**Social Studies Home Learning Activities**

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| **Standard Benchmark**  **Civics 2** | Students will understand that the concept of majority rule does not mean that the rights of minorities may be disregarded and will examine and apply the protections accorded those minorities in the American political system. |
| **Grade Band** | 6-8 |
| **Vocabulary/Key Concepts** | Majority, minority, majority rule, minority rights |

**Focus Questions**:

1. When should the rights of minorities outweigh the will of the majority?
2. How are minorities protected from abuse by a majority?

**Activity**

**Introduction**

Overall, the American people accept the principle of majority rule. Simply explained, majority rule is the idea that decisions should be based on what more than half of the people want. However, we know that a majority – the group with most people - can abuse a minority. For example, a majority of five people in a group of seven could vote to beat-up the two minority persons in the group.

Well aware of the potential danger of majority rule, the American people have come to accept a more sophisticated definition. Our definition suggests that decisions should be based on whatever more than half of the people want, but ***ONLY*** if what the majority wants does not result in harm to a minority, or take away their rights. To ensure that the minority is protected (because we might all be part of a minority at some point in time), those who make policies have passed laws and regulations that serve as a shield for those who are vulnerable.

It is also important to understand that the meaning of the word “minority” is not limited to the group with few people. In special legal situations, the word “minority” has been used to describe a group with little if any ***power***. Even though a so-called “minority group” may have more people, they may not be liked, have very little power, and are always more at risk of being abused.

Read the following case studies and decide whether they are cases where the minority should be protected, or the majority should be allowed to rule?

There are **five cases** to consider.

**Case 1**

The Ninth Amendment to the Constitution is interpreted to suggest that American citizens have the right to travel.

Lawmakers in State A issue an emergency declaration informing people who live in other states that they may not enter State A until further notice. The officials are trying to prevent those from other states bringing germs into their state.

Many people who do not live in State A own a second vacation home in State A. In some instances, the people who own second homes live in states where a pandemic is really bad. They want to go to their vacation homes where they believe that their families might be safer. They complain that the emergency declaration issued by the lawmakers in State A’s declaration is a violation of their rights to use their property and travel.

1. Who is the majority in this case? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the minority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Analyze:** Have the rights of the minority been disregarded?

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| **Best Arguments for the Majority**  Lawmakers | **Best Arguments for The Minority**  People who own vacation homes in State A |
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**Conclude**

Knowing what you know about majority rule and minority rights, is this a case where the minority should be protected? Or, should the majority be allowed to rule? Defend your conclusion.

**Case 2**

The Second Amendment to the Constitution is interpreted to state the citizens of the United States have a right to “bear arms” (in other words, own guns).

Lawmakers in State B pass an emergency law requiring all “non-essential” businesses, including gun stores, to close until the pandemic is over. A “non-essential” business is one that sells goods or services that are not needed in order to survive. Those who want to be allowed to purchase guns argue that the emergency law is illegal because it denies them the right to bear arms.

1. Who is the majority in this case? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the minority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Analyze:** Have the rights of the minority been disregarded?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Best Arguments for the Majority** | **Best Arguments for The Minority** |
|  |  |

**Conclude**

Knowing what you know about majority rule and minority rights, is this a case where the minority should be protected? Or, should the majority be allowed to rule? Defend your conclusion.

**Case 3**

The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution contains the right to “due process”. You may recall learning about due process in 5th grade. Due process means that government must pass laws that are fair then use fair procedures to enforce those laws.

Lawmakers in State C pass an emergency law that makes it illegal to go outside one’s home during a pandemic except for medical reasons, to purchase groceries, or to walk a pet. The pandemic is in its worst phase. The number of people with the virus has never been higher. Police have been told to enforce the emergency law and fine anyone breaking the law $1,000.

One day police see a man walking through a park by himself. They immediately issue him a ticket for $1,000 and order him to return to his home.

1. Who is the majority in this case? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the minority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Analyze:** Have the rights of the minority been disregarded?

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| --- | --- |
| **Best Arguments for the Majority** | **Best Arguments for The Minority** |
|  |  |

**Conclude**

Knowing what you know about due process, majority rule, and minority rights, is this a case where the minority should be protected? Or, should the majority be allowed to rule? Defend your conclusion.

**Case 4**

The first Amendment to the Constitution guarantees American citizens the right to freedom of religion. One clause, known as the “free exercise” clause, notes that people have the right to exercise the religion of their choice. Every right has “scope” meaning that there are limits to rights. An example often mentioned involves the freedom of speech. A person cannot shout “fire” in a crowded movie theater if there is no fire because people could be harmed or even killed in the stampede to get out of the movie theater.

Lawmakers in State D pass a law that requires people to stay at home except for essential purposes during a highly contagious pandemic. A pastor of a church tells the people who go to his church that going to church is essential, and he arranges for a bus pick up people who want to go to church. Over 100 people go to the church on Sunday. Police then arrest the pastor of the church.

1. Who is the majority in this case? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the minority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Analyze:** Have the rights of the minority been disregarded?

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| --- | --- |
| **Best Arguments for the Majority** | **Best Arguments for The Minority** |
|  |  |

**Conclude**

Knowing what you know about freedom of religion, the COVID-19 pandemic, majority rule, and minority rights, is this a case where the minority should be protected? Or, should the majority be allowed to rule? Defend your conclusion.

**Case 5**

The Environmental Protection Agency was created in 1970 to pass regulations and encourage voluntary actions that help conserve our nation’s natural resources and protect the American people from environmental pollution e.g. air and water pollution. Some of the regulations require the owners of companies, businesses, and factories to do things that cost them money (e.g. treating hazardous waste to get rid of dangerous chemicals before disposing of it, installing screens on top of smoke stacks to reduce air pollution, eliminating harmful contaminants from drinking water, placing labels on products that allow consumers to choose products with safer chemical ingredients, making farmers use more expensive pesticides because they do less damage to the environment etc.). There are many such regulations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a terrible impact on many American businesses. People are required to stay at home; many stores have been listed as “non-essential” and have had to close. Many businesses are struggling to survive and workers are losing their jobs at historic rates.

In response to the serious economic crisis brought on by a pandemic, some business owners asked the federal government to relax regulations so that they could save money, their businesses, and jobs. Government officials have agreed to do this. One unintended problem is that many of the factories that pollute are located in areas where many poor people live because it is cheaper to build factories there.

1. Who is the majority in this case? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the minority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Analyze:** Have the rights of the minority been disregarded?

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| --- | --- |
| **Best Arguments for the Majority** | **Best Arguments for The Minority** |
|  |  |

**Conclude**

Knowing what you know about the Environmental Protection Agency, majority rule, and minority rights, is this a case where the minority should be protected? Or, should the majority be allowed to rule? Defend your conclusion.