



# Toolkit for Democratic Talks

**Intergenerational exchange as  
a strategy to promote  
democratic values**



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# INTRODUCTION



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# What is the Toolkit?

The **Ties of Freedom Democratic Talks Toolkit** is an educational instrument designed to support teachers, educators and facilitators in guiding children and young people through a structured exploration of democracy, civic identity and the values that underpin democratic societies. Developed within **a multi-country European partnership** and grounded in research on children's rights, political socialisation and democratic education, the Toolkit provides concrete pedagogical pathways for introducing complex civic topics in age-appropriate, accessible and engaging ways.

At its core, **the Toolkit seeks to transform the way democracy is taught**. Rather than presenting democracy as a collection of institutions or abstract principles, it frames it as a lived experience shaped by relationships, emotions, memory, participation and collective responsibility. This perspective recognises that democratic culture is not transmitted through information alone; it is cultivated through **interaction, reflection, storytelling and shared meaning-making**. For this reason, the Toolkit integrates narrative materials developed in WP2 of the project—**an animated film, a booklet of testimonies and thematic illustrations**—with carefully designed activities that help children connect personal experience with civic concepts.

The Toolkit is structured into **20 standalone sessions**, each addressing a key theme such as justice, freedom, the transition from dictatorship to democracy, cultural diversity, gender equality, democratic participation and the role of young people in shaping public life. These sessions can be delivered individually or as a comprehensive learning programme. They are complemented by practical tools—**reflection prompts, group activities, observation sheets, evaluation forms**—which ensure both pedagogical rigor and adaptability to diverse learning environments. Each component has been tested with children, adolescents and educators across partner countries, ensuring **cultural sensitivity and accessibility**.

## Who is it for?

This Toolkit is intended for a broad community of practitioners engaged in the education, protection and empowerment of children and young people: **primary and secondary school teachers, youth workers, social educators, NGO staff, museum educators**, intercultural mediators and professionals working in formal and nonformal settings. It is also suitable for community organisations, civic associations and local institutions seeking to strengthen **youth participation** and **democratic awareness**.

The resource is designed to be usable by individuals with different levels of pedagogical experience. It does not require specialised expertise in political science or psychology; instead, it provides facilitators with **clear guidance, ready-to-use materials and a methodological framework** that supports meaningful, inclusive and developmentally appropriate civic dialogue. Because the Toolkit deals with **sensitive topics**—historical trauma, authoritarianism, discrimination, exclusion—particular attention is given to creating **emotionally safe, respectful and nonjudgmental spaces**.

The activities are adaptable to mixed groups, multicultural settings, multilingual contexts and heterogeneous classrooms. They respond to the realities of contemporary adolescents, who increasingly encounter political ideas through social media, digital ecosystems and transnational networks. For younger children, the Toolkit provides activities that help them develop **early democratic dispositions**—fairness, empathy, listening, cooperation—while older adolescents are encouraged to question, analyse and reimagine democratic systems in light of **-their lived experiences-**.

## How to use it

The Toolkit is organised into **two major blocks**:

§ Section I for primary school (ages 6–10) and

§ Section II for lower-secondary school (ages 11–16).

Each section contains **10 modular sessions** called Democratic Talks.

Although each session can be implemented independently, facilitators are encouraged to follow the suggested progression when possible, as the thematic sequence moves from **foundational concepts** (e.g., “The Meaning of Democracy”) to **more complex and critical topics** (e.g., “Challenges to Democracy”).

Each session includes:

- a clear description of the topic and learning intentions
- guidance on materials and setup
- an opening activity designed to activate prior knowledge and curiosity
- a narrative or audiovisual stimulus (film clip, testimony, illustration)
- a participatory activity promoting dialogue, cooperation or creative interpretation
- a reflection moment that helps learners consolidate meaning
- a light evaluation component aligned with the WP3 assessment framework

Educators can select sessions based on curricular needs, age group, the social context of the class or specific interests of the students. Sessions typically last between 60 and 90 minutes but can be shortened or extended. All activities can be carried out with basic classroom materials, making the Toolkit accessible in **resource constrained environments**. To ensure consistency, facilitators are invited to review the methodological sections before starting. These sections outline how to build a safe learning climate, how to encourage participation without pressure, and how to adapt activities to diverse emotional and cognitive needs. At the end of each session, facilitators may complete an observation sheet to document insights for later reflection and for the **WP3 evaluation processes**.

# Methodological Approach

The pedagogical methodology underpinning the Toolkit is articulated through the integrated **REACH & TEACH framework**. This approach draws on research from developmental psychology, narrative pedagogy, political education and child participation, recognising that children engage with civic life through both emotional and cognitive pathways. The sequencing of REACH before TEACH reflects evidence that **emotional engagement and relational trust** create the conditions for deeper conceptual understanding (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; ImmordinoYang & Damasio-, 2007).

## REACH – Creating the Emotional and Relational Conditions for Democratic Learning

REACH emphasises the affective, interpersonal and social dimension of civic education. Before children can understand democracy intellectually, they must encounter it experientially through **respectful interactions, shared decisionmaking and emotional recognition**. This dimension focuses- on:

- Emotional safety and belonging, created through ground rules, inclusive facilitation and attention to quieter voices.
- Empathy and identification, fostered through storytelling, character-based reflection and the use of personal or collective memory.
- Participation as experience, where children practise fairness, cooperation and voice in a protected environment.

This methodology resonates strongly with socialemotional learning models such as the CASEL framework (2020), which links emotional literacy to long-term civic engagement, conflict resolution and social cohesion. REACH sets the foundation upon which abstract concepts—rights, freedoms, institutions—**can be meaningfully explored**-.

## TEACH – Guiding Conceptual Understanding and Critical Exploration

Once a climate of trust and emotional engagement has been established, TEACH introduces **structured learning about democratic principles**. The sessions invite children to examine how democracies function, why they emerge, how they break down and what role citizens—especially young people—play in sustaining them. For younger children, this involves concrete, sensory and symbolic activities: drawing, roleplay, story-based dilemmas, simple collective choices. For adolescents, the methodology shifts toward analytical thinking, comparative historical reflection, media literacy, debates and civic imagination exercises-. TEACH aligns with constructivist and dialogical traditions (Freire, 1970; Wells, 1999), emphasising that understanding is built through **inquiry, negotiation of meaning and reflective confrontation of ideas**.

The Toolkit avoids reducing democracy to slogans; instead, it encourages learners to explore its **ambiguities, tensions and transformative potential**.

# SECTION 1

## PRIMARY SCHOOL (AGES 6-10)



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## Helping Children Discover Democracy Through Storytelling, Play and Empathy

This section of the Democratic Talks Toolkit is designed specifically for **children aged 6 to 10** — a stage where values are shaped, curiosity is high, and imagination is a key driver of learning. At this age, children may not yet fully understand abstract political concepts, but they deeply understand **fairness, friendship, voice, and belonging** — all of which are foundations of **democratic culture**. The activities in this section are not about teaching political theory, but about **planting the seeds of democratic thinking** through emotional connection, narrative exploration, and playful participation.

# **Part A – REACH**

**Supporting Educators to Create Meaningful,  
Safe, and Joyful Civic Encounters**



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# 1. Pedagogical Approach

The educational approach adopted in the “Ties of Freedom” project is grounded in a holistic and developmentally appropriate learning philosophy, specifically tailored to children aged 6 to 10. This age group, often referred to as middle childhood, represents a crucial developmental window in which children begin to consolidate their **understanding of the world, develop complex social relationships**, and **form the moral reasoning that underpins future civic behaviour**. In this phase, education must not only convey content knowledge but also cultivate empathy, curiosity, critical thinking, and a sense of agency. Civic education, in particular, must move beyond abstract principles and engage children in **real, tangible experiences of democracy, inclusion, and dialogue**. Drawing upon established theories of cognitive and social development—including the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, and more recent frameworks like the Council of Europe’s Competences for Democratic Culture—this learning philosophy integrates three core pedagogical pillars: **experiential learning, narrative learning, and symbolic and play-based learning**. These approaches are mutually reinforcing, ensuring that children are not only informed about democratic values but are also emotionally and socially engaged in their discovery.

## Experiential Learning: Living Democracy Through Practice

At the core of the learning philosophy lies experiential learning, which positions children as **active participants in their own learning journeys**. Inspired by the works of John Dewey (1938) and later systematized by David Kolb (1984), experiential learning is based on the understanding that **knowledge is constructed through experience**. For children in primary school, abstract principles such as freedom, justice, cooperation, or participation can be difficult to grasp in isolation. However, when these concepts are embedded in concrete, **participatory activities**—like taking turns in leading a game, voting on a group decision, negotiating classroom rules, or resolving conflicts — children begin to develop an intuitive understanding of democratic life. These structured experiences **serve as microcosms of civic engagement**, allowing children to practice listening, compromise, leadership, and collective responsibility in a safe and developmentally appropriate context.

Experiential learning is particularly effective because it **activates** both the **cognitive and emotional dimensions of understanding**. As Kolb’s experiential learning cycle suggests, the process begins with direct action (e.g., children participate in a classroom election), followed by reflective observation (e.g., a class discussion about the outcome), abstract conceptualization (e.g., linking the activity to ideas of representation and fairness), and active experimentation (e.g., adjusting class rules based on new input). Each stage of the cycle supports **deeper retention and critical thinking**.

Moreover, these activities are not merely classroom exercises; they are **moments** in which **children experience autonomy, mutual respect, and democratic agency**. Research confirms that such early participatory experiences are foundational in shaping long-term civic attitudes and behaviours. According to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), children who engage in democratic practices in school are **more likely to grow into active, informed citizens** (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). In “Ties of Freedom”, this approach is reflected in the design of the Democratic Talks, where each session opens with a participatory experience—from storytelling circles to simulations of collective decision-making—**anchoring democracy in children’s lived realities**.

## Narrative Learning: Building Empathy and Critical Thinking Through Stories

While **experience** provides the foundation for **civic action**, **narrative** provides the **emotional and ethical scaffolding** that helps children make meaning from their experiences. Narrative learning, drawing on the cognitive and constructivist theories of Jerome Bruner (1990), recognizes that human beings make sense of the world through stories. For children, in particular, stories offer a powerful lens through which to explore complex moral, cultural, and historical questions. In “Ties of Freedom,” storytelling plays a central role in helping children understand what democracy is, why it matters, and how it has evolved **through personal and collective struggle**. The animated film and the accompanying booklet of intergenerational stories are not mere teaching aids; they are pedagogical tools designed to foster **empathy, identification, and critical dialogue**. Through carefully curated narratives—some fictionalized, some inspired by real transitions from dictatorship to democracy—children are invited to see the world through others’ eyes, to reflect on concepts of injustice, exclusion, courage, and hope. These stories are not didactic; they are open-ended and designed to provoke questions. For example, a story about a child growing up in a time of censorship may prompt students to consider what it means to speak freely, or what it feels like to be silenced. Facilitated properly, narrative learning becomes a gateway to **moral reasoning and civic imagination**. Furthermore, the narrative approach supports **inclusive pedagogy**: stories transcend language and cultural barriers, allowing all children, regardless of background, to participate and connect. This is particularly important in classrooms that are increasingly diverse and multicultural. The European Commission and UNESCO have both highlighted the importance of using storytelling in citizenship education, noting that narrative formats improve **retention, deepen understanding, and make abstract values relatable** (UNESCO, 2015). In addition, narrative learning fosters what Martha Nussbaum calls “**narrative imagination**”—the capacity to enter into the life of another, a key democratic virtue. Within “Ties of Freedom”, each Democratic Talk includes a storytelling component that is not only an entry point into the topic but also a structured opportunity for children to reflect on **personal values, group dynamics, and social justice**.

## Symbolic and Play-Based Learning: Translating Values into Action

Another aspect of the learning philosophy recognizes that younger children naturally learn through **symbolic representation and imaginative play**. Drawing from the legacies of Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, and Loris Malaguzzi (Reggio Emilia), this approach embraces the idea that play is the primary language of children, and symbolic expression is a powerful mode of learning. When children engage in activities such as **dramatization, role-play, visual arts, and symbolic voting**, they are not simply “playing”—they are engaging in **deep forms of exploration and meaning-making**. In “Ties of Freedom,” this pillar is operationalized through classroom exercises that encourage students to embody civic roles, express abstract values through creative means, and simulate democratic processes in age-appropriate formats. For instance, children may create “**freedom trees**” filled with leaves representing their ideas of rights, or engage in a role-play about resolving a classroom dispute through dialogue and consensus. They may design posters to represent diversity, equality, or inclusion, or dramatize a scene from one of the project’s stories. These **symbolic activities** serve a **dual function**: they consolidate content knowledge while also activating emotional and social learning pathways. Moreover, symbolic methods provide children with **non-verbal tools** to process sensitive issues such as exclusion, prejudice, or inequality—topics that are often difficult to express directly at a young age. Research in child development confirms that play-based learning enhances creativity, collaboration, and emotional regulation—all essential **components of democratic participation** (Whitebread et al., 2012). More importantly, symbolic learning allows for differentiated instruction: children with different learning styles, abilities, or language competencies can all engage meaningfully with the content. By embedding symbolic and play-based methods into the Democratic Talks, “Ties of Freedom” ensures that **all children**—regardless of academic ability—can participate in a **democratic culture that values their voice, agency, and imagination**.

