The Deliberative Classroom: Democracy, protest and change

TOPIC BRIEFING AND LESSON PLANS
Theme 2: Democracy, protest and change

Teacher briefing paper

Introduction

The Deliberative Classroom resource packs are designed to support teachers to think about the subject knowledge base and concepts that underpin and inform debates about fundamental British values. They accompany student resources, which are designed for use with key stage 3 pupils.

This briefing is written for teachers, and therefore assumes the readership has a postgraduate level of literacy, although we do not assume readers are already subject experts in this area. The briefing is designed to sketch out some of the issues from the relevant area of academic study and to help teachers to think about what constitutes the knowledge base for these debates. We anticipate teachers will select aspects that are relevant to their students, and this will depend on age, prior knowledge and the time available to explore these issues.

This topic begins from the premise that many young people attracted by extremist narratives start with a dissatisfaction with an aspect of the current state of affairs and a desire to radically change the situation. By explicitly educating students about how change can be affected within democracies, peacefully and within the law, we intend to build a more positive perspective for harnessing this initial dissatisfaction. Through developing students’ knowledge of democracy and the many ways citizens can express themselves and engage in trying to create change in society, the resource can also help to help build resilience to being drawn into extremism or using violence.
What is a democracy?

In promoting fundamental British values and citizenship education teachers are supposed to promote democracy, but it is a concept which has been the subject of many different interpretations and therefore which has many contested meanings. It is notable that one of the UK’s greatest defenders of democracy against totalitarianism, Winston Churchill, is often reputed to have defended it on the rather pragmatic grounds that, “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.”

Robert Dahl starts his classic book on the topic by describing it as a political system in which “the members regard one another as political equals, are collectively sovereign, and possess all the capacities, resources and institutions they need in order to govern themselves.” From this simple basis, a number of issues emerge, not least who counts as being a member of such a system, what they are expected to do to sustain the system, and what mechanisms enable these processes to work? Depending on one’s answer to these questions, we can end up with a rather ‘thin’ version of democracy (where citizens largely obey the law and vote for others to govern on their behalf), or a much ‘thicker’ version (where citizens do more of the regular work of democracy by participating in civil society, engaging in public debates, and participating in democratic decision-making at various levels). And depending on where one puts the emphasis, this leads to different models of democracy, such as liberal democracy (emphasising individual freedom); participatory democracy (emphasising citizen action); deliberative democracy (emphasising public debate); or catallaxy (emphasising the process of rational choice).

Bernard Crick argued that we should approach democracy as three inter-related stories: firstly, democracy describes a principle of government; secondly it describes a system of government institutions and relationships; and thirdly it relates to a form of citizen behaviour.

When we talk about democracy we often emphasise the centrality of voting, but in order to appreciate the breadth and variety of the concept the first activity in this resource provides an overview of the broader political system. Given what we have already said, there is no obvious agreement, but the following list aims to capture some of the main characteristics that constitute a democratic political system:

- **Regular elections** to elect representatives to govern, which also provides the public with regular opportunities to remove people from power.
- **Freedom to stand as a candidate in elections**, to ensure that there is no permanent political class.
- **Free and secret ballot**, to ensure that people feel free to cast their vote as they wish, whilst minimising the chances of coercion or bribery.
- **Political parties** to help organise representatives around core policy ideas. This is perhaps a more debatable point, but it does provide a mechanism for political representatives to form governments and it also makes it easier for citizens to identify candidates to support.
- **Free media** to ensure information and a range of opinions are widely spread. This means that citizens are free to develop their own informed views and that politicians can be held to account for their actions, which are widely reported and analysed.
- **Freedom of assembly** for citizens and the freedom to organise.
- **Minority rights** are essential in a democracy to ensure that the principle of liberty is maintained for all and to avoid what is often called the ‘tyranny of the majority’.
- **Equal citizenship rights for women**, which we have listed as a separate point because women are generally not a minority, but have nevertheless been excluded from ‘democratic’ institutions and processes.

