

Referendums: Lesson Plan

Topic	
A referendum is a direct process through which people can vote on a particular issue and bring change. Either the people can ask for a referendum, or the government holds a referendum on an issue. Usually, the people can only respond with “yes” or “no” to the question. A majority has to be achieved for either side to prevail.	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Political Science, Government, History, Social Studies, Philosophy	30-35 mins
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/referendums-a-tool-for-unity-or-division/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain how a referendum works.• List out the potential advantages and disadvantages of referendums.• Give historic and modern examples of referendums.	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Direct Democracy, Representative Democracy	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet	
Before you watch	
Turn & Talk: Make a list of the ways ordinary citizens can influence government decision-making.	
While you watch	

1. What is a referendum?
2. List one advantage of a referendum in a democracy.
3. How can referendums heighten political divide?

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Should referendums be mandatory on every major legislative decision made by the government?
2. How can the government make sure that the public makes its decision during the referendum on complete and unbiased information?
3. Under the backdrop of the rising popularity of referendums, is there a need for representative democracies?

Activity Ideas

- Have a class debate on whether referendums lead to more efficient and faster decision-making.
- Allow students to pick and research a particular referendum in the world as a case study. Students should make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of the particular referendum and then rate its overall success and effectiveness.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Bale, Tim. "Elections, voting, and referendums." in European Politics a Comparative Introduction. London: Macmillan Education, 2017, 217
2. Goodman, Jack. "A Brief History of the Referendum." Atlas Obscura, Atlas Obscura, 1 July 2016, www.atlasobscura.com/articles/a-brief-history-of-the-referendum.
3. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Referendum and Initiative." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 7 Oct. 2019, www.britannica.com/topic/referendum.