

# Activities for acquiring civics knowledge



The following activities suggest ways for students to explore aspects of civics knowledge. Student-led and directed, they are designed for use in senior classes, with minimal input from teachers but able to be adapted for other uses, for example:

- as part of a careers and transition programme preparing senior students for life beyond school
- for exploring civics within a broader social studies programme that has been developed from the achievement objectives in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

# Living in a democracy

## Trigger warning

This set of activities includes a link to a news article and video about Wellington students protesting about rape culture and sexual abuse. Teachers and students are advised to use their discretion when watching and sharing this video. A trigger warning should be provided before its use, along with permission for students not to engage with this part of the activity.

Aotearoa New Zealand's system of government is a democracy, which means that:

- the power of decision making lies with the people
- the decisions Parliament makes are open to public scrutiny
- Parliament is accountable to the public.

In a healthy democracy, citizens of all ages play an active part in politics and civic life. These activities will support you to explore the ways individuals and communities can engage with central and local government to bring about change.

- 1 Watch this short video about [how a democracy works](#). Note that the video is heavily gendered, but it does provide a useful overview of the history of the democratic system.

The House of Representatives (Parliament) is comprised of people and parties who represent you, your whānau, and your wider community. Who chooses these representatives? People who vote, which is why taking part in elections is a really important way to influence the decisions that parliament makes.

General elections only happen every three years. Although you might not be old enough to vote in the next one, the good news is that there are many other ways you can make your voice heard and influence decisions that impact on society, as well as voting once you are eligible to do so.

- 2 Watch this NZ Parliament video on [how to have your say](#) on the decisions Parliament makes.
- 3 Watch this NZ Parliament video on [how select committees work](#), and this follow-up video, which provides information about the [select committee submission process](#).

- 4 A petition is a document presented to the House of Representatives and signed by at least one person. A petition might ask the House to act on a public policy or law or to address a local or private issue. You can submit a petition to Parliament at any age. Watch this video to learn [how to submit a petition](#).

- 5 Find out how to start a [campaign on an issue you care about](#). Check out the existing campaigns on the [ActionStation](#) website – use the tabs on the left to search for an area of interest such as animal rights, honouring te Tiriti, a flourishing planet, and more.

- 6 Living in a democracy means you have the right to express your opinions, including protesting about decisions that Parliament has made or is planning to make. These rights have some limitations so find out [how to exercise your right to protest](#), for example, what you need to consider if you are planning a demonstration. This Stuff news video shows [students in Wellington protesting about rape culture](#) – there are plenty of other student-organised protest stories online, so take a look and see what you can find.

- 7 Join the [Student Volunteer Army \(SVA\)](#) – you can log your volunteer hours or work as a team to design a school volunteer day.

- 8 These [rangatahi from Tāmaki Makaurau](#) are using online platforms to 'flip the narrative' on rangatahi community engagement and civics participation. Check out the site's [resources](#) for some ideas to help you and your friends get involved in a project you care about.

# Understanding local and regional government

People can engage with the democratic decision-making process at a local level through local and regional government. These activities will support you to explore the functions and services of local and regional councils and the ways you can get involved in decisions that affect your community.

- 1 Use this [local government poster](#) to brainstorm the types of everyday activities and services that councils perform. Check out the website of your [local council](#) to identify other functions and services.

People of any age can:

- let their council know what they think about an issue it is consulting on
- request information from the council on a relevant topic
- attend council meetings
- volunteer for boards, committees, and community events
- run for council.

Once you turn 18, you can vote in local body elections. You can [enrol to vote online](#).

## Local and regional: What's the difference?

**Local councils** provide and maintain services such as roads, waterpipes, sewerage, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, recreation services, local regulations, town planning, developing a vibrant community, and keeping the local economy alive.

**Regional councils** manage the wider environment, for example, a regional council might be responsible for flood control, air and water quality, pest control, regional (as opposed to local) parks, bulk water supply, and, in some regions, public transport networks.

Local and regional councils have a legal responsibility to take into account the relationship Māori have with their ancestral lands, water, wāhi tapu, sites, flora and fauna, and other taonga<sup>1</sup>.

This means that councils need to actively engage with hapū and iwi authorities that exercise kaitiakitanga (guardianship) within their rohe (tribal area) when they are making a decision involving land or a body of water.



- 2 Explore the iwi authorities and hapū that have an interest in your district or region using the [directory on the Te Puni Kōkiri website](#). Use the links provided to:
  - identify the rohe (tribal area) that the mana of an iwi in your district extends over (note that there are often more one in each district)
  - find the website of a representative organisation for the iwi. You can do this by clicking on the Representative Organisation tab and scrolling down to find the organisation's web address
  - use the organisation's website to explore ways that an iwi in your district or region is engaging in local decision-making.
- 3 Learn about some of Aotearoa New Zealand's youngest councillors such as:
  - Tamatha Paul
  - Josh Trlin
  - Teri O'Neill
  - Logan Soole
  - Sophie Handford
  - Fisher Wong.

Find out what motivated them to stand for council and research the path they took to become politicians.

<sup>1</sup> [Te Tari Taiwhenua Internal Affairs Māori participation in local government](#).



# Understanding MMP

Living in a democracy means that everyone who is 18 and older can influence who represents them in Parliament. These activities will support you to explore New Zealand's Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system.

- 1** Watch this [Electoral Commission](#) video to find out how MMP works.
- 2** This [Kaupapa on the Couch video](#) explains the history of the Māori electoral seats.
- 3** Check out the parties that make up the [120 seats of the House of Representatives](#). You can find out what electorate you are in on the [Electoral Commission's website](#).