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6. For a more detailed set of criteria and a detailed evaluation of aspects of the UK’s democracy see: http://www.democraticaudit.com/
Citizen action has been divided into actions which are primarily concerned with formal politics (for example voting and joining political parties), and cause-oriented activities (which relate to the pursuit of a particular cause or policy aim). In the latter category, decisions about ethical consumption and life-style politics blur the traditional distinction between the ‘political’ and the ‘social’. Cause-oriented activities also aim to influence other actors beyond the government, and actions may be aimed at corporations, other civil society groups, or international agencies as much as they are aimed at influencing politicians. This distinction is important because it broadens out our sense of what counts as citizen action and also because there is a generational divide, with younger people tending to be more involved in cause-oriented action and older people engaging more in traditional forms of political action. This generational divide is also evident in the organisations through which people conduct their activities, with older citizens tending to favour traditional organisations (such as religions, unions and political parties) and younger citizens engaging more with new social movements and advocacy networks (such as international environmental and humanitarian organisations). Some commentators have argued that rather than just being related to age, we are currently going through a deeper transition away from formal political engagement and towards more cause-oriented action.

The spectrum of action in a democracy

In the curriculum and many text books there is a tendency to focus on knowledge about institutions and processes. Crick’s definition of democracy (above) also includes democratic behaviours as an equally important dimension and throughout history, we see examples of how citizens have been involved in different kinds of action that have resulted in different sorts of change in society. From the list above, it follows that voting is one of the most essential forms of action expected of citizens. This is so important that some states make it mandatory, but in the UK it is legally seen as a right rather than a duty. However, the real strength of a democratic society is in a vibrant civil society, where those freedoms are not simply seen as individual commodities to be enjoyed, but rather where freedom is reinforced and multiplied through voluntary associations of citizens, all acting together to promote their interests, pursue their dreams of what constitutes a good life, and as a side effect creating a self-sustaining democratic culture.

Obviously there are many ways to achieve and organise each of these elements, which gives rise to the great diversity of democracies in practice. However, it is useful to ensure that students are aware of the breadth of the whole system, and how these elements interrelate. As each is removed or weakened, so the claim for that system to be democratic is undermined. The first lesson addresses this point and in doing so sets the scene for addressing the question of how one goes about changing or influencing society for the better. The underlying argument in this topic is that political violence is unnecessary, and therefore almost impossible to justify, in a system that is genuinely democratic, because other less destructive methods are open to citizens.

7 For a good discussion of this debate see: https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/beyond-turnout-consequences-compulsory-voting
8 For a succinct summary of how this works see Larry Diamond’s (2004) paper ‘What Civil Society Can Do to Develop Democracy’ https://web.stanford.edu/%7Eldiamond/iraq/Develop_Democracy021002.htm
In activity 2 we start with a list of types of citizen actions and then start to apply this to different contexts to help illustrate how the usefulness or appropriateness of an action might be judged. The actions we consider include the following:

- **Volunteering and doing things yourself:** this can involve essentially charitable voluntary work at one end of the spectrum, with few obvious political implications. However, many charities also have a political dimension to their work, implementing or influencing policy or sometimes spending public funds. Other forms of action include activities like clean up campaigns or guerrilla gardening, which in one sense directly tackle the problem rather than expecting a government agency to do it, but in another sense can be seen as campaigning methods in themselves to bring problems to public awareness. The National Citizen Service's view of social action might fall into this category. At the extreme end of this type of action we might consider vigilantism, where communities or individuals take direct responsibility for aspects of security where they perceive the police have failed. There is a huge range of vigilante action in the UK including: anti-paedophile groups, Jewish Shomrim groups protecting their communities, or spontaneous groups which arose in London to prevent riots and looting.

- **Supporting a campaign:** citizens can provide relatively passive support for a campaign, organisation or political cause by donating money, signing a petition, writing a letter or email to express solidarity with campaigners, or even voting. The action here is essentially facilitating others to act more directly.

- **Promoting a campaign:** other types of political behaviour might be seen as slightly more active than simply supporting a cause, examples here include: sharing information on-line or physically (e.g. leafleting), wearing a badge, raising awareness in your work, school etc. These actions get the word out and build awareness and this can itself be transformational as it permeates the culture and changes people's ideas and attitudes. This kind of participation is easy to do on-line but is sometimes derided as ‘clicktivism’ because it leads one to feel one has acted, but the impact might be minimal in reality.

- **Joining a campaign:** here we can imagine more direct action to promote campaigns, for example marching and protesting, lobbying elected representatives and others with power, standing for election as a candidate, being active in a local political party or organisation. Some such acts are protests against something, others are campaigns for something. Some forms of action are very specific such as demands for judicial review or fighting a legal case, such as the McLibel Case, the longest in UK history. Citizens can also use their role as consumers to promote specific causes, for example buying fair trade or organic goods to promote their preferred forms of food production.

