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THE VOTING PROCESS



Elections Alberta is a non-partisan agency of the Legislative Assembly with a mandate to conduct free and fair elections for Albertans, to facilitate compliance with electoral laws, and to advance public awareness of and confidence in the electoral process.

Alberta established **fixed-date elections** beginning in 2012, with a requirement that provincial general elections be held in the three-month period between March 1 and May 31, during every fourth calendar year. Regardless of fixed-date election legislation, a provincial election can be held at any time if the government loses the confidence of the legislature or if the lieutenant governor were to dissolve the legislature on the advice of the premier. For example, the 2015 provincial election was held a year early, at the request of the then-premier.

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

- a Canadian citizen
- at least 18 years of age
- ordinarily resident in Alberta

An elector is not required to produce identification prior to voting if their name is on the list of electors. If their name is on the list, they will be issued a ballot to vote.

Electors can use the Voterlink website (www.voterlink.ab.ca) to register for the first time, update existing information using the registration process, or check if they are registered to vote.

An elector whose name is not on the list of electors may vote after producing government issued identification containing their 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 that establish their name. One piece must establish their current address.

Every registered elector and every valid address in the province is sent a **Where to Vote (WTV) card** detailing voting options and methods of voting, including contact information for their returning office, polling station(s) and the dates, times and locations of where to vote during advance polls and on election day. Voters are allowed to vote at any advance poll location in the province.

LESSON 12: THE VOTING PROCESS

Voters may choose to cast their ballot in one of several ways:

In person on election day – You may choose to vote in person at your designated polling station on election day, between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m.

In person at an advance poll – You may choose to vote in person at an advance poll on one of the advance polling day(s) between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. Advance polls are open between the Tuesday and Saturday in the week prior to election day.

By special ballot – You can also vote by special ballot (mail-in ballot) if you are unable to vote on election day or at advance polls. You must apply for a special ballot from the returning officer in your electoral division. You can apply for a special ballot if you are unable to vote at the advance polls or on election 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*.

Special ballots must be completed and returned before the close of polls on election day (8pm), as late ballots will be counted as rejected.

Additional polls can be established for post-secondary campuses, work camps, correctional institutions, facilities on indigenous reserves, Métis settlements, and in select public buildings per the Chief Electoral Officer. These **special mobile polls** take place during the advance polls.

Returning officers may also establish **mobile polls** in treatment centres, supportive living facilities, shelters and support centres where there are 10 or more electors receiving services. These electors must appear on the list of electors or must complete a declaration. These electors do not have to provide identification when they complete their declarations.

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. Electors can find their polling station(s) on the Elections Alberta website, in local newspapers or on their WTV card.

Voting in government elections is done by secret ballot. This ensures the privacy of each voter's preference. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

A ballot lists the names of the candidates running in your electoral division and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be valid.

The voting process at a polling station works as follows:

1. Once you confirm your eligibility, you are given a ballot that has the deputy returning 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 deputy returning officer to check for the initials.
4. Place your folded ballot in the ballot box.

If you make a mistake and mark your ballot incorrectly rendering its use inappropriate, you may return it to the deputy returning officer. This is called a **spoiled ballot**. The election officer will reissue you a new ballot. Spoiled ballots are placed in a separate envelope instead of the ballot box and are to be counted accordingly.

A voter may also choose to indicate that they do not wish to mark the ballot. This is called a declined ballot. In Alberta, this is done by receiving a ballot, then giving the unmarked ballot back to the deputy returning officer. The voter states that they do not want to vote and the poll clerk will annotate the poll book accordingly. Declined ballots are placed in a separate envelope instead of the ballot box and are to be counted accordingly during the unofficial count on Election Day.

A rejected ballot is a ballot that cannot be counted because the voter's intention cannot be interpreted from the mark on the ballot. A ballot will be rejected if: it is not marked for any candidate; it is marked for more than one candidate; or it is marked in a way that could identify the voter. The returning officer will inspect each rejected ballot to decide on the validity of the rejection.

