

## The Biggest Singing & Dancing Celebrity Island – Teachers’ Notes

The Proportional Representation vote counting method will be used to elect members to the Upper House for the first time at the 2006 Victorian State election 2006. Similar to the Federal Senate ballot papers, the Upper House ballot paper will be large, providing voters with the option of voting above the line (for parties/groups) or below the line (for individual candidates).

If you vote above the line (for a party/group), you must put a number 1 in only one box.

If you vote below the line, you must number at least five boxes for the candidates you prefer, numbering them from 1 – 5 in order of your preference.

This animation explains the basic principals of proportional representation. It allows students and teachers alike to gain a basic understanding of the method before launching into complex examples.

### What is proportional representation?

Proportional representation is a system of counting votes designed to elect multiple candidates at once. It aims to ensure that the candidates who are elected are the ones with the highest level of support amongst the voters. It is used in Victoria for the State Upper House (Legislative Council) and for local councils in unsubdivided municipalities and multi-councillor wards.

Each of the three scenarios in the animation introduces different aspects of proportional representation.

With Audience A, we can see these aspects of proportional representation:

1. Candidates must receive a **quota** of votes to be elected. The quota is calculated using a formula to find the smallest number that guarantees that *the people elected have more votes than any of the non-elected candidates*. The quota changes depending on the number of voters.

In this case, there are 24 voters, so the number is 7. If the number were 6, then it would be possible for four candidates to all have the quota and then there would not be three clear winners. And we can stop counting at 21 (3 times the quota) because the remaining three votes are not enough to elect another candidate, even if they all have the same preferences.

2. Candidates are elected in proportion to their support. Roughly a third of the audience preferred each of the three successful celebrities.

3. Most votes count towards the election of a candidate. Even though the audience was divided in their support, the votes from almost all of the audience members counted towards the selection of one of the celebrities.

With Audience B, we can see:

1. If a candidate has more votes than the quota, the preferences of the voters who selected that candidate continue to count towards other candidates. However, the votes are only distributed to the other candidates **at the value of the surplus votes**.
2. These transferred votes can make a big impact on who is successful. Lucinda Diamondo was the most preferred celebrity of only one audience member, but she was the second most preferred by many others, and that counted towards her being successful. Note that Rick O'Shea had more first preferences than Lucinda, but did not receive any transferred votes from the successful celebrities.

With Audience C, we can see:

1. After the first preferences are counted and the surplus votes are transferred, votes are redistributed **from unsuccessful candidates**.
2. So second and later preferences continue to affect the outcome **both** if your first preference is elected **and** if he or she isn't.

Some systems of vote counting do not transfer surplus votes or transfer votes from unsuccessful candidates. They just count who is the most preferred candidate based on first preferences. That can make a big difference to the outcome. For example, in Audience B, Rick O'Shea would be elected instead of Lucinda Diamondo. This difference is a useful point for class discussion – does the class think this is fair and why or why not?