



## Indirect Representation

Lesson plan by Meg Magrath

**Learning Target/Objective for students:** I can explain why good representation is necessary in order for a democracy to work, and why it is so difficult to achieve.

**Activator:** *Give 10 minutes to complete this section*

As students enter the room, give them a half a sheet of paper and ask them to write a paragraph response to the prompt on the board: “Due to the recent recession, our school is faced with some difficult choices to make. We may be asked to cut some of our programs. If you had to choose, would you encourage the school board to cut all electives programs (arts, music, and gym) or cut all sports and after-school programs? In a paragraph, describe the option that you prefer, and explain why.

**Mini-Lesson:** *Give no more than 5-10 minutes to this section*

Explain to the class the objective for the class period: that you will be debating this controversial topic and then will be asking one student from the class to try to represent you all. Ask for a student volunteer to be the class’s representative. If multiple students volunteer, ask them each to stand up and give a “Brief and Brilliant” explanation of why he would be a good representative. Then have the class vote.

**Apply/Practice:** *Give 25 minutes to complete this section*

1. Collect all of the students’ responses.
2. Tell the students you are going to play a game called “Four Corners.” Explain the rules of “Four Corners:” there are Four Corners in the room. In a minute I am going to read a statement to you and I will ask you to think about your reaction to the statement and go stand in the corner that best represents your feelings: do you Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Agree, or Somewhat Disagree, with the statement. Once you go to the corner that matches your feelings the most accurately, you will be expected to share out with the other students in that corner why you are there, and one of you will present to the class.
3. Prompt: It’s better to cut elective classes than it is to cut after-school and sports programs.
4. While the students are moving to their corners and discussing the prompt, give the student responses to the representative. Tell them to sit quietly in a corner and look over the responses and decide on what they will say to the school board

in order to properly represent everyone. Encourage them to write down bullet points and tell them they will present to the class.

5. Have student corners share out. Ask students to take a seat and share out any notices they had – were they surprised about anything?
6. Have the representative come up and explain what their position is, after having read the responses.

**Debrief:** *Give at least 15 minutes to this section, more if possible – this is the most important section*

1. Ask the students to move again, Four Corners-style: “I feel like my Representative completely represented my feelings on this decision.”
2. Circle students up and ask them what they have learned about representation. Especially prompt the representative to explain how they felt trying to represent everyone (do you think you did a good job representing everyone?). Explain that the system of representation we have is called indirect democracy, because many voices are represented by fewer voices. Ask them to identify why it is difficult, but necessary.
3. **Ticket-to-Leave:** Explain what Indirect Representation is (hint: it’s what you just experienced!). Explain why indirect representation is difficult to do well. Explain why it is necessary for our country.

**Resources:**

- “Four Corners” posters posted around room
- Half sheets of paper

**Modifications:**

Each teacher knows his/her classroom the best. This lesson can be modified for age or social grouping. The initial prompt for the debate that I chose here suits my 10<sup>th</sup> grade classroom well, but a different question within the same format would work equally well if you thought it more suited to a different group. For example, I toyed with the idea of a sort of silly question like “Do you think energy drinks should be allowed in school?” or it could just have a different context like “Do you think it’s fair to take recess away from students who act up in class?” The more applicable the question is to your specific community and age-group, the more meaningful this exercise will be. Also, the length of the activator by no means needs to be a paragraph; it is equally hard-hitting to have students write one or two sentences. Also, if you know your class tends to be less participatory or shy, you might want to plan ahead and ask a student beforehand if she would be willing to be the representative. Also, a lower level class might need modeling concerning the meaning of “indirect,” or a teacher might opt out of defining “indirect” and just use the term “representation” throughout the lesson.