- **Acts of omission or withdrawal:** whilst we tend to think of citizenship action as a positive action to try to change things, there is also a powerful tradition of...
simply stopping doing something. In the work-place such practices as working to rule or striking have proved powerful. In civil society conscientious objectors refuse conscription; consumers, performers and sports people boycott companies or countries; and David Thoreau famously decided to withhold taxes in protest against slavery and the Mexican-American War.22 Others simply refuse to comply with unjust laws by bending the rules, or ignoring them. These acts are frequently seen as acts of ‘everyday resistance’ but Lily Tsai23 has recently described some as ‘constructive noncompliance’, where people believe this is a legitimate form of feedback to the government on badly framed laws.

• Civil disobedience: some of the acts of omission also constitute civil disobedience, where the object is to disrupt the law. Widely used non-violent acts include: sit-ins and others forms of occupation, such as the Greenpeace Women’s Camp or the Occupy movement; kiss-in protests have formed part of the campaign for gay equality24; data leaks, whistleblowing and hacktivism25 have been widely publicised in the age of social media; and more traditional forms of sabotage and disruption have been used, for example: protestors have taken over TV studios26 or disrupted parliament27; environmental campaigners have trashed GM crops; striking workers have picketed to cause disruption and prevent others attending work28; art works have been attacked.29 Some forms of civil disobedience employ humour, such as the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who have been important cultural icons in the LGBTQ movement,30 and Mark Thomas who combines comedy and activism.31 The point here is to disrupt the law by stopping other legal activities from proceeding (such as arms sales or GM crop experiments) or forcing the legal system to confront injustices.

• Political violence: some forms of civil disobedience provoke violence on behalf of the authorities or other groups, even though the protestors are non-violent. At other times violence is used as a more deliberate political act. Such violence can be directed towards the authorities or civilians. Terrorism is the term widely used to describe political violence that is aimed at the civilian population, but it is also used to describe more focused uses of violence to affect some political change. Some people using forms of civil disobedience are prepared to use what they may perceive as proportionate violence in what they may also perceive as ‘self-defence’ if they are attacked and such responses can sometimes turn into riots. And of course there is also revolutionary violence, designed to bring down a social or governmental system and bring about abrupt change. There is a long history of rebellion and riots being part of the process of political change in the UK, with the most tumultuous example being the Civil War (1642-49), sometimes referred to as the English Revolution, which led to the execution of King Charles I. Other notable examples of political violence include the Peasant’s Revolt (1381) against the poll tax; the Cornish Rebellion (1497) against King Henry VII and unfair taxes; the Jacobite Rebellions (1715, 1745-6) to restore the Stuarts to the throne; the Luddites (1811-12) who broke factory machines to protest against the loss of weavers’ livelihoods; the Peterloo Massacre (1819) in which protestors against poverty and disenfranchisement were killed; Poor Law Riots (1837); the Battle of Cable Street (1936) in which antifascists clashed violently with police to prevent the Blackshirts marching; student fees protests (2010), during which there were violent clashes with the police and the Conservative Party campaign offices were occupied.

22 http://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/thoreau-and-civil-disobedience
25 Dorothy Denning (2015 has written about the rise of hacktivism with many examples: https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/the-rise-of-hacktivism
26 https://youtu.be/n4Ls-Kmmiyk
27 https://www.gov.uk/industrial-action-strikes/going-on-strike-and-picketing
28 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3728617.stm
29 https://www.thethesisters.org/sistory
30 For a light-hearted view of forms of civil disobedience, Mark Thomas has made three films to accompany his book ‘100 Acts of Minor Dissent’: http://www.markthomasinfo.co.uk/about/100-acts-of-minor-dissent/
The rights and wrongs of breaking the law

When teaching about the rule of law (this term is defined below), we also need to explore what happens when people are involved in law breaking. There are many examples in history and recent times where people use different forms of action from civil disobedience to violent protest in pursuing change.32

Most of the time we do not have to worry about the morality of breaking the law because laws and morality often coincide, so we don’t attack or abuse people, or destroy their property, or drive dangerously because these are self-evidently wrong, not just because they happen to be illegal.