Discuss the following questions with a partner:

- Which electorate are you in? Who is your local MP? (If you're not sure, you can find out [here](#).)
  - Why is it useful to have two votes in a general election?
  - What is the difference between a list MP and a local representative?
  - Why might someone vote for a local representative from one party in their electoral vote but give their party vote to a different party?
  - Is one of the two votes more influential than the other? Explain your answer.
- 4** Many people think that the voting age should be lowered to 16. Investigate arguments for and against this idea.



# Knowing your rights

The protection of human rights is an important part of democracy. These activities will support you to explore your rights as a young person.

- 1** Watch this [Youth Law 101](#) video, which explains your legal rights.
- 2** Explore the [Youth Law 101: Rights Education Toolkit](#). Consider working together to deliver a workshop for junior students at your school that covers one or more of the following:
  - United Nations Youth Rights
  - discrimination
  - talking respectfully to the police
  - your rights in a police search
  - ways that lawyers can support young people.
- 3** Read more about [your rights as a young person](#), including those outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the rights guaranteed by te Tiriti o Waitangi.



# Media literacy: Critiquing sources of information

Media is a means of communication that reaches or influences a large number of people. Access to reliable information is essential to maintaining a healthy democracy. These activities will support you to explore aspects of media literacy.

Being media literate involves knowing how to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media. These activities focus on analysing and evaluating sources of media.

- 1 Watch the BBC video: [Why 'fake news' is actually good news](#). Identify examples of the role journalism plays in modern society and its relationship with power.

Discuss the following questions with a partner:

- Why is access to reliable information important for society?
- What factors limit or enhance people's access to reliable information?
- What influence can news reporting (reliable or unreliable) have in a community or a country?
- What news sources do you trust? What ones don't you trust? Why?



Te Ara Encyclopedia's [media and politics webpage](#) describes the relationship between democracy and freedom of the press, including shifts in the relationship between the government and the media in Aotearoa New Zealand and the protections that journalists have under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

- 2 Play the role of a journalist covering a breaking news story with this [BBC iReporter game](#). Compare your results with a partner.
- 3 Use this ABC news (Australia) interactive to [explore the differences between fact, opinion, and analysis](#). Test your ability to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information and draw conclusions about the accuracy of information and the purpose of articles.

[Key questions to ask about news stories](#) include:

- Who made this?
- Why was it made?
- What is missing from this message?
- Who might benefit from this message?
- Who might be harmed by this message?

- 4 Use this [Source Checker interactive](#) to explore the:
  - range of sources journalists use in a news report
  - strengths and weaknesses of these resources in relation to a story's context and their value in helping an audience understand an issue.
- 5 Listen to [UK journalist Carole Cadwalladr's TED Talk](#) about the role Facebook played in Brexit by hosting misleading information.
- 6 Watch this ABC video: [When you are the story](#) to learn about the way media coverage of a news story can impact people personally. Discuss the safety mechanisms that exist, or should exist, to protect people whose life stories make the news.

# Understanding systems of power

## Trigger warning

This set of activities includes a link to an NZ History webpage that includes a video about students in Wellington protesting about rape culture. Teachers and students are advised to use their discretion when watching and sharing this webpage and video. A trigger warning should be provided before its use, along with permission for students not to engage with this part of the activity.

Every day, you move through systems of power that other people have created. These activities will support you to explore the systems of power that affect your lives as citizens and the ways you can become more powerful as a citizen.

### 1 With a partner:

- define what power is
- give examples of visible and invisible forms of power
- explain why some people have more power than others
- identify the ways power can be used.

Share your ideas with another pair.

### 2 Watch the video [How to understand power](#).

Note that this video depicts an individualistic viewpoint. You could discuss whether it is an accurate depiction of how power operates in our society and around the world.

The sources of power outlined in the video are:

- physical force
- wealth
- state action
- social norms
- ideas
- numbers.

In a group, identify an example of each source (or a combination of sources), using current events (local, national, or global) or your general knowledge of Aotearoa New Zealand. If time is limited, choose several sources of power and then share your findings with other groups.

### 3 Watch the video [Greta Thunberg is leading a global climate movement](#).

Discuss the following questions in groups:

- How did Greta Thunberg's individual action become a movement?
- Why is this movement effective?
- What sources of power does the student climate crisis movement draw on? Give evidence to support your answer.

Examples of students in Aotearoa New Zealand creating change include:

- [Mia Faiumu – organiser of protest about rape culture](#)
- Aigagalefili Fepulea'i-Tapua'i – winner of the 2019 New Zealand Storytellers High School Public Speaking Contest with her speech [Waiting for Water](#)
- the Ōtorohanga students who campaigned for the [teaching of Aotearoa New Zealand history in schools](#).



# Creating a community vision



The following activity is based on an exercise from [Citizen University](#). It will support you and your classmates to explore your vision for your community.

As a class, watch the video: [How to turn protest into powerful change](#).

Then work in groups to brainstorm a vision for your community 20 years in the future.

- What changes would you like to see? What can you imagine for your community that might 'expand the frame of the possible'?

Identify the ways you could activate change by engaging with:

- systems of government
- the marketplace
- communities of faith
- media, including social media
- social institutions.

Discuss the skills you would need to:

- negotiate
- advocate
- frame your message
- navigate diversity and conflict
- overcome resistance to your ideas.

As a group, share your ideas with the class. Discuss the ways you could turn your ideas into collective action.



Published 2020 by Cognition Education for the New Zealand  
Ministry of Education.

[www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz)

All text and images copyright © Crown 2020,  
except for the following photographs:  
cover copyright © Stuff/Dominion Post; page 8 copyright © Image  
#mychillybin102325\_493 by gprentice © Graham Prentice.

All rights reserved.

Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-77669-882-0 (online PDF)