INSPIRING DEMOCRACY

STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS & STUDENTS (GRADES 3+)

WHY DEMOCRACY MATTERS

Democracy is more than elections. It's a way of living together that respects each person's dignity, rights, and voice. When we care for each other and make decisions together, we help create a fair and hopeful future for all, including the youngest among us.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Raffi's song "ABC Democracy" invites parents, teachers, and students to explore what democracy means and why it matters. This guide will help educators unpack the song's ideas in a way that connects with children's lives. The goal is to inspire curiosity, participation, and respect for everyone's voice.

KEY GOALS

- **Understand what democracy is and why it's important.**
- **Connect the values of democracy to everyday life.**
- **Encourage students to see themselves as active citizens.**

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CORE DEMOCRACY CONCEPTS

Responsibility

Doing your part to help your family, school, and community.

Freedom

Being able to make choices in your life and speak your mind, without hurting others.

Rights

What needs people have, like going to school, being safe, and being treated fairly.

Inclusion

Everyone feels welcome and can take part.

Diversity

Celebrating the ways people are different—such as culture, language, or abilities, and how those differences make us stronger.

Hope

Believing that things can get better and working toward that.

Community

A group of people who care about and help each other.

Working Together

Joining with others to make changes and solve problems.

Government

The system of rules and the group of people who make them. In a democracy, the voters elect the people who make decisions.

Voting

Choosing by showing what you want—picking a leader or deciding on rules.

Elections

The time when people vote to choose their leaders.

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SONG LYRICS GUIDE

Here are some key phrases from "ABC Democracy" with explanations, examples, and discussion prompts. Teachers can adapt based on students' age and understanding.

Young and old, standing free

• *Meaning*: Democracy includes everyone — not just adults. Even if kids can't vote yet, they benefit from living in a free and fair society.

• *Example*: Students having a say in class rules or school activities.

• *Prompt*: What's one way you've made a decision together in school or at home?

Choosing well, living free

• *Meaning*: In a democracy, we choose our leaders and the laws we live by. Choosing well means thinking about what will help the whole community.

• *Example*: Voting for a class representative who listens to everyone's ideas.

• *Prompt*: What qualities make someone a good leader?

Let freedom ring

• *Meaning*: A phrase made famous by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his "I Have a Dream" speech. It means letting freedom be celebrated and shared with all.

• *Example*: People being able to express their ideas without fear.

• *Prompt*: Why is it important that people feel safe to speak up?

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SONG LYRICS GUIDE (CONTINUED)

Free to be you, free to be me

• *Meaning*: Freedom means being able to live as your true self, while respecting others' right to do the same.

• *Example*: Choosing what you like to wear or what activities you enjoy.

• *Prompt*: How would you feel if you weren't allowed to be yourself?

With our own voice, we make our choice

• *Meaning*: In a democracy, voting is the way people choose leaders and make decisions. Everyone of voting age has one vote — and every vote matters.

• *Example*: Adults voting in elections; kids voting on a class activity.

• *Prompt*: If you could vote for a change in your school, what would it be?

Free to laugh, free to dream

• *Meaning*: Freedom allows people to enjoy life and imagine better possibilities for the future.

• *Example*: Being able to dream of becoming a teacher, scientist, artist, or anything you choose.

• *Prompt*: What's one dream you have for your future?

Alive with hope we all can sing

• *Meaning*: Hope is part of democracy — believing we can work together to make things better.

• *Example*: People joining together to help their community after a storm.

• *Prompt*: What's one thing you'd like to change to make the world better?

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ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

1. Democracy in Action: Hold a class vote on an activity. Discuss how everyone's voice was heard.

2. Freedom Collage: Students create a collage of images and words that show what freedom means to them.

3. Role Play: Practice making a group decision with respectful listening and compromise.

4. Explore Advocacy: Think of a problem or an issue? Who makes the decisions about the issue? Who would you contact to try to make change?

5. Explore Rules: Name the rules that already exist on the playground. How do playground rules reflect "respect, participation, and fairness," which are all key aspects of democracy? Which rules or customs may not reflect these ideals?