## 2. Facilitation Guidance

The success of civic education with younger children depends not only on what we teach, but also on how we **create the space for learning**. The facilitator plays a central role in shaping that space—both physically and emotionally—so that children feel **safe, valued, curious, and empowered to participate**. This chapter provides guidance to educators, youth workers, and cultural facilitators involved in the “Ties of Freedom” project, offering a pedagogical framework for conducting the Democratic Talks with children aged 6 to 10. Facilitation in this context is not about delivering content or giving lectures. Instead, it is about **opening up a dialogue**, observing group dynamics, guiding reflection, and responding with **empathy and creativity** to what emerges in the room. The facilitator’s job is to animate stories, mediate experiences, and nurture connections between the themes of the session and the children’s own lives. A democratic learning environment is one in which children learn to listen to each other, share their thoughts without fear of judgement, and test new ideas in a space where **disagreement is seen as a step toward deeper understanding**. This means that facilitation must balance **structure and flexibility**, imagination and intention, clarity and openness. Below are five core principles that guide effective facilitation in this project, each rooted in **child development theory and inclusive pedagogy**. Facilitators are encouraged to:

- **Use Age-Appropriate Language**

When introducing democratic concepts to children, **language matters**. Children aged 6 to 10 are still developing abstract reasoning, so words like “justice,” “solidarity,” or “human rights” may feel distant or confusing. Facilitators should translate these **into terms children already use and understand**. For example, instead of saying “equality,” a facilitator might talk about “treating people fairly.” Rather than discussing “civic responsibility,” they might ask, “How do we help take care of our class or community?” Using familiar, everyday language does not mean oversimplifying or diluting meaning; rather, it allows children to access **complex ideas through their own lived experiences**. Educators like Vygotsky emphasized that new learning occurs when it connects to what the child already knows—the **“zone of proximal development.”** That connection begins with language. Throughout the Democratic Talks, facilitators are encouraged to paraphrase the Toolkit content using child-friendly terms, ask open-ended questions in everyday language, and clarify new words through examples, visuals, or role play. This **linguistic accessibility** ensures that all children, including those with different language backgrounds or learning needs, can fully participate.

# Practical exercises:

## 1. “Big Word – Small Word” Matching Game

- Objective: Help children translate complex civic terms into familiar, everyday language.
- Materials: Flashcards with one “big word” on each (e.g., “Justice,” “Democracy,” “Rights”), plus blank cards for children to draw or write “small words.”
- How it works: Present a flashcard with a “big word” (e.g., “equality”). Ask: “Have you heard this word before? What do you think it means?” Invite the children to come up with “small words” that describe what that big word might mean in real life — e.g., “fair,” “everyone gets a turn,” “no one is left out.” Have children illustrate their version on a blank card and match it with the big word. Create a “Wall of Words We Understand” to display the matches.
- Why it works: It grounds abstract terms in concrete understanding and gives children ownership of the vocabulary.

## 2. “Say It My Way” Paraphrasing Circle

Objective: Practice rephrasing complex terms into child-friendly language using peer collaboration.

- How it works: Sit in a circle and give one child a complex word or phrase (e.g., “freedom of expression”). Ask them to explain it “their way” — however they understand it. The next child repeats the explanation and adds their own example or definition. Continue around the circle, encouraging variation and creativity. End by summarizing all the child-generated definitions into a final “Our Version” that can be written on the board.
- Why it works: It encourages listening, interpretation, and reinforcement of peer-to-peer learning.

## 3. “Real Life or Big Word?” Scenario Sorting

- Objective: Connect civic values with daily life experiences.
- Materials: Printed or read-aloud short scenarios involving fairness, sharing, inclusion, etc.
- How it works: Present a simple story or situation (e.g., “A classmate is not picked for the team because she wears glasses”). Ask: “Is this about fairness? Is this about justice? Is this about kindness?” Guide children to match the scenario with one or more civic words. Then ask: “How would we say this in everyday words?” (e.g., “Being fair,” “Letting everyone play”). Encourage drawings or dramatizations of the situations.
- Why it works: It encourages conceptual transfer from real life to civic terminology and back.



#### 4. “Civic Words in Our World” Photo Hunt

- **Objective:** Identify where civic concepts appear in the children’s environment using accessible vocabulary.
- **How it works:** Assign children a “civic word of the week” in child-friendly form (e.g., “Being fair,” “Helping each other,” “Taking care of things together”). Ask them to take or bring photos, drawings, or stories from home or school that show that value in action. Create a classroom exhibition or slideshow titled “Where We See Democracy.” Encourage each child to present their example using their own words.
- **Why it works:** It links civic vocabulary to personal and visual literacy.

#### 5. “If It Means... Then It Looks Like...” Chart

- **Objective:** Create visual language anchors using drawings and simple phrases.
- **How it works:** Choose a word like “inclusion” or “responsibility.” On a poster or chart, create two columns: Column 1: “If it means...” (ask children to define the word); Column 2: “Then it looks like...” (ask them to describe or draw real actions —e.g., “helping a new student,” “cleaning up after art time”). Complete the chart together and post it in the learning space as a visual reference.
- **Why it works:** It helps internalize vocabulary through association with action.



- **Focus on Emotion-Based Reflection**

At this developmental stage, children’s emotional understanding often precedes their ability to articulate complex social reasoning. This makes **emotion-based reflection** a powerful pathway into civic learning. Facilitators should regularly invite children to explore how situations make them feel, how others might feel, and what feelings can teach us about **fairness, respect, and belonging**. Instead of asking “Was this a democratic decision?” one might ask “Would that feel fair to you?” or “How do you think they felt when that happened?” These questions tap into children’s innate sense of justice and empathy, encouraging them to recognize the emotional consequences of inclusion and exclusion. Integrating feelings into the discussion also helps regulate the classroom dynamic: when children name their emotions, they learn to manage them, which strengthens **group cohesion and communication**. Narrative elements in the Toolkit—such as the animation or booklet stories—provide rich emotional moments that facilitators can pause and reflect on. **Emotional engagement** is not secondary to **cognitive learning**—it is essential to it. Studies in social-emotional learning (e.g., CASEL framework) show that children who regularly practice emotional awareness are **more likely to become compassionate, respectful citizens later in life**.

# Practical exercises

## 1. “Feelings Circle” – How Would You Feel?

- **Objective:** Encourage children to connect emotions to situations related to fairness and group dynamics.
- **Materials:** Emotion flashcards or printed emoji faces (happy, sad, scared, angry, confused, proud, etc.)
- **How it works:** Read or show a short scenario (e.g., “Two children are left out of a group game at recess”). Ask the children: “How would you feel if that happened to you?” Each child selects a feeling card that represents their answer and places it in the center of the circle. Open up space for sharing: “Why did you choose this card?” Continue with new scenarios that reflect inclusion, unfairness, or cooperation.
- **Why it works:** Children begin to recognize emotional responses to social dynamics, creating links between feelings and values.

## 2. “Character Emotions” – Pause and Feel

- **Objective:** Use storytelling or film to reflect on emotions in characters and deepen empathy.
- **How it works:** During the screening of the Ties of Freedom animation or reading a story from the booklet, facilitators pause at key moments (e.g., someone being excluded, a group making a choice). Ask: “What do you think this character is feeling right now?” Encourage children to justify their answers with observations: “Look at their face/body... what makes you say that?” Follow up with: “Have you ever felt the same?” or “What could the other characters do to help?”
- **Why it works:** It strengthens emotional literacy and builds a bridge between fictional experiences and real-life feelings.

## 3. “Emotion Thermometer” – How Big Is the Feeling?

- **Objective:** Help children express emotional intensity and regulate reactions.
- **Materials:** A large visual “emotion thermometer” on the wall or a printed worksheet with numbers 1 to 5 (1 = small feeling, 5 = very strong feeling).
- **How it works:** After an activity or group discussion, ask: “How strong was your feeling about what happened in the story/situation?” Children place a magnet or draw on the thermometer to show how big the feeling was. Use it as a springboard: “Why was it a 4 for you?” or “What makes a 5-feeling get smaller?”
- **Why it works:** It teaches self-regulation and helps children become more aware of emotional triggers and coping strategies.

#### 4. “Emotion Role-Play” – Step Into Their Shoes

- **Objective:** Build empathy by acting out different roles and emotional responses.
- **How it works:** Choose a scenario from the toolkit (e.g., a group deciding who gets to speak, someone being treated unfairly). Assign roles and ask children to act out the situation, focusing on how each character feels and reacts. After the role-play, debrief: “What was it like to play that role?” “How do you think your character felt inside?” Invite others to comment on what they noticed.
- **Why it works:** Children embody emotional experiences, leading to deeper understanding and more memorable learning.

#### 5. “My Inside Weather” – Daily Emotional Check-In

- **Objective:** Foster emotional vocabulary and daily reflection.
- **Materials:** A wall chart with weather icons (sunny, cloudy, rainy, stormy, windy, rainbow, etc.)
- **How it works:** Begin or end each session by asking: “What is your inside weather today?” Children choose or draw the weather that matches their mood and briefly share why. Occasionally link this to civic topics: “When we talked about fairness today, did your inside weather change?”
- **Why it works:** It creates an emotional baseline for group connection, encourages expression, and subtly links feelings to civic experiences.



- **Avoid Frontal Teaching and Guide Discovery**

In traditional models of teaching, the educator is the source of knowledge and the children are expected to absorb it. This frontal teaching approach is not only ineffective with younger children, but also contradictory to the values of **democratic learning**. In “Ties of Freedom,” facilitators are invited to step down from the metaphorical stage and instead **guide discovery** through questions, games, storytelling, role play, and creative expression. The facilitator’s voice should not dominate the room; rather, it should open up space for multiple voices to emerge. Instead of giving definitions, facilitators can ask “What do you think this word means?” or “Can anyone share a time they had to make a choice in a group?” This constructivist approach helps children build understanding through **dialogue, experimentation, and reflection**. It also affirms their **agency as learners**, showing them that their perspectives are valid and valuable.

Facilitators can prepare with key questions and activities, but should allow room for children to shape the direction of each session. Democratic education is not about transmitting correct answers—it is about cultivating **curiosity, listening, and collective meaning-making**.

# Practical exercises

## 1. “What Do You See?” Image Provocation

- **Objective:** Use visual prompts to spark discovery and dialogue without explanation.
- **Materials:** A selection of thought-provoking images (e.g., people voting, children in groups, a protest, a handshake, children of different backgrounds together).
- **How it works:** Show the group an image without any context or explanation. Ask: “What’s happening in this picture?”, “What do you notice?”, “What do you think these people are doing or feeling?” Let the children share freely, without correction. Summarize and connect the discussion to a civic value that emerges from their interpretations (e.g., cooperation, inclusion, choice).
- **Why it works:** Children co-construct meaning from observation, not from being told, and learn to interpret visual civic cues through discovery.

## 2. “Find the Rule” – Mini Democracy in Action

- **Objective:** Let children discover the need for rules, fairness, or turn-taking through guided chaos.
- **How it works:** Begin a group game with vague or no rules (e.g., passing a ball, drawing together). Let the confusion unfold briefly, then ask: “How did that feel?” “Was it fair?” Invite them to suggest rules together: “What would make this work better for everyone?” Replay the game using their rules and reflect on the difference.
- **Why it works:** Children experience the tension of unstructured situations and reach their own conclusions about the need for cooperation and shared decision-making.

## 3. “Group Dilemma Stories” – Choose What Happens Next

## 4. “Build a Better Classroom” – Collaborative Design Task

- **Objective:** Allow children to reflect on democratic participation by designing their ideal shared space.
- **Materials:** Large sheets of paper, markers, post-its, and simple classroom floorplans.
- **How it works:** Ask: “If you could design a classroom where everyone felt safe and included, what would it look like?” Let small groups draw, build or model their ideal space. Present designs and invite feedback from peers. Reflect on shared ideas: “What makes a classroom feel fair and democratic?”
- **Why it works:** It puts the focus on co-creation and shared values rather than rules imposed from the top.

