



All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed **rights** and **freedoms**, which are usually articulated in a legal document as part of a constitution, such as a bill of rights.

A right is a legal entitlement or something that we are morally or legally allowed to do or have. The rights and freedoms of citizens are vital to a thriving democratic nation. Rights are often fought for and claimed (in courts or even violently) and less often simply granted.

In Canada, our rights are protected by the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**. The Charter contains seven sections: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official languages rights and minority language education rights. Canada's Charter is widely admired around the world and is the constitutional document most emulated by other nations.

Our **democratic rights** include the right for every Canadian citizen, aged 18 and older, to vote in a federal election. Elections are the process by which our elected representatives and government are chosen.

With all rights come **responsibilities**. A responsibility is a duty or obligation. It is something you should do in order to respect, promote and maintain certain rights. For example, the right to vote comes with the responsibility to cast a ballot in an informed and purposeful manner.

The right to vote in Canada has not always been universal. It has been withheld from many groups throughout history based on gender, race, religion and even occupation.

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

Women in Canada eventually gained the right to vote following years of persistent protest. Manitoba was the first province to pass suffrage legislation to include women in January 1916, and women in British Columbia received the right to vote and run for office provincially on April 5, 1917. By 1918, women in Canada could vote federally and gained the right to run for federal office in 1919.

LESSON 2: RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES IN A DEMOCRACY

Even though Canadian women achieved suffrage, it was not applicable to all women. Women and men of several ethnic and racial minorities, such as Canadians of Chinese and Japanese origin and Indigenous peoples, were still disenfranchised for several decades. First Nations men could only vote if they gave up their treaty rights and registered Indian status. First Nations peoples were not given the right to vote in British Columbia provincial elections until 1949. Universal suffrage was not achieved until 1960.

Despite moving beyond these injustices, electoral participation has been on the decline in Canada over the past several decades. In particular, low voter turnout is disproportionately concentrated among young Canadians. The *National Youth Survey Report*, commissioned by Elections Canada, identified several reasons why youth do not vote. These barriers include a lack of political interest and knowledge, not knowing where or how to vote and a lower sense that voting was a civic duty.

BIG IDEA

All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. The right to vote comes with the responsibility to cast a ballot in an informed and purposeful manner.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

Upon completion of the lesson, students are expected to know the following:

- The political and civil rights articulated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*; and
- The history of voting rights in Canada and discriminatory policies related to suffrage.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Identify and explain the responsibilities that come along with our rights and freedoms in Canada; and
- Reflect on previous discrimination with respect to voting rights and assess the significance of people, events or development in regards to universal suffrage.

RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 2: Rights and Responsibilities
- Video: The Right to Vote
- Video: History of Voting Rights in British Columbia
- Handout 2.1: Highlights from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- Handout 2.2: History of Voting Rights in Canada
- Handout 2.3: History of Voting Rights in British Columbia

- Activity Sheet 2.4: Voting Rights in Canada
 - Activity Sheet 2.5: Our Rights and Responsibilities
 - Activity Sheet 2.6: Poster Planning Sheet
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at www.studentvote.ca/bc)

ACTIVITIES

 Hook: 10-15 min

1. Discuss the idea of a 'right' and ask students to brainstorm a list of rights they have at school. Some examples include:

- The right to an education;
- The right to freedom of thought and expression;
- The right to a clean and safe space;
- The right to be treated fairly and respectfully; and
- The right to make your own friends.

2. Review your school's code of conduct or essential agreements (this can often be found on your school or school board website, or within student agendas). Connect the specific student expectations back to the list of rights created by the class, making additions where necessary. Explain the concept that rights come with responsibilities (or expectations).

3. Ask students to brainstorm a list of expectations for both students and teachers that could be added to your school's code of conduct or essential agreements. Encourage students to share their ideas with your school administration through a discussion, presentation or letter-writing activity; for example, the principal and/or vice principal could be invited to visit the class for a discussion on the current rules and potential changes.

 Essential Concepts: 20 min

Use Slide Deck 2 and the 'Right to Vote' video to review the following key terms and concepts: right, freedom, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, responsibility, universal suffrage, women's suffrage.

Teacher Note: Handouts 2.1 and 2.2 can also be used for more detailed information.

 Discussion: 5-10 min

Voter turnout in Canada has declined over the past several decades. In the 2017 British Columbia provincial election, just more than half (57.7 per cent) of eligible voters cast a ballot. Why do you think fewer people are voting than before? Do you think it is disrespectful to those that fought for the right to vote? Are there legitimate reasons not to vote?

LESSON 2: RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES IN A DEMOCRACY

Teacher Note: Be sensitive to issues at home that may challenge perspectives around voting, such as religious reasons or traditions followed by certain groups.

★ Action: 20-30 min

1. Review and interpret the history of voting rights in British Columbia using Handout 2.3 and the 'History of Voting Rights in British Columbia' video, as well as research from other sources.
2. Using Activity Sheet 2.4, have students record the date when a particular group received suffrage and how or why it was granted to them.
3. Afterwards, ask students to create a visual timeline showing when various groups received the right to vote or when access was improved.

✚ Extensions:

- A. Using Handout 2.1, review the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as a class. Individually, in pairs or as a class, ask students to consider the responsibilities that go along with each right using Activity Sheet 2.5.
- B. Ask students to create a poster or multi-media piece to celebrate universal suffrage. Activity Sheet 2.6 can be used as a poster planning tool. Students should share the promotional materials and creative presentations throughout the school leading up to your Student Vote Day. Productions can also be submitted to CIVIX by email or shared through social media.
- C. Ask students to imagine they are a member of one of the groups that struggled to obtain 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.
- D. Using Handouts 2.2 and 2.3 as well as additional research, ask the class to research the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and how they gained the right to vote. Have students write a summary or article based on their research, including *who, what, where, when and how*.
- E. The number of people participating in government elections has been decreasing in recent years. Only 57.7 per cent of citizens voted in the last provincial election, compared to 70.5 per cent in 1983. Is this decline acceptable? Is it disrespectful to those who fought for the right to vote?

F. Using Handout 2.1 as a guide, review the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as a class. Individually, in pairs or as a class, ask students to consider the responsibilities that go along with each right using Activity Sheet 2.5. Students could also use selected sections and find a real world example that represents each.



Reflection: 5 min

Have a closing discussion about rights and responsibilities. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How does living in a democracy affect you?
- How would you feel if you were denied the ability to share your views or opinions?
- What is the importance of protecting minority rights in a democracy?
- How important is it that individuals are responsible members of society?
- Will you vote in elections when you turn 18 years old? Why or why not?

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Electoral History of BC," *Elections BC* — www.elections.bc.ca/resources/electoral-history-of-bc
- "Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right," CBC Digital Archives — www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/voting-in-canada-how-a-privilege-became-a-right
- "A History of the Vote in Canada," *Elections Canada* — www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=his&document=index&lang=e
- "Women's Right to Vote," *Telling Times Documentary* — <https://www.cpac.ca/en/programs/telling-times/episodes/21252966/>
- "Aboriginal Peoples and the Fight for the Franchise," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* — www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-peoples-and-the-fight-for-the-franchise
- "Indigenous suffrage," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* — www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-suffrage
- "Right to Vote," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* — www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/franchise