefits of School Councils' will help the children to prepare their lists. Tell this group that you would like them to prepare a short presentation for the rest of the class.

- It is essential to canvas the views of other members of the school community if you are considering whether to set up a School Council. In order to make an informed choice, members of the school, including teachers, support and office staff will need to understand what a School Council actually is. In pairs the children should write a short explanation of a School Council.
- In pairs, the children could write a letter to the head teacher and governors explaining that they would like to set up a School Council and asking for their support. The letter should set out the benefits of a School Council and briefly describe how they intend to move their ideas forward.
- A letter could also be drafted to parents asking them if they think a School Council would be a good idea and inviting them to apply for a place on the team.
- In pairs, ask the children to write an application form for themselves or a partner to join the School Council. Page 49 in the Photocopiable Resource Sheets provides support.

PLENARY

- Do the children think that setting up a School Council is a good idea? What sorts of decisions could such a body be involved in? Do the children already have ideas for improvements to the school?
- Ask the group who have been preparing a list of the pros and cons to share their ideas. Invite the rest of the class to contribute. On balance, is the idea of a School Council a good one?
- Prepare a class list of questions to ask the rest of the school to canvas their views.

VOCABULARY

School Council democracy political canvas
responsibility participation opinion society

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

- **ICT:** Use the computer to prepare survey materials – the list of ten questions, sheets to record data, etc. The children can also use the computer to make charts, tables and graphs to analyse and display the outcomes of their surveys. Help the children to send an e-mail to the schools mentioned on the website asking for advice and training.
Make posters and advertising leaflets to promote the idea of a School Council.

Political Literacy (2)

OBJECTIVES

- To talk and write about their opinions and explain their views on issues which affect themselves and society.
- To discuss topical issues.
- To reflect on cultural issues.
- To develop the ability to recognise and challenge stereotypes.

RECOMMENDED TEXT

Fabric Crafts from *Very Different* Anne Fine

WHOLE-CLASS INTRODUCTION

- Read the class this transcript from an interview with a woman whose primary education was from 1954 to 1961:

We learned English, maths, geography, history, PE, art and scripture (Bible stories). No science – just nature study – nor ICT, because there were no computers. We had games lessons; the girls played shinty (a kind of hockey using what we thought were walking sticks) and netball in the winter, and rounders in the summer; the boys played football in the winter and cricket in the summer. It didn't make much difference to the games we played outside school: boys and girls played cricket and rounders together. But the girls didn't play football. The girls did needlework and the boys did handicrafts. There was an after-school chess club for boys. My friend and I used to do the refreshments. I watched, and learned to play. One boy sometimes played chess with me at home but told me not to tell his friends.

- Ask the children about the similarities between the school curriculum in the 1950s and now. Do they think it provided equal opportunities for boys and girls? Why do they think girls and boys were given a different education? Discuss the different expectations that people had of boys and girls.
- Ask the children if they think people still have different expectations of boys and girls. They should give examples to support their views.
- Read *Fabric Crafts* from *Very Different* and consider:
 - How did Blair MacIntyre's father feel about the things his children learnt at school?
 - How did he feel about his son winning the embroidery prize?
 - What did he expect the other parents to think of it?
 - What kinds of feelings did he have about Annie winning the metalwork prize?
- Do the children think their parents or carers would react in a similar way? Why or why not?

GROUP/INDIVIDUAL WORK

- Ask the children to consider why Blair and Annie's father found it easier to accept his daughter being good at what he thought were 'boys' subjects' than his son being good at 'girls' subjects'.
- Ask the children to consider other related issues: for example, Mr MacIntyre's ideas of how men should behave, why he should be so unnerved by his son's skill and interest in embroidery and the response of Mrs MacIntyre.
- Do they think their own school curriculum gives equal opportunities to girls and boys? Have changes to school life and society made things better or worse in terms of equal opportunities? Page 50 in the Photocopiable Resource Sheets provides support.

