

7 The Voting Process

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the voting process and evaluate the campaign issues, party platforms, leaders and local candidates in preparation for Student Vote Day.

KEY WORDS

advance poll, elector, candidate, electoral division, issue, ballot, secret ballot, valid ballot, rejected ballot, spoiled ballot, declined ballot

QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- Why is voting by secret ballot important?
- Who can vote in provincial elections in Alberta?
- How does the voting process work?
- How do I mark my ballot?
- How do I make my decision about who to vote for?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 7: The Voting Process
- Video: How to Organize Student Vote Day
- Worksheet 7.1: Preparing to Vote
- Worksheet 7.2: How to Vote
- Worksheet 7.3: A Trip to the Polling Station

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10 min

1. Ask students to answer the following questions in their head, or choose questions that will work for your class. Consider questions that may not always elicit truthful answers.
 - a) What is your favourite TV show?
 - b) What is your favourite song?
2. Ask students the same questions again, but this time ask students to stand up and share their answers aloud in front of the class.
3. Have a follow-up discussion. Did anyone answer the questions differently when they had to share their answers aloud with the class? If so, why?
4. Voting in elections is done by secret ballot. This means that no one except the voter knows the choice that was made. Voters mark their ballots behind a privacy screen and the ballot is put in the ballot box without identifying who the voter is.

Discuss the importance of voting by secret ballot in elections. What are the benefits of voting in private? Emphasize the lack of opportunity for violence and intimidation.

Instruction: 15 min

1. To be qualified to vote in an Alberta provincial election, you must be:
 - A Canadian citizen,
 - At least 18 years of age or older,
 - Ordinarily resident in Alberta for the past six months.
2. A polling station is the official term given to the voting location. When you arrive at your polling station, the election officer will ask your name and will check for your name on the list of voters. If your name is on the list, you will be given a ballot to vote. If your name is not listed, you will be required to produce government issued identification containing your name, photograph and current address before being given a ballot. Alternatively, if you do not have a government photo ID, you can provide two other pieces of ID and one must confirm your address.
3. A ballot lists the names of the candidates (and political parties) running in your electoral division. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark your choice. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate (e.g., checkmark, X, shading in), your choice will be counted (valid ballot).

Teacher Note: Show students what a ballot looks like and how to fill it out correctly. Review the following ballot terms: valid, rejected, declined and spoiled. Use ballot examples (refer to the Student Vote Election Operations Manual).

Activity: 20 min and homework

1. Review the list of candidates (and their parties) that students are able to vote for in the provincial election.
2. Using Worksheet 7.1, have students reflect on the campaign issues, parties, leaders and local candidates.
3. Allow students the opportunity to share their views. Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and even try to convince others to adopt their choices, while others may opt for silence and prefer to keep their politics personal. Remind students that opinions should be respected and accepted.

Teacher Note: This could turn into a fruitful discussion about the privacy of voting decisions.

4. Encourage students to take their worksheet home and start discussions with their family and friends. What do they think about the leaders, parties and candidates? Do they know who they are going to vote for? Challenge students to help their family members find out when and where to vote, and educate them on the choices. Suggest to students that they accompany their parents to the polling station and observe the process (see Extension C).

Debrief: 10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about voting and making your decision. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log.

- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- What research or activity has helped you make your decision? Is there more research you would like to do?
- Do you feel that you know more about the election than your parents?
- Why is voting important?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using Worksheet 7.2, have students illustrate the steps to voting at the polling station. Encourage students to share their worksheet with their family.

Teacher Note: The Organizing Student Vote Day video may be helpful.

B. Create a ‘pledge to vote’ activity for all Student Vote participants. This could include a ceremony or an official “I am a Voter” agreement, whereby students pledge to vote when they turn 18 or agree to be a life-long voter.

C. Allow students to make predictions regarding the election results. Who do you think is going to win locally? Which party do you think will form government? Why do you think this will be the outcome?