## 5. “Question Relay” – Inquiry Instead of Answers

- **Objective:** Cultivate a classroom where questions—not answers—drive learning.
- **How it works:** Begin with a statement or situation (e.g., “Only the oldest children get to decide what game to play”). Instead of explaining or asking for opinions, invite children to ask as many questions as possible about the situation. Write the questions on the board. Then group them by theme (e.g., fairness, power, sharing). Use these themes as the basis for deeper exploration in future sessions.
- **Why it works:** It models the idea that asking good questions is a civic skill, and positions the facilitator as a co-inquirer, not a lecturer.



- **Create a Safe and Inclusive Space**

Before a child can learn or share, they must feel **emotionally safe**. A safe learning space is one where every child knows they are respected, their voice matters, and they will not be judged for expressing their thoughts or feelings. Facilitators are responsible for creating this environment from the **first moment of the session**. This includes setting clear agreements (“We listen to each other,” “There are no wrong answers”), modelling respectful communication, and being attentive to **power dynamics** in the group. Special attention should be paid to quieter children, children with disabilities, or those who may come from marginalized backgrounds—making sure they are **seen, heard, and encouraged**. It also means recognizing and managing conflict constructively: when children disagree or challenge one another, facilitators can turn it into a **learning opportunity about dialogue and difference**. According to UNICEF’s child-friendly schools framework, inclusion and participation are not add-ons; they are fundamental to quality education. In “Ties of Freedom,” creating a **safe and inclusive environment** is a foundational step in helping children experience democracy as something they belong to—not just something they learn about.

# Practical exercises

## 1. “Our Group Charter” – Co-create the Rules

- **Objective:** Empower children to co-construct the session’s ground rules, fostering ownership and mutual respect.
- **How it works:** At the beginning of the first session, invite the group to help create a Group Charter. Ask: “What do we need to feel safe and respected here?” Write down the children’s responses on a large sheet of paper or poster. Guide gently if needed (e.g., “How do we listen well to each other?” or “What if someone feels shy?”). Finalize 4–6 short, positive agreements (e.g., We listen when someone speaks, We don’t laugh at mistakes, Everyone gets a turn). Display the charter in every session and revisit it briefly at the start.
- **Why it works:** This sets a tone of shared responsibility and lets every child see that their voice helps shape the environment.

## 2. “The Talking Object” – Making Space for Every Voice

- **Objective:** Ensure equal speaking opportunities and active listening, especially for quieter or marginalized children.
- **Materials:** A soft ball, puppet, or any special object
- **How it works:** Use a designated “talking object” during group discussions or check-ins. Only the person holding the object may speak; others listen respectfully. Pass the object around the circle to invite contributions from each child. Children can always “pass” if they don’t wish to speak, but the invitation is extended to all.
- **Why it works:** It gives each child structured space to speak or be silent without pressure, building a norm of respectful turn-taking.

## 3. “Name and Gesture” Game – Building Familiarity and Belonging

- **Objective:** Reduce initial anxiety, learn names, and create a playful, inclusive group dynamic.
- **How it works:** In a circle, the first child says their name and does a simple gesture (e.g., clapping, spinning). The group repeats the name and the gesture aloud together. Go around the circle until every child has been welcomed in this way.
- **Why it works:** It affirms each child’s identity and presence in the group while encouraging active engagement in a light-hearted way.

#### 4. “Invisible Chairs” – Everyone Has a Place

- **Objective:** Visually and physically affirm inclusion and help children understand belonging.
- **Materials:** A circle of real chairs and one “invisible” chair (an empty space)
- **How it works:** Arrange enough chairs for all but one child; one space is left open. Begin by saying: “This chair is for someone who feels...” (e.g., shy, excited, left out, different, proud). Ask: “Who wants to sit in the chair today?” Children take turns stepping into the “invisible chair” when they identify with the prompt. Invite sharing: “Why did you choose this chair today?” Validate all answers without commentary.
- **Why it works:** It helps normalize emotional states, shows that everyone belongs, and gives children a safe platform to share difficult feelings.

#### 5. “Oops and Ouch” – Repairing and Respecting Differences

- **Objective:** Introduce a playful, non-punitive way to address accidental hurt or exclusion.
- **How it works:** Teach the group two words: “Oops” – for when someone realizes they said or did something that may have hurt or excluded someone else. “Ouch” – for when someone feels hurt or uncomfortable by something said or done. Practice with role-play: “What could you say if you interrupted someone by mistake?” → “Oops.” Let children know these are gentle ways to speak up or take responsibility. Use it during sessions as needed, modeling it yourself as a facilitator.
- **Why it works:** It gives children the language and tools to handle minor conflict without shame, reinforcing trust and respect.

- **Be Flexible and Responsive**

No two groups are the same, and no two sessions will unfold in exactly the same way. Effective facilitators learn to **read the room**—noticing where energy rises or falls, which children are engaged or withdrawn, when to pause for a break or shift to a different activity. Some sessions may spark animated discussion; others may require more scaffolding through visual aids, drawings, movement, or hands-on tasks. **Flexibility** is not a lack of planning—it is the **capacity to adapt in real time** to what the group needs. Facilitators should arrive prepared but not rigid, ready to let go of their agenda if a **spontaneous learning moment** arises. This responsiveness is especially important when dealing with sensitive themes such as **exclusion, injustice, or discrimination**. If a story brings up strong emotions or personal experiences, the facilitator must make space for that without rushing to the next item on the list. By being flexible, facilitators **model democratic behaviour** themselves: they show children what it means to be present, responsive, and open to change.

# Practical exercises

## 1. “Choose the Path” – Let the Children Decide What Comes Next

- **Objective:** Give children shared control over the session’s structure to enhance ownership and responsiveness.
- **How it works:** Prepare two or three activity options in advance for a given theme (e.g., a drawing task, a group story, or a movement game). Halfway through the session, offer the children a “choose the path” moment: We can tell a story together, act something out, or make a big poster. What do you feel like doing today?” Use visual symbols or real props to illustrate the options for non-readers.
- **Why it works:** This promotes shared decision-making and allows the facilitator to adjust energy levels or learning styles based on the children's real-time mood and preferences.

## 2. “Feel the Room” Check-Ins – Adaptive Mood Reading

- **Objective:** Help facilitators gauge the group’s energy and emotional tone to adjust pace and activities accordingly.
- **How it works:** Use a quick “temperature check” at the beginning, middle, or end of the session. Invite children to stand in a line or form a circle and respond to simple prompts: “Show me with your arms—do you feel high energy (big stretch) or low energy (arms folded)?” “Point to a color on our chart that shows how you feel right now.” Based on the overall response, adapt: if energy is low, bring movement; if emotions are high, slow down for calm reflection.
- **Why it works:** It creates a habit of group attunement, helping facilitators sense and respond to invisible dynamics.

## 3. “Pause and Shift” Cards – Empowering the Group to Request Change

- **Objective:** Give children tools to express when they need a break or a change without disrupting the group.
- **Materials:** Small cards with visual symbols (e.g., a turtle for slow down, a lightning bolt for move, a clock for break)
- **How it works:** Introduce the cards in the first session and explain their meaning. Leave them accessible during all activities. Invite children to gently hold up or point to a card if they feel the group needs to pause, move, slow down, or take a break.
- **Why it works:** Encourages self-advocacy and gives the facilitator immediate feedback without verbal disruption. It also models how democratic feedback loops can work in practice.

#### 4. “The Open Window” – Space for Spontaneous Sharing

- **Objective:** Create designated moments where children can bring up something important, off-topic, or emotional.
- **How it works:** Before the session ends, say: “We have a few minutes of Open Window—if you have something to say, ask, or share, this is your time.” Use a visual metaphor like drawing an open window on the board or having a special “Open Window” object. Allow children to voice ideas, stories, or reflections—even if unrelated to the topic. Validate each input and gently link back to themes when appropriate.
- **Why it works:** It teaches that learning is not linear, and that real voices matter more than plans—a core value in democratic facilitation.

#### 5. “What Helped Today?” – Reflect and Adjust Together

- **Objective:** Encourage facilitators and children to co-reflect on what supported learning, helping fine-tune future sessions.
- **How it works:** At the end of a session, ask: “What part helped you understand or enjoy the most?” “Was there something today that was too long or confusing?” Use thumbs-up/down, smiley face cards, or simply let them draw their answer. Keep a simple notebook or chart of their feedback and adjust accordingly in future sessions.
- **Why it works:** It makes reflection part of the culture, and shows children that their insights influence the process, reinforcing democratic and adaptive learning environments.

### 3. Integration of Project Materials

The animated film produced in WP2 can be used in short segments to introduce **key ideas or situations** — for example, showing a moment of unfairness or change.

The storytelling booklet provides simple, personal stories of real people's experiences before, during, or after a transition to democracy — **adapted for young readers**.

### 4. Learning Goals for Primary-Level Talks

Introducing democratic values to children in primary education (ages 6–10) requires more than the transmission of civic knowledge—it necessitates the cultivation of **developmental competencies** that align with the social, emotional, and moral growth typical of this age group. Children in early and middle childhood are in a formative stage of developing **empathy, social awareness, and a sense of justice**—capacities which are critical to democratic life. According to Piaget's theory of moral development (1932), children around this age begin transitioning from heteronomous morality (rule-following) to autonomous morality, where they understand fairness and mutual respect as relational rather than imposed. Similarly, Vygotsky's concept of the **zone of proximal development** (1978) emphasizes the role of guided interaction in helping children construct meaning from complex social ideas—such as fairness, voice, and participation. The Democratic Talks aim to engage these developmental windows by fostering **emotional literacy, cooperative behaviours, and early civic identity** through experiential and reflective learning. As underscored by the OECD's Learning Compass 2030, which positions social-emotional competencies at the heart of future-ready education, children need to develop not just knowledge about democracy, but also the **attitudes, values, and behaviours** that underpin active citizenship (OECD, 2019). Research from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) further supports this approach, showing that early education programs that integrate **social-emotional learning** (SEL) contribute to long-term gains in prosocial behaviour, classroom engagement, and civic responsibility (Durlak et al., 2011). Grounded in the broader goals of the Ties of Freedom project—to foster **intergenerational understanding, historical awareness, and civic empowerment**—the learning objectives for primary-level sessions are intentionally designed to be developmentally appropriate, emotionally resonant, and socially inclusive. The sessions provide children with **safe, participatory, and dialogic spaces** where they can begin to explore what it means to live together in a diverse society governed by mutual respect and shared values. Rather than simplifying democracy into abstract symbols, the Talks guide children to recognize and reflect on **fairness, cooperation, and inclusion** in their own lives—at home, in school, and in peer relationships. Through storytelling, guided discussions, collaborative play, and emotion-focused reflection, children connect **lived experience** with the foundational principles of democratic life, laying the groundwork for their future roles as **active, empathetic citizens**.

- To help children recognise when situations are fair or unfair
- To introduce the idea that societies can change and improve through cooperation
- To build emotional vocabulary around justice, voice, freedom, and respect

# **Part B – Democratic Talks (TEACH)**



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# 1.10 Modular Sessions to Spark Democratic Awareness and Expression

Each Democratic Talk is a ready-to-use session that can stand alone or be delivered as part of a wider educational path. Each session focuses on one of the 10 core themes identified by the project. The structure is consistent, familiar and age-appropriate.

**Each session includes:**

- **Title and Theme** (e.g. "Let's Vote!" or "Being Different is Great!")
- **Learning Objectives** – simple and focused (e.g., "Children will explore how choices can be made together.")
- **Opening Activity** – a drawing, game or role-play to warm up
- **Stimulus** – a short clip from the film, a picture, or a story
- **Main Activity** – creative and hands-on (e.g., group storytelling, build-a-fair-school exercise, "rule making" circle)
- **Reflection Circle** – children share ideas or emotions
- **Evaluation Moment** – with simple visual tools (e.g., an emoji chart or traffic light system)

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Basic school supplies (paper, colours, scissors), access to the film (tablet or projector), printouts from the Toolkit

## **Example Themes for Primary Sessions**

1. The meaning of democracy
2. Life before democratic transition
3. The transition process
4. EU democratic values
5. Challenges to democracy
6. Europe as a place of diversity
7. Multiculturalism and inclusion
8. Gender equality and participation
9. Active citizenship
10. The role of children and young people in democratic processes

## 2. Evaluation and Feedback

The evaluation of each Democratic Talk session is designed to be both **child-friendly and pedagogically meaningful**, ensuring that children's emotional and cognitive responses are captured in accessible ways. At the close of each session, facilitators will dedicate 5–10 minutes to a **reflective feedback moment**. This is not a formal test but rather a safe and creative opportunity for children to express what they felt, understood, and enjoyed. Depending on the age, needs, and energy of the group, facilitators may choose from several tools.

