



ECO SCHOOLS: POLITICS

I want your vote



Develop children's political nous with **Jonathan Lear's** eco-themed election...

Sustainability is high on the agenda of all schools, but how do we engage our children in the issues that really matter? It is vital that they see themselves as global citizens, and as such, take an active role in bringing about improvements for others as well as themselves. This topic aims to raise children's political awareness and give them opportunities to problem solve, negotiate with others and seek resolution within the context of an eco-election.

ACTIVITY 1

What is politics?

INTRODUCE THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT...

This first session aims to give children the necessary basic understanding of the structure of Government and the way in which democracies work. Begin with the words 'Political Parties' on the board – ask the children to share with their partners what, if anything, these words mean to them. Take feedback from the children in order to assess their prior knowledge.

Help the children to clarify their ideas by sharing the definition that politics is 'the process by which groups of people make collective decisions.' It would help to provide an example from the children's own experience so they can see that there are lots of occasions where we actively, but perhaps not consciously, take part in the political process (i.e. the school council).

Following this, the children need to develop their understanding of why there are different political parties. At this stage,

the children need only a basic understanding of the multi-party system. It is important they recognise that all parties have the responsibility of acting in the interests of the people (constituents), and that each party competes against each other for votes.



ACTIVITY 2

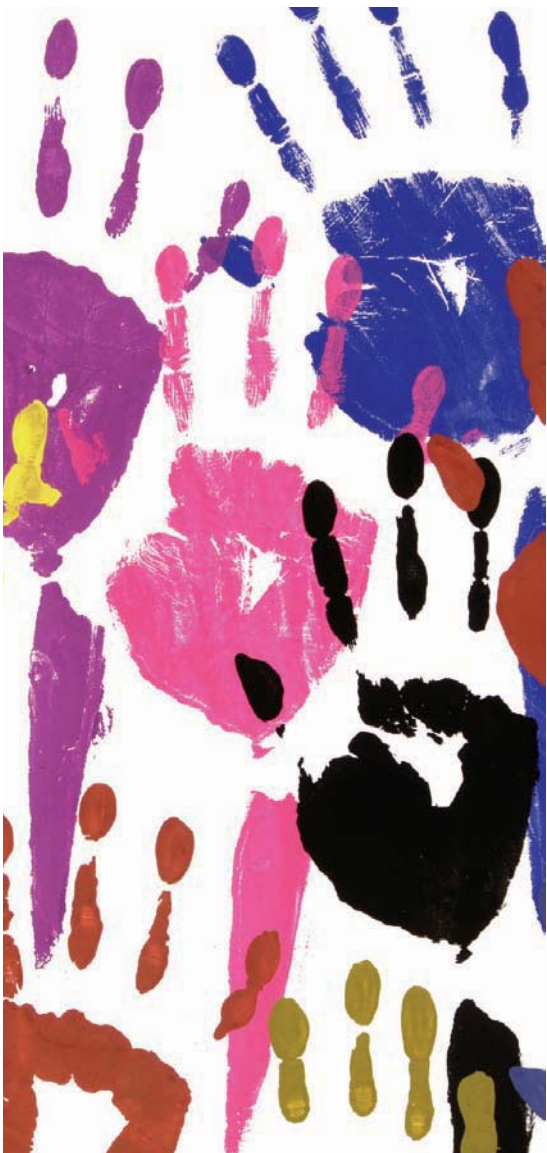
Education, education, education

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICIES...

Share with the children that political parties compete to gain control of Government. When in control they are able to implement policies (actions) that can impact life both in our own country and globally. To be elected, political parties must persuade voters to vote for them. To do this, they share their aims, policies and present a manifesto.

Give the children the first heading 'aims'. In groups, allow them to discuss what they feel should be the aims of political parties. What issues do you think need dealing with? If the children find it difficult to take a broader perspective, allow them to use the excellent BBC Newsround website. What types of stories are frequently being reported? What issues are people interested in? As children feedback, record stories under broad headings – obesity, for example, could be added under 'Health and Wellbeing' or perhaps 'Education'; recycling would be added to 'Environment'.

With the children's ideas added, allow them to think about the importance of each issue. You could write the headings on cards and place them in different areas of the classroom – the children could literally vote with their feet.



ACTIVITY 3

It's party time!

CAN THE CHILDREN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Recap on session 1 and then reintroduce the children's broad headings (Education, Health and Well being, The Environment etc.) Tell the children that they are about to start their own political parties and will be debating the issues surrounding the environment.

The creation of political parties is a really exciting prospect for the children, but they will need careful guidance in order to be successful. After grouping the children, they are ready for their first task. Present each party with an official looking envelope. On opening, the groups are given clear instructions for their first task; this can vary, but would usually include the creation of a name and a logo that best represents their party's environmental standpoint.

After the parties have introduced themselves to each other, the serious business of creating policy can begin. Each group is given a list of areas that can be explored whilst creating their policies and manifesto. These might include all or some of the following: Water management, Waste management/Recycling, Wildlife, Sustainable energy, Climate change and Energy.

At this point the children will need to be reminded about their constituents. The parties will be attempting to persuade other children and adults in school to vote for them. With this in mind, it is important that alongside exploring the big issues and global impact, children must also focus on the impact that their parties will make to the school community. What actual change can they affect? How will the school be different if they are elected?

It is important to give children the opportunity to voice ideas within their group. Encourage any and all ideas to be collected – any misconceptions can be dealt with at a later date.

ACTIVITY 4

Change we can believe in

CREATE AN ECO-MANIFESTO...

The session begins with all parties called to a meeting at the Houses of Parliament (ideally a specially set up space away from the classroom.) The competing political parties are told they must decide which of the environmental issues they will focus on. They will need to choose carefully as these will form the main elements of their Eco manifesto. Allow the children time to explore their chosen issues – they will need to research and find relevant information using as wide a range of resources as possible. To support the children in this process, they should be encouraged to look for the headline – can they summarise the issue in one sentence? E.g. 'Waste production in Britain is becoming unmanageable.' They should then be helped to

explore the role of individuals and groups in making a difference, e.g. we can help by recycling our cans and bottles.

Following this session, the parties are brought back together and briefed on forming policies and creating a manifesto. They first must decide what they want to achieve (the **Aim** of the party). The **Policies** are the things that they want to do to achieve their aims, and finally, the **Manifesto**, which is what they are promising to do if elected. With time and support, their policies and manifestos will take shape, enabling the groups to then focus on presentation and persuasion.



ACTIVITY 5

The election

TIME TO COUNT THE VOTES...

The subsequent sessions are entirely flexible, the children could spend a number of weeks preparing for the elections or, for a shorter topic, just a few intensive days. The work focuses on how best to present their views to the constituents. Children will need to consider to what degree they can persuade whilst still maintaining their integrity – they will be accountable for any false promises! The children could work on making a Party political broadcast using filming equipment; they could design and make leaflets, posters, or billboards. A live debate could be arranged to allow representatives from each of the parties to discuss the relative merits of their policies.

After allowing the children to develop the presentation of their policies and manifesto, it is time for the election.

To give the children a sense of a real election, a large number of voters need to be involved – ideally several classes of children. The constituents would listen to each group in turn, before returning to their own classes to cast their votes in a secret ballot. As votes are counted, the parties wait nervously in their own classroom waiting for the results to trickle through. After the results are announced and the winners are congratulated, cross party friendships can be rekindled and the post election celebrations begin. Who said that politics couldn't be fun?