

THEME: Our Republic

TOPIC: Republic vs. Democracy

PREPARATION / PROPS: American flag, Pledge of Allegiance poster, poster of Benjamin Franklin, graphs to illustrate majority and minority, poster of the Constitution, the word REPUBLIC in large letters on a poster

LESSON: United States Constitution, Art. 4 Sec. 4 Par. 1 says - "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican form of Government." [Not a Democracy.]

Pledge of Allegiance – "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands ..."

"Democracy" has become a sort of catch-all phrase for any form of government in which the people participate in electing their officials. However, it is important to know the difference between a Republic and a Democracy.

As Benjamin Franklin was leaving the building where, after four months of hard work, the Constitution had been completed and signed, a lady asked him what kind of government the convention had created. A very old, very tired, and very wise Benjamin Franklin replied, "A Republic, ma'am, if you can keep it." He knew then that the American experiment of a free Republic would be difficult to maintain.

A Democracy operates by a direct majority vote of the people. When an issue is to be decided, the entire population votes on it. The majority wins and rules. Another way of putting it is - everybody votes for everything. A Democracy is rule by majority feeling (what the Founding Fathers described as "mobocracy"). Example: In a Democracy, if a majority of the people decide that murder is no longer a crime, murder will no longer be a crime.

A Republic is a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to the people and governing according to law.

Where the general population elects representatives who then pass laws to govern the nation - a Republic is "rule by law". Our Republic is a form of government where power is separated, pitting representatives against each other and requiring them to make an argument for why a law should or should not be passed. This makes it more difficult to pass laws and make changes. Why? Our Founding Fathers knew that people can be weak, sinful and corruptible.

A "Majority" is the greater part or number of a group; the number more than half the total.

A "Minority" is the smaller part or number of a group; the number less than half the total. While most people are represented in "the majority", the rights of the minority are important too, and should be protected.

The framers of our Constitution had strong opinions about why our country should be a Republic and not a Democracy. Below are some of their thoughts:

John Witherspoon (signer) said, "Pure democracy cannot subsist long nor be carried far into the departments of state – it is very subject to caprice and the madness of popular rage."

Zephaniah Swift (author of America's first legal text), said, "It may generally be remarked that the more a government resembles a pure democracy the more they abound with disorder and confusion."

Benjamin Rush (signer) said, " a simple democracy ... is one of the greatest of evils."

John Quincy Adams said, "The experience of all former ages had shown that of all human governments, democracy was the most unstable, fluctuating and short-lived."

Noah Webster said, "In democracy ... there are commonly tumults and disorders ... Therefore a pure democracy is generally a very bad government. It is often the most tyrannical government on earth."

James Madison said, "Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have, in general, been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."

John Adams said, "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

Samuel Adams said, "... it does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds ..."

In simpler terms, in a Democracy, everyone votes for everything. One problem with such a system is that the "minority" wishes are never allowed to be expressed through voting. The "majority" always wins. It would be too time consuming for every citizen to be completely informed enough to vote on every issue - large and small - and the time it would take to have everyone vote on everything would be outrageous. Nothing would get done in our government. By allowing elected representatives to vote on our behalf on issues, the vote is typically well understood and not susceptible to hasty, emotional voting, as it would be in a Democracy. Issues must be proposed, debated and voted upon, allowing a "cooling off period" of sorts. It is also more manageable to have a smaller number of people voting, so a Republican form of government works well for large countries and organizations.

One problem that can occur, and has occurred in our own country, is that when people elect someone to represent them, they sometimes stop paying attention. People have busy lives and have trusted another person to look out for their best interests. When the people aren't watching, the representatives might start doing things they really should not be doing, like passing laws that are unconstitutional. Think about the government as a business. If the boss hires a few managers to deal with the employees and then goes off on vacation for several years, those managers might start to run things to benefit themselves instead of their boss who is away on vacation and has no idea what they are doing. "We the People" are the boss in this scenario. When we elect people to represent us, flawed human beings that we all are, we must monitor their work and redirect them as necessary. And never forget our representatives "performance reviews" - otherwise known as voting.

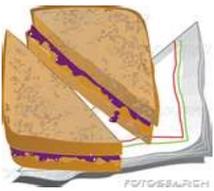
It could be argued that Our Founding Fathers chose a Republic over a Democracy for many reasons. Perhaps they remembered the most infamous “democratic” vote in all of history - the lesson of a bureaucrat some 2000 years ago who turned to a crowd and asked which prisoner should be released. The crowd yelled “give us Barabbas”. The “will of the people” spoke that day. When the bureaucrat asked the people what should be done with this innocent, this Jesus, the crowd responded with a loud “CRUCIFY HIM!” Jesus was crucified by a majority vote exercising pure Democracy which was the emotional, changing rule of the mob or as we call it today mobocracy. This is the reason our Founding Fathers wanted a Republic, a government based on the rule of law which could not be changed by the whims of the people.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- What happens in a republic if the people do not communicate with their elected officials? What are some ways we can communicate with them?
- Do you think most people communicate with their representatives today? Why might someone choose not to communicate with their representatives?
- If you could vote, how would you choose which candidate to vote for? Remember, they will be representing you. Do you think you would choose someone who you think is very smart, or someone who shares your values, or someone with a lot of experience working in government?

ACTIVITY: Put it to a Vote

Materials: Several sheets of poster board, a large black marker for tallying votes, paper, pencils, envelopes, two cell phones per sub-group



Method: Take several votes on issues the campers understand and vote as a democracy and as a republic. For example, vote for a National Sandwich: Grilled Cheese vs. Peanut Butter and Jelly. Ask the kids to raise their hands if they like Grilled Cheese the best. Tally the vote. Ask them to raise their hands if they like Peanut Butter and Jelly the best. Tally the vote. Announce the winner. This is a democratic vote.

Break the group into three sub-groups. Have each group choose a leader. Take the vote again having the group leaders cast the only three votes. Tally the votes and announce the winner. This is a republican form of voting where the people are not active in their government. Did the vote turn out the way most of the kids wanted? Maybe. Maybe not.

Next, have the kids elect new representatives for their sub-groups. This time have the members of the group tell their representative which sandwich they like better. Kids can write them a letter, or call them on the phone, or go see them in person. Then, take the vote again having the group leaders cast the only three votes. Tally the votes

and announce the winner. This is a republican form of voting where the people are active in their government. Did the results turn out differently? How did the kids feel about the three different types of votes, especially between the two republican votes? Did the representatives like knowing what the people wanted or did they like it better when they just voted on what they liked? If you have one of each, ask the kids which one they think would make a better representative.

Try a different issue and let the kids take turns being the representatives.

REFERENCES: www.freerepublic.com, article written by "Tailgunner Joe", www.dictionary.com, www.wikipedia.org, www.merriam-webster.com