

The 8th of June is a very important day this year. The British people will elect a Prime Minister to lead our nation. All around the United Kingdom, people will also select leaders for their local areas who will represent them on a national level. Both of these things will be decided by a nationwide vote. This is called a general election.

The election was supposed to happen in three years time, but Prime Minister Theresa May asked for an election to be held this year so that the best person can be in charge of Britain leaving the European Union (EU). This is an important decision as the new Prime Minister will be making decisions for future generations.

Why is it important?

The results of this election will have a large impact on our country because the leaders who are chosen will have the power to make important decisions. As well as planning leaving the EU, they will decide about social issues, such as what you learn at school and how large the budget for the National Health Service should be. They will be able to create new laws and set the levels of tax which different people will have to pay.

Their decisions will not just affect the United Kingdom, but also the whole world, as the men and women selected in the general election will influence how Britain relates to other countries. Our leaders may also have to decide if our country goes to war, and will determine the amount of money Britain gives to other nations in aid donations.

We call the leaders 'politicians' and they make many of these decisions by voting. They present new ideas or new laws to each other (called 'bills'), and then debate them. These presentations and debates are known as 'readings'. Normally, different groups of politicians disagree and the proposed idea or new law is altered a little to convince more of them to support it. After several readings have occurred, the politicians vote to decide if the proposal should go ahead.

This process takes place in the Houses of Parliament, which are in London. The 'Houses' are not two different buildings but are actually two rooms in an old building called Westminster Palace. Westminster Palace stands on a bank of the river Thames and has a tall, four-faced clock tower called 'Big Ben'.

The two enormous rooms, or 'Houses' of Parliament, are called the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Politicians who are selected in the general election work in the House of Commons. The Lords and Baronesses who work in the House of Lords are appointed by the Queen, and they debate bills in the same way as the elected politicians. A bill must be approved by both Houses before it can become law.

How do people vote?

Our country is divided into 650 sections called constituencies, and each constituency can send one politician to the Houses of Parliament. Various candidates put themselves forward. The people in each constituency will vote for the candidate that they think will represent them best. Almost everybody who is 18 or older is allowed to vote but there are some exceptions (such as criminals serving a sentence in prison).

It is possible to vote by post but most people do it in person. On election day, certain places such as churches, libraries and schools will be transformed into 'polling stations' where people can cast their vote. These polling stations are open from 7 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night so that everyone has time to vote. If you are lucky, you might get a day off! A few weeks prior to election day, anyone who wants to vote has to send their name and address to be checked. If they are allowed to vote, their name is put on the electoral register. When they attend a polling station to vote, they will have their name marked off this register. After this, they will be given a 'ballot paper' which lists the candidates that they can choose. Hidden from everyone else by a screen, they will mark a cross next to the name of the politician they want. Finally, they put their paper into a secure case called a 'ballot box'. All of this is done to ensure that their vote remains anonymous.

At the close of voting, all the ballot boxes will be gathered and all the votes from the area will be counted. Sometimes it can take all night! In Britain, we use a voting system known as 'first past the post', which means that the politician who gets the most votes in their constituency will become a Member of Parliament, or 'MP'. They are elected, and will proceed to spend a lot of time in Westminster Palace, where they will be permitted to sit on the long, green benches in the House of Commons, debating proposals and making serious decisions. It is because of these famous benches that when a politician is elected, we say that they have 'won a seat'.

Who can people vote for?

Everybody's opinions differ about how our country and society should function. One person may be convinced that a particular system or solution is perfect while another person believes that it is completely wrong. Some people want things to change while other people think the best plan is for things to remain exactly as they are. A person who feels very strongly about their opinions might choose to become a politician because, if they are elected, they will have a much better opportunity to make society operate the way they think it should. Their vote in Parliament will directly affect which ideas become realities and which do not.

A person must be 18 or older before they can stand for election in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In Scotland, people as young as 16 can stand for election. Independent candidates are people who attempt to be elected on their own, but most potential politicians join a group which shares the same opinions and values as them. A group like this is known as a 'political party'. The size of political parties varies; some have memberships which number in the tens of thousands. Some of these members will try to become MPs, and the others will give them financial donations and try to help promote them. There are a number of different parties in the United Kingdom, but the largest are:

The Conservatives – The Conservatives are lead by Theresa May, the current Prime Minister. They are often known as the 'Tories', and won the largest number of seats in the last election (331 in total). The party logo is a picture of a tree, and the party colour is blue.

The Labour Party – The Labour Party leader is Jeremy Corbyn. Often just called 'Labour', this party won 232 seats in the last general election. The party logo is a rose, and the party colour is red.

The Liberal Democrats – The Liberal Democrats are lead by Tim Farron. People sometimes shorten the party name to 'The Lib Dems'. In the election of 2010 they won 57 seats, but joined with the Conservatives to form a government. In 2015, they dropped to just 8 seats. The party logo is a picture of a bird, in the party colour of yellow.

The Green Party – The Green Party are lead by both Jonathan Bartley and Caroline Lucas. A relatively new party, the 'Greens' have won just 1 seat in the last two elections. The party logo is a picture of the world surrounded by petals, and the party colour is, of course, green!

The United Kingdom Independence Party – The leader of The United Kingdom Independence Party is Paul Nuttall. Often known just by their initials, 'UKIP' did not have any MPs elected in 2010, but two Conservative politicians swapped parties to join them after the election! In 2015, they only managed to hold onto one of those seats. The party logo is a pound sign with 'UKIP' written across it, in the party colours of purple and yellow.

