‘ELECTION’
A sense of optimism, relief, frustration or ambivalence

Billy Crombie
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Billy is an experienced Citizenship educator who has been teaching Citizenship for the past 13 years in the UK and Australia. Whilst living in the UK Billy advised and developed resources for England’s Qualification and Curriculum Authority on Citizenship and National Curriculum developments, the European Union and the BBC.

With travelling out of the system Billy is now back home in Australia and working as the Community Education Team Leader at the Victorian Electoral Commission, engaging those who have higher barriers to voting, including young people, the homeless and Indigenous communities in elections.

Whatever your feelings with regard to the announcement of the upcoming Federal election, there’s no denying that election fever will seep its way from train station billboards and letters to the editor into classroom corridors. For Social Education and Citizenship teachers, the election provides an unmissable opportunity for authentic Citizenship learning and rigorous debate in the classroom.

More than just the alluring smell of the sausages (although we admit the sausages are a bonus), elections take their place as the backbone of our democracy and voting is the fundamental right of everyone to have their voice heard by our leaders, both those in office and those hoping to get into office. Unfortunately, many of us are guilty of taking this precious right for granted and forget the struggles of those who’ve gone before us to ensure voting equality.

It may be surprising to hear that for some groups in our society, such as Indigenous Australians, the right to vote was only received in our lifetime! Or that ‘the Secret Ballot’, a concept now practiced globally, had its origins right here in Victoria!

Despite these achievements, it is concerning to note that the Lowy Institute’s recent study shows that only 48% of 18-29 year olds say they prefer democracy over any other form of government, and that almost a quarter of young people feel that ‘for someone like me, it doesn’t matter what sort of government we have’. This has a knock-on effect for voter enrolment among young people. As of March this year, fewer than half of 18-year-olds were enrolled.

Furthermore, the Australia Institute conducted an online survey of young people aged 17-25 in May 2013 to assess youth interest in the upcoming Federal election and found that:

- 46% of females and 43% of males had no interest in the election
- 71% of females and 66% of males could not identify who their Federal Member of Parliament is
- 57% of females and 62% of males did not intend to enrol to vote

Against this backdrop, the challenge is clear for Citizenship and Social Educators. How can we make learning about democracy and elections engaging and relevant?

To find the hook, tap into issues that students truly care about and create a climate in the classroom that encourages sometimes difficult and controversial discussions, this is the approach which the Victorian Electoral Commission’s (VEC’S) Passport to Democracy Program hopes to encapsulate.

‘Passport to Democracy’ – tapping into the passion

The VEC’S secondary school program, Passport to Democracy, aims to equip students with the tools and

2. Oliver, A. ‘More Young Aussies Dismissing Democracy’, Herald Sun, 20/6/13
4. The Australia Institute, Youth Survey, 14/06/13, Australia.
techniques with which they can make a genuine and lasting change on an issue important to them.

Usually delivered over a period of four to six weeks, students identify an issue they feel strongly about and explore the various viewpoints of and the potential solutions to, their issues. This involves identifying who the key decision-makers might be in their schools and at a local, state and national level and considering strategies to influence them. This leads students to develop action plans, which outline the steps needed to take action on their issue and to run a class election to identify the issue that they might like to take action on collectively.

This active learning approach taps into issues that are important to young people and helps to build their understanding of political literacy and how Australia’s political processes works. As students recently filmed by the VEC to showcase active citizenship say; “I haven’t really taken action before because I’ve been scared of doing it, but this is why I’m so excited to do it this time...” and “taking our issue to our Member of Parliament; I didn’t know it was that easy to do”.  

7. You can view these recently produced films at www.passport.vec.vic.gov.au.

The Passport to Democracy Program provides a comprehensive range of resources that explore:

• What do young people care about and who makes decisions in government about these issues?
• What are the facts behind their issue and what are some of the potential solutions?
• What action can they take to have a positive impact on their chosen issue?
• How can elections be an opportunity to take action on their issue?

Additional resources can also be found on the Passport to Democracy Blog at www.passport.vec.vic.gov.au and professional development workshops on active Citizenship strategies in the classroom are delivered across the State.  