If using emoji sheets, children are given a handout with three to five faces (e.g., happy 😊, neutral 😐, confused 😕, sad 😞). They are asked to circle or colour the emoji that best represents how they felt during the session. A template for the emoji sheet should include a short prompt such as “**How did this session make you feel?**” and leave space for children to write or draw if they wish.

With the coloured sticker method, facilitators prepare a large poster with statements such as “I understood today's session,” “I felt included,” or “I liked the activity.” Children are given coloured stickers (e.g., green = agree, yellow = not sure, red = no) and place them next to the statements as they leave the session. This visual method is particularly effective for **group-level tracking** and works well in classrooms with limited time or literacy variation. A reusable template can be created on A2 paper or whiteboard, laminated for repeated use.

For a more expressive option, drawings allow children to reflect visually. Prompts like “Draw what you remember most from today” or “Draw how the session made you feel” encourage **internalisation and personal connection**. Facilitators should collect and store these as **qualitative evidence**, and optionally include space on the drawing template for name, age, and date.

Alternatively, a verbal reflection circle invites each child (or volunteer speakers) to briefly share a sentence such as “Today I learned...” or “I felt...” This can be structured using a talking stick or object passed around. Facilitators are advised to use **open-ended guiding questions** and ensure every voice has space, including quieter or non-verbal participants.

Finally, facilitators will complete a **standardised observation sheet** after each session. This document includes simple prompts such as level of engagement, group dynamics, emotional tone, recurring questions or ideas expressed by children, and any challenges encountered. It also contains a short section to note how the session aligned with the **Toolkit's learning objectives**. Templates for this observation sheet can be provided in both print and editable digital formats.

# SECTION 2

# SECONDARY SCHOOL (Ages 11–16)



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## Empowering Young People to Think Critically, Engage Locally, and Act Democratically

The adolescent phase, particularly between the ages of 11 and 16, represents a **critical juncture** in the development of civic awareness and democratic sensibility. It is during this period that individuals begin to exercise advanced cognitive abilities, including abstract reasoning, moral reflection, and hypothetical thinking (Piaget, 1972). At the same time, young people seek greater autonomy and social recognition, making them particularly receptive to discourses around **power, justice, identity, and responsibility**. These characteristics position adolescence as an ideal stage for **targeted civic education**—education that not only informs but also enables participation, critical engagement, and ethical action. The sessions developed for this age group within the Ties of Freedom Toolkit do not follow a transmission model of teaching; they are not conceived as top-down instructions in institutional facts. Instead, they are grounded in **dialogic and participatory pedagogies** that view young people as active interpreters of their social and political environments. Drawing on traditions of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and experiential citizenship education (Hoskins & Crick, 2010), the sessions provide structured opportunities for young participants to **question, deliberate, and co-construct meaning**. This includes exploring the foundations of democratic systems, understanding the **historical legacies of authoritarian regimes**, and critically examining contemporary social challenges through a civic lens. Rather than focusing exclusively on democratic institutions, this section of the Toolkit prioritises the cultivation of **democratic competences** as outlined by the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2018). These include values (human dignity, justice, equality), attitudes (civic-mindedness, openness to others), skills (listening, arguing respectfully, evaluating sources), and knowledge (understanding democratic processes and cultural contexts). Each session encourages the connection between **historical narratives and lived experience**, inviting students to draw parallels between past transitions and current democratic practices in their own communities. In a context where adolescents are increasingly exposed to complex and sometimes contradictory information—particularly in online environments—there is a pressing need to offer spaces that are **intellectually honest, emotionally safe, and politically relevant**. The Toolkit responds to this by combining narrative tools (such as first-person accounts of democratic transition), **peer-to-peer dialogue**, creative expression, and situational role-play. These approaches are not ornamental: they are central to the goal of nurturing **critical consciousness and civic agency**. The overarching aim is not to persuade young people to accept a particular definition of democracy, but to equip them with the **analytical tools and participatory experiences** that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to democratic life. By placing adolescents at the centre of inquiry—rather than at the margins of instruction—this section reaffirms their role not only as future citizens, but as **present actors** in shaping democratic culture at the local, national, and European levels.

# **Part A – Foundations (REACH)**



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# 1. Pedagogical Philosophy

The adolescent years represent a **decisive moment** in the construction of political identity. At this stage, students begin to interrogate systems, question inherited narratives, and position themselves more consciously within the social and political realities that surround them. As such, civic education with this age group cannot be reduced to a transmission of facts or institutional knowledge. Rather, it must provide an **epistemological space** in which **historical experience, critical reflection, and democratic imagination** converge. The “REACH” component of the Ties of Freedom Toolkit is designed precisely to address this need. It offers a **pedagogical framework** that connects the **lived experience of past democratic transitions** to the analytical and imaginative capacities of today’s youth, enabling them to situate themselves within an **evolving democratic continuum**. The foundation of this approach lies in **narrative inquiry**, a methodology that prioritises **personal and collective stories** as both content and method for democratic education. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry enables learners to reflect on the **moral and civic dimensions of lived experience**, making it particularly effective in contexts that deal with **historical trauma, resistance, or transformation**. In this Toolkit, historical transitions to democracy are not taught as static timelines, but as **lived experiences** shared through first-person testimony, animation, and interactive storytelling. These narratives serve as anchoring points for reflection, inviting adolescents to recognise that democracy is not a finished product but an ongoing human endeavour shaped by **courage, compromise, and complexity**. Building on this narrative foundation, the REACH section employs **Socratic questioning as a dialogical method** to engage students in **open-ended inquiry**. This pedagogical technique, with roots in classical philosophy and contemporary dialogic education (Wegerif, 2007), shifts the teacher’s role from **authority to facilitator** and creates a space in which students explore **ethical dilemmas, conflicting values, and ambiguous choices**. By asking “What would you have done in their place?” or “Is freedom always fair?”, facilitators encourage students to grapple with the moral tensions inherent in democratic life. The aim is not to elicit consensus but to cultivate democratic dispositions such as **tolerance for ambiguity, critical self-reflection, and respect for difference**. In a media-saturated environment, media literacy becomes an essential democratic competence. Adolescents today are immersed in an **information landscape** where political narratives are constantly constructed, contested, and manipulated. The REACH methodology integrates media analysis into civic education, training students to examine how democratic values such as **freedom, equality, and participation** are portrayed, questioned, or distorted in digital media, popular culture, and political discourse. Drawing on the work of Hobbs (2010) and the Council of Europe’s Digital Citizenship Education framework (2019), this component helps students develop the analytical tools to detect bias, evaluate sources, and understand how **media narratives shape public opinion and democratic institutions**.

Finally, the REACH section promotes **civic imagination**—the ability to envision alternatives to existing structures and imagine oneself as an **agent of change**. As suggested by scholars like Appadurai (2013) and Jenkins et al. (2016), imagination is not a trivial component of civic life but a **vital capacity for participation and transformation**. Through guided exercises, creative prompts, and collaborative projects, young people are encouraged to explore what a more **just, inclusive, and participatory democracy** might look like. This not only strengthens their sense of ownership over democratic processes but also affirms their **capacity to contribute meaningfully** to their communities.

## 2. Facilitation Guidance

Working with adolescents on democracy and civic life demands more than content delivery; it requires the creation of **dialogic spaces** that respect their agency, complexity, and capacity to grapple with contradiction. This age group — typically between 11 and 16 — is entering a critical phase of **cognitive and emotional development** marked by increased abstract reasoning, moral questioning, and identity formation. For this reason, facilitators of the Ties of Freedom Democratic Talks must approach their role not as **instructors but as moderators of a shared inquiry**. The goal is to nurture an environment where young people can critically reflect, challenge assumptions (including their own), and begin to articulate their place within democratic society. At the heart of this facilitation strategy is the commitment to creating **non-judgmental, discussion-rich environments**. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to being dismissed or corrected in ways that **invalidate their developing perspectives**. A successful facilitator will therefore cultivate a classroom culture that welcomes uncertainty, embraces nuance, and protects dissent. This is not about avoiding structure or discipline; rather, it is about establishing norms of respect and inclusion that empower all participants to **speak and listen with openness**. Controversy and contradiction, often seen as disruptions in traditional classrooms, are reframed here as learning moments. Democracy itself is rooted in pluralism, disagreement, and the negotiation of competing values. When young people express divergent views, facilitators are encouraged to **hold space for exploration rather than resolution**. This aligns with the principles of **deliberative democracy and dialogic pedagogy** (Freire, 1970; Biesta, 2011), both of which view education as a process of becoming through encounter with difference. Facilitators might use prompts like **“Why do you think people see this differently?”** or **“Can both perspectives be true in different ways?”** to open up the interpretive space. Acknowledging different lived realities is also central to this process. Adolescents bring with them experiences shaped by family background, social class, migration status, racial or gender identity, and more. Rather than assuming a neutral starting point, facilitators are invited to listen attentively to the **variety of experiences** in the room and make space for them within the learning process. When a student shares a story about exclusion or injustice, that testimony becomes a democratic text in itself—one worthy of **collective attention and reflection**. Another essential function of the facilitator is to connect the thematic content of the sessions to the adolescents’ own spheres of life. Democracy is not just something that happens in parliaments or on election day.

It is **lived and contested** in **schools, households, friendships, social media spaces, and local communities**. By encouraging students to relate **project themes (freedom, participation, inclusion, accountability)** to **everyday experiences**, facilitators help make civic learning relevant and embodied. For instance, a discussion **on voice and representation** might explore **student councils, online activism, or cultural invisibility in school curricula**. This approach reflects the experiential learning models developed by Dewey (1938) and later expanded through youth civic engagement research (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006).

### 3. Use of Project Materials

To support facilitators in this **complex work**, the Ties of Freedom project offers **carefully curated narrative resources** designed to stimulate **reflection, dialogue, and emotional engagement**. The **animation film** serves as an **evocative trigger**, portraying **fictionalised yet realistic** scenarios inspired by **citizens who lived through democratic transitions in Europe**. It is not meant to **“explain” democracy** but to **unsettle, provoke questions, and humanise** abstract concepts. Facilitators should watch the film with students in small sections and pause to explore reactions, associations, or emerging emotions. Questions such as **“What stood out to you?”** or **“Have you ever felt like that character?”** open the door for **personal reflection and group discussion**. The **storytelling booklet** contains a selection of **real-life testimonies** from **different European countries**, offering a polyphonic lens on the path from **authoritarianism to democracy**. These stories—some hopeful, others painful—anchor the project’s civic themes in concrete, lived experiences. Facilitators can assign different stories to small groups, asking them to identify the choices made, the obstacles faced, and the lessons learned. **Comparing stories across contexts** helps students understand **democracy as a shared, though uneven, European journey**. Facilitators are also encouraged to incorporate these materials creatively. **A powerful testimony** might be **transformed into a dramatic reading**, a character from the animation might be debated in a mock parliament, or a scene from the film might be reimagined from another perspective. What matters is that the materials are not treated as “texts to study,” but as **invitations to enter, feel, and respond**.

## 4. Learning Objectives for Secondary-Level Talks

At the heart of the Ties of Freedom project lies a belief that **democratic education** is most effective when it is rooted in **lived experience, emotional resonance, and critical inquiry**. While the **primary-level activities** focus on introducing **fairness, empathy, and shared decision-making**, the **secondary-level Talks** are designed to push young people toward a **deeper and more active engagement with democratic life**. This shift reflects **developmental research in adolescent learning**, which shows that between **the ages of 11 and 16**, students begin to form **complex moral frameworks, question authority, and situate themselves** within broader social and political structures (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Flanagan et al., 2007). The Toolkit's learning objectives are thus crafted to align with this transformative moment—**offering not just information, but tools for interpretation, agency, and action**. The **first objective** is to **deepen understanding of democratic processes and European Union values**. This is not limited to explaining how parliaments work or listing treaties. Rather, the sessions aim to uncover the principles underpinning democratic systems: accountability, rule of law, human dignity, equality, and participation. Through **role plays, storytelling, case studies, and debates**, students engage with democratic values as living realities—ideals that are sometimes fulfilled, sometimes threatened, and always under construction. The **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**, for instance, can become a tool not just to be memorized, but **to interpret everyday issues such as online hate speech, youth participation in decision-making, or discrimination**. By engaging directly with the foundational texts and practices of democracy, students gain the literacy needed to navigate and question contemporary civic life.

