My Parliamentary Scrap Book

Stacey Sanderson
What is an election?
We live in a democratic country, which means that we can all have a say in how the country is run. The United Kingdom is divided into 650 different areas, called constituencies. The people who live in each area choose a Member of Parliament (MP) to represent their views in the House of Commons. This usually happens at a general election. There are also elections for other institutions, such as local councils and the European Parliament.

How does voting work?
People vote for things all the time from local government elections and family decisions to TV programmes like The X Factor. In a general election voting is voluntary. You must be aged 18 or over and a British, Irish or Commonwealth citizen to vote.

Each voter gets one vote, which they give to one of the candidates standing for Parliament in their local constituency. Voting takes place by secret ballot (in private) in school halls and other public buildings across the UK.

The candidate with the most votes becomes the local MP.

Constituency
The UK is divided into 650 different areas, called constituencies, where the public elect candidates to be their MP.

General election
A general election is when the electors of the country cast their votes to elect Members of Parliament (MPs).

Prime Minister
The Prime Minister is the leader of the government.

Did you know?
The United Kingdom has three main political parties – Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats – and a number of other smaller parties and independent candidates. The Prime Minister is usually the leader of the political party that wins the most seats at a general election and he or she forms the government.
First School Council meeting

The School Council elections are on at the moment. We all get to vote for who we want to be on it. Everybody should vote for me, obviously, as I reckon I'm the best candidate this school has ever seen. I'm going to try and make life so much better for everyone if they do, just like my MP does for his constituents.

Do you have an excellent school council? Do you want to shout out loud about it?

Why not enter the Speaker's School Council Award, which recognises the achievements of school councils? Have a look at www.parliament.uk/schoolcouncilawards to see our winning schools from 2010 and details of how you can apply for next year's awards.

My Student Council election campaign to-do list:

* Make and give out posters and leaflets
* Get my photo in the school paper
* Talk to other people at school and persuade them to vote for me
* Write my nomination speech

My election campaign manifesto:

Vote for me! If I am elected to the School Council I believe I could do loads of things to change school for the better and make a positive difference for us all. I will get us RESPECT by getting our voice heard and making the school listen to what we want from it, including stopping bullying, improving recycling, and getting tastier, healthier food in the canteen. Pick me, it'll be great!

I would like to campaign on the following issues:

1. More time for clubs, sports and activities and more choice
2. Better equipment and facilities for our school
3. Free public transport for all students in full-time education
4. Raised awareness of health and environmental issues (no-fried-food day; swap shop)

October

I WON!
We watched TV in class today. It was the State Opening of Parliament, which is in Westminster in London. We found out that Parliament is split up into three parts: the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch. The State Opening is the only time when all three parts hang out together and it only happens once a year.

The monarch arrives in a horse-drawn coach to perform the State Opening.

The three parts of Parliament

1. **The House of Commons**
   This is based in the Palace of Westminster in London. It is where all the Members of Parliament spend a lot of their time working and debating. It is made up of 650 elected MPs.

2. **The House of Lords**
   This is also based in the Palace of Westminster in London. It has about 740 members, known as peers, who aren’t elected like MPs but are picked for the job by the Prime Minister or the Appointments Commission and appointed by the Queen.

3. **The monarch**
   The monarch is our current King or Queen. The monarch opens Parliament every year and asks the winning party in a general election to become the government. The monarch also officially agrees to all the laws that Parliament votes for.
So what IS Parliament?

I was quite confused before class today; I asked my friend Whitney what the difference was between Parliament and government. She thought they were the same thing. It turns out they’re not, and not every Member of Parliament is in the government...

The government is led by the Prime Minister. It is in charge of managing the country and deciding how our taxes are spent. It is the job of everyone in Parliament to check what the government is doing and to make sure they are doing a good job.

What does Parliament do?
• It spends half of the time deciding on the rules of the country by making and passing laws to deal with our constantly changing society.
• It collects money from taxpayers, which the government uses to carry out its work: all government money comes from us when we pay taxes like income tax and VAT. This is spent on things like schools, hospitals, emergency services, the legal system and the armed forces.
• It checks (scrutinises) that the government is doing its job properly by MPs and Members of the House of Lords asking awkward questions and forming committees to keep an eye on what it is doing.
• Debating: MPs meet up and discuss the major issues of the day.

What government does
• The government manages the country.
• It is made up of about 100 MPs and Members of the House of Lords.
• They usually belong to the same political party as the Prime Minister or the two political parties which have formed a coalition government.

Activities
In class, discuss the main political parties, their current leaders and who the Prime Minister is. What are the different departments within government and which do you think are the most important?

Each week (Wednesdays), MPs question the Prime Minister on his policies and work. What would you ask him?