Addressing the ‘democracy challenge' through the Australian Curriculum

The proposed Civics and Citizenship Australian Curriculum provides exciting opportunities to explore and critically reflect upon elections as a key symbol of Australia’s democracy.

Although opportunities will be presented throughout the Australian curriculum from Years 3-10, the focus for this exploration is Year 8 and Year 9. The areas of Civic and Citizenship knowledge and understanding and skills that seem most relevant are outlined below.  

8. Contact the Education Team at the VEC to find out when the next active Citizenship Professional Development day is in your local area. CRT costs are also available to eligible schools in this free opportunity.  
### YEAR 8

**Civic and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government and democracy</th>
<th>The rights and liberties that enable active participation in Australia's democracy. How citizens can participate in Australia's democracy, engage in debate, express their opinions and take action about issues in Australian society ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laws and citizens</td>
<td>The responsibilities of a citizen participating in and contributing to Australia's democracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Civics and Citizenship Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questioning and research</th>
<th>Identifying a range of questions to inform an inquiry about Australia’s political systems.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis, synthesis and interpretation</td>
<td>Using critical thinking to assess the effectiveness of democratic practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### YEAR 9

**Civic and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government and democracy</th>
<th>The role of contemporary political parties and independent representatives in Australia’s democracy and system of government. How citizens’ choices are shaped at election time through public debate, the media, social media, opinion polls, advertising and political party campaigns.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Civics and Citizenship Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questioning and research</th>
<th>Identify, select and evaluate a range of questions to inform an inquiry about Australia’s social, political and legal systems.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis, synthesis and interpretation</td>
<td>Use critical thinking to assess the effectiveness of democratic practices and systems. Identify and account for different interpretations and points of view.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What follows is a selection of engaging activities that support the delivery of Passport to Democracy and the teaching of the Civics and Citizenship Australian Curriculum. They aim to look more deeply into who has the right to vote today, how this was achieved and some of the key principles behind ensuring that our elections are democratic.

We hope that these activities will inspire you to try something new, take the plunge and embrace election fever!

**Activity 1: It's MY right**

This activity explores the struggles experienced by some groups in our community to be granted the vote. Women, workers, prisoners and our Indigenous community have all had to fight for the right to vote.

1. Provide each student with a character card (Appendix 1, page 27). Ask students to consider whether the character on their card has the right to vote. Allocate one side of the room as 'I have the right' and another side as 'I ain't got no right'. Ask students to consider whether their character has the right to vote and to move to the corresponding side of the room.

2. Explore with students the decision they made. Are there some groups that they feel are less entitled to vote than others?

3. Explain that all these groups in Australia today are actually entitled to vote and that to vote you must be 18 and an Australian citizen. However, this has not always been the case for all groups. Ask students to suggest which of these characters may at some stage have been denied the right to vote in Australia.

4. Divide the room into decades, from the 1840s to present and ask students to now arrange themselves in the order that they believe they might have been granted the vote.

5. Use the timeline (Appendix 2, page 28) to explore the reality with students.

6. Discuss with students:
   - Are there any surprises?
   - Why do they think that Indigenous Australians were not given the vote until just over 50 years ago?
   - Should those serving sentences in prison be allowed to vote? What are both sides of the argument?
   - Why might mobile voting be provided for those experiencing homelessness?
   - How might these characters feel about voting today? Why?
   - Who in our community currently is unable to vote? Why?
   - Should all these groups be allowed to vote? Why?

**Activity 2: The struggle**

Appendix 3 provides a timeline of the Indigenous vote. It may surprise people to know that, despite fighting for Australia in two World Wars, our Indigenous community was not entitled to vote until 1962. This activity helps students to explore Indigenous perspectives and the struggle for equality and recognition and lends itself to exploring the proposed Australian cross-curriculum priority ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures’.

1. Share with students key events and dates on the ‘Path to Voting timeline’ separately and ask to arrange the events in a chronological order.