A **second objective** is to **recognize the warning signs of democratic erosion**. Across Europe and globally, recent years have witnessed a resurgence of **authoritarian tendencies, attacks on press freedom, weakening of judicial independence, and the spread of disinformation**. These are not distant political problems—they are realities that affect young people's rights, voices, and futures. Drawing from historical cases and current events, the sessions provide space to identify how democracies can be dismantled—not always through sudden coups, but through slow erosion. Students learn to spot the signals: **shrinking civic space, suppression of dissent, normalisation of hate speech, and the weakening of institutions**. This awareness is crucial in building democratic resilience. As research from the Bertelsmann Stiftung and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project shows, civic education plays a key role in preventing democratic backsliding when it teaches not only ideals, but also risks (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

The **third goal** is to explore **historical transitions and youth-led social change**. Adolescents benefit greatly from encountering stories of people—especially other young people—who helped shape history through civic action. The project's **narrative resources**, including **testimonies** from the storytelling booklet, offer a rich spectrum of such examples: **students who resisted censorship, communities that rebuilt democracy after dictatorship**, young activists who opened space for pluralism and rights. These stories are not presented as heroic exceptions but as evidence that change is possible, often from the margins. Adolescents learn that **civic transitions** are not abstract historical events but ongoing processes shaped by ordinary people who make extraordinary choices. By exploring this, students begin to perceive democracy not as a legacy handed down by previous generations, but as a terrain they are called to inhabit, defend, and renew.

Finally, a core learning goal of the **Democratic Talks** is to help students identify their own capacities to act, speak, and participate. This is where democratic education becomes personal and empowering. Adolescents often experience a gap between the ideals of democracy and their lived realities—particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented communities. The Toolkit does not pretend that all young people feel equally empowered. Instead, it creates space to **explore** the **limits and possibilities** of **youth participation** in real terms: how can students influence decisions in their **schools, towns, online communities**? What forms of expression and engagement are available to them? What obstacles do they face, and how can solidarity help overcome them?

# **Part B – Democratic Talks (TEACH)**



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# 1. 10 Youth-Driven Civic Dialogues on Democracy and Participation

The **“Teach” component** of the Ties of Freedom methodology translates the **foundational principles** explored in the **“Reach” section** into **concrete, participatory learning experiences**. At this stage, young people (aged 11–16) are not only invited to understand democratic values intellectually, but to experience and interrogate them through structured dialogue, co-creation, and reflective civic exploration. The **ten thematic Democratic Talks** proposed in this section are designed as **self-contained, yet interlinked sessions**. Each offers an opportunity to engage deeply with a **specific facet of democracy**—ranging from **identity and voice, to power and participation, to diversity and resistance**. Each session follows a consistent pedagogical structure that reflects best practices in civic education, particularly those aligned with **learner-centred, inquiry-based, and emotionally intelligent approaches** (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Biesta, 2011). Rather than prioritising content transmission, these sessions are built to provoke curiosity, stimulate emotional and ethical reasoning, and invite collaborative meaning-making. Youth participants are not passive recipients of knowledge; they are co-constructors of understanding, through stories, dilemmas, dialogue, and creative output. **Sessions** are intentionally designed for flexible delivery—ideally within a **90-minute block**, but easily **adaptable** to shorter periods or double sessions. Each includes a **warm-up activity** that draws on popular culture, current events, or everyday school life; **a stimulus** (video clip, testimony, visual prompt, or short reading); **a main participatory task** (such as debates, mapping exercises, digital storytelling, or role-play); and **a collective reflection moment**. This structure scaffolds engagement across diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds, recognising that democratic learning must be inclusive, intersectional, and experiential (UNESCO, 2017). Crucially, the design of the Democratic Talks is grounded in the assumption that democracy is not merely taught—it is lived in dialogue. Sessions open up space for controversial questions and difficult emotions, from frustration with political systems to uncertainty about belonging or identity. **Facilitators are equipped to hold this complexity**—not with the goal of consensus, but with the commitment to pluralism and voice. Each activity is accompanied by **facilitation tips and reflection guides**, ensuring that educators can navigate sensitive topics with confidence and care. Topics include: the meaning of democracy; life before democratic transitions; youth agency; equality and power; digital citizenship; democratic erosion; and the future of Europe. While the sessions are independent, they are enriched when delivered sequentially—creating a **developmental journey from democratic awareness to civic agency**. In parallel with classroom implementation, the project integrates transnational elements. Sessions draw on **real-life testimonies** from the project countries, encouraging participants **to see democracy not as a local ideal but as a shared, contested, and evolving European process**. Students are encouraged to compare their own experiences with those of their peers across borders, fostering empathy and solidarity.

The **outcomes** of these sessions are both **cognitive and affective**: a **richer vocabulary** for naming **injustice and inclusion**, a **stronger sense of agency and voice**, and a more **nuanced appreciation** for democracy as a fragile, precious good that must be continuously defended and reimagined. Ultimately, the Democratic Talks invite young people not just to study democracy, but to **practise it**—by **listening, challenging, dreaming**, and **building** together.

Each session includes:

- **Title and Thematic Focus** (e.g., “Democracy Under Pressure” or “My Voice in Europe”)
- **Learning Outcomes** – 2–3 civic competencies per session
- **Materials Required** – typically minimal: projector, printed cards, posters, markers
- **Opening Activity** – a quote, image, or question that sparks debate
- **Stimulus Segment** – use of the WP2 film or a story from the booklet
- **Main Participatory Activity** – group work, role-play, mapping, simulation, poster creation, digital media
- **Closing Reflection** – circle or written reflections (How did today make you think differently?)
- **Evaluation** – pre/post impact quiz with statements to rate (Likert scale)

### **Example Themes for Secondary Sessions**

1. The meaning of democracy
2. Life before democratic transition
3. The transition process
4. EU democratic values
5. Challenges to democracy
6. Europe as a place of diversity
7. Multiculturalism and inclusion
8. Gender equality and participation
9. Active citizenship
10. The role of children and young people in democratic processes

## 2. Evaluation and Feedback

Evaluation in the adolescent strand of the Ties of Freedom Toolkit is conceived as a **formative, participatory, and dialogic** component of each session, rather than a summative add-on. In keeping with the principles of **democratic education and reflective pedagogy**, the evaluation process aims not only to monitor impact but also to empower learners to recognise and articulate their own civic growth. Each session incorporates a pre/post impact questionnaire consisting of six statements rated on a 4-point Likert scale (from “Not at all” to “Very much”), such as “I feel that my opinion matters in my community,” “I can recognise unfair situations,” or “I understand what democracy means in real life.” These are administered at the beginning and end of each session, taking approximately 5–7 minutes to complete, and are designed to track short-term shifts in knowledge, attitude, and civic confidence. Results from these tools will be aggregated anonymously and contribute to the WP3 evaluation framework.

To supplement these quantitative snapshots, each session ends with a structured reflection moment using accessible prompts such as “One thing I learned today”, “One thing I’m still thinking about”, or “One way I could take action”. These reflections can be shared orally in a closing circle or written on post-its and displayed as part of a “Democracy Wall” that builds throughout the sessions. This practice not only helps consolidate learning but also provides facilitators with real-time insight into how young people are processing the content emotionally and cognitively. For learners with different communication needs, alternative formats are encouraged—such as drawing symbols, selecting emoticons, or using gesture cards (e.g., thumbs up/down/sideways) to express responses.

### **Beyond the Sessions**

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- Invite students to present their reflections to school leadership or parents
- Organize a small exhibition (e.g., posters, stories, quotes) in the school
- Encourage schools to integrate democratic topics into school councils or student initiatives.

# ANNEXES



Funded by  
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Project Number: 101196470

# **Supporting Materials SECTION 1 (Ages 6–10)**



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# Session 1

## “Let’s Decide Together!” – Understanding the Meaning of Democracy

### Learning Objectives

- Children will begin to understand that democracy means making decisions together.
- Children will explore fairness and participation in group settings.
- Children will reflect on their own experiences of inclusion and having a voice.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

### Materials Needed

- Large paper sheets or whiteboard
- Colour pencils, crayons, scissors
- Access to the Ties of Freedom animated film (tablet, computer, or projector)
- Printed story cards or stills from the film
- Pre-printed evaluation tools (emoji or traffic light charts)

### Opening Activity – “Stand Up If...”

This playful movement game helps children begin reflecting on decision-making and fairness.

**Instructions:** The facilitator reads statements aloud, such as:

- “Stand up if you’ve ever had to vote on something.”
- “Stand up if you like when someone listens to your opinion.”
- “Stand up if you’ve ever felt left out of a group decision.”

Children sit and stand as appropriate, creating an active group rhythm. After 5–6 statements, the facilitator opens a short conversation:

“What does it feel like when someone includes you in a decision?”

“What does it feel like when you don’t get to choose?”

**Stimulus** – Clip from the Ties of Freedom Animation

Show a short clip from the Ties of Freedom animation.

**Prompt:** “Let’s watch what happens when the characters have to make a decision. Was it fair? Did everyone get a chance to speak?”

### Main Activity – “Design Our Classroom Rules”

Children collaboratively decide on 5 basic classroom rules that represent fairness and participation.

**Instructions:**

- Divide the class into 3–4 small groups.
- Give each group paper and colours. Ask them to imagine a perfect classroom where everyone feels happy and heard.
- Each group draws or writes 2–3 rules they would include.
- The facilitator collects the proposals and facilitates a group vote on the top 5 rules. These are posted on the wall.

This playful exercise models democratic decision-making while making the abstract idea of democracy concrete and child-centred.

**Reflection Circle – “Fair or Unfair?”**

Children sit in a circle. The facilitator reads aloud quick mini-scenarios:

“One person always chooses the game at recess.”

“We all take turns bringing snacks.”

“Only some children are asked for their opinion.”

After each scenario, children give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down. The facilitator asks: “What makes it fair?” “How could we make it better?”

## Session 2

### “What If We Couldn’t Choose?” – Life Before Democracy

**Learning Objectives**

- Children will explore the concept of freedom by imagining life without choice or voice.
- Children will reflect on the importance of being listened to and treated fairly.
- Children will begin to understand that democracy was not always part of our lives—and that it was gained through change and courage.
- Children will connect historical restrictions with everyday situations (school, games, rules).

**Duration:** 60–90 minutes

**Materials Needed**

- “Freedom Box” (a small closed box with symbolic objects inside: a small lock, whistle, blindfold, etc.)
- Paper chains made of coloured strips
- Access to the animation or storybook from Ties of Freedom (or printed images)
- Music player/speaker (optional dramatic background music)
- Drawing materials, simple props (e.g., hats, signs, rope)
- Evaluation cards (traffic light or emoji faces)

## Opening Activity – “The Invisible Rules”

### Instructions:

Begin with a silent game. Don't explain the rules, but start giving unexpected commands (e.g., "Only children in blue can speak today," "You must walk backwards," "No drawing allowed today"). Follow this for 2–3 minutes until the children start to question the logic or feel confused.

Pause the game and ask:

“How did that feel?”

“Was it fair?”

“Did anyone ask for your opinion?”

Explain that in some places and times, people couldn't make their own choices—not even about what to say, do, or think. This short disruption introduces the theme emotionally, not intellectually.

**Stimulus** – Clip from the Ties of Freedom Animation or section from Booklet

Show a quiet, thoughtful scene from the Ties of Freedom animation where a character experiences a restriction: being told not to speak, or not to meet friends, or to follow unfair rules.

If a clip isn't available, tell a short, dramatic story based on a real-life testimony from a democratic transition (adapted into simple language):

“There was a time when teachers could not speak their minds. A girl's book was taken because it had a banned story. People whispered instead of talking loud in public...”

Ask the group:

“How do you think that person felt?”

“What would you miss if you couldn't speak up?”

## Main Activity – “The Paper Chain of No Choices”

Children create a symbolic paper chain representing limitations on freedom.

### Instructions:

- Each child receives 3 strips of paper. On each, they write or draw something important to them (e.g., “talking to friends,” “drawing,” “choosing my clothes”).
- Once done, explain: “Now imagine someone says: You're not allowed to do these anymore.”
- One by one, the children link their strips into a long paper chain and place it around a chair or object, symbolizing how people were 'bound' by rules.

Then, ask:

“How would it feel if someone else decided everything for you?”

“Why do you think some people changed those rules?”

As a group, decide how to “break” the chain and what symbols of freedom to put in its place (colours, stars, flags, open doors).

### Reflection Circle – “Then and Now”

Give the children a simple timeline with two images:

- A closed door (before democracy)
- An open field (now)

Ask:

“What do we have today that people didn’t have before?”

“What would you tell a child who lived in a time without democracy?”

Encourage them to share in pairs or small groups and then with the circle. Use a feelings cube or visual card set to help children name emotions.