Some people33 (following Socrates, who submitted to being killed by the state) argue that we should always follow all laws, because ultimately we all benefit from having a predictable system of laws to regulate our collective existence fairly. Deciding to break individual laws threatens anarchy (if others followed suit), and breaks a general duty to be fair to other citizens, who we generally rely on to follow the law so we can live our lives safely. Some theorists argue that, simply put, any law which was passed by the proper procedures within a constitutional system is justifiable anyway. This argument was stated forcefully by Thomas Hobbes in his book ‘Leviathan’ which was written during the English Civil War34. Seeing how law and order had broken down around him, Hobbes argued that individuals had no realistic alternative other than acknowledging the legitimate authority of a sovereign (person or assembly), who could use their authority to overcome ‘the war of all against all’ which Hobbes thought was our natural state. On this argument, in order to live a life of relative freedom and order, we have to submit to the rule of law. To continue as though we had absolute freedom in all regards would undermine the rule of law and lead to anarchy, which Hobbes felt he had glimpsed in the Civil War and which made him fearful that life would simply be ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’

Rawls35 tries to recognise the strength of this position and argues that, in a democracy the argument that one should generally uphold the law is even more powerful because the law is created in a relatively fair and democratic process. However, his view is that civil disobedience can, in exceptional circumstances, be justified where the cause is serious and where it can reasonably be defended as an action of last resort. In this way, civil disobedience is argued to act as another check in democracy and draws dramatic attention to institutions or processes that veer away from democratic principles.

Others argue that this is too restrictive and there are other issues such as poverty, the environment, or animal cruelty that are justifiable causes for civil disobedience. This means we need to look for broader criteria to judge whether the laws are just according to some independent notion of what constitutes justice. Dworkin36 argues that any laws that infringe moral rights can be broken, obvious examples might include Nazi laws against helping or protecting Jews, where the illegality of an act had no bearing on its morality. This obviously opens up a much broader range of opinions about justifiable actions. The risk might be that if many groups decide on a fairly routine basis to break the law, then the law itself ceases to function as a predictable framework for communal living. In other words, as Hobbes feared, if people pick and choose what laws to follow, then the principle of the rule of law may itself be threatened, and society might slip closer towards anarchy. This means that making decisions about breaking the law has serious implications beyond the specific circumstances or issues being considered.

32 https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civil-disobedience/
33 See for example Paul Smith’s discussion of this area in his 2008 book Moral and Political Philosophy, London: Palgrave Macmillan
34 https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm
Whatever their justification, citizens should expect some form of sanction for breaking the law. Rawls’ position is that, whilst citizens remain free to break the law, they should expect the fair and impartial judgement and retribution from the state that upholds the rule of law, i.e. having a good values-led justification doesn’t mean you can evade the punishment that follows. In this vein Gandhi told the court sentencing him: “I am here to submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.” On this view, submitting to the court while it compounds an injustice, is part of the act of dissent. Dworkin by contrast, argues that the state should not compound the problem by prosecuting or punishing people, although this would seem to compromise some of the principles of the rule of law (below).

One argument is that a non-democratic society (like Dworkin’s Nazi example) provides little justification for the laws in the first place, and offers citizens few alternatives to protest or improve the law. This is where a more critical definition of the ‘rule of law’ can be useful. Lord Bingham, a former Lord Chief Justice, summarised eight principles of the rule of law. This implies that the phrase means much more than a simple instruction to always follow the law, but rather it introduces a further set of criteria to judge the standard of a legal system:

1. The law must be accessible, intelligible and predictable.
2. Legal questions should be resolved by application of the law not discretion.
3. The law should apply equally to all.
4. Ministers and public officers should exercise their power within the law.
5. The law must protect human rights.
6. People should have access to the courts to resolve their disputes.
7. Fair trial.
8. States should also comply with their international obligations.

The further a legal system strays from these principles, the more one might reasonably expect citizens to break the law, simply because the law offers them no alternative redress for their complaints.

**Can violence ever be justified?**

We have seen that there may be some legitimate grounds for breaking the law through civil disobedience, so how does this relate to the use of violence? Here we should note that some forms of political violence are effectively revolutionary efforts to challenge democracy and establish an alternative social and political system. This is a clash of fundamental principles or values and clearly sits outside the scope of this resource, which is concerned with methods for achieving change within a democracy. It is also important to remember that political violence is relatively rare in the UK. This could be because there are many other avenues of action to protest and pursue change, or because people do not see opposing the rule of law as a viable alternative. The more open, free and democratic a society, the more difficult it is to justify the use of violence. By contrast, the more repressive and elitist a government, the more likely citizens will feel violent protest or opposition is a necessary and realistic option.