2. To commemorate last year’s 50th Year of the Indigenous vote, the AEC produced the film ‘Louder that One Voice’ - which can be found at [www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au). Watch this film with the class and explain that the rate of voting within the Indigenous community is significantly lower than the general public.

Discuss and investigate with students:

- What reasons can students suggest for this?
- Should voting be compulsory for Indigenous Australians?
- How do have Indigenous Australians traditionally choose/chosen their leaders now/ previously?
- How many members of Parliament are Indigenous? Why might this be?
- Victoria is yet to see an Indigenous leader in the State Parliament, should this issue be addressed? Why? If yes, how?

3. Share with students the VEC’s Indigenous Program’s logo, ‘My Vote, Your Vote, and Our Vote’. Students are to imagine that they have been asked to make a short film to launch the message to young people who are recently eligible to vote. They must create a pitch for their film to present to the VEC.

**Activity 3: Why should we vote?**

Australia prides itself on its democracy and the ability of citizens to share their views with the government. In Australia, enrolling to vote and voting is compulsory for all Australian citizens over the age of 18, but still some people fail to vote in elections. This activity (Appendix 4) raises arguments for and against voting that are often expressed by young people.

- Arrange the students in two concentric circles facing each other. Students in the inner circle are each given a discussion card to discuss with their partner sitting opposite them.
- After three minutes clap loudly and ask the students in the outer circle to move one place to the right. Continue this for several moves. Swap roles to vary the experience.

10. ACARA, Draft Years 3-10 Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship, May 2013, P12.
11. Adapted from an activity from LSIS, Time to Vote: Citizenship and the elections, UK, 2009, P4.
• Debrief the activity by asking for comments made about each card.

**Activity 4: The great race**

This activity uses an element of competition to explore the key measures taken to ensure that elections are democratic. Students explore what a voting centre might look like and its key features. They then reflect on why some of these practices are in place.

1. Using the provided image of a voting centre as a reference, create a simple map or drawing of a Voting Centre. This must include the following features: a ballot box, the electoral roll, ballot papers, an election official, an issuing officer, a voter, an electoral roll, privacy screen, magnifying glass, wheelchair ramp, a scrutineer and canvassers handing out how to vote cards.

2. Ask students to form teams of five and provide each team with paper and colour pens. The challenge of the game is to copy as closely as possible the original picture/map, which will be placed at the front of the classroom. Each team member will only be given one minute to study the picture. They must then run back to their group and draw what they remembered, whilst another team member takes a turn studying the image. The team may want to decide upon their strategy before embarking on the challenge.

3. After each team member has been given an opportunity, the team may take stock and agree upon a fresh strategy to ensure that its version is as close as possible to the original.

4. On completion, points can then be awarded to the team whose picture most closely resembles the original mind map.

5. This then provides a perfect opportunity to discuss some of the key principles of the role of democracy in elections and could include the following:
   • What is the purpose of the electoral roll?
   • How many times is someone allowed to vote?
   • How do we know how many times a person has voted?
   • How is the vote made secret?
   • Who is able to work in an election?
   • What is the role of the scrutineer?
   • Why are canvassers not allowed in the voting centre?
   • Why do staff working in an election have to be ‘impartial’?
   • How does the Electoral Commission ensure that people living with a disability are given the right to vote?
   • What improvements would you make to this voting centre to make it more accessible?
**Activity 5: What would I fight for?**

This activity recognises the achievements of those that have campaigned to be granted the vote. It explores some of the methods used historically and considers what issues might warrant use of the same campaign methods today.

With students, generate a list of people who have been denied the vote in the past.

Identify with students a range of protest methods used by suffragist campaigners throughout history. This could include: hunger strikes, marches, petitioning, public debate, making an embroidered protest banner, etc.

Ask students to identify issues about which they feel strongly enough to campaign for. Discuss with students:

- Which of the protest methods do they feel would be most effective today?
- Are there any protest methods they feel would be less effective today? Why?