## Session 3

### “Crossing the Bridge” – Understanding the Transition Process

#### Learning Objectives

- Children will begin to understand that change from unfair to fair systems can happen through collective effort.
- Children will explore the concept of transitions as bridges—from silence to voice, from rules imposed to rules shared.
- Children will connect the idea of historical or political transitions with their own experiences of change and growth.
- Children will reflect on the role of courage, listening, and cooperation in building better communities.

**Duration:** 60–90 minutes

#### Materials Needed

- Large rope or coloured paper strips (to create a “bridge” on the floor)
- Footprint cut-outs (cardboard or coloured paper)
- Printed dialogue cards (historical testimonies simplified into age-appropriate language)
- Drawing materials

- Musical playlist (uplifting background music)
- Projector/tablet for short video or image display
- Evaluation symbols (e.g., stepping stones chart)

### Opening Activity – “When I Changed”

Begin the session in a circle. Ask children to think of something in their life that has changed:

“Can you remember when you changed schools?”

“Did you ever move to a new house or meet new classmates?”

“How did it feel? Was it easy? Was it scary?”

Use a soft ball or stuffed toy to pass around. Each child who catches it shares a moment of personal change. This exercise personalises the idea of “transition” before introducing historical content.

**Stimulus** – Clip from the Ties of Freedom Animation or section from Booklet Main Activity – “Building the Transition Bridge”

Children physically and symbolically create a bridge representing the transition from silence to participation.

#### Instructions:

- Use rope, masking tape, or long paper strips to make a bridge shape across the room.
- Each child receives two footprint cut-outs. On the first, they draw or write something unfair or silent (“Nobody could choose,” “Only one person decided,” “We had to hide what we thought”).
- On the second, they imagine and draw a hopeful change (“We can vote,” “We can speak up,” “We help each other”).
- As they place their footprints on the bridge, they narrate their step: “I am walking from silence to voice because...”

The bridge becomes a visual metaphor for the democratic transition process. Children are both participants and witnesses in a shared journey.

### Reflection Circle – “What Helps Us Change?”

Children return to the circle and the facilitator places dialogue prompts:

“What makes it hard to change?”

“What gives us courage to speak?”

“Can one person start a change?”

Offer real-life mini-testimonies (simplified and anonymized), e.g. “Maria was scared to talk at school. One day she raised her hand. Her classmates listened.” Children discuss what makes these small steps matter. Introduce the idea that democratic transitions start with small voices that grow.

# Session 4

## “Our Shared Treasure” – Discovering the Values of the European Union

### Learning Objectives

- Children will be introduced to core values of the European Union in child-friendly terms (e.g., fairness, peace, helping each other).
- They will understand that different countries in Europe work together to protect people’s rights.
- They will begin to associate shared values with actions in daily life (e.g., being fair, helping a friend, respecting differences).
- They will reflect on how shared values help groups live together in peace and cooperation.

**Duration:** 60–90 minutes

### Materials Needed

- Printed treasure map template (or teacher can draw one on the board)
- Cut-outs or images of EU flags or symbols (heart, handshake, scales, stars, open door)
- “Value Cards” with simplified EU values (e.g., “We are all equal,” “We help one another,” “We can speak freely”)
- Large paper chest or envelope marked “Our Treasure”
- Markers, crayons, tape/glue
- Short animation clip or image of European countries working together
- Music or rhythm instrument (optional)

### Opening Activity – “The Lost Treasure” (Story Game)

Introduce the session with a playful story: “A long time ago, people in Europe fought and didn’t listen to each other. Then they decided to hide their most important treasure — the treasure of values. But now it’s time to find it again so everyone can live happily and in peace!”

Show children a hand-drawn treasure map (paper or board). Mark 3–5 “islands” they’ll visit in this session:

1. Island of Equality
2. Island of Freedom
3. Island of Peace
4. Island of Respect
5. Island of Helping Hands

As the class “travels” from island to island (each representing a value), they collect symbols and experiences.

**Stimulus** – Clip from the Ties of Freedom Animation or Symbol Cards

### **Main Activity – “Build the Treasure Chest of Values”**

Children work in small groups to create a treasure chest of shared values.

#### **Instructions:**

- Each group picks one “island” (value) and illustrates what it looks like in real life.
- They can draw or write examples:
- Equality: “We all take turns.”
- Peace: “We solve problems with words.”
- Freedom: “We say what we think kindly.”
- They glue or place their value into a large classroom “Treasure Chest” (box, envelope or wall display).
- After all groups share, the chest becomes a visible symbol of shared democratic values.

### **Reflection Circle – “If You Had to Protect a Value...”**

Children sit in a circle holding a soft object (like a “talking stone”).

Ask:

“If you could only keep one value safe for everyone in the world, which one would you choose?”

“Why is it important to you?”

“What would the world be like without it?”

Encourage children to listen, and thank each speaker. If some prefer drawing instead of speaking, allow that option.

## **Session 5**

### **“Democracy is Like a Garden – What Can Harm It?” - Understanding the Challenges to Democracy**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- Children will begin to recognise that democracy can be weakened when people are not treated fairly or when only a few get to decide.
- Children will explore the importance of listening, sharing, and respecting others’ voices to protect democratic spaces.
- Children will reflect on what happens when rules are broken or power is misused.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

### **Materials Needed**

- “Garden of Democracy” template (drawn or printed)
- Coloured paper, markers, scissors, glue
- Printed “democracy weeds” cards (examples of unfairness or exclusion)
- Projector or tablet to show a short film clip or image
- Evaluation chart (emoji system or traffic light colours)

### **Opening Activity – “The Garden Game”**

Begin with an imagination exercise: “Close your eyes and imagine a big, beautiful garden. It’s full of different flowers, bees buzzing, kids playing... What helps a garden grow?”

Then ask: “What might happen if weeds grow too much? Or if someone doesn’t water it?”

Children draw quick doodles of something that helps a garden grow (e.g., sun, water, kindness, sharing) and something that hurts it (e.g., weeds, trash, shouting, unfairness). This metaphor sets the stage: democracy, like a garden, needs care — and it can be harmed by certain behaviours.

**Stimulus** – Clip or Story

### **Main Activity – “Pull Out the Weeds!”**

Children create a “Garden of Democracy” mural on a large sheet of paper. In the centre, draw a big colourful garden. Give each child a flower-shaped card and ask them to write or draw something that helps democracy (e.g., voting, being kind, listening, taking turns). Glue these onto the garden. Then, introduce “weed cards” — printed or drawn examples of things that harm democracy (e.g., “Only one person chooses everything,” “People are shouted at when they speak,” “Some children are left out”). As a group, read each “weed” and discuss:

“What can we do to stop this from happening in our classroom or community?”

Children write or draw solutions on leaf-shaped cards and paste them beside the weeds.

### **Reflection Circle – “Guardian of the Garden”**

Children sit in a circle. Pass around a “magic watering can” or “sun badge.” Whoever holds it answers:

“What can I do to help our democracy garden grow every day?”

Each child shares a word or action (e.g., “I will listen,” “I will take turns,” “I will let others speak”).

This builds ownership and personal commitment to democratic values.

# Session 6

## “Europe is a Rainbow” – Europe as a Place of Diversity

### Theme:

Children discover that Europe is made up of many different people, languages, traditions, and stories – and that this diversity is what makes living together beautiful, interesting, and fair.

### Learning Objectives:

Children will recognise the richness of cultural, linguistic, and personal differences in Europe. They will begin to understand that living together peacefully means listening to and respecting those who are different from us.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

### Materials Needed:

Paper, crayons or markers, glue sticks, printed map of Europe, access to the animation film (tablet/projector), picture cards of children from different European countries (optional), blank "Rainbow of Europe" template (provided in the Toolkit).

### Opening Activity – “The Suitcase Game”

Begin with a role-play game: place an empty suitcase (real or imaginary) in the center of the room. Tell the children, “We’re going on a trip across Europe! What should we pack?” Let each child “pack” one thing that represents their culture, family, or identity (e.g., a food, a song, a toy, a saying in their language). They can draw it or describe it. As each item is added, highlight how many different things are going into the same suitcase — and that it makes the trip more fun!

Purpose: Warms up curiosity about difference, encourages personal connection to diversity.

**Stimulus** – Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation + Discussion

### Main Activity – “Rainbow of Europe” Mural

Hand out the Rainbow of Europe template or draw a large rainbow on paper or board. Each arc of the rainbow will represent a kind of diversity (language, food, traditions, appearance, beliefs, dreams).

Each child adds a drawing or word to an arc of the rainbow – for example:

- In the “language” arc, a child might write “Hola” or “Ciao.”
- In the “food” arc, they might draw sushi, pizza, or couscous.
- Discuss as the rainbow grows: “Look how many colours we’re using. Would it still be a rainbow if we only used one colour?”
- When finished, hang it up as a class poster.

**Alternative:** Instead of drawing, use magazine cut-outs or printed images to build a collage.

### Reflection Circle – “If I Were...”

Invite the children to sit in a circle and complete this sentence:

“If I were from another place in Europe, I would...”

Or: “Something different about me that I’m proud of is...”

This allows sharing of family heritage, language, or simply what makes them feel unique.

Help children celebrate differences by affirming each contribution: “That’s wonderful!” or “That would make our classroom more fun!”

## Session 7

### “Different and Together” – Multiculturalism and Inclusion

#### **Theme:**

Children explore what it means to live in a community where people come from different cultures, speak different languages, or have different ways of doing things — and how everyone belongs when we include each other with kindness and curiosity.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

Children will understand that multiculturalism means living with people who are different from us.

They will learn how inclusion happens through small everyday actions like inviting, listening, sharing, and respecting.

They will be able to recognise situations where someone might feel left out and think about how to make them feel welcome.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

#### **Materials Needed:**

Paper cut-outs of children (one per participant), drawing materials, markers, basket or box, projector or tablet (to show the animation), printed “Circle of Inclusion” chart (from the Toolkit).

## Opening Activity – “In My Shoes” Game

Prepare a small set of cards or slips of paper with different child profiles (e.g., “I’m new to the school and I don’t speak the language well,” “I wear different clothes for my religion,” “I eat different food at home,” “I use a wheelchair,” “My parents are from another country”).

Each child picks a card and is asked to “walk in that child’s shoes” for a few minutes. They are invited to imagine:

- “How would I feel if others didn’t understand me?”
- “What could someone do to make me feel welcome?”
- The group shares ideas aloud or draws a simple gesture of inclusion they could do.

**Stimulus** – Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation + Guided Questions

## Main Activity – “We All Belong” Paper Chain People

Each child receives a blank paper cut-out of a person. They decorate it to represent themselves — with their skin tone, favourite clothes, a flag from their heritage, or something special about them (like a book, food, or music).

Then, as a class, link all the paper people into a big chain.

Ask:

- “What makes your person special?”
- “What happens when we link everyone together?”
- Display the chain with a big banner: We All Belong Here.

**Alternative:** Use puzzle pieces instead of cut-outs — each child designs one piece that fits into the community puzzle.

## Reflection Circle – “Inclusion Starts with Me”

Children sit in a circle. Each child completes the sentence:

- “One way I can include someone is...”
- Write down their answers on a big poster. This becomes their collective “Inclusion Charter.”
- Encourage concrete actions like “ask them to play,” “learn their name,” “draw with them,” “help translate.”

# Session 8

## “Girls, Boys, and Everyone’s Voice” – Gender Equality and Democratic Participation

### Theme:

Children explore what it means to treat everyone equally, regardless of whether they are a girl or a boy. They reflect on how all voices—no matter the gender—should be heard and valued in decisions made at school, at home, and in their community.

### Learning Objectives:

Children will begin to identify unfair situations where boys and girls are treated differently.

They will understand that everyone, regardless of gender, can have good ideas, take on responsibilities, and participate in decisions.

They will learn simple ways to promote fairness and inclusion in daily life.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

### Materials Needed:

- Story cards showing boys and girls in different situations, stickers or small tokens, large paper labelled “Our Class Council,” printed emotion faces, crayons and scissors.

### Opening Activity – “Who Can...?” Game

Start with an interactive movement game. Ask questions and invite children to step forward if they agree:

- “Who can be a scientist?”
- “Who can be a great cook?”
- “Who can be a leader?”
- “Who can take care of babies?”

When the children see that everyone steps forward, open a short discussion: “Can both boys and girls do these things? Why do some people think only one gender can?”

**Stimulus** – Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation

## Main Activity – “Our Class Council” Simulation

Set up a mini “Class Council” where children pretend to vote on something simple (e.g., what game to play, where to go for a class trip).

