

Lesson 5: Federal Elections



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How are candidates elected to the House of Commons?**
- 2 Who are the candidates running in my electoral district?**
- 3 Which party or candidate will best address my priorities and concerns?**

OVERVIEW

During federal elections, political parties and candidates communicate their ideas and vision for the country to gain public support. Voters need to evaluate the policies and promises critically, and find out which party or candidate best aligns with their political views and priorities.

In this lesson, students become familiar with federal elections in Canada and learn how to become informed voters. After learning about the electoral process, they work in groups to research the candidates and parties running in the election. In the *Consolidation* activity, students evaluate the choices and decide who they support and why.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe the federal election process;
- identify their electoral district and determine which candidates are running for election;
- work collaboratively with their peers to learn about the candidates and parties;
- compare how different political parties or candidates will respond to the same political issues; and,
- apply political decision-making skills to evaluate the parties and candidates and justify their choices with reasoned explanations.

Readiness

A few days before the lesson, ask students to survey at least five family members or friends about which issues they believe are most important in the federal election. This information could be collected informally through discussion or through an online survey, or using Handout 5.1.

Suggested prompts:

- Which issue is most important to you over the next five years?
- Which two issues should the federal government take action on immediately?

Starter

1. Highlight to students that the federal election presents a chance for citizens to discuss political issues affecting them and their communities, and to debate the future direction of the country.
2. Provide students with the list of current policy issues (Handout 5.1), or create your own based on opinion polls.
3. Have students rank their personal top 5 issues from most to least important. Ask them to write a brief justification for their top choice.
4. Divide students into small groups and have them:
 - Share their rankings
 - Discuss and debate the issues
 - Agree as a group on a top 3 list
5. Ask each group to share their top 3 issues and explain their reasoning to the class. As a class, work together to come to a final consensus on the top 3 issues for the whole class.

If consensus is hard to reach, hold a class vote (Dotmocracy-style) where each student gets 3 dots/stickers to place on the issues they feel are most important, and then tally the results.

Activities

1. Ask students to fill out the 'before' column in the anticipation guide (Activity 5.2).

2. Review the election process in Canada using the "Federal Elections" video and Slide Deck 5.
 - Federal elections in Canada are usually held every four years—one year before the constitutionally required five-year limit for a parliament. However, the prime minister can request an election earlier if desired.
 - Canada is currently divided into 343 electoral districts (also called ridings), and each district elects one Member of Parliament (MP) to the House of Commons.
 - Candidates from different political parties (or independents) compete for the job of MP by sharing their ideas and convincing voters to choose them.
 - After the election, the party with the most members in the House of Commons usually forms the government, and their leader becomes the prime minister.
3. Demonstrate to students how they can find out which electoral district they live in by visiting the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca). Go to the 'Voter Information Service' and enter your school's postal code.
4. Review key information about your electoral district and record the list of candidates running for election (nominations close 21 days before election day).
5. Organize students into groups and assign each group a candidate/political party to research, or allow them to choose one based on their preference. The goal is to ensure that a group covers each candidate/party running in your electoral district, including independent candidates.

Co-create a checklist for the research and agree on a format (e.g., slide deck, video, bristol board).

Guiding questions:

- Who is the local candidate? What skills and qualifications do they have?
- Do they belong to a political party? Who is the leader of the party?
- What are the main messages of their campaign advertisements?
- What are the party's main priorities or promises? Who will they impact?
- How will the party address the top 3 issues identified in the *Starter* activity? Are the proposals short-term solutions or will they have long-term benefit?

Suggested sources:

- Candidate/party websites
- Candidate/party social media platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube)
- Candidate/party campaign literature
- News sources
- *Pollenize* – pollenize.org/canada (party platform summaries on various topics)

Have each group present their political party/candidate to the rest of the class, or share their presentations/products through a digital gallery. Students can take notes on each presentation using Graphic Organizer 5.3. Provide as many copies as necessary. Digital and/or virtual presentations could also be shared with classes in the school, to help prepare other students for Student Vote Day.

Alternative Method

Research into the parties/candidates can also be completed individually or in pairs, where students collect information about all the candidates running in the election using the same suggested resources. Students can use Graphic Organizer 5.3 to help them organize their findings or encourage them to use a digital format that incorporates images and social media posts.

