



Minorities in a Democracy—Alternate Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Discuss the importance of diversity in any democratic society.
- Reflect on the relationships between language and culture and language and learning.
- Explore the tensions between national cohesion and the cultural identity of minority groups.
- Examine how democracies with different national histories respond to similar problems with different solutions.
- Explore the influence of history on the specific balance of values and legal protections in different democratic societies.
- Analyze the reasons supporting and opposing government funding of elementary education for children of minority groups in their own language.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement with other students.
- Decide, individually and as a group, whether the government should fund elementary education for children of minority groups in their own language; support decisions based on evidence and sound reasoning.
- Reflect on the value of deliberation when deciding issues in a democracy.

Question for Deliberation

Should our democracy fund elementary education of students from minority communities in their own languages?

Materials

- Lesson Procedures
- Handout 1—Deliberation Guide
- Handout 2—Deliberation Worksheet
- Handout 3—Student Reflection on Deliberation
- Alternate Reading (*a short, easy-to-read discussion script*)
- Selected Resources
- Deliberation Question with Arguments (*optional—use if students have difficulty extracting the arguments or time is limited*)



Minorities in a Democracy—Alternate Reading

Deliberation Question: *Should our democracy fund elementary education of students from minority communities in their own languages?*

1 Students in Ms. Navarro’s class have done a reading about this deliberation question. They have
2 read and analyzed the text, identifying arguments on both sides. Now, working in small groups,
3 they are preparing to discuss the question.

4 **Let’s “listen in” on one group’s discussion.**

5 **Carlos:** I think it would be a good idea to start by having each of us say what we thought was the
6 strongest argument we read. Would you agree with that idea?

7 **(Other students nod.)**

8 **Carlos:** Okay, I’ll start. I don’t think our democracy should fund elementary education in
9 students’ native language. The strongest argument I read was that learning a language is
10 easier the younger a person is. Thus, teaching young kids from minority groups in their own
11 language means delaying learning the national language, in our case English. And delay
12 could mean that the students never really become fluent in English. As a result, they could
13 end up as second-class citizens.

14 **Nick:** The strongest reason I read was that language should be a tool for learning. In elementary
15 school, students need to learn some basic skills. They will be better able to learn those basic
16 skills in the language they already know. Thus, offering education in the native language of
17 minority groups can help everyone get off to a good start in school.

18 **Ceal:** I agree that’s a very strong argument. However, I will add another point. Offering
19 language instruction in young kids’ native language makes school seem welcoming. Kids

20 will be happy to go to school instead of scared. If you like school, you're more likely to
21 continue going to school and to be successful.

22 **Keisha:** I'm going to agree with Carlos and say that our democracy should not fund elementary
23 education in minority groups' native languages. The best reason I read had to do with the
24 cost. Schools are hurting for money right now. Providing classes in native languages will be
25 taking money from other programs. All students need to learn the main language spoken
26 here anyway. So why waste money teaching in a language that students need to move away
27 from anyway?

28 **Ceal:** I don't think it's fair to say students need to move away from their native languages.
29 Language is an important part of who you are. Like that quote at the beginning of the
30 reading said, "Language is about power." That quote is from Roly Sussex, an Australian
31 language professor, who also said "You have to be in a minority situation to appreciate what
32 it means to have a language of your own, and what it means when someone threatens to take
33 away your right to use it when and where you please." Students from minority groups
34 should be able to retain their heritage. Learning in their own language helps them do that.
35 And that diversity adds to our nation's cultural richness.

36 **Keisha:** I agree that keeping your native language alive is a good thing. I overstated.

37 **Carlos:** So maybe we can agree that people have the right to keep their native language alive
38 and our democracy should encourage that—but not necessarily by teaching classes in the
39 native language.

40 **(Everyone nods.)**

41 **Nick:** Let's talk about the cost issue. Maybe funding education in the language of minority
42 students is a good investment. According to the reading, students from many minority

43 groups drop out of school at higher rates than students from the majority group. Dropouts
44 don't contribute much to the economy. They get in trouble with the law. Basically, they are
45 a cost to society. So making an investment that would keep kids in school will pay off in the
46 end.

47 **Carlos:** That's a good point. But I feel like the funding crisis today is so bad that we have to be
48 really positive everything we invest in works. Is elementary education in the native language
49 the most effective way to keep kids in school? Or are there other, cheaper programs that also
50 work?