Of course there are many campaigners who reject completely the use of violence, notably Gandhi and Martin Luther King, who refused to use violence, even when they were confronted with violence, even when they were campaigning did not adhere to the democratic principles outlined above (i.e. when equal rights were not guaranteed and access to justice was denied). However, if we follow the kind of calculation outlined above, some people believe it may be justifiable to use violence if the ends justify the means. This argument carries even more weight if one considers that the world itself is already...

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37 https://pdcrodas.webs.ull.es/anglo/GandhiStatementInTheGreatTrialOf1922.pdf
38 https://binghamcentre.biicl.org/about-us
39 This is one of the conundrums that sits at the heart of liberal democracy – to what extent should it tolerate the development of ideas which seek to undermine democracy? If democratic systems intervene too freely to prevent or outlaw such expressions, do they cease to operate according to their own principles of liberty?
a violent place, and that oppression of some minorities and poor citizens is particularly brutal. In such circumstances, why should we refuse to use violence to achieve good when violence is everywhere making things worse?

In considering why we should always reject violence there are two main principled arguments. The first is the one we have already considered, that we must value above all the rule of law, because it guarantees freedom. The second is that we can never justify using people as means to ends – they have to be respected at all times. Maeve Cook has also argued that the use of violence seldom has no impact on the people who use it, and on the society as a whole. Even if one is successful at securing the desired political goals, one has damaged society by making it more violent. This echoes Hannah Arendt’s position that ends are very often unpredictable, so the only thing we can be certain of is the means we employ: “The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world.”

Arendt’s book ‘On Violence’ is important here, not least because she defines power and violence differently. Many classical scholars have tended to see power as a legitimate form of coercion, and to see the state’s power as ultimately deriving from its role as the only form of legitimate violence, this makes violence the ultimate form of power. Arendt distinguishes between the two and argues that power is the essence of government whilst violence is only ever instrumental. Violence can destroy or undermine power, it can never create it. Making the distinction is helpful because it implies that violence is an inferior force for governance, and other forms of power are more sustainable.

Arendt also argues that the more that government is professionalised and bureaucratised, the more likely it is that citizens will resort to violence, because the other political mechanisms of change seem diminished. Writing in 1969, just after the 1968 protests that swept much of the world, she wrote “It is simply true that the riots in the ghettos and the rebellions on the campuses make people feel they are acting together in a way that they rarely can.” This looks for the causes in the context as much as the activists themselves and in a debate with Hannah Arendt and Susan Sontag in 1967, Noam Chomsky makes the general point that it is almost impossible to abstract the dilemma from real contexts. He holds out that political violence could be justifiable if there was a reasonable expectation that it could improve a bad situation but, whilst this implies a rather pragmatic approach, this is undermined in his detailed consideration of whether the Anti-Vietnam War Peace Movement should adopt violent methods of protest in America. He argued ‘no’ because the government was prepared to meet them with greater violence and control, it would alienate mainstream Americans from their cause, and that using violence does some kind of psychological harm to the person who acts violently. Whilst the first two criteria might change in different contexts, the third one seems to be a principle that would deter us from violence in most circumstances.

Building on this kind of pragmatic argument Andrew Valls argues that we can use the framework of Just War to evaluate non-state actors’ use of violence to achieve political aims:

- Just cause, such as defending oneself against aggression.
- Legitimate authority, in other words the people using violence genuinely represent the interests of others, and are not simply acting for narrow or personal reasons.
- Right intention, to defend a principle of justice rather than seeking to exploit others.
- Last resort, other reasonable types of action have been fully explored.

41 http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/theforum/is-political-violence-ever-justified/
43 The transcript of the event is here: https://chomsky.info/19671215/
44 Andrew Valls (2000) ‘Can Terrorism Be Justified?’ in Andrew Valls (Ed) Ethics in International Affairs, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman
45 For a short summary see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/just/introduction.shtml For a longer discussion see: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/
Additional resources

1. Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks
This article by Pippa Norris illustrates how important it is to understand democracy as a whole system. She assesses three potential threats to democracy in relation to cultural support, constitutional arrangements and behaviour.

2. Is violent political protest ever justified?
This piece from The Conversation raises these general issues in the specific context of America. Christopher Finlay argues that there must be some grounds for justifying violence, but that this should largely be restricted to self-defence and that adopting violent protest methods is likely to weaken protest movements overall. This echoes arguments above, that the negative long term side-effects of using violent means in a democracy where other forms of action are available, might be worse than any apparent short term gains.
http://theconversation.com/is-violent-political-protest-ever-justified-72630

3. Yes terrorism can be justified
This opinion-piece by Brian Brivati is an accessible discussion of the ways in which violence might be considered, in order to distinguish because the justifiable use of force (such as the ANC) and unjustifiable cases (such as the Taliban). Here the significance of context and purpose emerges very clearly as factors that help to distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable uses of violence.