PLENARY

- Invite the children to share their responses to the book. Did they find it funny? Which parts made them laugh? Did any parts make them feel angry or outraged?
- Explore their ideas about what made Mr MacIntyre so uneasy and why he could just about tolerate having a daughter who could change spark plugs but not a son who embroidered.
- What do the children think about Mr MacIntyre's views? Do they believe anyone still thinks in this way? Discuss the different ways boys and girls are still treated in other countries. How do the children feel about this?

VOCABULARY

equal opportunities	sexist	gender
gender bias	stereotype	unfair

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

- **History:** The children could find out about the education and play activities of boys and girls in Victorian times. They could talk to people who remember the 1930s and 1940s to find out about their education and play activities. Ask the children to comment on the differences between the roles of men and women and the changes between then and now. Encourage them to explore the reasons for these changes.
- **Art:** Focus on the work of women artists. Note that there have been many more male than female artists achieving recognition; the children could look at lists of the winners of art prizes such as the Turner prize, and comment on the balance.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- In groups, ask the children to discuss whether they think boys and girls are equal in all ways, or whether they think boys are better at some things and girls at others. Ask them if they think this is natural, or if it is because of opportunities they have been given to develop particular skills.
- The children could consider toys. Are there any toys which the boys would not want because they are for girls only? Ask the girls if there are any toys they would not want because they are for boys only. Explore their reasons. Ask them to carry out a survey to find the toys which most boys think are for girls only, and vice versa. They could present their results as graphs. Do the girls and boys agree with one another's views?
- Read extracts from Anne Fine's classic story *Bill's New Frock*. Discuss any stereotypes this brings up among the class.
- Ask the children to write a list of the sorts of areas in which a School Council could be involved. Examples could include: improvements to the grounds, playtime routine, anti-bullying education, selection of new teachers, fund raising, changes to the curriculum, etc.
- What sorts of people would make good School Council members? Ask the children to write a job description for a School Council representative and list the skills and qualities a person would need to fulfil the role. For example, an effective representative would need to be a good listener, highly motivated, energetic, caring, believe in fairness and be willing to role their sleeves up and get involved.
- The children could design badges, caps and T-shirts for their School Council members.

CIRCLE TIME

- Ask the children if they think any types of behaviour are appropriate for one gender but not the other, and why. Does their gender affect what they do, and how?
- Do girls and boys want to do the same things? Ask the children to complete one of the following sentences:
 - I like being a girl because ...
 - I like being a boy because ...
- If you are working on the idea of setting up – or improving – a School Council, use this time to review progress, modify any plans and schedules that aren't working, think up other ideas and prepare an agenda for the first meeting.
- Carry out some mock interviews for potential School Council representatives. The class can take turns to ask the candidates why they want to be a member, what they think they have to offer and any ideas they have for change and improvements to school life.

HOME ACTIVITIES

- The children could compile a questionnaire to find out about the views of members of their families about the roles of men and women, boys and girls.
- Consider the roles of men and women in families. Ask the children to record who carries out different jobs in their household and to identify if there is a fair division of labour. Page 51 from the Photocopiable Resource Sheets provides support.
- The children could talk to their families about the School Council plans and how they might be involved. How do they think the school could be improved? Page 49 in the Photocopiable Resource Sheets could be used as a starting point for discussion.

ASSEMBLY IDEAS

- Invite a female religious leader (for example, a rabbi or a Church of England or Church of Scotland minister) to talk to the children about her work, and about the changes in people's views (and the pressures) which have brought about the changes to enable women to do work which was once considered suitable only for men. They could also talk about any resistance they have faced from within the local community.
- If you and your class are keen to begin a School Council, you could use assembly time to promote the idea to the rest of the year group or whole school. Ask the children to prepare a ten-minute presentation of their thoughts, ideas and research so far. If you have already surveyed opinion, your class could show their tabulated results and discuss the outcomes.

Invite the rest of the assembly – including teachers and visitors – to express their opinions and suggest items for the first agenda.

You could then advertise for prospective members to the new council over the next couple of weeks and hold elections. Use assembly time for regular updates.