6. Link to the UN Rights of the Child: Explore Article 6, every child's right to life, survival, and development, and connect it to democracy.

7. Class Constitution: Ask students to brainstorm rights and responsibilities in the classroom. Write a "constitution" together.

8. Democracy Origins: Explore the history of democracy worldwide, from Ancient Athens to the Iroquois Confederacy to today's post-WW2 democracies.

9. Leaders We Admire: In younger grades, draw or write about a good leader (could be a family member, teacher, or famous figure).

10. Debate And Compromise: Present a low-stakes issue (for example, indoor vs outdoor recess). Have small groups debate, then compromise, modeling respectful disagreement.

11. Community Action Project: Students identify an issue in their school or town (for example, recycling, kindness, playground safety). Plan a small project or advocacy.

12. Art And Music: Create posters, poems or songs that express what democracy means.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (GRADES 3-8)

Canada-Focused

The Charter for Children (Series)

Author: DC Canada Education Publishing

Grades: 3–6

Description: A child-friendly storybook series introducing Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms through fun, fictional tales set across the country.

Canada Votes: How We Elect Our Government

Author: Linda Granfield

Grades: 4–7

Description: A detailed and engaging explanation of Canada's federal election process, voting system, and citizen involvement.

Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation

Author: Monique Gray Smith

Grades: 6–8

Description: A powerful and accessible resource helping students understand truth, reconciliation, and Indigenous rights in a Canadian democratic context.

U.S.-Focused

Grace for President

Author: Kelly DiPucchio

Grades: 3–6

Description: A student-run election inspires discussion about leadership, gender equality, and civic participation in this fun and empowering story.

What Can a Citizen Do?

Author: Dave Eggers

Grades: 6–8

Description: A poetic and imaginative book that illustrates how ordinary people—including kids—can contribute to democracy and community.

Fault Lines in the Constitution

Authors: Cynthia and Sanford Levinson

Grades: 7–8

Description: A critical and accessible examination of the U.S. Constitution's impact on modern life and civic engagement, encouraging debate and inquiry.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (GRADES 3-8)

International & Globally Inclusive

For Every Child

Text: Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Illustrated by: 14 international artists

Grades: 3–6

Description: Each spread presents a child's right, highlighting themes of equity, voice, and global citizenship. A beautifully visual interpretation of the UNCRC.

Peace and Me

Author: Ali Winter, illustrated by Mickael El Fathi

Grades: 3–7

Description: Profiles Nobel Peace Prize winners and their contributions to justice, democracy, and peace, inspiring children to think globally.

Global Citizenship: Engage in the Politics of a Changing World

Author: Julie Knutson

Grades: 6–8

Description: Encourages older students to understand international politics, rights, activism, and the role of youth in shaping the future.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (GRADES 3-8)

Web & Multimedia Resources

iCivics

Website: https://www.icivics.org/

Grades: 4–8

Description: A robust, interactive platform featuring games, simulations, and lessons on U.S. government, laws, and civic life. Great for classrooms and self-paced learning.

UNICEF – UNCRC Child-Friendly Version

Website: https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention

Grades: 4–8

Description: A simplified version of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child designed for young readers. Perfect for introducing rights and democratic participation globally.

Raffi Foundation for Child Honouring

Website: https://www.raffifoundation.org/

Grades: 3–6

Description: Offers music-based and values-based resources for educators that center child rights, sustainability, and peace as civic values.

Teacher Resources

The Kid's Guide to Social Action

Author: Barbara A. Lewis

Grades: 4–8 (student-facing)

Description: A practical and empowering guide that helps young people develop and lead their own change-making projects.

Teaching for Democracy in an Age of Economic Disparity

Author: Cory Wright-Maley

Grades: 3–8 (educator-facing)

Description: Supports educators in connecting democratic values to real-world issues and guiding meaningful civic dialogue in the classroom.

Facing History and Ourselves

Website: http://www.facinghistory.org/

Grades: 6–8

Description: Offers teacher tools and lessons that explore ethical decision-making, history, and civic responsibility across cultures and time periods

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