



RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES IN A DEMOCRACY

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.

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

LESSON 2: RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES IN A DEMOCRACY

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 and discriminatory policies in Canada.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Assess the responsibilities that come along with rights and freedoms in Canada;
- Reflect on past injustices with respect to voting rights; and
- Determine appropriate ways to support and celebrate 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
- Handout 2.4: Provincial Election Voter Turnout by Age Group

(Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at www.studentvote.ca/bc)

ACTIVITIES

 **Hook: 15-20 min**

1. Discuss the concept 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. Link the specific expectations back to the list of rights created by students, adding to the list where necessary. Reinforce the concept that rights come with responsibilities.

3. Ask students to brainstorm a list of expectations that could be added to your school's code of conduct or essential agreements. Encourage students to share this information with your school administration through a discussion, multi-media 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*, fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, responsibility, universal suffrage, women's suffrage. 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 last three decades. In the 2017 British Columbia provincial election, 57.7 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot. Why do you think fewer people are voting? Do you think it is disrespectful to those who fought for the right to vote? Are there legitimate reasons to not vote?

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

LESSON 2: RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES IN A DEMOCRACY

★ Action: 20-30 min

1. Using Handout 2.3 and the 'History of Voting Rights in British Columbia' video, review the evolution of suffrage within the province.

2. Ask students to create a visual campaign or visual timeline to depict the path of other minority groups to suffrage. In small groups or independently, students should design one or more media products (e.g., poster, video, article/blog, social media posts) to illustrate the history of voting rights and to emphasize our right and responsibility to vote.

3. Students should share the promotional materials and creative multi-media 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.

✚ Extensions:

A. Divide students into five groups and provide each with a section from Handout 2.2. Ask students to create a dramatic or multi-media presentation to inform the rest of the class about the pathway to universal suffrage. A particular focus could be placed on the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and how they gained the right to vote. Handout 2.3 can also be referenced.

B. Typically, voter turnout among youth is much lower than older age groups. Using Handout 2.4, examine voter turnout rates by age group at the provincial level and initiate a class discussion.

- Which age group usually has the highest voter turnout? Which group usually has the lowest?
- What is the impact of the varying rate of voter turnout among different age groups? How does it influence the results of an election? Which age groups are politicians more likely to want to speak with?
- Consider possible reasons for these differences. What does it say about different age groups? What does it say about our election process?

C. Ask students what words or images come to mind when they think of civil and political rights. Students should incorporate quotes from historical sources or from current politicians in an essay about the significance of living in a country with protected rights and freedoms. Alternatively, students can create a poster or acrostic poem using the word 'democracy' that promotes or illustrates their rights and freedoms in Canada.



Reflection: 5 min

Have a closing discussion about the right and responsibility to vote. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How would you feel if you were denied the ability to share your views or opinions?
- Why is it valuable to strive towards similar participation rates among all groups and demographics? What happens if they are not balanced?
- Will you vote when you become eligible? 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