Lesson 6
Local Elections

GUIDING QUESTIONS

❶ **How is my municipal council or electoral area director elected?**

❷ **How can I learn about the election candidates?**

❸ **Which candidate(s) do I support and why?**

OVERVIEW

Elections present an opportunity for citizens to discuss political issues and shape the future direction of their community.

In this lesson, students become acquainted with the local election process and analyze ways to compare the candidates. In groups, students collect information about or from one of the candidates, and share their findings with the rest of the class. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on the reasons behind their candidate preferences.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze issues facing their community;
- explain details about the local election process;
- analyze different ways to compare the candidates;
- research the candidates running for election using primary and secondary resources;
- evaluate which criteria is important to them when comparing the candidates and/or which candidate(s) they support and why.

Starter

1. Share the following with students to frame the lesson.

   In any given place – a neighbourhood, community, province or country – anywhere that groups of people live together and where the laws and decisions affect everyone, there will be differences in opinions about how government and society should work, which issues are most important and how best to take action. Elections present an opportunity for citizens to discuss political issues and shape the future direction of their community.

2. In small groups, have students brainstorm some of the most pressing issues in your community. Aim for 6 to 8 issues.

3. As a class, co-create criteria to evaluate the list of community issues.

   Sample criteria: Ask students to respond to the following questions for each issue – Definitely / Probably / Probably not / Definitely not

   • Is the impact long lasting?
   • Is the impact extreme – positively or negatively?
   • Are many people affected?
   • Does it directly affect you, your family and friends?
   • Are many people for and/or against it?
   • Are the differences between supporters and opponents substantial?

4. Return to small groups and have students rank the issues using the criteria established.

5. Follow up with a class discussion to review the small group rankings and as a class come to a consensus on the top three issues facing your community.

Activities

1. Review the local election process in British Columbia using the following guiding questions and Slide Deck 6. Add specific information about the election races in your community to the Slide Deck in advance.

   • Why do we have elections?
   • Who is responsible for organizing local elections?
   • How are candidates elected in local elections?
   • How many candidates can I vote for in each race?

2. On a blackboard or whiteboard, write down the following question: How do voters decide who to vote for?

   Through a discussion, generate questions to frame this decision. Start with pairs or small groups and then move to a whole class discussion.

Sample criteria for evaluating candidates:

   • Why does the candidate want to be elected?
   • Who would make a good leader for the community?
   • Who would work well with the rest of council or regional district board to make decisions for our community?
   • What experience does the candidate have in serving the community?
   • Which candidates share the same concerns as me? Do they have ideas to address these issues?
   • What ideas or proposals do the candidates have for our municipality / community? Which candidate's ideas do I support the most?

3. Find out which candidates are running for election in your municipality or electoral area. Show students where they can find this information by visiting your local government's website.

   > **TEACHER NOTE**
   > If your municipality has political parties/election slates, explain the concept to students. You may also want to consider focusing research on the parties and/or mayoral candidates, rather than all the council candidates, to reduce the amount of work that follows.

4. Divide the class into pairs or small groups to research the candidates running for election. As a class, develop a checklist for creating a candidate profile. Have students also choose how the information will be presented (e.g., poster, slide deck, video, mock social media profile).

   Sample candidate profile:

   • Name and photo
   • Personal information (What skills or experience do they have for the job?)
   • Reason for running (Why do they want the job?)
   • Priorities (What issues are most important to the candidate?)
   • Issues (What is their position or proposed ideas for three election issues?)

   > **TEACHER NOTE**
   > Encourage students to use primary and secondary resources, including news articles and commentary, candidate websites and social media, or even contact the candidates directly.

5. Have each group present their candidate profile to the rest of the class. Ask students to take notes using Activity 6.1. Alternatively, you can post the group work on a digital platform and allow students to review each profile on their own.

Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about evaluating the candidates, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions.

- What criteria is most important to you when evaluating the candidates and why?
- Which candidate do you prefer and why?
- Which candidate do you think will best address the issues that matter most to you? Explain your reasoning.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Language Learners	• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	• Analyze the diversity of the candidates running in your community and discuss the need for diversity in politics.
	  - Local government in Metro Vancouver is 90% white — but it doesn't have to stay that way: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/metro-vancouver-diversity-solutions-2020-1.5620528
	  - Women in Politics: https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/women-politics/
	  - Refugees in Politics: https://www.vicnews.com/news/canada-declares-victoria-councillor-a-noteworthy-historical-figure/

Accommodations	• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion. • Consider using a digital format for the candidate research and profile so that it can be shared online, in order to limit interactions or movement in the classroom.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

General local elections in British Columbia are held every four years on the third Saturday in October. The next general local elections will be held on Saturday, October 15, 2022. British Columbians will elect their municipal council members, or if they live in an unincorporated area, they will elect their electoral area director, as well as other positions such as Park Board representatives and Island Trust trustees. (The Islands Trust is a federated body responsible for protecting the unique nature and amenities of 13 major islands and more than 450 smaller islands and the surrounding waters in the southern Strait of Georgia and Howe Sound.)

An individual who seeks public office or competes for the job of elected representative is called a **candidate**. It is their job to share their goals, ideas and commitment to the job in order to win the support of voters during a campaign.

In some of the larger municipalities in the province, such as Vancouver, Surrey and Richmond, candidates may belong to a political party or election slate. A **political party** is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political beliefs whose intention is to achieve power through an election and create meaningful political change. An **election slate** is a group of candidates that run in multi-seat elections on a common platform.

British Columbia municipalities use a system called **First-Past-The-Post** (FPTP). A successful candidate must receive the most votes in order to be elected. In a mayoral race, only a single candidate wins because there is only one position. Whereas, in a multi-member race, where five councillors are elected **at large**, it is the five candidates with the most votes that win a seat on council.

Across all municipalities, there may be ten or more candidates running for a position on council, depending on the race.

Conversely, a candidate is elected by **acclamation** if they have no opponents, or if the number of candidates match the number of council members to be elected. In that case, no vote is held for that race.

To become a candidate in a local government election in British Columbia, you must be 18 years of age or older on general voting day; be a Canadian citizen, have been a resident of British Columbia for at least six months prior to filing nomination documents; and, not be disqualified under the *Local Government Act* or any other enactment from being nominated for, being elected to or holding office, or be otherwise disqualified by law.

There are many ways to gather information about the election candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings or all-candidate debates where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the issues and ask them questions. Information can also be found on radio and television, media websites or in newspapers and local magazines. Individuals may also visit campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they visit homes during door to door canvassing. Information may also be accessible online through candidate websites and social media pages.