51 **Ceal:** That's a good question, Carlos. I don't think there's anything in the reading that provides
52 actual data about the effectiveness of elementary education in the native language. If we
53 have time, maybe we could do some research on this.

54 **(Everyone nods again.)**

55 **Keisha:** Let's go back and refocus on the deliberation question: *Should our democracy fund the*
56 *elementary education of students from minority communities in their own languages?* Does
57 it bother anyone that providing instruction in the native language of minority communities
58 would create segregation? It reminds me of "separate but equal." As we know from U.S.
59 history, majority communities have the power and end up getting the most resources and the
60 best teachers. I don't think we should be setting up a system where students from minority
61 groups will be getting a second-class education under the guise of helping them. Will they
62 end up as an isolated, second-class community? I know the reading said that some nations,
63 like Azerbaijan and Estonia, have different schools for students who speak a language
64 different from most people in the country. I don't want that for our country.

65 **Ceal:** I think the arguments about minority language groups living in isolation are exaggerated.
66 Students from minority communities have a lot of motivation to learn the majority
67 language—they know they need it to succeed. We're not talking about offering education in
68 the minority language through high school. We're just talking about the early years—
69 helping them get a good start. After that, the emphasis should definitely be on integration
70 into the larger community.

71 **Carlos:** Keisha's separate but equal argument is powerful. And there's a corollary. School is
72 where students learn their national history and culture. The national language—English for
73 us—is part of this education.

74 **Nick:** That's a good point, Carlos. But we're only talking about the early grades.

75 **Carlos:** Yeah, I get that. But those early grades are where it will be easiest for students to learn
76 the national language.

77 **Keisha:** I'm interested in the dual language model—schools that teach everyone English, but
78 also teach a language of a large minority community. ALL students would learn that second
79 language. Didn't the reading say they do that in Switzerland?

80 **Ceal:** Switzerland, some places in Ireland, the Czech Republic, and even some communities here
81 in the United States. To me, that would be a great model. I wish I had learned another
82 language as a kid. But then we get back to cost. Is there any way that we could deal with the
83 cost issues that a dual language model would involve?

84 **(The group continues talking about costs and the dual language model.)**



Minorities in a Democracy—Selected Resources

- “Basque Language,” The English Centre of International PEN,
<http://www.englishpen.org/writersintranslation/magazineofliteratureintranslat/basquecountry/basquelanguage/>.
- Gorman, Anna and David Pierson. “Not at Home with English,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-language13sep13,0,2795081.story?coll=la-home-center>.
- Kniesmeyer, J. and Daniel Cil. “Epilogue: Democracy and Minority Rights,” *Beyond the Pale: History of the Jews in Russia* (1995, in Russian and English), <http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/index.html>.
- “Moldova schools resist threats,” *BBC News*, Tuesday, 7 September, 2004,
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3631436.stm>.
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<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1999/04/F.RU.990402122750.html>.
- “Official Languages Act,” (1985, c. 31 (4th Supp.)), Canadian Parliament,
<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/O-3.01/>.
- Pachiotto, Carla. “Language Policy, Indigenous Languages and the Village School: A Study of Bilingual Education for the Tarahumara of Northern Mexico,” *Journal of Bilingual Education And Bilingualism*, Vol. 7, No. 6, 2004, pp. 529-548, <http://www.multilingual-matters.net/beb/007/0529/beb0070529.pdf>.
- Sciolino, Elaine. “Calls for a Breakup Grow Ever Louder in Belgium,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2007,
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/21/world/europe/21belgium.html?_r=1&oref=slogin.
- “Switzerland – Educational System—Overview,”
<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1472/Switzerland-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html> (accessed February 2008).
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- “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Article 22, <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.
- Van Parijs, Philippe. “Europe’s Three Language Problems,” prepared for *Multilingualism in Law and Politics*, R. Bellamy, D. Castiglione & C. Longman eds., (c. 2003),
<http://www.law.nyu.edu/clppt/program2003/readings/vanparijs.pdf>.
- “What is an Irish-medium School?” Gaelscoileanna Teo,
http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/index.php?page=contact_details&lang=en.



Minorities in a Democracy—Deliberation Question with Arguments

Deliberation Question

Should our democracy fund the elementary education of students from minority communities in their own languages?

