



Story of Our Rights and Freedoms – The Balance of Power – Year 7 Civics

Teacher preparation

Overarching learning goal: Students will gain an understanding of the balance of power between the three arms of government. They will be able to reflect on how an individual's rights and freedoms can be compromised when power is exerted unlawfully and unethically. Students will understand the connection between separation of powers and rights and freedoms.



Teacher content information:

Throughout the Story of Our Rights and Freedoms lessons, students will consider Civics and Citizenship concepts through a human rights lens. They will critically assess the Australian system of government and the effect that it has on our rights and freedoms.

There is no universally accepted definition of human rights, and our understanding is continually developing. Some definitions include:

- The recognition and respect of peoples' dignity
- A set of moral and legal guidelines that promote and protect the recognition of our values, our identity and access to an adequate standard of living
- The basic standards by which we can identify and measure inequality and fairness



- Those rights associated with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

When we talk about human rights we usually refer to principles that have been agreed upon by countries throughout the world. These rights have been set down in international agreements and form part of international law. They can also be written into the domestic law of individual countries. Human rights cover virtually every area of human life and activity. These include:

- Civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom from torture
- Economic and social rights, such as the rights to health and education
- Individual rights, including the right to a fair trial
- Collective rights, or those rights that apply to groups of people, such as the right to a healthy environment or to live on one's ancestral land.

The UDHR is an international document that recognises the basic rights and fundamental freedoms to which all human beings are entitled. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 and marks a key milestone in the history of human rights. The Magna Carta, though limited in who it protected, was an important precursor to the UDHR.

[Click here to watch a video about the Magna Carta.](#)

You can view the entire text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the other core international human rights treaties, on the [United Nation's website](#) or by downloading [RightsApp](#) (free from the iTunes App store).

Additional resources:

- Factsheet: [What are Human Rights?](#)
- Factsheet: [About the Australian Human Rights Commission](#)



- Factsheet: [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- Factsheet: [The International Bill of Human Rights](#)
- Link: [Human Rights Explained: Index of factsheets](#)
- Factsheet: [The Australian Constitution: Overview](#)
- Link: [Parliamentary Education Office Factsheet - The Australian Constitution](#)
- Link: [Rule of Law Institute of Australia: The Separation of Powers Poster](#)

Hot tips: Consider starting this lesson by establishing a mutually agreed list of class agreements, displaying them in a highly visible place, and encouraging the class to kindly remind each other of the agreements. Refer to the [Handling Sensitive Topics and Controversial Issues factsheet](#) for more information.

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) publishes useful and informative factsheets and infographics about Parliament and its functions. You can view and download them from the [PEO website](#).

Teaching sequence

15 minutes – Part A: Our Rights, Our Freedoms and Power
20 minutes – Part B: What is Power?
50 minutes – Part C: Separation of Powers in Australia
45 minutes – Part D: Power Grab
10 minutes – Reflection

Work through this resource material in the following sequence:

PART A: Our Rights, Our Freedoms and Power

Step 1. This part of the lesson explores the idea that human rights protect people's freedoms. Students will see that when one or more human rights is withdrawn from society, individuals or groups of people may experience oppression.



Inflate some balloons before starting this part of the lesson. Move the classroom furniture to the sides of the room so that the students have open space in which to move around.

Give each student one [UDHR article](#) and write the following instructions on the whiteboard:

- You have one article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- Form groups of eight, making sure each person has a DIFFERENT article of the UDHR
- Form a circle facing each other once you have created a group.
- One by one, share the UDHR Article with your group - this will help us to become more familiar with human rights.

Hot tip: Before students begin, ensure that they have had an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions so that they know what they are expected to do during the activity.

Step 2. Ask students to stand close together in their circle and give each group a balloon. Explain that their next challenge is to work together as a group to keep the balloon in the air. They must remain in a circle formation so they will need to communicate and support each other to work together to keep the balloon in the air, and ensure that it stays within reach of where the group is positioned. The group that keeps the balloon in the air for the longest amount of time will win a prize. Give each group a couple of minutes to practise keeping the balloon in the air.

Note: The 'prize' on offer is a key part of the learning in this activity, so don't forget to mention it!

Step 3. Regain the class's attention, and explain that while groups continue to keep their balloon in the air, you will be calling out different articles of the UDHR. The group members whose article has been called out must freeze; this represents that they no longer enjoy that right. They cannot help their group to keep the balloon in the air, and



are out of the running for the prize. Explain that you will call out more UDHR articles as time goes on.

Start the round, and after 10-15 seconds, call out one of the UDHR Articles (1-30). As time goes on, groups will be finding it more difficult to keep the balloon in the air.

Step 4. Next, invite students to form one large circle. Debrief the activity by asking students to share their response to the following questions:

- How did it feel once you couldn't participate in the activity, and you were out of the running to win the prize?
- Did it feel unfair that you were out of the running for the prize?
- Did it feel frustrating that you couldn't re-join and be back in the running?
- Did anyone feel powerless when they weren't able to help their group?

Step 5. Explain to the class that for this activity, rights and freedoms were the 'prize'. Once we start to take away basic human rights, people's freedoms are compromised, and their lives can change - and not for the better. Ask students to think back to how unfair and frustrating it felt when they were no longer allowed to participate in the game. Ask the class:

- What do you think can happen when people don't have rights and freedoms?
- What are some ways that we can ensure that people have rights and freedoms?

