Hypothetical – student election

ONE VOTE, ONE VALUE

Imagine that each class at your year level is allowed to elect one representative to your school's representative student body. There are three classes at your level in the school. Each class will elect one representative.

Class A has 24 students, Class B has 15 students and Class C has 26 students.

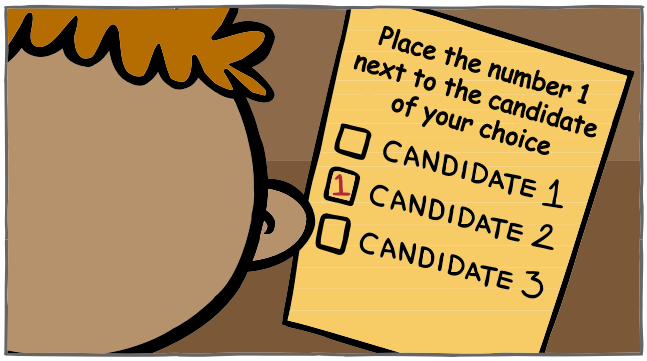
Discuss and record your answers:

> In which class is each student's vote worth the most?
> In which class is each student's vote worth the least?
> How might the school rearrange the vote at your year level to ensure that each student's vote is worth the same?
> Write down a definition of what 'one vote, one value' means.
> Why might this be important when electing representatives?

Imagine that Class A, Class B and Class C each adopt different methods of electing their representatives.

CLASS A: FIRST PAST THE POST AND SECRET BALLOT

There are three students in Class A who want to be elected as the class representative. They use a voting method called first past the post. In this voting system the candidate who gets the most votes is elected. All members of the class are given a ballot paper with each candidate's name on it. They are asked to put number 1 next to the name of the candidate they wish to represent them. They are also given the opportunity to vote privately. That is, there is no opportunity for any other student to see how anyone votes. (This is called a secret ballot.)



The results of the election are:

John	6 votes
Gabriella	7 votes
Huyn	11 votes
Total	**24 votes**

> Which candidate has been elected?

> How many students voted in favour of that candidate? How many students voted against that candidate?

> Does the elected person have the support of an **absolute majority** (more than 50%) of the class?

> Why do you think this is called a **first past the post** method of voting?

CLASS B: HANDS UP AND FIRST PAST THE POST

The students in Class B decide to use a different method. They also have three candidates who wish to represent the class but instead of secret ballot they vote in public by a show of hands. This means that the whole class knows who each individual voted for.

> What are the advantages and disadvantages of this method of voting?

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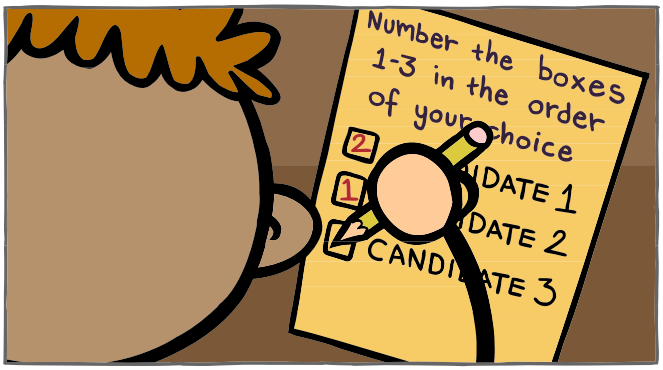
CLASS C: FULL PREFERENTIAL VOTING AND SECRET BALLOT

Class C also has three student candidates for the election but has decided to use another voting method. The aim of the election is to get a class representative who is most preferred by an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the class.

Class C is asked to number the three candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3) on the ballot paper. This is called a full preferential voting system. Class C students are also given the opportunity to vote in private (called a secret ballot).



> How many votes would a candidate in Class C need to get in order to have absolute majority support in the class?

The results of the election are:

First preference count

Susan	8 votes
David	11 votes
Frank	7 votes
Total	**26 votes**

None of the students has received an absolute majority (more than 50% of the formal vote or 14 votes).

As Frank has the fewest votes, he is excluded from the count and, according to the order of the preferences on the ballot papers, his votes are distributed to the other candidates. The candidates who were listed second (numbered 2 on the ballots) receive the votes. Once this distribution of preferences is complete, the totals for the remaining two candidates can be determined. If one voter who originally voted for Frank indicated David as their second preference, then David's tally of votes would increase to 12. If six voters who originally voted for Frank put Susan second, then Susan would receive a total of 14 votes. The final count would look like this:

Final count

Susan 8 votes + 6 votes = 14 votes	
David 11 votes + 1 vote = 12 votes	
Total	**26 votes**

Susan has now received an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the votes. We call her the 'most preferred' candidate and she is elected.

Discussion

> Compare the different results of the elections in Class A (first past the post) and Class C (preferential voting).
> Which class, A, B or C, is represented more fairly?
> How does the voting system used affect the outcome of the election?
> What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these voting systems?
> Is one voting system fairer than the other?

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