The Scottish National Party – The Scottish National Party are lead by Nicola Sturgeon. The SNP (as they are known) gained 50 seats in the 2015 election, from a mere 6 in 2010. The party logo is of the initials, SNP, and a symbol which represents Scotland in two ways: a thistle (the national flower of Scotland) and the Saltire (the cross on the Scottish flag).

At this election, these big parties will have a candidate in nearly every constituency in the country, all working to persuade people to elect them. There are also some large parties who only try to obtain votes in Scotland, or Northern Ireland, or Wales. The main leader of the political party which is victorious in the election will become the new Prime Minister.

All the candidates are very busy before an election. They go on a campaign, trying to convince the people in their constituency to vote for them. Often they knock on doors and explain to residents how their policies and ideas will benefit them. They put up posters and share informative manifestos, which contain policies and pledges that they promise to do if elected. All of this is done to convince voters that they are the best politician to choose. Sometimes, there are heated political discussions on television, where party leaders debate the policies they believe in. They declare that their proposed ideas are best for the country and that the other leaders are misguided. These debates and the promises of all the parties are analysed a great deal on television and in newspapers in the weeks before election day.

There is a flurry of activity before a general election. Some parties create and broadcast adverts which explain their ideas or which mock the policies of the other groups. Sometimes, local residents put up bright posters in a certain party's colours on their houses or on lamp posts. The posters proudly display the name of a politician, declaring who the people want to vote for.

Who wins the election?

Every constituency will elect a politician which means that 650 politicians will be chosen to be Members of Parliament. They will be from many different parties, but the party to which the majority of the elected politicians belong, will be the winner. This party will form the new government and the party leader will be appointed as the Prime Minister by the Queen. A majority is important because it means that the governing party will be able to win when MPs vote on new laws in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister will be the leader of our country and is permitted to live in a special house in London. The house is number 10, Downing Street, and has been the official residence of Prime Ministers since 1735.

The United Kingdom has 'fixed term' governments, which means that there has to be an election every five years. However, in certain circumstances there could be one earlier than that. As Britain have voted to leave the EU, the Prime Minister has called for an election 3 years early.

Ed Moss

General Elections

What is an election? Pick 2 answers.

A time when people vote.

A time when hospitals are closed.

A time when people have a party.

A time when leaders are chosen.

Find and copy 2 things that the leaders who are picked will do.

Why might you get a day off?

Why do some parties make adverts which make fun of the other parties?

When else might you or other people use voting?

In what year should the next election have taken place?

Do you think you would find this text in an encyclopaedia or a story book? Give a reason for your answer.

'Big Ben' is a famous London landmark.

(a) Find and copy another famous place in London from the text.

(b) Which person in the text might you find at Buckingham Palace?

Do you think people write their names on their voting papers? Why?

Choose the best answer.

Do you think the author is trying to:

Persuade readers?

Annoy readers?

Inform readers?

Make readers laugh

Put these election events in the order that they happen.

A politician is made into the Prime Minister by the Queen.

Politicians go on campaigns to win voters.

Votes are counted.

People go to polling stations.

There are four underlined questions which break up the text. Explain one way that they are helpful.

The author writes that party leaders 'declare that their proposed ideas are best for the country and that the other leaders are wrong.' What does the word 'declare' tell you about the attitude of the party leaders?

Why might it benefit a politician to join a party?

Describe two ways in which the author has tried to make it easy to compare the main parties.

What does the word ‘heated’ show the television debates are like? Pick one.

Calm

Long

Passionate

Quick-paced

General Elections

What is an election? Pick 2 answers.

A time when people vote.

A time when hospitals are closed.

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Find and copy 2 things that the leaders who are picked will do.

Various answers; must be from the text.

Why might you get a day off?

School may be closed so people can vote there.

Why do some parties make adverts which make fun of the other parties?

To make voters think that the other parties are bad/silly/wrong; so that more people vote for them instead of the other parties.

When else might you or other people use voting?

Various answers from occasions in school/friendships/the wider world.

In what year should the next election have taken place?

2020

Do you think you would find this text in an encyclopaedia or a story book? Give a reason for your answer.

An encyclopaedia because it is non-fiction/factual writing.

'Big Ben' is a famous London landmark.

(a) Find and copy another famous place in London from the text.

The Houses of Parliament/10 Downing Street.

(b) Which person in the text might you find at Buckingham Palace?

The Queen

Do you think people write their names on their voting papers? Why?

No, because everyone's votes are kept secret.

Choose the best answer.

Do you think the author is trying to:

Persuade readers?

Annoy readers?

Inform readers?

Make readers laugh

Put these election events in the order that they happen.

2 A politician is made into the Prime Minister by the Queen.

4 Politicians go on campaigns to win voters.

3 Votes are counted.

1 People go to polling stations.

There are four underlined questions which break up the text. Explain one way that they are helpful.

Various answers relating to the features of a subheading, for example, it gives the reader an idea of the information that will be in that section.

The author writes that party leaders 'declare that their proposed ideas are best for the country and that the other leaders are wrong.' What does the word 'declare' tell you about the attitude of the party leaders?

Various answers; confidence/forcefulness/a desire to convince voters.

Why might it benefit a politician to join a party?

For the financial and physical support.

Describe two ways in which the author has tried to make it easy to compare the main parties.

Various answers; placing them one after another/giving the same selection of information for each. Accept other answers if justified.

What does the word 'heated' show the television debates are like? Pick one.

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Passionate

Quick-paced