YES—Arguments to Support the Deliberation Question

1. Language should be a tool, not a barrier, for learning. A key goal of elementary education is to teach children the basic skills necessary for academic achievement. Permitting elementary students to learn basic information and concepts in their own language will better prepare them for success in later grades and in the larger society.
2. Language is the most basic vehicle for maintaining cultural identity. Teaching elementary students from minority groups in their own language helps these children to retain their cultural heritage, contributes to students' personal development, and adds to the cultural richness of the nation as a whole.
3. Students succeed academically when they are motivated to excel and when they see school as a welcoming place. Teaching elementary students from minority groups in their own language provides them with a "safe harbor" in which to develop positive attachments to school and increases the chances that they will continue their education.
4. Funding elementary education in the language of minority students is a smart investment. Students from many minority groups drop out of school at higher rates than students from the majority group, often due to feelings of not being accepted. Students who drop out before completing their education contribute less money to the economy and get into more trouble with the law than students who stay in school.
5. Concerns about minority language groups living in isolation from the larger society are overblown. Students from minority groups have every incentive to learn and use the majority language, and most develop the level of fluency they need to survive and succeed. Teaching students in their own languages at an early age will not prevent them from integrating into the larger community as they grow older.



Minorities in a Democracy—Deliberation Question with Arguments

Deliberation Question

Should our democracy fund the elementary education of students from minority communities in their own languages?

NO—Arguments to Oppose the Deliberation Question

1. The desire to educate young children from minority groups in their own language is well-intentioned but misguided. Learning a language is easier the younger a person is. Teaching elementary students from minority groups in their own language delays their proficiency in the national language. As a result, many do not achieve fluency in the national language and, ultimately, become marginalized second-class citizens.
2. Paying to educate elementary students from minority groups in their own language is not a good use of state funds. All citizens must learn the national language, and the sooner that students from minority groups learn how to use the national language, the better they will be.
3. Fluency in the national language will lead to greater acceptance of students from minority language groups and national unity. When young children learn the national language from an early age, everyone—from the majority and from minority groups—grows closer together as friends and fellow citizens. By contrast, teaching minority students in their own language not only isolates them from the larger society, but it also divides the nation.
4. Students learn more in school than just how to read, write, and add. School is where students learn their national history and culture. The national language is an essential part of this education. The place to learn one's personal culture and traditions is the home, not the school.
5. Separate is not equal. Teaching elementary students from minority groups in their own languages will create a dual school system. Because students from minority groups usually have less power than students in the majority language community, students in majority language classes will get more resources, greater attention, and better teachers than students in minority language classes. As a result, students from minority groups will receive a second-class education.



Lesson Procedures

Step One: Introduction

Introduce the lesson and the Student Objectives on the **Lesson Plan**. Distribute and discuss **Handout 1—Deliberation Guide**. Review the Rules of Deliberation and post them in a prominent position in the classroom. Emphasize that the class will deliberate and then debrief the experience.

Step Two: Reading

Distribute a copy of the **Reading** to each student. Have students read the article carefully and underline facts and ideas they think are important and/or interesting (**ideally for homework**).

Step Three: Grouping and Reading Discussion

Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Group members should share important facts and interesting ideas with each other to develop a common understanding of the article. They can record these facts and ideas on **Handout 2—Deliberation Activities** (Review the Reading).

Step Four: Introducing the Deliberation Question

Each **Reading** addresses a Deliberation Question. Read aloud and/or post the Deliberation Question and ask students to write the Deliberation Question in the space provided on **Handout 2**. Remind students of the Rules for Deliberation on **Handout 1**.

Step Five: Learning the Reasons

Divide each group into two teams, Team A and Team B. Explain that each team is responsible for selecting the most compelling reasons for its position, which you will assign. Both teams should reread the **Reading**. Team A will find the most compelling reasons to **support** the Deliberation Question. Team B will find the most compelling reasons to **oppose** the Deliberation Question. To ensure maximum participation, ask everyone on the team to prepare to present at least one reason.

Note: Team A and Team B do not communicate while learning the reasons. If students need help identifying the arguments or time is limited, use the **Deliberation Question with Arguments** handouts. Ask students to identify the most compelling arguments and add any additional ones they may remember from the reading.

Step Six: Presenting the Most Compelling Reasons

Tell students that each team will present the most compelling reasons to **support** or **oppose** the Deliberation Question. In preparation for the next step, Reversing Positions, have each team listen carefully for the most compelling reasons.

