

# Lesson 1

## Democracy and Voting



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do we have elections?
- 2 How do we vote in elections?
- 3 Is it important to vote?

### OVERVIEW

Voting in elections is an opportunity to shape your government and the future of your community and country.

In this lesson, students review the idea of democracy and elections. Afterwards, they practice voting through a mock vote and analyze the importance of voting by secret ballot. Next, students learn about the upcoming federal election and the Student Vote program. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on what they want to learn before casting their ballot on Student Vote Day.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the purpose of elections;
- describe the voting process;
- evaluate why it is important to vote; and
- communicate what they want to learn through their Student Vote experience.

## Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- Be sensitive to issues at home that may challenge perspectives around voting and democratic participation, such as religion or traditions.
- Recognize and acknowledge barriers that inhibit individuals or groups from voting (e.g., negative history, socio-economic class, language, newcomers).
- Supplies/Needs: "Voting in a Democracy" video, "Why Voting Matters" video, "Student Vote Canada 2019" video, Slide Deck 1, paper or digital ballots (Activity 1.1 or the Google Forms or Microsoft Forms templates), and a ballot box and voting screen if organizing a polling station.
- All digital files, videos and slide decks can be found at: [studentvote.ca/canada](http://studentvote.ca/canada) (Classroom Resources).

## Starter

Through a whole class discussion, ask students to share examples of when they were involved in a decision for a group (e.g., family activity, choice for movie night, a game to play at recess, topic for a group assignment).

- How did you make the group decision? What was the method or process? Did everyone have a say?
- Were you happy with the decision? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is important to have a way to express your opinion or have a voice in decisions that affect you?
- What are some decisions you want to have a say in and why?

## Activities

1. Using the "Voting in a Democracy" video and/or Slide Deck 1, review the concept of democracy and elections.
  - A **democracy** is a system of government, where citizens get to have a say in how government is run. Canada is a democracy.
  - Not all people live in a democracy. In some places in the world, citizens have little power or influence over their government.
  - Voting in elections is an important way we influence our government. It is the method for choosing **representatives** to make decisions on our behalf.
  - A **candidate** is a person who competes for the job of an elected representative. There are usually several candidates in each election race. Their job is to convince voters to choose them.
  - On election day, citizens express their choices by voting, usually by marking a **ballot** paper.

2. Watch the "Why Voting Matters" video and listen to young people talk about why they think voting is important. Afterwards, review some of the reasons shared by students and write a list of key words or phrases so that students can see.
3. Show students how to fill out a ballot correctly (Slide Deck 1, slide 9). You can use a check-mark, X, or any other mark as long as the choice is clear. Reinforce that you are only allowed to make one choice. If you mark the ballot for more than one option, it will not count.
4. Next, have students practice voting by holding a mock vote in your class. Use Activity 1.1 (or the Google Forms template) to create a simple ballot with a fun question and three to four choices (e.g., favourite sport, food, movie, TV show or musician/band). Alternatively, you could vote on something that has consequences, such as a game to play in class, an outdoor activity or spirit day theme.

### TEACHER NOTE

If possible, set up a polling station for the mock vote to mirror the real process. If you choose to vote using digital ballots or have students vote at their desk, show students a picture of a polling station (Slide Deck 1, slide 10).

5. Tally the results of the vote. Emphasize the importance of privacy and no one knowing how each person voted.
6. Reflect on the idea of a secret ballot (Slide Deck 1, slides 10-12) and debrief on the voting activity.
  - Why do you think we vote by "secret ballot"?
  - Did you know that a long time ago elections were held in public? What are some problems with voting in public? How could it influence the election process?
  - Were you happy with the results of the vote? Why or why not? (Reinforce the idea that in a democracy you might not always like the outcome, but most importantly, you had a chance to express your opinion.)
  - How would you feel if you did not have a chance to participate and only some students made the decision?
  - Is it important to participate in the voting process? Why or why not?

