



EduTrend Contents

P4C · POWER AND LEADERSHIP · HIGH SCHOOL

Who Should Rule?

Plato's ship of state and the case for democracy

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

60 minutes

Circle and pairs · up to
30

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

Who Should Rule?

Students read Plato’s ship of state image from the Republic: sailors argue over who should steer a ship, flattering the owner, while the true navigator is ignored. Plato suggests that ruling needs expert knowledge. Students compare Aristotle’s argument in the Politics that many people together may judge better than a few, and modern arguments for democracy based on equality and consent. They enquire into who should rule.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain Plato’s ship of state;
- compare arguments for democracy;
- evaluate expertise and equality;
- construct a reasoned position.

KEY WORDS

democracy · expertise · Plato · Aristotle · consent · equality

CURRICULUM LINKS

Philosophy: political philosophy.
History: ancient Athens and modern democracy. Citizenship: voting.

1	2	3	4	5	6
STIMULUS	THINK	QUESTION	ENQUIRE	BUILD	REFLECT
Share something to think about	Quiet thinking time	Create and choose a question	Reason together	Agree, disagree, add	Last words

Materials (per class)

- Ship of state card
- Argument cards
- Question and thinking-move cards
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Read the stimulus and note possible concepts.
- Prepare question and thinking-move cards.
- Set out a circle so everyone can see each other.
- Print the worksheets.

SAFETY

Everyone may pass. Discuss ideas, not people, and use the story or invented examples rather than personal situations.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Stay neutral: ask for reasons, examples and counter-examples rather than giving your own view.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Stimulus	Share the ship of state image and counter-arguments.	<i>"What did you notice?"</i>
10–22 min Questions	Students create questions in pairs and vote on one.	<i>"Which question is most interesting to talk about?"</i>
22–52 min Enquiry	Enquire into the chosen question, building on each other's ideas.	<i>"Who should rule?"</i>
52–60 min Last words	Each person says one last thought or passes.	<i>"Has your thinking changed?"</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Defend a view on who should rule.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

Plato's ship of state appears in Book VI of the Republic.

In Book III of the Politics, Aristotle suggests that a group of ordinary people, taken together, may judge better than a few experts.

Common ideas to listen for

- "Plato supported democracy." He criticised it.
- "Democracy means everyone is an expert." It means equal say.
- "Experts are always neutral." They can have interests.

Adapting the activity

Support

Compare Plato and Aristotle.

Stretch

Design a system that uses both experts and citizens.

WORKSHEET 1

Our questions

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

Our questions

Question	Who asked	Votes

WORKSHEET 2

Who should steer?

Compare.

Who should steer?

View	Main argument	Weakness
Plato		
Aristotle		
Modern democracy		

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

**Should experts or everyone make decisions? Before the enquiry I thought...
Now I think... because...**

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Asks a philosophical question	Gives reasons and examples	Listens and builds on others

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Who Should Rule? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Power and Leadership programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

© 2026 EduTrend Contents. This activity may be printed and copied for use with students in your own school, club or home. It may not be resold or published elsewhere. Photos: luthfian alfajr / Unsplash.