

Lesson 3

Informed Citizenship



GUIDING QUESTIONS

1 How does information influence my decisions?

2 Do you think people should be exposed to different perspectives or more than one side of an issue before making a decision?

3 What are the opportunities and challenges of using online platforms?

OVERVIEW

Being a responsible citizen involves seeking out information from a variety of sources and comparing perspectives on issues of importance.

In this lesson, students experience the relationship between the information we consume and the decisions we make through a hands-on interactive activity. Before participating in a mock local election, students learn about the candidates and election issues by reviewing information from one of two polarized social media feeds. After the vote, students discuss how what they read may have influenced their decision. Next, students learn about how the internet has changed the way we consume and share information, and evaluate the opportunities and challenges

associated with getting information from online platforms.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze how news and information can influence our opinion on people, events and issues;
- describe how algorithms personalize the information we see online;
- evaluate the opportunities and challenges associated with receiving information through online platforms; and,
- describe strategies for being an informed citizen and making responsible choices.

Starter

1. Start with an opening conversation about making informed decisions. In pairs or small groups, ask students to consider how they would become informed to vote in the following scenarios.

- a) School council election
- b) Federal election

Discussion questions:

- What actions would you take to learn about the people running for election?
- Which sources of information would you rely on and why?
- Do you think it is important to make an informed decision? Why or why not?

Activities

1. Complete the *Feed for Thought: Election Edition* activity found at the CIVIX website newsliteracy.ca. The activity can be used as an online activity (online scrollable feeds and online voting with automatic results reports). Alternatively, you can print paper feeds and use paper ballots (with manual counting). Either way, you will need to register at newsliteracy.ca to access the materials.

- a) **Introduce the Scenario.** There is a high-stakes election coming up, and you are going to vote in it. There are two candidates to choose from, and people in your community feel strongly about who should win. It will likely be a close race. Before you cast your ballot, you will learn about the candidates and election issues by reviewing information on social media to help make your choice. The social media feed has a mix of articles from news media and posts from friends and community members.
- b) **Read the Feeds.** Without informing students of the two different feeds, provide some students with 'Feed A', and others with 'Feed B' (each feed supports one of the two candidates). If you are using the online version, the link provided will randomly assign students one of the two feeds. Give students 10 minutes to review the information.
- c) **Vote.** Have students vote for the candidates using the online voting method (following the online social media feed) or by distributing paper ballots (Activity 3.1). Tabulate the results and announce them to the class. If you are using the online voting system, you can access the results from your dashboard.

d) **Debrief.** Through a whole-class discussion, ask students why they voted the way they did and what information shaped their decision.

Over the course of the discussion, it should become obvious that some students were provided with different information than others. At an appropriate point in the discussion, share the fact that there were two different feeds. You can also review the feeds side-by-side to compare the differences (preview links are available newsliteracy.ca).

Further questions to prompt discussion:

- How did you feel about the results of the vote before you knew there were two feeds? Were you surprised by the outcome? Why or why not?
 - How might two people end up with such different news feeds?
 - What are the consequences of people consuming different facts and opinions?
 - Do you think people should be exposed to different perspectives or more than one side of an issue before making their decision?
2. Watch the "Behind the Screens: Who decides what I see online?" video and/or the "Algorithms and Filter Bubbles" video, and/or review Slide Deck 3 to introduce the concepts of algorithms and filter bubbles, and the effects of online platforms on democracy. Key questions:
- Have you ever noticed information or advertisements online that were based on your previous internet searches?
 - How do algorithms personalize your internet experience?
 - What happens if we only see information we like or agree with?

TEACHER NOTE

The content in the videos is very similar. You can choose either option or both.

Consolidation

In pairs or small groups, ask students to respond to the following questions. Afterwards, discuss the responses as a class.

- Why is it important to think critically about online information?
- What are the opportunities and challenges associated with online platforms? (This can be completed with a T-Chart.)
- How can we make sure we are informed citizens?
- Why should we consider different perspectives?

TEACHER NOTE

The last question above (Why should we consider different perspectives?) could be communicated on a class bulletin board so that it remains visible to students over the course of the program and beyond.

Extended Learning

Ask students to create a 'healthy news diet/plan' for the upcoming election. First, have them list different information sources they will rely on to learn about the election and the choices. To support their thinking, provide students with a list of credible news sources, including national and local media. Next, have students create a schedule for news consumption for the remainder of the campaign. Encourage students to include a variety of news sources and people in their plan.

Assessment

Ask students to fill out the '3-2-1 Exit Card' (Activity 3.2).

- What are three misconceptions you had before the lesson?
- What are two actions you may take based on what you learned?
- What is one question you still have?

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., online platforms, algorithms, filter bubbles).• Share the "Behind the Screens" and/or "Algorithms and Filter Bubbles" videos before class discussions and activities.• Ensure that subtitles are on during the videos.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students may come from households with varying access to the internet, and have different levels of familiarity with social media. Keep in mind that not all students will have prior knowledge of the social media feeds being emulated in the 'Feed for Thought' activity.• Encourage students to share their own experiences with online platforms and social media.• Ensure that you are open and encouraging of diverse viewpoints your students may share.
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, considering using Google Docs for collaborative discussion/brainstorming.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

As citizens living in a democracy, we have a responsibility to stay informed about the issues that matter to us and to society. This is true all the time, but especially when we must make a meaningful choice at the ballot box.

The introduction of the internet and the rise of social media have been significant for news and information, and complicated for citizens.

Where traditional news organizations were once the **gatekeepers** of information and the only ones with the resources to disseminate it — printing presses and TV stations are costly to purchase and operate — the internet allows anyone, anywhere to be a publisher.

The rise of blogging and social media a generation ago was widely viewed as the democratization of

information, bringing new voices into public discourse and leading to positive social change. The reality of online communication has been more complex.

When news came only from traditional or **legacy media** — newspapers, TV, and radio — there was always someone who stood between audiences and information, a person or process that filtered the stories or content, checked facts and packaged stories for public consumption.

Where human editors and producers were once the only gatekeepers who decided what news audiences saw, on the internet, that job belongs to **algorithms**, which are sets of instructions that tell computers how to perform specific tasks, like sorting information. Social media algorithms work in such a way that we are more likely to see content that is similar to what we already like or agree with. Our social media feeds never give the whole picture.

Since people have become such heavy adopters of **social media**, they now rely on these sites (such as Facebook or TikTok) for news. The problem is that social media platforms never intended to be news organizations, and there are consequences for informed citizenship when people rely on friends and the results of algorithms to find out about what is happening in the world.

Informed citizenship involves seeking out news and information from a variety of sources, comparing perspectives and keeping up with new developments. There are things you can do to make sure you are informed, particularly when there is so much information available online.