***Episode 2 – Transcript***

BC Hey Steph!

SS Hey Bryce!

BC Do you reckon Gang-Gang is going to be much longer? I mean - it's lovely out here in the bush, and all, but I've got to get back to Squiz Kids HQ kind of soonish and get back to work.

SS Here he comes now!

GG I'm so sorry to keep you both waiting! There was quite a crowd at the pyracantha tree, and once I got stuck into those berries and got squawking with my friends, I completely lost track of time.

SS No worries Gang-Gang.

BC I hope you were busy sharing all the cool new stuff you learned about referendums in the last episode. What the Constitution is, what a referendum is and the sorts of issues Australians have voted on in the past.

GG As a matter of fact, I was. There's just so much noise and fuss and bother down here in Canberra at the moment around the whole referendum thing .. I feel like I understand it all just a little bit better.

SS Well that is good to hear.

BC And that's in no small part thanks to the fact that Steph works at the Museum of Australian Democracy in Old Parliament House here in Canberra ...

GG I know some excellent gum trees near there ...

BC I'm sure you do ... and there aren't too many people who can explain to kids as well as Steph can how our system of government works.

GG Excellent ... then maybe she can explain to me why - if there have been 44 referendums - only eight have passed?

SS That is an excellent question Gang-Gang. And it's got something to do with the fact that there are some pretty big hurdles that have to be jumped over for a referendum to pass.

BC Why is that?

SS Well, if we are changing something as important as the Constitution - which is what a referendum has the power to do - and if the Constitution is the rule book by which Australia is run - as we discussed last episode - then you want to make sure it's something that is only done if a majority of Australians are in favour of the change.

GG Well, that's easy. Surely you just count everyone's votes and if there are more YES votes than NO votes, then the YES side wins?

SS Well - not quite. And here's where it gets a bit complicated.

GG I was worried you were going to say that ... ok - let me just get my listening ears on

SS So you understand the concept of a majority, right? In the case of a vote, it's when there are more votes for one side than there are for the other.

GG Ohhh-kaay ... so far, so clear ...

SS In order for a referendum to succeed in Australia - a majority of Australians need to vote YES across the entire country - AND a majority of the states need to also vote YES. Meaning 4 out of 6 states need to have a majority of YES votes

BC Ok - you lost me there. Back it up a bit.

SS It IS a little tricky Bryce, but I'll try and break it down. So there are about 26 million people in Australia, right? And of those 26 million - around 8 million are under the age of 18 - so they're not able to vote, yes?

BC Don't worry Squiz Kids - your turn will come.

SS Indeed it will ... now that leaves us with around 18 million Australians who will be voting in the referendum. 18 million people giving a YES or NO answer to whatever question might be being asked.

GG Okey doke.

SS Now if over 9 million people vote YES across all our States and Territories then that's a majority.

GG So that means the referendum succeeds?

SS Ahhh - not so fast! Because we're voting to change the rule book by which the country is run - there's an extra hurdle that has to be jumped. In fancy adult speak - another threshold that has to be met. Because we want to make absolutely positively sure that the change is something that most Australians want.

BC And what is that extra hurdle?

SS Well Bryce, there also needs to be a majority of states voting YES.

GG You're losing me ...

SS Australia is made up of six states and two territories, right?

BC Oooh- I know this one. The six states are Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia! And the two territories are the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory - where we are now.

SS Well done you! Someone HAS been paying attention in class ...

BC But you're only talking about the states right?

SS That's correct Bryce. To make doubly sure Australians want a change to the Constitution we also need four out of the six states to have a majority of people vote YES.

GG You keep mentioning the states Steph, but what about the Territories?

SS Good point Gang-Gang, the votes of people living in the ACT, Northern Territory and any of Australia’s external territories count towards the national majority only.

BC Ah I see. Thanks Steph that is a little bit tricky

SS It is Bryce. It's about making sure all voters can have their voice heard. A double majority makes sure there is support for a change across the country and that voters within every state, regardless of that state's population, have an equal say on the change.

GG So, what happens on voting day?

SS The Federal Government picks a Saturday and people all over the country head off to their local school, community centre or polling place, including public buildings like the Museum of Australian Democracy, and cast their vote.

BC So this is when they get asked a question?

SS Yep, that's correct! The referendum question or questions passed by parliament are published on a ballot paper. Each person’s name is marked off the electoral roll when they arrive to vote, and they are given a ballot paper. Each voter then goes into a private little cardboard cubicle and in the privacy of that cubicle, casts their vote - which is to say, they write ‘Yes‘ or ’No‘ on the ballot paper to answer the question.

GG So you're saying voters need to think carefully about the question and decide if they want to write yes or no to change the Constitution.

SS That's absolutely right Gang-Gang

BC Steph, say voters agree to the change and there is a double majority. What happens next?

SS In that case Bryce - the people have spoken - and the change can be made to the Constitution. The proposed alteration is then presented to the Governor-General for the King’s assent. Which is a fancy way of saying it's signed off and the referendum is complete.

GG Wow! It's a huge process to go through. Thanks Steph for talking us through it.

BC I feel smarter already! So Gang-Gang - does that clear things up? Does that explain why there is so much fuss and bother in your beloved Canberra right now?

GG It does make sense now .. but honestly, I haven't heard this much flapping about since my cousin discovered that secret bunch of pyracantha trees in bloom - oh what a feast we had that day ..

BC Sounds fascinating .. you'll have to tell me the whole story some time soon. Off you go, buddy. And don't forget: to the all the Squiz Kids listening out there - if you want to learn more about the Constitution and referendums and how they work - we've stuck a bunch of really useful links in the episode notes, including a link to the website for the Museum of Australian Democracy - which is a rich source of excellent info. Plus - you'd be mad if you didn't check out the excellent classroom worksheets that we've produced to go along with this podcast - the perfect way to consolidate every thing you've just listened to. Righto Steph - I guess it's time to head back to work. Thanks for taking the time to explain everything ..

SS No worries , Bryce .. Squiz Kids may not be able to vote yet, but Australia's democracy still belongs to them.

BC Indeed it does ... will you help me wrap this podcast series up with our traditional Squiz Kids sign off?

SS Sure thing ...

BC Now get out there and have a most excellent day ..

SS Over and out !

Hey teachers and parents, have you checked out our awesome resources on the Squiz Kids website yet? Make sure you drop by so that you and your kids can learn more about the Australian Constitution and Referendums. We've even created a board game that takes you, step-by-step, through the process of running a referendum. It's kind of like snakes and ladders but the stakes are higher! Will your country vote Yes, or will you be consigned to the long list of No votes? You'll find out when you play...Referendum. The Board Game! Now roll those dice and get playing!