

# 2 Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the fundamental rights and freedoms that exist in a democracy and the associated responsibilities.

## KEY WORDS

democracy, government, right, freedom, responsibility, election, universal suffrage

## QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What does it mean to live in a democracy?
- What is a 'right'?
- What rights and freedoms do we have in Canada?
- What responsibilities come along with our rights?
- How is voting both a right and a responsibility?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 2: Rights and Responsibilities in a Democracy
- Handout 2.1: Highlights from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- Handout 2.2: History of Voting Rights in Canada
- Worksheet 2.3: Presentation Planning Sheet
- Worksheet 2.4: Our Rights and Responsibilities
- Worksheet 2.5: Voting Rights in Canada
- Worksheet 2.6: The Right to Vote

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 10-15 min

1. Read students the following fictional story:

*Last year, there was a lot of bullying among the students at Harrison Public School. Students were not treating each other with respect. There was fighting, teasing and tears almost every day and it was very disruptive to the school community. Over the summer, parents, teachers, the principal and members of the school division held meetings at the school to find a solution. After lots of discussion, it was decided that students would not be allowed to choose their own friends anymore. Instead, parents would make those decisions and teachers would enforce them.*

2. Have a follow-up class discussion:
  - Why did the students lose the right to choose their own friends?
  - How would you feel if you lost the right to choose your own friends?
  - Would a better solution have been reached if students had been involved in the decision-making process?

- How important is it that we are allowed to make our own decisions?
- How important is it that we do so in a responsible manner?

## Discussion: 10 min

What is a right? What is a responsibility? What are some of the rights you have in the classroom or at school? What responsibilities come with our rights and freedoms? For example, every child has the right to learn, but every child has the responsibility to arrive at school on time and complete their homework. The right to a safe classroom comes with the responsibility to follow the rules.

*Teacher Note: Record the examples on a blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard so students can see their responses.*

## Instruction: 20-25 min

1. All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. Some of these basic rights include the ability to form your own opinion and express it freely (freedom of thought and expression), the choice to worship your own god (freedom of religion), and the right to gather and meet with one another, or to protest (freedom of assembly).
2. In 1982, the Canadian government created the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to protect our rights (Handout 2.1). One section is dedicated to our democratic rights, which includes the right of every Canadian citizen, 18 years of age and older, to participate or vote in government elections. Elections are the method of how our elected representatives and government are chosen.
3. The right to vote in Canada has changed over time. In the early days, only wealthy men who owned property/land could vote. At that time women and people of various ethnic backgrounds could not vote. Universal suffrage is the granting of the right to vote to all adult citizens, including the removal of restrictions against women and various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

See Handout 2.2 and other suggestions listed in the *External Resources* section.

**Activity: 20-30 min**

1. Explain to students that fewer and fewer people are voting in government elections. In the last provincial election, only 5 out of 10 citizens cast a ballot. In the 2004 and 2008 elections, less than half of the people voted. Questions to discuss: Is the decrease in voting disrespectful to those who had to fight for their right to vote? What are the responsibilities that go along with the right to vote?
2. In groups or individually, have students design a campaign poster or PowerPoint presentation to encourage people to cast a ballot in the provincial election. Students should use images and words to describe why it is important to vote. Worksheet 2.3 can be used as a planning tool. Afterwards display the posters around the school or ask students to share their work with their families.

**Debrief: 5 min**

Have a brief closing discussion about rights and responsibilities. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log.

- What does living in a democracy mean to you?
- How important is it that individuals are responsible members of society?
- Will you vote when you turn 18 years old? Why or why not?
- Should voters lose their right to vote if they choose to skip an election?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

A. As a class, review the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Individually or in pairs, ask students to consider the responsibilities that go along with each right using Worksheet 2.4.

B. Have students review and interpret the history of voting rights in Canada (Handout 2.2 and other sources). Using Worksheet 2.5, have students record the date when a particular group received the right to vote or when a change was brought about to improve their ability to cast a ballot, and how or why it was granted to them. Afterwards, ask students to create a visual timeline showing when various groups received the right to vote or when access was improved.

C. Ask students to remember a time when they finally received a privilege (e.g., the right to walk to school on their own, have a sleepover, extend their bedtime). Now ask students to imagine they are a member of one of the groups that was granted the right to vote and ask them to write about their feelings and experiences in a diary. Students should write two diary entries: one before being granted the right to vote and one after receiving the right to vote. Use Worksheet 2.6.

D. Investigate countries around the world where people are currently fighting for the right to vote. Have students write a summary or article based on their research, including the *who, what, where, when* and *how*.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

*What rights and responsibilities do we have in a democracy?*

A right is a freedom that is protected. The rights and freedoms of citizens are vital to a democratic government.

In Canada, citizens' rights and freedoms are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections that define our rights as Canadians: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official language rights and minority language education rights.

Democratic rights include the right for every Canadian citizen, 18 years and older, to vote in an election and to be a candidate, as well as the requirement that governments hold elections at least every five years and that these governments meet at least once per year. An election is the process of choosing individuals from among a group of candidates who will run a government.

With all rights come responsibilities. A responsibility is a duty or obligation. It is something you should do in order to respect certain rights or rules.

The right to vote comes with the responsibility to cast a ballot in an informed and purposeful manner.

*What is universal suffrage?*

Universal suffrage is the extension of the right to vote to all adult citizens, including the removal of restrictions against women, minorities, various ethnic and religious groups, and property ownership requirements.

**EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

- A History of the Vote in Canada, Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- The Evolution of the Franchise, Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- The Electoral System of Canada, Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right, CBC Digital Archives — [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)