Use UK Parliament’s website to find out who your MP is and how you can contact him or her: www.parliament.uk/about/how/members/mps_contact.cfm
January

Meet Bill

Acts of Parliament are laws of the land that affect us all. For example, laws determine at what age people can drive cars or vote in elections. A proposed new law is called a Bill, but it can only become the law of the land once it has completed a number of stages in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and has been agreed to by the monarch. This can take a long time, up to one year.

Funny Christmas laws

In the 1650s the Puritan ruler Oliver Cromwell banned Christmas pudding, mince pies and anything to do with gluttony, so eating mince pies on Christmas Day was illegal. He also banned Christmas celebrations because he thought they were immoral. But don’t worry, the next Parliament wasn’t full of party poopers and repealed all of Cromwell’s laws.

How are laws made?

Today, in class, Mr Bright told us we were going to find out how laws were made. We have to track an imaginary Bill through all the stages at Parliament until it becomes a law. We voted for this law: FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR UNDER 16s ACROSS THE UK. I wish that this was a real law. If it was passed I wouldn’t have to pay for the bus to get into town every Saturday.
MAKING LAWS: HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

1. READY?
A Bill can start in the House of Lords or House of Commons. Most ideas for new laws come from the government.

2. GET SET!
When a Bill starts in the House of Commons it is announced to MPs who then discuss it. If they agree with the Bill, MPs then go through the Bill line by line to make sure it will work.

3. GO!
The changes are announced and all MPs can vote for or against the Bill.

4. HOUSE OF LORDS
Next it must go through a similar process in the House of Lords.

5. ROYAL ASSENT
Finally, if most of the MPs and Lords agree, the Bill is sent to the monarch for Royal Assent.

Activity

The new year is a time to consider your life and the things that you would like to change about yourself and the world around you. You may want to get fit, join a club or learn to play a musical instrument. Create a new year’s resolution for yourself and write down the pros and cons of sticking to it.
I interviewed my MP for the school magazine last week. Here’s the article:

An MP visits our school

By Stacey Sanderson

What do politicians do all day? Our MP Terry Tonkinson visited the school last week, and told us all about his job.

SS: Do you like your job?
TT: Yes, I do.

SS: What is an MP?
TT: The people in my constituency elected me to Parliament to represent their local area. Local people can email, phone or meet me to discuss their issues and concerns, either local or national.

SS: Do you spend a lot of time in London?
TT: Yes, a fair bit. MPs split their time between working in Parliament itself, working in the constituency that elected them, and working for their political party. Some MPs from the ruling party become government ministers with specific responsibilities in certain areas, such as health or defence.

When Parliament is sitting (meeting), MPs generally spend their time working in the House of Commons. This can include raising issues affecting their constituents, attending debates and voting on new laws. Most MPs are also members of committees, which look at issues in detail, from government policy and new laws, to wider topics like human rights.

SS: Is that when we see you arguing on TV?
TT: (Laughs) Yes, I guess it is. Not all MPs have the same opinions on things, just like you and your friends may disagree on who the best football teams or bands are. We have to weigh up the pros and cons of each issue and then take a vote on it.
SS: In their constituencies, MPs often hold a ‘surgery’ in their office, are they doctors?

TT: It isn’t that kind of surgery, people don’t go there for prescriptions or physical examinations; instead it is where local people can come along to discuss any matters that concern them. In their constituency MPs also visit schools and businesses and generally try to meet as many people as possible to gain a better understanding of the issues they may discuss when they return to Westminster.

SS: All that must keep you pretty busy?

TT: Yes, but it is a very interesting job. I’d recommend it.

Activity: Who is my MP?

You can find out who your MP is via the Find Your MP service at: http://findyourmp.parliament.uk

Find out more about the work of an MP by playing the ‘MP for a week’ game on our website at: www.parliament.uk/education
I can’t believe it’s March already!!! We went on a school trip to Westminster today. They gave us a tour of Parliament, and we got to see the House of Commons and met a Life Peer called Lord Ovdadance, who works in the House of Lords.

The UK Parliament is made up of three parts – the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch (the King or Queen).

The Palace of Westminster is another name for the Parliament buildings because Kings and Queens used to live here. The last monarch to do this was King Henry VIII.

For more information about Parliament and the services we offer to young people and schools, go to www.parliament.uk/education or telephone 020 7219 4496.

Name: Lord Ovdadance  
Current role: Life Peer  
Who made you a Lord? There are three types of Members: Life Peers, Hereditary Peers (who can no longer pass on their seat) and Bishops. Life Peers are chosen by the Prime Minister or the Appointments Commission because of our skills and expertise. We work in the House of Lords. Like MPs, peers also make and debate laws, check on the work of the government and make up specialist committees investigating work relating to Europe, science and technology, economics, and communications.