Pulling it all together
These ideas clarify that the use of political violence causes damage to the people who experience the violence, but also the person who uses violence, and to people more generally who are forced to live in a more violent society. The immediate costs to those affected, and the general costs to everyone through the erosion of the rule of law, can be seen as very high prices to pay for any immediate gain that might be achieved through the use of violence. Given those costs, it is very difficult to see how political violence can ever be justified when seeking change in a democracy.

Young people may study examples of political violence in history, and may feel they were justified in some circumstances (e.g. the Suffragettes’ violent protests and Nelson Mandela’s use of violence against the Apartheid government). Understanding Valls’ criteria and the different democratic contexts help to explain why such actions might have been justifiable then and there, but not necessarily here and now.

• Probability of success, which means it would be wrong to run the risk of violence unless there were some reasonable expectation that it might yield beneficial outcomes. Given the known harms of using violence, this is a high bar to achieve.
• Proportionality, meaning the benefit should be worth the cost.

Whilst it is quite controversial to apply the theory of ‘Just War’ to individuals and groups, Valls does present us with a framework for at least being more analytical about examples of political violence. One of the suggested lesson activities provides students with an opportunity to engage with these ideas.
4. **John Pym’s speeches, Friday 13th January 1642.**
John Pym was a leader of the Parliamentarians during the English Civil War and was responsible for helping to build the military forces required to fight the King. He makes an argument appealing to many of Valls’ criteria (discussed in the briefing notes above), arguing that the King initiated violence first against Parliament, that Parliament’s use of force was a last resort, that Parliament was exercising legitimate authority, that they were protecting the royal family and thus exercising proportionate violence, and that the violence would only be used to protect people’s liberty against the oppression of the King. This historical example helps to introduce the significance of context – as the monarch asserts his power and the elected representatives feel their other options are closing down, the rationale for violence changes.

[https://archive.org/details/twospeechesspoke00manc](https://archive.org/details/twospeechesspoke00manc)

5. **The Battle for Cable Street**
This website provides an excellent and accessible resource for students to investigate one of the most significant and celebrated battles against fascism in British history. Video interviews with participants brings to life the stark choice anti-fascists faced as a huge fascist parade was planned to march through the multicultural East End of London. This historical example echoes current debates about the alt-right / far right and the anti-fascists who oppose them.

[http://www.cablestreet.uk/](http://www.cablestreet.uk/)

6. **Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship: A guide to the debate**
This booklet from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) was published in 2005 and provides a succinct introduction to some of the theoretical aspects to understanding active citizenship within a democratic society. Whilst the references to government policy are now out of date, the theoretical introduction (chapter 1) and later section on forms of participation (chapter 3) are still highly relevant background reading to this topic.

[https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/participation/civil_renewal_active_citizenship.pdf](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/participation/civil_renewal_active_citizenship.pdf)

Students can also take their own democratic action. The Association for Citizenship Teaching runs the ACTive Citizenship Award, with First News. There are toolkits for students and teachers here: [www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/active-citizenship-award-scheme](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/active-citizenship-award-scheme)
Lessons: Activity instructions

The big picture
“It has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried” (Winston Churchill, 1947)

Teachers are being asked to promote the values underpinning democracy and this seems like a reasonable expectation in a democratic society. However, the concept of democracy is far from straightforward, and it is important to understand the ways in which democracies operate in order to fully appreciate why it should be defended. This requires taking a little time to build students’ knowledge around the broad idea of what constitutes a democratic system of government.

These lessons are designed to broaden students’ understanding of how change can be achieved peacefully and legally, within our democratic system. We do this by focusing first on the big picture of the various elements that constitute a democratic system, and then considering the role of citizens in sustaining a democracy and generating progress. Lesson 2 explores the range of actions available to citizens and starts to consider the circumstances that might justify activities which break the law. Lesson 3 extends this by focusing on the question of whether one can ever justify violence to achieve one’s goals.

These lessons do not assume the position that democracy is perfect and able to solve all problems, but we do want to focus quite pragmatically on how democracy works and how it has the capacity to generate improvements for people. Extremists reject democratic routes to achieve change, and they do this sometimes because they simply reject the values that underpin democracy, and partly because they want a shortcut to change. This resource aims to ensure that the potential of change from within the system is better understood, and to enable students to think about the full range of arguments against using violence when democratic methods are available.