- Team A will explain their reasons for **supporting** the Deliberation Question. If Team B does not understand something, they should ask questions but NOT argue.
- Team B will explain their reasons for **opposing** the Deliberation Question. If Team A does not understand something, they should ask questions, but NOT argue.

Note: The teams may not believe in or agree with their reasons but should be as convincing as possible when presenting them to others.

Step Seven: Reversing Positions

Explain that, to demonstrate that each side understands the opposing arguments, each team will select the other team's most compelling reasons.

- Team B will explain to Team A what Team A's **most compelling** reasons were for **supporting** the Deliberation Question.
- Team A will explain to Team B what Team B's **most compelling** reasons were for **opposing** the Deliberation Question.

Step Eight: Deliberating the Question

Explain that students will now drop their roles and deliberate the question as a group. Remind the class of the question. In deliberating, students can (1) use what they have learned about the issue and (2) offer their personal experiences as they formulate opinions regarding the issue.

After deliberating, have students find areas of agreement in their group. Then ask students, as individuals, to express to the group their personal position on the issue and write it down (see My Personal Position on **Handout 2**).

Note: Individual students do **NOT** have to agree with the group.

Step Nine: Debriefing the Deliberation

Reconvene the entire class. Distribute **Handout 3—Student Reflection on Deliberation** as a guide. Ask students to discuss the following questions:

- What were the most compelling reasons for each side?
- What were the areas of agreement?
- What questions do you still have? Where can you get more information?
- What are some reasons why deliberating this issue is important in a democracy?
- What might you or your class do to address this problem? Options include teaching others about what they have learned; writing to elected officials, NGOs, or businesses; and conducting additional research.

Consider having students prepare personal reflections on the Deliberation Question through written, visual, or audio essays. Personal opinions can be posted on the web.

Step Ten: Student Poll/Student Reflection

Ask students: "Do you agree, disagree, or are you still undecided about the Deliberation Question?" Record the responses and have a student post the results on www.deliberating.org under the partnerships and/or the polls. Have students complete **Handout 3**.



Handout 1—Deliberation Guide

What Is Deliberation?

Deliberation (meaningful discussion) is the focused exchange of ideas and the analysis of arguments with the aim of making a decision.

Why Are We Deliberating?

Citizens must be able and willing to express and exchange ideas among themselves, with community leaders, and with their representatives in government. Citizens and public officials in a democracy need skills and opportunities to engage in civil public discussion of controversial issues in order to make informed policy decisions. Deliberation requires keeping an open mind, as this skill enables citizens to reconsider a decision based on new information or changing circumstances.

What Are the Rules for Deliberation?

- Read the material carefully.
- Focus on the deliberation question.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying.
- Check for understanding.
- Analyze what others say.
- Speak and encourage others to speak.
- Refer to the reading to support your ideas.
- Use relevant background knowledge, including life experiences, in a logical way.
- Use your heart and mind to express ideas and opinions.
- Remain engaged and respectful when controversy arises.
- Focus on ideas, not personalities.



Handout 2—Deliberation Activities

Review the Reading

Determine the most important facts and/or interesting ideas and write them below.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Deliberation Question

Learning the Reasons

Reasons to Support the Deliberation Question (Team A)	Reasons to Oppose the Deliberation Question (Team B)

My Personal Position

On a separate sheet of paper, write down reasons to support your opinion. You may suggest another course of action than the policy proposed in the question or add your own ideas to address the underlying problem.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Teacher: _____

Handout 3—Student Reflection on Deliberation

Large Group Discussion: What We Learned

What were the most compelling reasons for each side?

Side A:

Side B:

What were the areas of agreement?

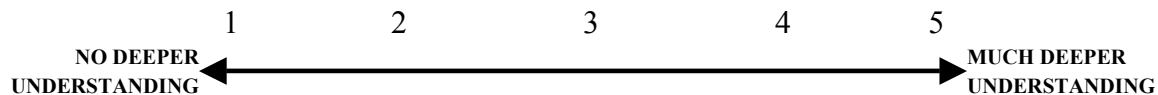
What questions do you still have? Where can you get more information?

What are some reasons why deliberating this issue is important in a democracy?

What might you and/or your class do to address this problem?

Individual Reflection: What I Learned

Which number best describes your understanding of the focus issue? [circle one]



What new insights did you gain?

What did you do well in the deliberation? What do you need to work on to improve your personal deliberation skills?

What did someone else in your group do or say that was particularly helpful? Is there anything the group should work on to improve the group deliberation?