Interesting fact: I have lost my voice on two occasions through debating heatedly and loudly in the House of Lords.
It’s Easter time, so there won’t be any school for a couple of weeks – and it’s my birthday in three days 😊 My family are going on a camping holiday...

Did you know?
In 1958 the Life Peerages Act changed the way the House of Lords operated. It introduced peers appointed for their lifetime, rather than inheriting the position from their dad and allowed women to join the House of Lords for the first time.

What some other Lords had to say:
Lord Adebowale
“We can’t have the final say – we don’t have that power, only the elected chamber has that power – but we can revise law, and we can make law – we can suggest laws.”

Baroness Williams of Crosby
“Often what the House of Lords has to do is go through the absolute detail, little by little, of the bills that come up to it.”

Baroness D’Souza
“The Lords has a very large amount of expertise in very many different fields. Whether it be in science, or medicine, or in law, or the arts, or architecture, or prison, or child-studies, there are people who are at the absolute top of their profession.”

Easter holidays
* * Yay! * *

Here’s where we’re camping
Good: No chores.
Bad: Sharing a tent (Dad snores).

Did you know?
UK Parliament has given away some of its powers so that people who live in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland get to have more of a say about what happens in their own countries. The bodies that have these powers are the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Can you find each of these devolved assemblies on the map?
BOYS! How unfair! I just found out in history class that women weren’t allowed to have a say in how the country was run. They had to fight for the right to vote 90 years ago. Imagine that?! They chained themselves to railings and went on hunger strikes so that I could have my vote today. That’s commitment to a campaign. I wonder what sort of injustices would get me to do something like that...

Missy Stacey May 12 at 19:50
Have you done your homework for history yet? 😏

Jamie D May 12 at 19:53
LOL! Not yet, I really should start it though. We need to research something about how to run a campaign as well don’t we? Are you writing about winning the School Council election?

Missy Stacey May 12 at 20:00
Nah. We have to do it on the Votes for Women campaign. I’m looking stuff up online now... it’s pretty interesting. I’ll send you some links in a bit if you want.

Jamie D May 12 at 20:03
Thanks! 😊
Background

- In the UK women had to fight for their right to be able to vote in general elections and be represented in Parliament. They campaigned, mostly peacefully, from the middle of the 19th century to obtain the right to vote.

- They organised themselves into groups, held meetings, sent petitions to Parliament and tried to persuade MPs to change the law to enable them to vote. These non-militant women were known as ‘suffragists’.

- In 1897 all these small groups came together to form one large group: The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Fawcett.

- Suffragettes was the name given to the more militant members of the women’s suffrage movement.

The votes for women campaign

These are some of the ways that the suffragettes tried to get Parliament to listen to them:

- Presenting petitions to Parliament
- Hunger strikes while held in prison
- Chaining themselves to areas in and around Parliament
- Setting fire to the empty homes owned by anti-suffrage MPs
- Smashing shop windows
- Disrupting speakers in the House of Commons.

Changing the law

In 1918 the Representation of the People Act allowed women over 30 the right to vote. It took another decade to abolish the age qualification and put men and women on an equal footing.

EMMELINE PANKHURST
(1858-1928)

Emmeline Pankhurst was brought up in a politically active family. She became involved in women’s suffrage in 1886 and formed the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) when her local branch of the Independent Labour Party refused to accept women members. She believed winning the vote would never be achieved by constitutional means. In 1907 she gave up her job to run the WSPU full time. She was imprisoned on a number of occasions and went on hunger strike protests. Emmeline Pankhurst died in June 1928 one month before the Equal Franchise Act became law.

EMILY WILDING DAVISON
(1872-1913)

Emily Wilding Davison joined the WSPU in 1906. She was an active member and a chief steward at the ‘monster’ demonstration in Hyde Park in June 1908. A regular protestor at Parliament, she was imprisoned in 1910 for breaking windows in the House of Commons. On several occasions she gained illegal entry to the building including an overnight stay on census night 1911, when she hid in a cupboard so she could give her address as the ‘House of Commons’ on the census form. She became a martyr to the cause of women’s votes when she was fatally injured in the 1913 Epsom Derby. She ran onto the track in support of the women’s right to vote campaign and was hit by the King’s horse.
Debating our idea for a new law

Mr Bright says that we’re going to do a bit more on the new law idea that we chose in December... the one about making public transport free for under 16s.

Today we’re going to have our own mock reading and debate about the Bill. I’m in the group that’s going to argue in favour of it, which means I’m going to have to come up with lots of reasons why it’s a good idea and be prepared to answer questions from other people about the law and how it will be paid for.

For

Why free public transport for under 16s is a good idea:

Travelling on public transport is better for the environment than travelling by car. Many young people have no income. Making it free for under 16s to travel on buses, trams, tubes, water ferries and trains means that you are encouraging greener behaviour and cutting pollution and congestion. It will also help to change the attitude of future generations.

Against

Why free public transport for under 16s is a bad idea:

If public transport is made free for under 16s, more people will want to use buses etc. and they will become really crowded. There won’t ever be enough seats, so we’ll have to stand or wait ages for the next bus or train.

Activity

Why don’t you stage your own mock debate about a new Bill in your class? Are you For or Against the new law? Split into two groups and write speeches. Nominate your speaker and hold a debate. After the speeches have been given, take a class vote on whether to pass or fail the law.
Campaigning

Summer’s almost here! We were set an end of term project in school today. We have to create a campaign to get more clean water in developing countries using all the knowledge and skills we’ve picked up through the year.

According to the charity UNICEF:

“Over 884 million people still use unsafe drinking water sources. Inadequate access to safe water and sanitation services, coupled with poor hygiene practices, kills and sickens thousands of children every day.”

Campaign to-do list:

1. Make posters and run a poster campaign in school – Ask my tutor for permission first.
2. Send emails to my MP about why I think clean water is important, and see if he can help raise the issue in Parliament.
3. Write a petition and get other students and Lord Ovdadance (who we met when we visited Parliament) to sign it.
4. Get some information leaflets about my issue (and maybe pin badges, pens and other free stuff!) from a relevant charity or make them myself.
5. Set up a cause page (http://exchange.causes.com) on a social networking site like Facebook or MySpace or use my status update on my profile in Bebo and Twitter to tell all my friends about my campaign. Make a campaign video using my phone or equipment from the media department and put it on YouTube and embed on a social networking cause page.
6. Set up a campaign stall at school with banners. Talk to people and give out the leaflets and badges.
7. Get the school magazine to run a feature or news story about the issue.
8. Write and record a song like they do for Comic Relief. It helps to spread the message in a catchy way and we could sell the CD to raise more money.
**Bill:** A Bill is a proposal for a new law, or a proposal to change an existing law, that is presented for debate before Parliament.

**Cabinet:** The Cabinet is made up of about 22 senior ministers chosen by the Prime Minister. It decides on government policy and co-ordinates the work of the different government departments.

**Clock Tower (Big Ben):** The Clock Tower is the famous tower of the Houses of Parliament and contains the bell nicknamed Big Ben.

**Committee:** Much of the work of the House of Commons and the House of Lords takes place in Committees, made up of around 10–50 MPs or Lords. For example, select committees which scrutinise the work of government departments, such as the Defence Committee which examines the spending, administration and policy of the Ministry of Defence.

**Debate:** A debate is a formal discussion on a topic in the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Members take it in turns to speak on the subject concerned and the debate is strictly controlled by a set of rules. Debates are reported in the Official Report (Hansard).

**Devolution:** Devolution is the decentralisation of government power. The most recent examples of devolution are the setting up of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

**General election:** A general election is when the electors of the country cast their votes to elect Members of Parliament. The Parliament Act 1911 set the maximum life of a Parliament, that is the time between general elections, as five years.

**Government:** The government runs the country and is formed by the Prime Minister, who is usually the leader of the party that gains the most seats in the House of Commons at a general election.

**Manifesto:** A document that outlines what the party will do if they win the election and their leader is asked to become Prime Minister.

**MP (Member of Parliament):** The person who is elected by a group of people within a particular constituency (area) to represent them in the House of Commons.

**Opposition:** Members who are not in the governing party. They sit on benches opposite the government in the House of Commons and House of Lords Chambers.
Order, order: ‘Order, order’ are the words that the Speaker calls out to regain control during a debate in the House of Commons.

Parliament: The British Parliament is made up of three parts – the Crown, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Parliament is where new laws are debated and agreed.

Peer (Member of the House of Lords): A peer is a Member of the House of Lords. Most people in the House of Lords are Life Peers, which means they have been appointed for their lifetime. There are a small number of hereditary peers, but they can no longer pass on their position in the House to their son or daughter.

Ping-pong: Ping-pong refers to the to and fro of amendments to Bills between the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Prime Minister: The Prime Minister is the leader of the government. He or she is usually the leader of the party that wins the most seats at a general election. The Prime Minister chooses the other members of the government and has a residence and offices at 10 Downing Street. He or she is also an MP.

Royal Assent: Royal Assent is the monarch’s agreement to make a Bill into an Act of Parliament.

Activity

Do you want to find out more about what is happening in Parliament? Take a look at the UK Parliament website and catch up on the news. The website also features online guides and information about the work of Parliament, online tours, interactive classroom resources and games: www.parliament.uk

You can also watch videos about the work of Parliament and interviews with MPs, Lords and the Speaker of the House of Commons here: www.youtube.com/UKParliament