Assign roles—leader, note-taker, time-keeper, speaker—for both boys and girls, rotating roles.

Before voting, ask:

- “Did everyone get to share their opinion?”
- “Was anyone not listened to?”
- Use this to highlight how everyone’s voice matters.
- Children can then create a paper badge: “I Speak Up for Fairness.”

**Alternative:** Use puppet characters or stuffed animals with different “opinions” and have children mediate a decision using fair turns and inclusive language.

## Reflection Circle – “Fair Means Everyone”

Sit in a circle and ask children to finish one of the sentences:

“I feel strong when I...”

“One thing I’m good at is...”

“A time I helped make something fair was when...”

This builds self-confidence and connects their personal strengths to the theme of equality.

# Session 9

## “I Can Make a Difference!” – Active Citizenship

### Theme:

Children discover that they are already citizens — not in the future, but right now. This session explores how their everyday choices, ideas, and actions matter in their school, neighbourhood, and community. Through storytelling and playful action, they learn that being a citizen means helping others, taking care of shared spaces, and speaking up for fairness.

### Learning Objectives:

Children will understand that they are part of a community and that their actions can help or hurt it. They will identify small but meaningful ways they can contribute to their school and neighbourhood. They will feel empowered to speak up, share ideas, and take action when something feels unfair or unkind.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

**Materials Needed:**

Large paper, markers, stickers, recycled materials (optional), character cards, emoji cards, a large printed “community map” of the school or neighbourhood.

Opening Activity – “Little Citizens, Big Actions” Brainstorm

Ask children:

- “Have you ever helped someone in class?”
- “Have you picked up trash in the playground?”
- “Have you reminded someone to be kind?”
- As children raise their hands, write their examples on a large sheet titled: “Things Kids Can Do for the Community.”
- Explain that every one of these actions is citizenship — not something for grown-ups only.

**Stimulus** - Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation

**Main Activity – “Our Community Map” Creation**

Unroll a large paper map of the school, neighbourhood, or draw it together on the board.

Ask children to place symbols or drawings on the map showing:

- Places they love
- Places that need help
- Places where they can do something good
- They can use stickers, draw little figures, or write kind actions (e.g., “help a friend,” “plant flowers,” “ask for a bin”).

Optionally, children can form pairs and role-play being “kid reporters” who discover where their help is needed and what they can do.

**Reflection Circle – “I Can...” Sharing Time**

Pass around a soft ball or object and ask each child to finish a sentence:

- “One thing I can do for my school is...”
- “One thing I would change in my town is...”
- Encourage positive action and curiosity. Even shy children can contribute with gestures or pointing to a picture they drew.

# Session 10

## “We Belong in Democracy!” – The Role of Children and Young People in Democratic Processes

### Theme:

This final session empowers children to see themselves not just as future citizens, but as current participants in democratic life. Through playful inquiry, creative thinking, and collective dreaming, children are encouraged to understand that they have the right to be heard, the power to express their ideas, and the ability to make change happen—starting right where they are.

### Learning Objectives:

Children will understand that their opinions and voices matter in a democratic society. They will explore how children can participate in decisions in their school, family, and community. They will reflect on how listening, voting, sharing ideas, and showing care are all democratic actions. They will experience a sense of belonging and responsibility in group life.

**Session Duration:** 60–90 minutes

### Materials Needed:

Drawing paper, coloured pencils/markers, stickers, cardboard for a “Children’s Charter,” the animated film (if available), and a talking stick or “democracy microphone.”

### Opening Activity – “Where Do We Have a Say?” Brain Map

On a large poster or board, write the question:

“Where can children make decisions?”

Invite children to call out or write places they’ve had a say (e.g., at home, in class, with friends, on a team). Group their ideas into themes: family, school, friends, community.

Explain that democracy means people having a say—and children are people, too!

**Stimulus** – Short Film + Guided Questions

### **Main Activity – “Let’s Write Our Charter!”**

Children work in small groups to draft a Children’s Charter for Our Class — a list of rights, responsibilities, and actions that reflect their democratic role.

Facilitators can guide with questions:

- “What should every child be allowed to do in our class?”
- “How do we want to be listened to?”
- “How do we care for others?”
- Each group contributes 2–3 statements, and then the class votes on the top 5–7 to write onto a large cardboard charter. Decorate it with drawings and symbols. Display it in the classroom.

### **Reflection Circle – “My Voice, My Power”**

Using a decorated stick, soft ball, or “democracy microphone,” each child is invited to say:

- “One thing I want to say more often is...”
- “One way I can help my class be more fair is...”
- Children can speak, gesture, or draw. The focus is on building confidence and the habit of speaking up respectfully.

# Democratic Talks – Evaluation & Feedback Templates

## 1) Emoji Sheet

instruction: Ask children to circle the face that best represents how they felt during the session. Optionally, they can add a sentence or a small drawing to explain why.

How did this session make you feel?

■Happy	■Okay	■Confused	■Sad
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## 2) Sticker Poster Layout

Instruction: Children place a coloured sticker next to each statement

Statement	Green (Yes)	Yellow (Not sure)	Red (No)
I understood today's session.			
I felt included.			
I liked the activity.			

## 3) Drawing Reflection Page

Prompt: Draw what you remember most or how you felt during the session.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 4) Verbal Reflection Guide

Instructions: Use an object or a 'talking stick' to guide turn-taking. Prompts may include: • Today I learned... • I felt... • A part I liked was... Ensure everyone has space to contribute, but participation is always voluntary.

5) Facilitator Observation Form

To be filled after each session.

	<b>Session Theme:</b>	
	<b>Date:</b>	
	<b>Facilitator Name:</b>	
	<b>Location/Class:</b>	
	<b>Children's Engagement (low/medium/high):</b>	
	<b>Were learning objectives met? (yes/no/partially):</b>	
	<b>Group Dynamics Observed:</b>	
	<b>Emotions or comments expressed by children:</b>	
	<b>Challenges or adaptations needed:</b>	

# **Supporting Materials SECTION 2 (Ages 11–16)**



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# Session 1: What Does Democracy Really Mean?

## Thematic Focus:

Exploring democracy not as a textbook definition, but as a lived and shared experience — in school, at home, online, and in society.

## Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

Reflect on how democracy shapes (or fails to shape) their daily lives.

Recognize that democracy is a practice of dialogue, rights, and responsibilities.

Understand that democracy is not static — it can be defended, challenged, or improved.

## Materials Needed:

Projector or laptop with speakers (to show a short video or animation clip)

Printed “Democracy Moments” scenario cards

A3 paper, coloured pens, markers, masking tape

“Democracy Barometer” poster (you can draw this in advance)

### 1. Opening Challenge – “Democracy? Prove it.” (15 min)

Start by splitting the class into small groups. Ask them to list 5 signs that democracy exists in their daily lives. Then challenge them to list 5 signs that democracy may be missing or at risk.

Groups present one item from each list. This warm-up encourages young people to interrogate their environment critically, rather than passively accept the word “democracy” as a given.

Facilitator prompt:

“If democracy is more than voting, where do we actually see it — or not — in everyday life?”

### 2. Stimulus – Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation (10 min)

### 3. Main Activity – Democracy Reality Map (30 min)

Each group receives cards describing situations such as:

A class votes on which charity to support.

A school rule is made without student input.

A student council is elected, but decisions are ignored.

Online users challenge misinformation in a respectful debate.

They place these on a large Democracy Reality Map, with axes labelled:

More democratic ← → Less democratic

Empowering ← → Disempowering

# Session 2: Life Before Democratic Transition

## Thematic Focus

Understanding what life was like under authoritarian regimes and how everyday freedoms were restricted before democratic transitions in different countries.

## Learning Outcomes

Participants will:

- Grasp the contrast between democratic and authoritarian societies through historical and emotional lenses.
- Develop empathy by exploring lived experiences of restriction, censorship, and fear.
- Recognize that democracy is not a given, but often the result of collective struggle.

## Materials Required

- Printed excerpts from the Ties of Freedom storytelling booklet (or testimonies prepared as role cards).
- A quiet space and comfortable seating (circle, chairs or floor).
- Chart paper and markers.
- Optional: audio recording of one testimony or project clip.

### 1. Opening Provocation – “Could You Speak Freely?” (10 min)

Write the following on the board:

“What would change in your life if speaking your opinion was dangerous?”

Let students reflect quietly, then open a short discussion. What would it mean to not be able to

criticise a teacher, a politician, or post on social media? This simple question activates imagination and personal relevance, setting the tone for deeper exploration.

### 2. Stimulus - Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation + discussion (15 min)

### 3. Main Activity – “Before & After” Wall (30 min)

Groups receive a set of scenarios (e.g., “going to school,” “starting a protest,” “using social media,” “writing a song”) and are asked to compare how each situation would play out:

- Before democratic transition
- After democratic transition

They draw two sides of a wall, one grey and one colourful, illustrating the difference between restriction and expression. They then present their drawings to the class, explaining their choices.

This allows them to translate abstract contrasts into concrete, creative outputs.

#### 4. Creative Reflection – “Freedom in One Object” (10 min)

Each student is asked to invent or describe one object that represents freedom to them — it could be a phone, a key, a megaphone, a pair of shoes.

They sketch it and write 2–3 lines explaining their choice. These are pinned up to create a “Gallery of Freedom.”

This promotes symbolic thinking and helps consolidate learning through metaphor.

## Session 3: The Transition Process

### Thematic Focus:

From Dictatorship to Democracy – How Change Happens.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Understand what a democratic transition is and how it unfolds in different contexts
- Explore the roles played by ordinary people, youth, and communities in driving political change
- Reflect on the risks, hopes, and complexities involved in moving from authoritarian rule to democracy.

### Materials Needed:

Projector or tablet for screening the animation clip, printed story from the Toolkit booklet, large paper sheets, markers, post-its, and coloured pens.

### 1. Opening Challenge – “Moments of Change”

Begin by placing four signs in the room corners marked: Before, During, After, and Now.

Read aloud this prompt:

“Think of a time something big changed—at school, in your family, or in your country. Go to the corner that represents the moment you find most important.”

Let them move and share briefly in pairs or small groups: What made that moment meaningful? Who helped make the change happen? This introduces the idea of transition as a process, not a single event.

### 2. Stimulus – Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation (10 min)

### 3. Main Activity – “Transition Timeline” Simulation

Divide participants into small groups and give each a large sheet titled “Our Country’s Transition.” Assign roles or let them choose: citizens, students, artists, journalists, workers, etc. Each group creates a fictional timeline of how a country transitions to democracy over 10 key moments. They must decide:

- What triggers the change?
- Who leads it?
- What happens in schools, streets, newspapers?
- What resistance might occur?

They use drawings, symbols, and short texts to create a visual story. Emphasise that transitions are not linear or perfect, and allow different versions to emerge. After 25–30 minutes, groups present their transition timelines and discuss:

- What were the hardest choices in your scenario?
- Where did hope come from?
- Could young people have done something?

#### 4. Closing reflection

Ask each participant to write a short monologue (2–3 sentences) from the point of view of someone living through the transition:

“My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

During the transition, I felt \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

I believed that \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Session 4: EU Democratic Values

### Thematic Focus

Unpacking the key democratic values of the European Union and reflecting on how these values shape the rights and responsibilities of EU citizens—especially young people.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, students will:

- Identify and explain the core values of the EU (e.g. dignity, democracy, rule of law, equality, human rights).
- Connect EU values to their own experiences and local realities.
- Explore the meaning of being a democratic citizen in a shared European space.

### Materials Required

- Printed value cards with simplified EU value definitions.
- Blank “Value Map” handouts.
- Projector or screen to show a short film clip.
- Paper, markers, sticky notes, coloured dots.

### 1. Opening Activity – “Which Value Matters Most?” (10 min)

Display the following EU values (simplified):

- Human dignity
- Freedom
- Democracy
- Equality
- Rule of law
- Human rights

Ask students to place a sticky dot or mark on the one they feel is most important.

Facilitators then invite quick reactions:

“Why did you choose that value?”

“Are there any you think are missing?”

This creates an initial emotional connection and shows diversity of opinions.

## **2. Stimulus - Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation**

### **3. Main Activity – “EU Values Map” (30 min)**

Divide the class into small groups. Each group receives a “Value Map” worksheet with the 6 core EU values in the centre. Their task is to brainstorm examples of where that value shows up in daily life — in school, in their town, on social media, etc.

Example:

- Equality → “Our school has a ramp for wheelchair users”
- Freedom → “We can start a petition if we want to change something”

They then present their group map to the class. This participatory activity translates abstract concepts into visible, relatable actions.

### **4. Creative Extension – “Design a Value Poster” (15 min)**

Each group chooses one EU value and creates a poster that promotes it among their peers.

