

You are never too young to learn about democracy

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By Democratic Audit UK

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*The question of how to ensure that young people understand their role in a democracy has yet to be properly answered, with turn-out amongst first time voters continuing to sag. **Ellie Levenson**, the author of [a book](#) which seeks to introduce toddlers to democracy, argues that normalising the activity of voting is the best way to contribute to solving this problem.*



Click on the picture to be taken to the funding page (Credit: WarmSleepy, CC BY 2.0)

We like to joke at home that our children can be anything they want to be, other than a Tory. Given that my husband and I met through Labour politics, this seems a reasonable hope. But it's not really true of course – what we want more than our children to share our political beliefs, is for them to have political beliefs, and act on them, whatever they may be.

In amongst the challenges of parenthood, between trying to get the toddler to eat vegetables and the baby to sleep through the night, we try to encourage our children to look at the world around them, ask questions and think about how they might leave things better than they find them. These questions aren't always easy – I remain a little stumped by why we don't have dessert after breakfast – but when they are political and stemming from the world around us, we really try our best to answer them properly.

Of course our very young children aren't asking questions about interest rates or immigration, but they do notice waiting times at the GP, our exclamations when something is expensive, the houses being built on the next street and the reduced services at the local children's centres. And of course as parents our eyes have been opened to the cost of a pint of milk, and of childcare, the oversubscribed local schools and the threat to the NHS that has served our children so well already.

All of this has come together for me, along with the launch of my new business, Fisherton Press, a children's book publisher producing books for children that adults also like reading, and one of our first offerings, to be published in

January 2015, will be a book about elections and the democratic process, aimed at pre school children.

The story focusses on two families who vote for, and campaign for, opposing political parties, but who remain friends. It doesn't sugar coat elections – it shows a winner and a loser, and a sense of despondency for the family who campaign for the losing party – but it also gets across the ideas of participation, activism and, above all, tolerance and respect for the democratic process. It does all of this, hopefully, without being too po-faced or earnest.

The plan is that this book will normalise turning out to vote so that children grow up thinking it is just something that everybody does. So that not voting is a conscious and deliberate decision (and hopefully one they don't make) rather than voting being something you have to make an effort to do.

I've decided to crowdfund this project, where members of the public are invited to donate any amount, large or small, with the money only being released to my company if the entire target is met, for two reasons. First, because unlike most of our projects where we will be paying authors and illustrators on a royalty only basis, I want to be able to give the illustrator of this project an advance. This is because whilst I hope every infant school and library, and indeed household, owns a copy, I am not wholly convinced of its commerciality, though I do think it is a book that should exist regardless of this. And second, because I love the idea of a book about democracy and government by the people, being funded by the people. If I can get cross-party buy-in for the project – and so far I've had interest and retweets, donations and messages of support from politicians and activists across the board – then the message of participation is stronger.

One question I have been asked regarding the project is how to ensure that it's not just the children of people who are already politically engaged who get bought this book. It is a good question. From a commercial point of view perhaps I should suggest everyone buys some copies for their friends and neighbours! But I also hope to get it into every school and library. And I have some plans for trying to get funding from various sources to give copies away through schools and children's centres, though need the finished book first in order to tout it around properly.

In my ideal marketing strategy, I manage to persuade CBeebies to have it as the bedtime story pre election. But it is a big challenge. The first step however is in creating the book. At the time of writing, just over halfway through the funding period, we have just under a thousand pounds left to raise – do please consider joining the list of funders.

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*Note: You have until **4.37pm on Thursday Nov 21** to contribute funding to the project. [Click here to see the crowdfunding page](#). This post represents the views of the author and not those of Democratic Audit or the LSE. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting. The shortened URL for this post is: <http://buff.ly/1e0Qxin>*

Update: This project received the required funding by the required deadline.

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Ellie Levenson is a freelance journalist writing comment and features for several publications with the intention of making politics and political issues accessible to a wider audience. She is a former editor of Fabian Review and an editor of Fabian Thinkers: 120 Years of Progressive Thought. Her latest book is 'The Noughtie Girl's Guide to Feminism.'