Invite students to turn to the person next to them and share their response.

Inform students that the rest of the lesson will focus on the risk that government power could pose – intentionally and unintentionally – to people's rights and freedoms, and the checks and balances that exist to



help ensure that this doesn't happen.

PART B: What is Power?

Step 1. Move the classroom furniture so that students are sitting at their tables in groups of around four (or so that there are six table groups). Invite students to explore POWER by completing the first step of the [3-2-1 Bridge visible thinking routine](#) on the Student Worksheet. This routine asks students to note three thoughts, two ideas, and one question about a topic, then later connect these to new thinking about the topic after they have found out more.

Hot tip: If students are finding it difficult to come up with an analogy for power, ask them to think of a way to compare power to something else or to start with an example of what power is. For example, a knight's power is in their sword; a writer's power is in their pen.

Step 2. Next, invite the class to share their ideas with a partner or in small groups. Encourage students to extend their own responses with ideas from the discussion with their peers. Reconvene the class and ask students to share something interesting that came up in their discussion.

Step 3. Draw three columns on the whiteboard and write: 'Power allows people to....' as an overarching heading. Leave the three columns unlabelled, however remember to yourself that one column is categorised as 'positive' (freedom) one as 'neutral' and the other as 'negative' (oppression). Don't share this with the class yet.

Ask students to complete the sentence stem: 'Power allows people to...' in the space provided on the Student Worksheet, then invite volunteers to share what they have written. As students are sharing, write their ideas in the column that they fit best into.

- Suggestions such as: 'Power allows people to...help others' would be written in the 'positive/freedom' column.
- Suggestions such as: 'Power allows people to...tell other people



what to do' might be categorised as neutral.

- Suggestions such as: 'Power allows people to...hurt other people without consequences' would be written in the negative/oppression column.

Once students have made their contributions, ask the class to come up with a category for each of the columns based on what has been included in each. Alternatively, you could write the words Freedom/Neutral/Oppression on the side of the table and ask students to assign each word to a column.

Note: If necessary, inform the class that oppression means:

1. the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner.
2. an act or instance of oppressing or subjecting people to cruel or unjust impositions or restraints.

Source: www.dictionary.com

Step 4. Facilitate a quick discussion about power and the way that it can be used to grant freedoms or to oppress people. Invite students to write a summary of their understanding on the Student Worksheet.

PART C: Separation of Powers in Australia

Step 1. Explain to students that the Australian Constitution describes the three arms of government and that each arm checks (restricts) each other's use of power. This is referred to as the separation of powers....That way, they act as checks and balances on each other.

The idea is that by separating governmental power into three arms (the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary), each will be compelled to act in the best interests of all people and our rights and freedoms are better protected.



Step 2. Place one factsheet ([The Judiciary](#), [The Executive](#), [The Legislature](#)) on each table, and ensure that students have a copy of the Student Worksheet. Allow 10 minutes for students to walk around the tables and read through each factsheet, discuss any questions they have about the information, and complete the corresponding activities on the Student Worksheet. Once students have completed the section they're working on, invite them to move to the next table so that they can read about a different arm of government then respond to the questions.

Step 3. Once students have read each factsheet, invite them to return to their original tables. Place a copy of the [Separation of Powers Flow Diagram](#) in the centre of each table, and invite groups to work together to fill in the diagram. They should aim to illustrate their understanding of the separation of powers, and how the arms of government can keep each other in check.

While students are working on their diagram in groups, draw a non-annotated version on the whiteboard. After groups have had a chance to complete the diagram, facilitate the class to share their ideas on the whiteboard.

Step 4. When the diagram is complete, ask students to summarise their understanding of the separation of powers in the space provided on the Student Worksheet.

PART D: Power Grab

Step 1. Ask the six groups to form into three groups, moving their tables and chairs so that they are seated together and can work as a team. Each group will need one copy of the [First Three Chapters of the Australian Constitution](#) (from the Parliamentary Education Office) and a set of [Power Grab scenarios](#).

Step 2. Write the following instructions on the whiteboard:



- As a group, read the scenario. Each describes an example of a time when the balance of power is ineffective and one or more arms of government are overstepping their powers.
- Find an article in the Australian Constitution that outlines how the arms of power have acted unlawfully.
- The first team to correctly identify an article that outlines how the other arm/s of government have acted unlawfully wins the round.

Allow 10 minutes for groups to read, understand and complete the tasks related to each scenario.

Step 3. Facilitate a class discussion so that students can share their thoughts on the following:

- Why is it important to keep a balance of power?
- What could happen if there is an imbalance of power?
- Is it worse when people in high profile positions abuse their power?
- Who and/or what is affected when power is abused?

Students could summarise their new ideas on the space provided on the Student Worksheet.



Reflection

Invite students to return to the 3-2-1 Bridge visible thinking routine from the start of the lesson. Encourage students to note down three new thoughts, two new questions and one new analogy around the concept of POWER. Once completed, ask students to write a paragraph underneath explaining how their new response connects to their initial response.

Differentiated Learning

Extension: Students could write an extended expository piece that explores the issues raised during the class discussion points in Part D: Power Grab.

Provisional Learning Support: Ensure that students are working in groups of diverse abilities.