

## Lesson Plan: California's Proposition System Explained

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### Featured resources

[KQED Lowdown: Majority Rules](#)

[KQED Election Guide: State Propositions](#)



### Opening quick write prompt:

California's proposition system allows citizens to propose new laws, get rid of old ones and even amend the state constitution. These propositions qualify for the ballot if they get enough signatures, and they become law if a majority of voters support them. What are positive aspects of this system? What are some potential pitfalls? What policies would you like to see changed or added to make your state a better place?

*A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.*

### Objectives

- Students will analyze the origins of California's proposition system and examine how an initiative gets on the ballot.
- Students will evaluate a selection of propositions on the 2016 ballot and reflect on the advantages and potential pitfalls of this system.

### Essential Question and Lesson Context

#### How does California's proposition system work? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this system?

California is one of 24 states with some form of direct democracy. But with its huge population and low threshold for getting measures on the ballot, the California proposition system is particularly robust. Analyzing the proposition system reveals some of the potential advantages and problems. A look at the current crop of measures on the November 2016 ballot will help students evaluate this system ahead of the upcoming election.

### Key vocabulary

*Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).*

Word	Simple definition
Direct democracy (n.)	A system allowing citizens to vote directly on laws and policies (rather than only electing representatives to create laws for them).
Eligible (adj.)	Having the right to do or obtain something; satisfying the appropriate conditions
Prominent (adj.)	Important, well-known
Ripple effect (n.)	One action influences or causes a series of other actions
Straightforward (adj.)	Easy to do or understand, not complicated

## Activity

- Individually or in small groups, students read [Majority Rules: California's Proposition System Explained](#) to set the stage for the activity.
- Examine a selection of propositions on the November ballot using [KQED's election guide](#) or another teacher-recommended resource like [CALmatters](#). Students can explore the ballot measures individually or in small groups based on the model below.
- **Model:** Choose one current ballot proposition to examine as a class. Point out what a Yes or No vote would mean and who is funding the measure. Write a class summary of the key elements of the proposition.
  - **Recommended 2016 ballot initiatives to focus on:** Proposition 64 (legalizes marijuana); Proposition 51 (\$9 billion bond measure for K-12 and community college school construction); Proposition 67 (eliminates single-use plastic bags statewide); and Proposition 58 (eliminates law that requires English-only instruction in schools)
- Think-Pair-Share or quick write: Do you think all California voters should have a chance to vote on these issues? Why or why not?

## Discussion questions

- Explain in your own words how California's proposition process works.

- If your teacher or someone in your community wanted to get a proposition on the ballot, do you think they would be able to? What would they need to do in order to succeed?
- Who benefits most from the proposition process? Explain your answer using evidence.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of California’s proposition system?
- If you had a chance to put a measure on the ballot, what would you propose to the voters of California? What do you want to see changed?

*Circle chats, small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.*

### Extension activities

**Classroom proposition process:** What proposition would YOU put before your fellow voters? As a class, in small groups or individually, students create a campaign poster or infographic to explain their proposition related to a school, community, or national issue. Students then share their ideas with classmates and collect signatures for their proposal. Decide how many signatures are needed to get on the class ballot and hold an election. Students can post their ideas and links to their posters in the comment section of the [Lowdown post](#).

**A national platform for your students’ voices:** Students make their voices heard on issues they care about by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters. For more resources and examples, see also [KQED’s student video project](#).

### Common Core standards

<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1</a>	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7</a>	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
<a href="#">D2.Civ.11</a>	Differentiate among procedures for making decisions in the classroom, school, civil society, and local, state, and national government in terms of how civic purposes are intended.