7. Introduce the upcoming federal election and the Student Vote Canada program.
  - In Canada, we have elections for each level of government (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal/local, band councils).
  - In the upcoming federal election, voters throughout Canada will elect people to represent them in the House of Commons in Ottawa. These representatives are called **Members of Parliament**.
  - In federal elections, most candidates belong to **political parties**. Political parties are like teams. They share similar views and values, and work together to get elected.
  - Elementary and high school students will also have an opportunity to take part in the election and practice voting through a program called **Student Vote**.
  - After learning about the political parties and candidates, students will vote in a parallel election.
  - Although the votes will not count in the official tallies, the Student Vote Canada results are shared with the public and covered by media. This allows young people to have a voice in the election and have their opinions shared.
8. Watch the "Student Vote Canada 2019" video to hear students and teachers speak about their experience with the program (for the 2019 federal election).

## Consolidation

Ask students to discuss what they want to learn from the Student Vote program. Co-create a list of learning goals that students want to achieve by the time they cast their Student Vote ballot (e.g., How do I decide who to vote for? How do I find information about my candidates, and the parties they represent? What skills or qualities should I look for in the candidates? What issues are important in my community, my province/territory and throughout the country?). Keep this list posted in the classroom for the duration of the program.

## Extended Learning

Watch the "Government and Democracy" video and have students complete Activity 1.2. This video outlines the characteristics of a dictatorship, oligarchy and democracy. It also reviews how Canada is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, and what it means for our country.



## ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Section	Guiding Questions for Teachers
<b>Starter</b>	Can students appreciate the value of having a say in decisions?
<b>Activities</b>	Are students able to understand the value of participating in government elections? Are students accurately marking their ballot? Can students analyze the importance of voting by secret ballot?
<b>Consolidation</b>	Can students generate learning goals for the Student Vote program?

## ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

<b>Individual Education Plans</b>	<p><b>Modifications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide key terms and definitions in advance.</li> <li>• Present examples of different ways you can make decisions (autocratic/dictatorship, democracy).</li> <li>• Use additional CIVIX video resources on democracy and voting to help students develop prior knowledge before class discussions and activities (i.e., the “Government and Democracy” video).</li> </ul> <p><b>Enrichment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Activities</i> – Have students conduct research into the roles of different election officials (see <i>Election Manual</i>) or ways the voting process has evolved to be more accessible over the years.</li> </ul>
<b>Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- democracy</li> <li>- government</li> <li>- elections</li> <li>- candidate</li> <li>- political party</li> <li>- ballot</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind students that new immigrants, adults who have difficulty reading, Language Learners, persons who are homeless and other specific groups may face challenges understanding or accessing the election system. Keep the focus on ideas to increase access and the benefits our society gets from hearing different voices, not only on the disadvantages these groups face.</li> </ul>
<b>Accessibility &amp; Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure students can access ballot templates (large print, alternative colours, electronic copies).</li> <li>• Consider using an online voting survey or platform to conduct the vote (e.g., Google Forms or Microsoft Forms).</li> <li>• If using a stationary polling station for the mock vote:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ask students to use their own pencils/pens to avoid sharing</li> <li>- practice physical distancing</li> <li>- provide mobility accommodations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Demonstrate examples of valid ballots and rejected ballots so that students understand the difference.</li> </ul>

## 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.

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 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, and the right to participate in free and fair elections, and run for political office.

Canada's system of government is a **parliamentary democracy**. 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.

In federal elections, voters throughout Canada elect politicians to represent them in the House of Commons in Ottawa. These politicians are called **Members of Parliament**.

Voting across Canada is done by **secret ballot**. This ensures the privacy of each voter's choice. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made. It is actually illegal to take a photo of a marked ballot.

A **ballot** lists the names of the candidates running in your riding and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark your preference. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot is valid. This includes a checkmark, X, shading in or another marking.

A **rejected ballot** is a ballot that cannot be counted due to a deliberate

or accidental unrecognizable choice. This can include marking the ballot for more than one candidate even if different symbols are used, ranking the candidates, leaving the ballot blank, writing your name or anything on the ballot.

A **spoiled ballot** is a ballot that has been kept separate and never placed in the ballot box because it was mistakenly marked or torn, and exchanged for a new ballot. The **election worker** marks the ballot as spoiled and sets it aside.

When preparing to vote, you can consider reasons to support a candidate for MP, a political party or leader, a specific policy idea and/or an entire party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time. You will know you are ready to vote when you feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

Elections Canada is the official source for all information about federal elections in Canada. Find out more information at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca).