

Lesson 1

Democracy



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 **What does it mean to live in a democracy?**
- 2 **Which principles of democracy are most important to me?**

PURPOSE

There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy, such as fair elections, fundamental freedoms, citizen participation and the rule of law.

In this lesson, students explore what democracy means and what the implications are for them as members of a democracy. After learning about key democratic principles, they investigate how the principles look in practice. In the *Consolidation* activity, they reflect on the significance of democratic principles for themselves and society.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the meaning of democracy;
- describe some fundamental principles of democracy and how they are reflected in current events;
- evaluate which democratic principle affects their life the most or which principle they think is most important.

Starter

1. Give students time to work in pairs or small groups to activate any background knowledge they have about the term 'democracy' using a Frayer Model (Activity 1.1). Students can also use images to communicate their thinking.

TEACHER NOTE

Consider providing some key terms to support their thinking, such as political power, leadership, government, citizen participation, viewpoints, rights and freedoms.

2. Watch the 'Government and Democracy' video and have students add to their notes on Activity 1.1.
3. Afterwards, debrief as a class and create a class definition for the term 'democracy'. Students should add the class definition to their activity sheet.

Activities

1. Using the 'Democratic Principles' video and/or Handout 1.2, explain to students that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them work together to complete Activity 1.3. For each principle, students should help each other summarize it in their own words. Afterwards, review the responses as a class and ensure there is a solid understanding of the principles.
3. Students should next investigate what the principles look like in practice and consider which principle(s) are most important. Two options:

OPTION A: Provide students with reputable media sources (e.g., newspapers, journals) in print or online and have them search for stories in which they feel one of the principles is being put into practice or being challenged. Students can also use examples from their own lives. Ask students to complete the second column of Activity 1.3.

OPTION B: Provide students with news articles and have students identify which principle(s) are relevant or being put into practice. This could be completed using a 'Jigsaw' method, where students analyze an article with others and then share it with their group.

Examples:

- "Potential jurors in P.E.I. avoid punishment for failing to show for duty," *The Guardian* (March 24, 2018)
 - "Canada's freedom of information laws 'very outdated': commissioner," *iPolitics* (September 28, 2018)
 - "Quebec students poised to strike over climate change," *Montreal Gazette* (April 22, 2019)
 - "Hundreds walk out of school to protest climate change inaction in Regina," *Global News* (May 3, 2019)
 - "Former N.S. Mountie sentenced to decade in prison for cocaine theft, trafficking," *CTV News* (July 4, 2019)
 - "UBC barred from Vancouver Pride Parade for hosting controversial speaker," *CBC News* (July 8, 2019)
 - "No direct threats to the election yet but foreign actors are getting ready to meddle: officials," *CBC News* (Jul 9, 2019)
4. Invite students to share their examples and rankings in a larger group discussion.

Consolidation

Using a 'Quick Write' strategy, have students reflect on the significance of democratic principles using one of the prompts below.

Provide students with 3-5 minutes to write a response on a piece of paper or within their learning journal. Inform students that they will be assessed on their ideas and content, not grammar or organization, so they should write freely.

- The democratic principle that most affects my life is... because....
- The democratic principle that I think is most important is... because....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A **government** is made up of the people and institutions put in place to manage the land, resources and people living within its borders. Various types of government exist in the world.

Governments can be compared by their governance model, the number of people who have access to power, the rights and freedoms granted to citizens, and the existence of rule of law (laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently).

An **autocracy** is a type of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person who rules without restriction. There is no rule of law and citizens are not consulted on the decisions and affairs of the country. An autocracy can be a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy.

In a **dictatorship**, the dictator or ruling group exercises power through control of a mass movement, a political party or the military. Dictatorships often come to power through a military takeover (also known as a coup d'état). Power is then maintained without the consent of the people through a one-party state where political opposition is forbidden. Dictatorships generally restrict individual civil and political rights and there is no independent media.

The term **authoritarianism** is sometimes used to describe dictatorships. Authoritarian governments exercise forceful control over the population with no particular concern for their preferences or for public opinion.

A **monarchy** is a form of government where a monarch (king or queen) is the head of state. The role of the monarch is inherited and usually lasts until death or abdication. The power of ruling monarchs can vary; in an **absolute monarchy**, a monarch retains full political power over a state and its people whereas in a **constitutional monarchy**, the role of the monarch is more symbolic. In a constitutional monarchy, the authority of the monarch is limited by a constitution, which includes the principles and laws of a nation or state, defines the powers and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people living within it. A constitutional monarchy has a democratically elected government with a government leader, and a monarch who remains the head of state and performs ceremonial duties.

A **democracy** is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making. In a direct democracy, citizens themselves vote for or against specific proposals or laws. In an indirect or representative democracy, citizens elect political representatives to make decisions on their behalf. In democratic countries, citizens have protected civil and political rights such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association, the right to participate in free and fair elections, and to run for political office. There are many different types of representative democracies around the world.

A **republic** is a sovereign state, country or government without a monarch where all members of government are elected (including the head of state), and the democratically elected government holds all political power. Similar to a constitutional monarchy, the government in a republic exercises power according to the rule of law and often has a constitution.

A **consensus democracy** uses a consensus decision-making model while developing legislation and aims to be more collaborative and inclusive by taking into account a broad range of opinions, as opposed to decisions made by majority rule. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut both have consensus governments where a group of individuals without any political party affiliation share political power.

Canada's system of government is a **parliamentary democracy** and a **constitutional monarchy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures, and the political party with the most elected representatives, usually forms government. The British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is our head of state, represented by the Governor General at the federal level. Every act of government is done in the name of the Queen, but the authority for every act comes from the Canadian people through the Constitution. The Constitution of Canada is the highest legal ruling in the country and includes laws, decisions by judges, agreements between federal and provincial governments, traditions, and our civil and political rights (the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*).