**Appendix 1**

**Activity 1: It’s MY right**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An Indigenous male, aged 25</th>
<th>A white woman, born in Australia, aged 22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A male renter, born in Australia, aged 18</td>
<td>A male land owner, born in Australia, aged 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A homeless male, born in Australia, aged 45</td>
<td>A woman with an intellectual disability, born in Australia, aged 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Somali male, who has become an Australian citizen</td>
<td>A female inmate, born in Australia, who is serving a sentence of 2 years for dealing drugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 2**

**Activity 1: It's MY right**

**Voting Rights Over The Ages**

1842  First Parliamentary election took place in NSW, which at that time included Victoria. It was only possible to vote if you owned land or paid rent on property. Most men could not vote and no women or Indigenous person could vote.

1854  Following Eureka Stockade, a new law was passed allowing miners to vote.

1856  Victoria becomes the first democracy in the world to introduce the secret ballot.

1891  30,000 Victorians sign a ‘Monster Petition’ calling for women’s right to vote. The petition was the largest in its day and measured 260 metres!

1902  The Commonwealth Franchise Act is passed. The Act meant that most men and women over the age of 21 could now vote in a Federal election.

1908  Victorian women over the age of 21 were granted the vote in State elections.

1912  Enrolling to vote is made compulsory.

1924  Compulsory voting is introduced.

1949  Indigenous men who had served in the armed forces are allowed to enrol and vote.

1962  All Indigenous people are granted the right to enrol and vote, however it is not compulsory.

1973  The voting age is lowered from 21 to 18.

1984  Enrolling and voting becomes compulsory for Indigenous people.

2006  Laws were passed banning any prisoner from voting in Federal elections.

The Victorian Electoral Commission begins a mobile voting service for those experiencing homelessness.

2007  Vicky Roach, a prisoner serving a sentence in Victoria, challenged the Australian Government at the High Court saying that the Government had broken the human rights of prisoners by denying them the vote. This resulted in the High Court reinstating the right of those prisoners who have a sentence of less than three years to vote in a Federal election.

2013  The Australian Electoral Commission include mobile voting services for the homeless in the Federal election.

**Appendix 3**

**Activity 2: The Struggle**

1936  Aboriginal activists William Cooper, Doug Nicholls, Bill and Eric Onus and others start the Australian Aborigines Advancement League in Melbourne to campaign for better rights.

1949  Indigenous soldiers who had fought in the World Wars were granted the right to vote.

1962  All Indigenous people are granted the right to enrol and vote however it is not compulsory.

1971  The Aboriginal flag is flown for the first time.

Neville Bonner becomes the first Indigenous Australian in Federal Parliament.

1974  Indigenous candidates win their seats in Queensland and the Northern Territory parliaments.

1976  Sir Doug Nicholls, a Yorta Yorta man (a clan from North East Victoria) is appointed the Governor of South Australia.

1984  Enrolling and voting becomes compulsory for Indigenous people.

1995  The Aboriginal flag is recognised by the Australian Government as the flag of Australia.

2001  The first Indigenous woman, Carol Martin, is elected to the Parliament of Western Australia.

2013  The first Indigenous Head of a Government is appointed to the Northern Territory Parliament.

2013  Victoria is still waiting for its first Indigenous Member of State Parliament.
## Appendix 4
### Activity 3: Why Should We Vote?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Opposite Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a duty to vote in elections. We want to live in a free society and voting is part of that freedom.</td>
<td>Australia will be run based on the voices of only a few if we do not vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone’s voice is equal when you vote, no matter what colour / religion / gender / sexuality you are.</td>
<td>People don’t trust politicians so they won’t vote for any of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people are just not interested in politics. They don’t understand how the decisions that governments make affect their lives.</td>
<td>Some people think that their vote doesn’t make a difference in the end, so they don’t bother to vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people don’t know enough about politics and can’t understand what the politicians are saying.</td>
<td>We take our freedom to vote for granted. In some countries people still cannot decide on their government and they are prepared to go to prison or die fighting for that right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people can’t be bothered to go to the voting centre. They might if they could use the internet or text their vote.</td>
<td>If we don’t vote, we can’t complain about decisions the government make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only reason some people vote is to avoid the fine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>