This could include a slogan, an image, or a scenario.

Posters can be displayed in school or shared digitally.

This task invites visual literacy and civic imagination, and helps internalise the values creatively.

### **5. Reflection Circle – “Values in My Life” (10 min)**

Facilitators ask:

“Which EU value do you see in your life most often?”

“Which one is sometimes missing in your community?”

Students can respond verbally or write it on a card to be read anonymously.

## **Session 5: Challenges to Democracy**

### **Thematic Focus:**

Recognising threats to democratic life and understanding how democratic systems can be weakened — or protected — by citizen action.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Identify key internal and external threats to democracy (e.g. misinformation, exclusion, corruption).

- Recognise warning signs of democratic backsliding and authoritarian tendencies.
- Discuss their own role in preserving democratic values and practices in everyday contexts.

### **Materials Required**

- Projector or laptop (to play an animation segment or visual story)
- Printed “democracy challenge cards” (each describing a different situation)
- Sticky notes, poster paper, and markers
- A large printed outline of a democracy “tree” (roots, trunk, branches)

### **1. Opening Activity – “What Would You Do?”**

Begin with a short set of real-life or fictional dilemmas read aloud by the facilitator. For example:

- A student is punished for expressing their opinion in a school debate.
- A news channel is shut down for criticising a government.
- A group is excluded from voting because of their religion or ethnicity.

Ask students to move to a corner of the room based on their reaction: "This is unfair", "This depends", or "This is acceptable". After each, ask a few to explain why. This warm-up quickly introduces participants to situations where democracy is threatened, and surfaces initial reflections.

### **2. Stimulus Segment – Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation.**

### **3. Main Participatory Activity – The “Democracy Tree” Challenge**

Draw or display a large tree on a poster with visible roots (values), trunk (institutions), and branches (freedoms and rights).

Distribute challenge cards to small groups, each describing a different threat to democracy (e.g., “fake news spreads online,” “a group is not allowed to vote,” “politicians take bribes”).

Each group must decide:

1. What part of the tree is affected (roots, trunk, branches)?
2. How serious is the challenge?
3. What action can protect or strengthen that part of the tree?

Groups share their analyses and suggestions. The facilitator collects their answers on post-its and attaches them to the tree, building a collective map of democratic vulnerability and resilience.

### **4. Closing Reflection – “Defenders of Democracy” Circle**

Form a discussion circle. Ask each student to complete the sentence:

“One way I can protect democracy in my life is by...”

Encourage varied responses: speaking up against injustice, checking sources before sharing news, listening to different views, voting (when old enough), etc.

The aim is to help young people see that defending democracy isn't abstract—it's a series of everyday civic choices.

## Session 6: Europe as a Place of Diversity

### Thematic Focus:

Exploring cultural, linguistic, religious, and social diversity in Europe, and how diversity is protected and celebrated within democratic systems.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Understand the concept of diversity as a European value.
- Recognise how democratic systems protect cultural and individual differences.
- Reflect on inclusion, representation, and their own experiences of diversity in everyday life.

### Materials Required

- Large European map (physical or digital)
- Stickers or coloured pins
- Profiles of young Europeans from different backgrounds (printed or digital)
- Paper, pens, printed templates of the "Belonging Passport"

### 1. Opening Activity – “Where Are We From?”

Display a large map of Europe and ask each participant to place a sticker or pin to represent:

- Where they or their family come from.
- Places they've visited or want to visit in Europe.

Use this moment to show how each person in the room already reflects European diversity. Briefly discuss how movement, migration, and multiple identities are part of Europe's story.

### 2. Stimulus from the Clip of the project

Read aloud a short profile of a young person from the Ties of Freedom booklet who has a multicultural identity (e.g., a Roma teen advocating for education rights, or a second-generation immigrant sharing what “home” means). Alternatively, use a film segment that portrays a diverse school or community.

Prompt questions:

- What challenges does this young person face?
- How are they included or excluded?
- What role does democracy play in ensuring they are heard?

### 3. Main Participatory Activity – “Belonging Passport”

Give each student a blank passport template with prompts such as:

- My name is...
- I speak these languages...
- I feel at home when...
- A tradition or value that’s important to me is...
- A time I felt included / excluded was...

After filling them in, invite students to exchange their “passports” in small groups, reading one another’s and asking respectful questions. This exercise encourages personal reflection, connection, and empathy.

Facilitators can then guide a discussion on how schools, communities, and governments can create spaces where everyone feels they belong.

### 4. Closing Reflection – “Diversity Is...”

Give students a slip of paper to finish the sentence:

“For me, diversity means...”

Then display them anonymously on a wall or board, creating a visual tapestry of definitions.

End with a brief group reflection:

- What did we learn from each other?
- Why does democracy need diversity?
- What can I do to make my space more inclusive?

## Session 7: Multiculturalism and Inclusion

### Thematic Focus:

Understanding multiculturalism as a feature of modern democratic societies and exploring the challenges and opportunities of building inclusive communities.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Define multiculturalism and distinguish it from simple diversity.
- Reflect on the value of inclusive practices in democratic life.
- Identify ways they can act inclusively within their own schools, peer groups, and communities.

### Materials Required

- “Inclusion Cards” (scenarios of inclusive/exclusive behaviours)
- Flipchart or board
- Markers, post-its, printed “Inclusion Tree” template
- Stories from the Ties of Freedom booklet

### **1. Opening Activity – “What’s on My Street?”**

Facilitator asks: “Imagine walking down your street or through your town—what kinds of languages, foods, clothes, traditions, or people do you see?”

Invite a quick brainstorm where each participant adds something to a shared board or sheet. This helps surface the real diversity in their local environment and sets the stage to talk about how people live together with different backgrounds, identities, and beliefs.

### **2. Stimulus Segment – Film**

#### **3. Main Participatory Activity – “Inclusion Cards” and the “Inclusion Tree”**

Divide the group into small teams. Give each team a set of Inclusion Cards—these describe short scenarios (e.g., a student being mocked for their accent; a friend translating for a newcomer; a classroom celebrating multiple holidays).

Each group classifies the cards as:

- Inclusive
- Exclusive
- Needs discussion

Groups discuss why they placed each card where they did, then report back. This creates space for disagreement, negotiation, and moral reasoning.

Next, introduce the Inclusion Tree:

- Roots: What values support inclusion? (e.g., empathy, respect)
- Trunk: What actions uphold it? (e.g., listening, standing up for others)
- Leaves: What does inclusion look like around us? (e.g., diverse teams, bilingual signs)

Each group fills in a version of the tree and shares it with the class.

#### **4. Closing Reflection – “How I Can Include”**

Students write down one concrete action they can take in the next week to make someone feel included—at school, online, in their community. These are placed anonymously into a shared “Action Box” that stays in the room as a reminder of small commitments toward bigger change.

## **Session 8: Gender Equality and Participation**

### **Thematic Focus:**

Exploring how gender shapes access to rights, representation, and participation in democratic life.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of the session, students will:

- Understand how gender norms can influence civic participation.
- Recognize historical and ongoing inequalities in representation and leadership.
- Reflect on how to promote more inclusive participation in their own environments.

**Materials Required:**

Projector or tablet for film clip, printed quote/image cards, flipchart, markers, A4 paper, stickers (optional).

**1. Opening Activity (10 min):**

Display a series of illustrated cards showing different civic scenarios (e.g., a parliament, a protest, a school council, a family decision).

Ask: “Who do you imagine in this picture?” and note answers. Then ask: “Are there more boys or girls? Why?” This introduces the concept of implicit bias in representation.

**2. Stimulus Segment (10 min):**

Show a short excerpt from the Ties of Freedom animation or read a passage from the storytelling booklet.

**3. Main Participatory Activity (40 min):**

“Parliament of Equals” Role-Play Simulation

Divide the class into small groups, each representing a mini civic council tasked with making a community decision (e.g., building a youth centre, planning a school event). In each group, assign secret roles with constraints (e.g., one participant may be told “your ideas are often ignored because you’re the only girl in the group,” or “you’re interrupted often when you speak”).

After the role-play, debrief: “How did it feel to speak? To be heard or ignored? What made it easier or harder to participate?”

Use this moment to connect with real-world data (e.g., women make up only 33% of EU parliament members; source: European Parliament, 2024). Alternative activity if time is limited: Create a poster campaign titled “Participation Means Everyone” where students design slogans or visuals to promote gender equality in civic life.

**4. Closing Reflection (10 min):**

Ask students to write down or share in a circle:

- One thing they learned
- One thing that surprised them
- One thing they want to change in their school or community regarding inclusion

# Session 9: Active Citizenship

## **Thematic Focus:**

Understanding the meaning of active citizenship and discovering ways young people can make a difference in their communities and beyond.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this session, students will:

- Understand the concept of active citizenship as participation beyond voting.
- Identify local or school-based issues they care about.
- Develop ideas for small-scale civic actions they can take as individuals or groups.

## **Materials Required:**

Paper, markers, post-it notes, printed community issue cards (optional), projector or tablet for video clip.

### **1. Opening Activity (10 min):**

Present a provocative question on the board:

“Do you need to be 18 to change the world?”

Invite students to stand on a continuum line (agree/disagree) and explain their position. This opens a dialogue on agency, voice, and youth participation.

### **2. Stimulus Segment (10 min):**

Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom film or read a story from the booklet highlighting a young person who made a difference during a democratic transition—perhaps by organising a peaceful protest, starting a school club, or raising awareness.

Ask: “What did this person do? What made their action powerful?”

Follow with brief input on real-life examples of youth activism (e.g., climate marches, anti-bullying campaigns, digital petitions).

### **3. Main Participatory Activity (40 min):**

“Action Circles” – Design Your Micro-Change Project

Students form small groups and brainstorm things they would like to improve in their school, community, or online spaces (e.g., more student voice, safer school, more inclusive events).

Each group selects one issue and creates a mini-action plan using the prompt:

- What is the problem?
- What is one small thing we can do to help?
- Who can support us?
- When and how can we start?

Facilitators support with examples (e.g., poster campaign, dialogue with school leaders, online awareness challenge). Groups may present their idea with a poster or a “pitch” to the class. Alternative or parallel task: Create a “Citizen’s Backpack” drawing what tools, values, and skills a good citizen needs to carry with them (e.g., listening, courage, kindness, facts, teamwork).

### **1. Closing Reflection (10 min):**

Ask:

“What surprised you about today?”

“What is one way you already act like a citizen?”

Students can reflect verbally or in writing. Encourage journaling or drawing their “first step” as a citizen.

## Session 10: The Role of Children and Young People in Democratic Processes

### **Thematic Focus:**

Exploring how children and adolescents can meaningfully participate in shaping democratic life, both now and in the future.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Recognise that children and young people have rights to participate in civic life, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12).
- Understand examples of youth involvement in democratic processes, such as school councils, activism, consultations, and social media engagement.
- Identify personal opportunities to engage, influence, and contribute to decisions that affect them.

### **Materials Required:**

Projector or tablet, post-its, markers, large paper sheets, access to film/story clip, printed timeline or role cards (optional).

### **1. Opening Activity (10–15 min):**

Begin with the question: “Who gets to decide?” Write it in the centre of a large sheet or digital board. Invite students to brainstorm:

- Who makes decisions at school?
- Who decides what happens in your community?
- When have you ever been asked your opinion?
- Map their answers around the central question, then transition to:
- “What if young people were included in these decisions?”

**2. Stimulus Segment (10 min):** Show a clip from the Ties of Freedom animation

**3. Main Participatory Activity (40 min):**

Option A: “Our Voices Matter” – Create a Youth Participation Charter

Divide the group into small teams. Each creates a mini “Charter” of how children and young people should be included in decisions in school, community, or online spaces.

**Prompts:**

- Where do we want our voices heard?
- What kind of participation feels meaningful?
- What commitments do we ask from adults?
- Charters can be illustrated, presented verbally, or symbolically (e.g., handprints, slogans, role-plays).

Option B: “Power Map” – Who Has a Say?

In pairs, students draw a map of power: Who makes decisions in their lives (teachers, parents, mayors, social media, peers)? Then, identify:

- Where do we have influence already?
- Where would we like to have more say?
- End by drawing an “action arrow” from a current space to a future opportunity (e.g., from student to school council rep, from reader to youth blogger).

**4. Closing Reflection (10 min):**

In a quiet circle or in writing, invite students to finish the sentence:

“I can participate in democracy by...”

Encourage diverse responses, from “signing a petition” to “speaking up in class” or “helping make fair rules in my team.”

Reinforce that democracy is lived every day, in big and small acts of voice, care, and responsibility.

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# Ties of Freedom



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