Consolidation

1. Facilitate a brief closing discussion about the political parties and local candidates. Afterward, have students fill out the *Campaign Reflection* (Activity 5.4).
 - Which party or candidate's priorities or positions align most closely with your values, views and concerns?
 - Which party do you think is best suited to lead the country at this time? Explain your reasoning.
 - Based on what you've learned, which candidate will you choose to vote for and why?
 - Even though you aren't eligible to vote in the actual election yet, do you think the outcome matters to you? Why or why not?

TEACHER NOTES:

- Some students may jump at the chance to share their opinions and even try to persuade others to adopt their choices. Others may opt for silence and prefer to keep their politics private. As an alternative, you could encourage them to share their thoughts about how to evaluate the parties, platforms and candidates (e.g., what criteria should we use to evaluate the platforms, what skills and characteristics does your ideal MP have).
- Reinforce the choice for privacy and the importance of being respectful towards others with different points of view.

2. Ask students to fill out the 'after' column in Activity 5.2.

Assessment

Ask students to develop an evaluation rubric for assessing political party platforms. Building on previous learning and activities, have them create descriptors for key criteria such as clarity, level of detail, persuasiveness, feasibility, and relevance to voter concerns. Once the rubric is finalized, students can use it to assess and compare different party platforms, justifying their evaluations with specific examples.

Extended Learning

Organize an in-person or virtual all-candidates meeting, where students can engage directly with candidates running for office. If an event isn't feasible, invite each candidate to submit a short explaining their reasons for running and outlining their key priorities for the community.

Alternatively, students can work together to develop a set of thoughtful questions and send them to all candidates. Candidates can then respond via email or recorded video messages, allowing students to compare perspectives and analyze responses.

Adaptations and Supports

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide key terms in advance (e.g., electoral process, electoral district, candidate, political party, party platform). • Use an AI tool or word cloud generator to simplify political party messages (e.g., ChatGPT, www.wordclouds.com). We recommend attaching or pasting the information you want to simplify, rather than asking the AI tool to find it for you.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss issues or challenges your community is facing. • Analyze the diversity of the candidates running in your electoral district and discuss the need for diversity in politics.
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide digital alternatives for students who may struggle with in-person collaboration (e.g., Google Docs, Padlet). • Offer flexible participation options—students can contribute verbally, in writing, or through multimedia formats for their research projects.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

The **Office of the Chief Electoral Officer**, commonly known as Elections Canada, is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. Elections Canada is responsible for organizing federal general elections, by-elections and referendums.

An **electoral system** is the way in which we elect our representatives. An electoral system includes set rules for how preferences are recorded and the method for determining which candidates win. There are many different electoral systems used around the world.

Canada uses a system called **Single-Member Plurality**, commonly known as **First Past the Post (FPTP)**. Under this system, voters choose a single candidate on the ballot and the candidate with the most votes wins. The successful candidate does not need more than 50 per cent of the vote; just one more vote than any other candidates. This is called **plurality**.

The country is divided into geographic areas called **electoral districts** (or ridings). Each electoral district is represented by one Member of Parliament in the House of Commons.

The Constitution of Canada requires that federal electoral districts be reviewed after each 10-year census to reflect changes and movements in Canada's population. The most recent redistribution process began in October 2021; it was completed in October 2023. Canada now has 343 electoral districts. This reflects an increase of five electoral districts since the last general election.

The size of electoral districts is determined by factors such as population size, geography and social considerations, such as culture and language. The most important factor is making sure that the number of people represented is as equal as possible.

Urban electoral districts are often geographically smaller due to dense populations, while rural electoral districts are often geographically larger with less dense populations.

Under Canada's parliamentary system, the party that elects the greatest number of representatives to the House of Commons usually forms government and their leader becomes the prime minister.

Canada has a fixed-date election law. This means that federal elections must take place at least every four years, and that the date for that election is set. Regardless of fixed date election legislation, a federal election can be held at any time if the government loses the confidence of the House of Commons or if the governor general were to dissolve Parliament on the advice of the prime minister.

During an election campaign, an organized course of action is taken by a political party and its candidates to share its vision and platform with voters. The length of a federal election campaign may vary, but it must be between 36 and 50 days.