

RIGHTS-WHAT DO YOU KNOW?



We all talk about our rights and knowing about our rights, but do you know where those rights actually come from? Who represents our interests? How are our rights safeguarded from abuse? Read the following story and then either on your own, or in small groups, answer the questions.

A Perfect Place?

You have been thrust forward in time. In this advanced age there is no government. Technology is king.

Laws are embedded in computer chips in 'smart rings'. Rub the ring and a hologram displays, telling citizens how to behave in every situation. Break a law and your 'smart necklace' records the details and transmits them to a central computer.

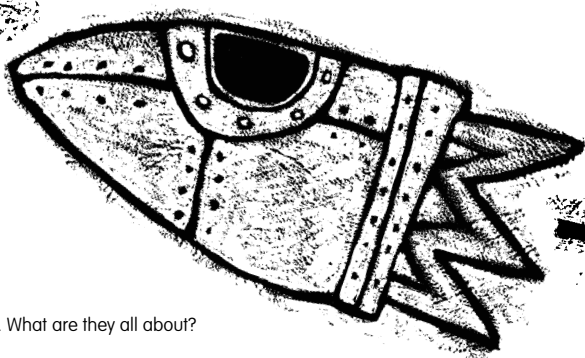
Punishment is immediate and harsh. The most important law is, 'You must not remove ring or necklace'.

You don't like this at all. For one thing, you are the only one who is not fitted with a smart ring and necklace. You're not sure if this is good or bad, but so far, so good.

You have met some people your age in the Intellicaf. They have found a way to remove their necklace and ring without being detected. This means that they are free at last to discuss their political system and work to create a more democratic society.

You come with knowledge of a more just time – called 'the golden age'. You sit with these people in the darkened silence of a secret dugout. Joey, one of the youngest in the group, asks two simple questions, but the questions bring a puzzled look to everyone's face.

Task 1: What are laws anyway? Can you explain what laws are in a way that these people will understand?



Task 2: Who makes the laws where you come from? Who enforces the law where you come from?

As the minutes pass you think 'How I wish I had paid more attention in class. Oh well, I can only share with these people what I know. They are very interested...'

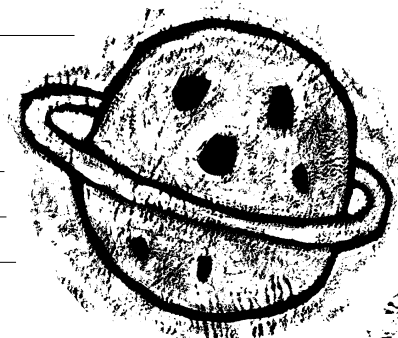
As time passes, the discussion soon comes around to 'P' words like Parliament and politician.

'Parliament sounds like an important place. We use the word Parliament to describe the Univox Computer Centre. That's the place where they make these rings and necklaces. But your Parliament has people in it. Wow! How do they get to be members of Parliament?'

Task 3: Can you explain to the group how people become members of Parliament?

'So that's a tough job, being the people's representative. But how do they know what the people want?'

Task 4: What are the main influences that affect the decisions made in Parliament?





Simone has been sitting very quietly through the entire discussion.

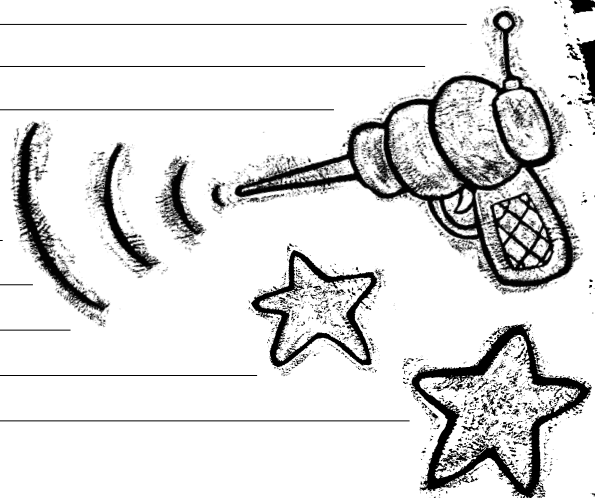
“This all sounds fantastic,” she says, “but how do you know it’s real? I mean, Univox makes holograms about political processes, and we all watch them, but some of us think they are all computer-generated images, and that a computer is actually in control of the whole planet. How does your Parliament and system of government work?”

“Well,” you draw breath and hope you can remember it all. In Australia, there are three levels of government – local, state and federal. The Federal Government is the most powerful, has the most money, and affects the most people, but our State Government is easier to visit. Our State Government has over 100 Parliamentarians. Some have actually come to our school. What does State Government do? I think I remember...

Task 5: Outline the main responsibilities of State Governments.

‘Amazing’, says Simone, getting more interested. ‘But what happens to the decisions made in the State Government? How do they get carried out? I mean, it’s all very well to make a law saying education is compulsory, but who is responsible for building all the schools and checking on all the kids? Maybe you could take one of these necklaces back. Would that help?’

Task 6: You decline the invitation but explain how you think the decisions made in Parliament get carried out.



Geoff butts in, 'but this place you're talking about, Australia you call it? An island isolated in the southern hemisphere. I think we call it Amboolia. Did this system of government – did you call it democracy? – only operate in Australia or did other countries have it as well?'

'Oh heck', you think. 'I've got this far all right, now they want me to explain the big 'D' word. What was that saying – "government of the people, by the people and for the people?" Here goes...'

Task 7: What are the most important features of a democracy?

Just as you finish off this part of the explanation there is an urgent beeping noise in the room. 'Quick', said Geoff. 'It's the people from Univox. They're on to us.' As everyone in the room scrambles for their rings and necklaces, I disappear when Jewelene zaps me with a ray gun.

Now you're back home, with your head on your desk and the radio going. Was that a dream, or is your homework a nightmare?

Just when you were starting to feel you knew something, too.

You see your parents in the kitchen. 'You know that State election next week?', you say. 'Who did you say is standing in our electorate...?'