Each lesson has been designed to be addressed within about 60 minutes of teaching time with pupils in key stage 3.

Objectives
The three lessons in this theme are focussed on developing student knowledge, understanding and skills so that they can:
1. Develop understanding of how citizens can influence change in a democracy through knowledge of a range of citizen actions that can be used
2. Develop understanding of why such citizenship action is essential in a healthy democracy
3. Understand some of the ways in which illegal methods might be justified and evaluate some of the arguments in specific cases.
Lesson 1: What is democracy?

Resources 1 and 2

The initial activity focuses on the essential components for a democratic society. The purpose is to demonstrate that periodic elections are not sufficient and that there are other elements, which combine to constitute genuine democracies. This sets the scene for lessons 2 and 3 by ensuring students understand how the context (i.e., whether people are in a democracy or not) ultimately determines whether an action is justifiable.

Teachers might like to start with an activity to elicit students’ prior knowledge, for example by asking students to describe the lives of two people – one who lives in a democracy and another who doesn’t. The examples given can be historical or contemporary and this will help the teacher to gauge prior levels of understanding. Through careful questioning the teacher should be able to elicit many of the 9 factors listed below. It will be useful to draw out these factors (and any others the students can think of) before the lesson starts so students are aware of the general argument. It is likely that the class will know about each factor in its own right, but the teacher could use this opening session to gauge the extent to which students are aware of the inter-connections between them and their relationship to the overarching concept of democracy.

If the class starts with the suggestion that elections are the most important feature of democracy, this list can easily be extended by asking basic follow-up questions such as:

- Who can vote in an election?
- What happens to the votes?
- How do we know who to vote for?
- How do we make sure the vote is fair?
- Can the winners do whatever they want?

Students may also benefit from being given the chance to review the timeline of democracy, to introduce them to some of the key changes over time in the UK:

http://assets.parliament.uk/education/houses-of-history/main.html?theme=journey_to_democracy#

The resources have been devised to facilitate a ‘balloon debate’ in which up to nine characters start off in the balloon, and then the rest of the class vote people out until just one is left. In this case, each character represents a feature of democracy.

Resource 2 includes nine briefing sheets to help students prepare for their short speeches in the balloon:

1. Regular elections to elect representatives to govern (represented by Nick Clegg, initiator of fixed term Parliaments Act).
2. Freedom to stand as a candidate in elections (represented by Dr Richard Taylor, Independent Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern MP).
3. Free and secret ballot (represented by Feargus O’Connor, Chartist MP).
4. Political parties to help organise representatives around core policy ideas (represented by Keir Hardie, Founder of the Labour Party).
5. Free media to ensure information and a range of opinions are widely spread (represented by Tim Berners-Lee, Inventor of the Internet).
6. The rule of law (represented by Tom Bingham, former Lord Chief Justice).
7. Freedom of assembly for citizens and the freedom to organise (represented by Lech Walesa, Leader of Solidarity and President of Poland).
8. Minority rights (represented by Darcus Howe, a black rights campaigner).
9. Equal citizenship rights for women (represented by Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, a Suffragette leader).

The suggestion here is that students can take on the role of an individual defending their principle. They can put forward arguments for their importance to democracy using information from their character’s life as well as general arguments. The students who assume these roles will need to spend some time researching their arguments and preparing speeches and they could be assisted by small teams from the rest of the class.
Lesson 2: Influencing change

Resources 3-6

In this activity, students will be given a series of possible campaigning activities to use (resource 3) and a cause to campaign for (resource 4). They must pick 2-3 campaign actions that they think would be effective for a cause and one they would not advocate is used. They create explanations, making links between the problem, the action and the desired outcome and explain the connections at each stage. We have suggested the same three topics as for lesson 3 to provide some continuity between these two lessons (women’s rights, animal rights, and anti-fascists) but teachers may also want to choose their own issues to reflect topics the students have previously studied, or which are of local relevance.

The first scenario focuses on the Suffragettes and so students may be able to draw on prior knowledge from their historical study of the suffragists (who refused the break the law) and suffragettes (who did break the law). They may also have encountered some of these campaigning strategies through other examples of protest and reform in history.

The range of activities listed in resource 3 extends from uncontroversial to very controversial, including actions which break the law or use violence. In order to explore the issues arising from this we suggest splitting the lesson roughly in half, with the first half spent considering these case studies and appropriate actions; and the second half focusing on the deliberative debate about whether or not citizen action must always be within the law.