D. Sometimes adults can be intimidated by the voting process as well. Encourage students to “take” their family members to the polls and support them in casting their ballot. Ask students to observe the process while at the polling station and fill out Worksheet 7.3.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Who can vote?

To be eligible to vote in a provincial election in an Alberta provincial election, you must be:

- A Canadian citizen,
- At least 18 years of age or older,
- Ordinarily resident in Alberta for the past six months.

What type of identification do I need in order to vote?

- An elector whose name is on the list of electors is not required to produce identification prior to voting.
- An elector whose name is not on the list of electors may vote after producing government issued identification containing the elector’s photograph, current address and name. This includes an Operator’s (Driver’s) Licence or an Alberta Identification Card.
- An elector whose name is not on the list of electors, and who is unable to produce government issued identification, must produce two pieces of identification from the list posted on the Elections Alberta website (www.elections.ab.ca). Both pieces of identification must establish the elector’s name, and one piece must establish the elector’s current address.

How do I get on the List of Electors?

You can register to vote using Election Alberta’s secure on-line registration system called Voterlink. You can also contact Elections Alberta in person or by phone, e-mail or facsimile. Your information will be added to the Register of Electors to ensure that it will appear on subsequent lists of electors.

Where do I vote?

- Each electoral division is divided into smaller polling subdivisions, which are defined geographic areas. Eligible voters residing within each polling subdivision vote at the polling station designated for their area.
- During the election period, you can find your polling station on the Elections Alberta website and in local newspapers. In addition, notices are delivered to all residences in the province.

How does the voting process work?

1. Once you confirm your eligibility, you are given a ballot that has the election officer’s initials on the back.
2. Go behind a voting screen to mark your ballot. Choose only one candidate on the ballot.
3. Hand your folded ballot back to the election officer to check for the initials.
4. Place your folded ballot in the ballot box.

What is a secret ballot?

Voting across Canada is done by secret ballot. This ensures the privacy of each voter’s choice. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

How do I mark my ballot?

A ballot lists the names of the candidates (and political parties) running in your electoral division. There is a space beside each candidate’s name on the ballot where you can mark your preference. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be valid. This includes a checkmark, X, shading in or another marking.

What is a rejected ballot?

A rejected ballot is a ballot that cannot be counted due to a deliberate or accidental unrecognizable choice. This can include marking the ballot for more than one candidate even if different symbols are used, ranking the candidates, leaving the ballot blank, writing your name or anything on the ballot.

What is a declined ballot?

A voter may also choose to use their vote to express their dissatisfaction with the options given. This is called a declined ballot. In Alberta, this is done by receiving a ballot, then giving the unmarked ballot back to the poll clerk. The voter states that he or she does not want to vote. The deputy returning officer will write the word “declined” on the ballot and place it in the declined ballot envelope.

What is a spoiled ballot?

A spoiled ballot is a ballot that has been kept separate and never placed in the ballot box because it was mistakenly marked or torn and exchanged for a new ballot. The deputy returning officer shall write the word “spoiled” on the back of the ballot and place it in the spoiled ballot envelope.

What are advance polls? What are other ways to vote?

Electors, who are away, busy or unable to vote on polling day, have the option of voting at advance polls. Advance polls are held from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday prior to polling day.

You can also vote by special ballot (mail-in ballot) if you are unable to vote on polling day. You must request a special ballot from the returning officer in your electoral division. You can only request a special ballot if you are unable to vote at the advance polls or on polling day because you are:

- Physically incapacitated,
- Away from your electoral division,
- Serving as an inmate,
- An election officer, candidate, official agent or scrutineer, or
- Living in a remote area, as defined in the *Election Act*.

Visit www.electionsalberta.ab.ca for more information.

How do I prepare to vote?

Get informed. Learn about the candidates, the political parties and the issues. When preparing to vote, you consider reasons to support a candidate for premier, a local candidate for MLA, a political party, a specific issue or a whole party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time.

How do you know if you are ready to vote?

You feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Student Vote Election Operations Manual
- Elections Alberta — www.electionsalberta.ab.ca