When preparing to vote, you can consider reasons to support a candidate for MLA, a political party or leader, a specific policy idea and/or an entire party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time. You will know you are ready to vote when you feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Is it important to vote? How do I vote in provincial elections?

LESSON 12: THE VOTING PROCESS

PURPOSE

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

In this lesson, your students review essential information about voting in provincial elections in Alberta. Afterwards, they practice voting and counting ballots through a mock vote. In the *Conclusion activity*, students demonstrate their knowledge of voting by creating an instructive pamphlet or poster, which can be shared with a parent, guardian or an adult they know, encouraging them to vote.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, I can:

- explain the importance of being an active and engaged citizen;
- describe how to participate in Alberta provincial elections;
- demonstrate effective communication skills to share information and messages about voting using our words and graphics.

INTRODUCTION

1. Explain to students that the purpose of the Student Vote program is to give students a chance to practice voting so that they will be more prepared to vote in the future. The Student Vote results are also released publicly and through the news media. This allows young people to have a voice in the election and have their perspectives shared with the parties and politicians.

Watch the 'Student Vote Alberta 2015' video with your class to give students a preview.

2. Through a whole class discussion, answer the following questions.

- Which skills do you practice regularly? (e.g., sports, music, languages)
- Is it important for students to practice voting? Why or why not?
- Why should young people have the opportunity to share their views and opinions?
- Is voting in elections important? Why or why not?

ACTIVITIES

1. Using the 'How to Vote in Alberta' video and Slide Deck 12, discover some of the key aspects of voting in Alberta provincial elections.

- Who is qualified to vote in provincial elections?
- What is the list of electors?
- Where do I vote?
- How do I vote?

2. Have students practice voting by holding a mock vote with your class. Create a simple ballot with a fun question and three to four options for choices (e.g., favourite sport, food, movie, TV show or musician/band). Templates are provided in Activity 12.1. You could also use an online application or software program.

3. Show students how to fill out a ballot correctly. Students can use a checkmark, X, or any other mark as long as it clearly indicates their choice. Remind students that they can only vote for one option, otherwise, it will not count.

4. Distribute the ballots and invite each student to go behind the voting screen one at a time to mark their choice. Afterwards, ask them to re-fold their ballot to ensure privacy and place it in the ballot box.

5. Review the ballot terms 'valid', 'rejected', 'spoiled' and 'declined'.

- Accepted: A ballot that is properly marked for one candidate.
- Rejected: A ballot that cannot be counted because the choice was not clear or more than one option was selected.
- Spoiled: A ballot that was torn or marked incorrectly, and exchanged for a new one.
- Declined: A ballot that was returned by the elector due to a dissatisfaction with their options.

6. Divide students into small groups and ask them to review and count the ballots from the mock vote. One person should show the ballot to the rest of the group and as a group they should decide whether the ballot would be deemed 'valid' or 'rejected'. One person should be selected to tally the votes.

7. Add up the results from each group and announce the results.

8. Have a closing discussion and answer any remaining questions about the voting process.

- Do you think voting is easy?
- Do you feel ready to vote in the Student Vote election? Why or why not?
- What other questions do you have about voting?

CONCLUSION

Voting Poster

Have students demonstrate their knowledge by creating a poster or pamphlet about how to vote or why it is important to vote. It could be designed for a parent, guardian, or an adult they know. This poster can be done informally in a notebook, or as a larger *Assessment for Student Learning* opportunity. An image of selected student posters could be shared through social media, to increase awareness and encourage voter turnout.

Ideas for possible content:

- Lists the qualifications for eligible voters in provincial elections;
- Where and when to vote;
- The steps to cast your ballot;
- Reasons for voting.

Co-create criteria with your class. Sample criteria below.

- Headings are meaningful and appropriate;
- Graphics or symbols are used to help explain the process (if applicable);
- The tagline and/or graphics are used to capture interest;
- Maps and charts are presented to help the intended audience.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Be aware of culturally responsive practices when discussing voting with students. Open and non-judgmental discussions about reasons why people do or do not vote will help foster comfort during class talks.