Part 1 – choosing and justifying an action

Resource 4 suggests that students start work on this activity individually and then discuss the campaign with others working on the same issue. This enables them to test their reasoning against others.

In stage 3 students feedback their answers to the other groups. Then reflect on common questions:
• Are there any methods that seem generally useful across the causes?
• Are there some that you feel should not be used at all? Why?
• Does breaking the law make a difference to your judgement? Why?

Part 2 – working within or challenging the law?
This part of the lesson starts with a fairly straightforward position in favour of always campaigning within legal frameworks, and asks students to think about whether there are any justifiable instances that would fall outside of this (the motion and some instructions are in resource 5). Students should discuss and amend the statement as a whole class activity so it gathers as much support as possible – the ideal would be unanimity in the class. You may want to take occasional votes as the amendments are taken and the statement develops to track progress in gaining more support.

As with all deliberative debates, it is essential to emphasise how important it is that people listen respectfully, keep an open mind, and try to understand people’s opinions. It is equally important that people find reasons for their opinions if they want others to take them seriously.

The statement suggested in resource 5 is:
“Citizens in a democracy are free to undertake any actions to bring about change so long as they are within the law.”

As it is likely that most students will immediately agree with this statement, resource 6 offers some stimulus cards the teacher could distribute to kick-start the discussion. Each suggests an amendment that could be tabled, with some prompts to think about a justification:
1. Unless the law is wrong, unfair, or promotes inequality.
2. Unless the action causes more harm than good.
3. As long as no one is hurt.
4. And the people committing those acts shouldn’t be punished.
5. And the people committing those acts should be punished.

4 and 5 are deliberately contradictory to ensure students do not just accept every amendment tabled.

Lesson 3: Can violence be justified?
Resources 7-10
In this final activity, we focus more closely on citizens’ actions which fall outside of the law, especially those which involve violence of some sort. Students can work with a set of scenario cards, based on real actions relating to the three case studies from lesson 2 (women’s rights, animal rights, and anti-fascists). Each cause includes six very short scenarios of real action, illustrating the range from relatively safe to increasingly extreme actions (resource 7).
• Scenarios 4-6 illustrate violence (against property and / or people) in relation to the Suffragettes.
• Scenarios 10-12 illustrate violence (against property and / or people) in relation to animal rights activists.
• Scenarios 16-18 illustrate violence (against property and / or people) in relation to anti-fascists.

This will enable the teacher to ask students to reflect on whether violence can ever be justified?

Teachers may use these cards to generate discussion in a number of ways. One tried and tested method would be to mark a line of continuum in the class for justifiable / unjustifiable and then to ask students to spread themselves along the line depending on the card they have selected. They can negotiate their position by talking to their neighbours and moving along.

Alternatively, students can work alone or in small groups initially to place the scenario cards along a line from “totally unjustified” to “totally justified”. This could be extended by asking questions like “where on this line should the legal / illegal line be?” and “what could you change about scenario X to move it left / right on this line?”

This activity can be further extended by prompting students to consider a variety of perspectives of people involved in different ways and then considering the implications of these actions and the different ways in which the situation could be dealt with. Could you justify it in general? Could you justify it to the family of people affected? Could you justify it to the police?
You may choose to move directly on to the class debate at this point. However, we have also provided an additional activity (resource 8) designed to introduce students to a model developed by a political studies academic to help unpick possible justifications. Based on his analysis of the criteria for 'Just War', Valls has developed a list of criteria to analyse the arguments put forward by any proponent of political violence (see the final section of the teacher briefing for further information). Students can use this to analyse the three most violent scenarios (6, 12 and 18).

Finally, the class will select one example (from scenarios 6, 12 and 18) for a whole class debate: “This house believes this scenario is justified”

Resource 9 provides a suggested structure and some additional prompts for students to prepare for the debate. Resource 10 provides specific guidance for the chair and time-keeper, if the teacher allocates these roles to students.

It is important that there is time at the end of this lesson to reflect on what the students have learned and to deal with any misunderstandings. A key point to raise is that the bar for justifying the use of violence in a democracy is set very high. In particular, the requirement for violence to be proportional to the benefit gained and for the action to be demonstrably the last resort, means that most examples will fail to meet these requirements. This is also an opportunity to reflect on other issues that will influence such judgements, for example Arendt’s argument that we never really know what the outcome of any action will be, but we do know with some certainty that using violence makes society more violent.