

Lesson 1

Democracy



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What does it mean to live in a democracy?
- 2 How can we support and maintain our democracy?

OVERVIEW

There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy, such as fair elections, fundamental freedoms, political tolerance, citizen participation and the rule of law. Citizens have a responsibility to uphold and support these principles.

In this lesson, students reflect on and discuss the values they believe are important in society. Next, students explore the underlying principles of democracy, connecting them back to values that are important to them and looking at real-world examples. Afterwards, students discuss the obligation of citizens to stand by these principles and exercise their rights in a responsible manner.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- evaluate the values they believe are important in society;
- describe the principles of democracy; and,
- analyze the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

Starter

1. Review the photos in Slide Deck 1 and ask students what words or concepts come to mind.
2. Through a 'Placemat' activity, have students answer the question: What values are important in society? (e.g., justice, freedom, respect, community, fairness)

The Placemat Activity is a cooperative learning strategy that allows each student in a group to record their own ideas on a topic or question, before working with the rest of their group to reach a consensus on a response.

- a) Divide students into groups of four or five.
- b) Provide each group with one large sheet of paper divided into sections (one for each student and a centre block for the final group response). Alternatively, you can use a digital template, such as a Google Doc, to complete the activity.
- c) Ask students to respond individually to the question within their allotted space.
- d) Provide time for each student to share their recorded responses with the rest of their group without discussion or debate from the other students.
- e) Next, have each group decide, collectively, on the five most important values and record them in the centre of the placemat.
- f) Have each group write their list of values on sticky notes and post them on a wall or blackboard.
- g) Afterwards, order the sticky notes to see which were most common and create a master list.

Activities

1. Review the idea of living in a democracy and the foundational principles using the "Democratic Principles" video and Handout 1.2.
 - Democracy by definition is "rule by the people," where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making.
 - A democratic society favours equal rights, freedom of speech, rule of law and political tolerance.
 - A healthy democracy requires responsible citizens who value the system of government and actively participate in society.
2. Through a class discussion, make connections between the democratic principles and the student responses from the *Starter* activity. Consider writing out the democratic principles and adding the sticky notes from the *Starter* activity underneath each principle. Some values may be connected to multiple principles.
3. Using Slide Deck 1 as a starting point, analyze examples of democratic principles in practice and the different ways they shape our lives. Ask students to share their own real-world examples with each slide.
4. Using a Think-Pair-Share protocol, have a closing discussion with the following prompts.
 - Is it important for citizens to support and uphold these principles? What would happen if no one cared?
 - Do our rights come with responsibilities? Explain using concrete examples. For example, the right to protest comes with the responsibility to do so peacefully and without violence.

Consolidation

Option 1: Which concepts from this lesson about democratic principles are most important to remember? Use the exit card (Activity 1.2) to create six hashtags to describe what you learned from the lesson.

Option 2: Which principle is most important to you? Create a poster or digital artwork that reflects this principle and what it means to you.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

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| Language Learners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with terms and definitions in advance. • Share the lesson videos before class discussions and activities. • Ensure that subtitles are on during videos. • Support students' understanding of democratic principles with additional real-world examples. |
| Culturally Responsive Pedagogy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare democracy to other forms of governance representing different countries and cultures that have meaning for your students. • Students will come from different backgrounds and may have different opinions on democracy. Ensuring a safe place for respectful discussion is encouraged. • Review democratic principles in various social settings, inclusive of First Nations peoples, and diverse cultural groups. • Discuss the systemic barriers to equality faced by First Nations peoples, and other diverse cultural groups. |
| Accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion. |

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Democracy means rule by the people. There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. Citizens have a responsibility to uphold and support these principles.

Equality and Human Rights:

All individuals are valued equally, have equal opportunities and may not be discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. Fundamental rights include freedom of thought, opinion and assembly.

Economic Freedom: The government allows some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose their own work and join labour unions. It is generally accepted that a free market should exist in a democracy and that government should not control the economy.

Protected Rights: In a democracy, there is a formal declaration of citizens' rights and freedoms. This document limits the powers of government, explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people and protects people from a government that might abuse its powers.

The Rule of Law: All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination. No one is above the law – this includes elected officials, the police and members of the military.

Control of the Abuse of Power:

To protect corruption and abuses of power, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government offices and those who work for them.

Free and Fair Elections: Elected officials are chosen every few years by the people in a free and fair manner. Adult citizens have the right to vote and run for office regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or economic status.

Multi-Party Systems: Multiple party systems provide the government with different viewpoints on issues and voters are given a choice of candidates, parties and policies to support.

Citizen Participation: Participation can take the form of running for office, voting in elections, becoming an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.

Accountability and Transparency:

Elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and are accountable to the people. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend. The press and the public are kept informed regarding decisions being made.

Independent Judiciary: Courts and the judicial system are impartial. Judges and the judicial branch are free to act without influence or control from the executive and legislative branches of government. They should also not be corrupted or influenced by other individuals, businesses or political groups.

Political Tolerance: People who belong to different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, all hold unique and valued political views. Democratic societies strive to be politically tolerant, and the rights of minorities and other groups are protected. Those who are not in power must be allowed to organize and share their opinions.

Accepting the Results of Elections:

Free and fair elections have both winners and losers. The losers and their supporters must accept that they have lost an election as democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the next.