

2 Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

OBJECTIVE

Students will develop an appreciation for the fundamental rights and responsibilities that exist within a democracy.

KEY WORDS

representative democracy, right, responsibility, elections, voter turnout, universal suffrage

QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What rights and freedoms do we have in Canada?
- What responsibilities come along with our rights?
- What is universal suffrage?
- Why is it important to exercise your right to vote?
- What is a democratic citizen?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 2: Democratic Rights and Responsibilities
- Video 1: Government and 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: The Right to Vote
- Handout 2.4: Voter Turnout by Age Group (Federal Elections)

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10 min

1. Play a game of “Use it or lose it” using the directions and rules below.

Students have five minutes to accomplish three goals.

- a) Find a partner.
- b) Draw detailed portraits of one another using at least five different colours.
- c) Accumulate as many writing utensils as possible.

Rules for the game:

- Each student begins with three writing utensils in front of them.
 - They can write with only one utensil at a time.
 - Students can ask for utensils from each other.
 - Whenever students are asked for a utensil they are not using, they must give it up.
2. Once the five minutes are up, identify how many students were able to achieve each of the goals. Ask students if it was difficult to accomplish all three goals and how they felt during the experience.

3. Afterwards, explain to students that the exercise was meant to represent rights and freedoms. Ask students to reflect on how they would feel if their right to have a say or make decisions (in class, at home, in their social group) was removed or was temporarily revoked.

Instruction: 15-20 min

1. All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. A right is a legal entitlement. Rights are more often fought for and claimed (in courts or even violently), and less often simply granted.



2. In Canada, our rights 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, aged 18 and older, to vote in an election (Handout 2.1). Elections are the process by which our elected representatives and government are chosen.
3. The right to vote in Canada has not always been universal. It has been withheld from many groups throughout history, including women and various ethnic and religious groups. See Handout 2.2 and other suggestions listed in the *External Resources* section.

Teacher Note: Assign Worksheet 2.3 for homework.

Discussion: 5-10 min

What is a responsibility? What responsibilities come along with our rights? Make a list of rights and corresponding responsibilities on the board. Some examples include:

Right	Responsibility
The right to vote	The responsibility to cast a ballot and make an informed decision
The right for any person to not be discriminated against	To demonstrate tolerance and respect for diversity of background, gender, ethnicity, race and religion
Freedom of expression	The responsibility not to slander someone or to spread hate propaganda

Activity: 20-30 min

- Electoral participation is declining across Canada at all levels of elections. In the last three Alberta provincial elections, only half or less than half of citizens cast ballots. What does this reflect?

Teacher Note: Voter turnout was 45 per cent in 2004, 41 per cent in 2008 and 54 per cent in 2012.

- Voter turnout is typically much lower among younger age groups. Examine voter turnout rates by age group at the federal level (Handout 2.4).
 - Which age group had the highest voter turnout? Which group had the lowest?
 - Discuss the impact. How does it influence the results? Who would politicians want to speak to more?
 - Consider possible reasons for these differences. What does it say about different age groups? What does it say about our election process?
- Watch Rick's Rant — March 29, 2011 ("The Rick Mercer Report") with your class for a humorous but insightful look at voting in Canada and youth participation.
- Ask students to imagine they are marketing advisors or a marketing firm hired by Elections Alberta to attract young voters to participate in the 2015 provincial election. In small groups or independently, students should design an advertising campaign that will encourage youth to vote by incorporating social media, digital, print and/or audio-visual elements. Post advertisements around the school or play videos in the lead-up to Student Vote Day. Submit your productions to CIVIX by email or upload them to YouTube or Facebook.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about the right and responsibility to vote. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- Is the decline in voter turnout disrespectful to those who had to fight for their right to vote? Why or why not?
- Is not voting ever a legitimate choice? What are some reasons for not voting?
- Should voting be mandatory? Why or why not?
- Will you vote when you become eligible? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. In groups or individually, have students promote various aspects of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Students can create a short speech, comic strip, dramatic presentation, essay, news article, poster or multi-media presentation.

B. Divide the class into five groups and provide each with a section from Handout 2.2 (or History of the Vote — www.elections.ca). Ask students to create a dramatic or multi-media presentation to inform the rest of the class about the pathway to universal suffrage and improved accessibility for voters.

C. Using Handout 2.2 and additional research, have students design a chronological timeline of events depicting the history of voting rights in Canada and the contributions by various individuals, agencies and non-governmental organizations.

D. Australia has a governmental system similar to Canada's, but non-voters are fined \$20 by the Australian Electoral Commission if they do not have a valid reason for not voting. As a class or in small groups, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of such a system. Ask the following discussion questions:

- Would mandatory voting make you more or less likely to vote?
- Do you think this would enhance or decrease the value Canadians put on voting?
- Would it increase voter turnout?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What rights and responsibilities do we have in Canada?
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 social force that binds you to your obligations and courses of action demanded by that force.

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, various ethnic and religious groups, and property ownership requirements.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A History of the Vote in Canada, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- The Evolution of the Franchise, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- The Electoral System of Canada, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right, CBC Digital Archives — www.cbc.ca
- Women’s Right to Vote, Telling Times Documentary — www.cpac.ca
- A History of Voting Rights, New York Times — www.nytimes.com
- Rick’s Rant — March 29, 2011 (“The Rick Mercer Report”)