

LESSON 5:

Local Candidates and Issues

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about their riding, the candidates and local issues.

KEY WORDS

riding, electoral system, candidate, independent, ballot, incumbent, issue, constituent, First-Past-The-Post

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a riding?
- What is a candidate? How do candidates get elected?
- What is the name of my riding and who are the candidates?
- What are the most important issues in my riding?
- How can I learn about my local candidates?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 5: Local Candidates and Issues
- Worksheet 5.1: My Riding
- Worksheet 5.2: Election Candidate Profile
- Handout 5.3: A Framework for Planning an All-Candidates Meeting
- Worksheet 5.4: Graphic Organizer

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10-15 min

1. Explain to students that the country is divided into 338 different areas or ridings. Find your school's riding on the national riding map and write the name of your riding on a blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard. If you don't know your school's riding, use the Voter Information Service on Elections Canada's website (www.elections.ca).

2. Ask students if they notice any differences between their riding and others across their province or across the country (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population, geography, landmarks).

3. Show students an individual map of the school's riding on the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca). If your riding has changed since 2011, compare your 2011 riding to your 2015 riding. Answer the following questions:

- What are the boundaries of the school's riding? Have they changed since 2011?
- Where is the school located?
- What major landmarks or attractions are included in the school's riding? What makes it unique?

4. Give students an opportunity to fill out sections of Worksheet 5.1 or assign it for homework.

Instruction: 10-15 min

1. In Canada, there are 338 electoral districts (also known as ridings or constituencies) and each has its own elected representative called a Member of Parliament (MP). The average number of electors per riding is 72,747 and this is why ridings differ in size. For example, ridings will be smaller in big cities (where there is a dense population) while rural areas will have larger ridings (where the population is spread out).

2. During an election, several people in each riding compete against one another for the job of MP. These people are called candidates. Candidates can be associated with a political party or have no association (called an independent).

3. A ballot lists the candidates (and political parties) running for election in the local riding. Each voter is allowed to choose one candidate. The candidate who receives the most votes becomes the MP. This method of electing representatives is called First-Past-The-Post (or Single-Member Plurality).

4. Incumbent is the term given to the candidate who held the position of MP before the election.

Discussion: 10 min

How should you evaluate candidates? What qualities and skills do you expect from an MP? Why are these qualities necessary for the job?

Activity: 20-30 min plus homework

1. List all of the candidates (and their party if applicable) running for election in your school's riding. Show students where they can find this information on the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca). Ask students to write down the information on Worksheet 5.1.

2. Ask students to create profiles by examining candidate websites, social media platforms, campaign literature, or by finding information through newspapers and media websites. For each candidate, students should focus on the following questions to narrow their research:

- What experience and skills does the candidate have? Consider careers, community involvement and volunteer experience.
- Why does the candidate want to be elected? What goals do they want to achieve?
- What do you like or dislike about the candidate and why?
- What question would you like to ask the candidate?

Teacher Note: This activity can be completed independently, in groups or by jigsaw method using Worksheet 5.2. Ensure that all candidates in your riding are researched. Have students share their findings with the class or within their groups.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a closing discussion about local issues and candidates with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How can a voter learn about the issues and candidates?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Which candidate would you support and why?
- What does it mean to run as an independent? Why would someone choose to run as an independent?
- Would you ever consider running as a candidate? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. To help students learn more about the candidates, their priorities and their role, have students prepare questions for each of the candidates. Consider the following to guide the development of questions:

- Which election issues have you been following most closely?
- Which issues impact you, your family and friends?
- What do you want to know about the candidates before casting your ballot?

Pose the questions to candidates through Twitter or email, by conducting a phone interview, by arranging candidates to visit your class or by holding an all-candidates' debate in your school (refer to Handout 5.3).

B. Ask students to collect articles related to their riding and the candidates. These could be shared on a daily basis to raise awareness about current events. Using Worksheet 5.4, students should identify the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why* and *how*. Post the articles on a bulletin board for reference.

C. Have students organize and engage in a mock debate to gain a better understanding of the job of a candidate and their team in a local campaign. Divide the class into small groups, making sure every local candidate is represented by a group. Select one student from each group to take on the role of a local candidate (and persona, if possible), and the rest of their group will act as the candidate's campaign team. Using existing arguments taken from media coverage, candidate websites and campaign literature, have each group prepare their candidate for the debate.

D. Have students take on the role of an actual local election candidate and write a campaign speech to attract supporters. Students should focus on three main arguments or points, and use information from the candidate's website and campaign literature to guide their arguments. Alternatively, students could be their own candidate running for election in the riding or they could use a fictional example for their campaign speech (e.g., the schoolyard grant from the *Hook* in Lesson 4). Students can be assessed on their persuasive writing skills.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What is a riding?

A riding, also known as a constituency or electoral district, is a geographical area with defined boundaries represented by an elected official. In Canada, the elected official is called a Member of Parliament (MP). Each riding has an MP who represents the local needs and interests of their constituents (people living in the riding) in the House of Commons. The MP also addresses issues at the local level.

The number of ridings in Canada has increased over time and this number is established by a formula. The Constitution of Canada requires that federal ridings be reviewed every 10 years to reflect changes and movements in Canada’s population. The most recent federal redistribution process began in February 2012 and was completed in October 2013. The process was led by independent commissions working separately in each province to establish electoral boundaries. The number of ridings has increased by 30 since 2011, and Canadians are electing 338 MPs to the House of Commons in the 2015 election.

What is an electoral system?

An electoral system is the way citizens’ choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats. All electoral systems have three basic elements:

- District magnitude: The number of members elected per district.
- Ballot type: The way in which choices are presented and voters express their preference(s).
- Electoral formula: The method for determining which candidate gets elected (or wins).

How does First-Past-The-Post/Single-Member Plurality work?

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used across Canada. Another name for FPTP is Single-Member Plurality. The district magnitude is single-member districts. Citizens elect one representative per riding. The ballot type is categorical or exclusive ballot. Voters are allowed to choose one candidate on their ballot. The electoral formula is plurality. The successful candidate must receive at least one more vote than any of the other candidates (the most votes).

Example of FPTP: In a riding with 100 ballots cast.

VOTE TOTALS BY CANDIDATE

Leila (Banana Party)	40
Mohamed (Pear Party)	15
Emma (Apple Party)	11
Thomas (Independent)	34

In this case, Leila becomes the elected representative because she has the most votes. Leila wins even though 60 per cent of the voters chose other candidates. Under FPTP, it is not necessary to win more than 50 per cent of the votes — the candidate simply needs to win the most votes.

How does one find out which riding they are in?

You can visit the Elections Canada website and search using your address or postal code to find your riding. During a federal election campaign, Elections Canada also posts a list of candidates running for election in each riding on an ongoing basis. Candidate nominations officially close 21 days before election

day (September 28, 2015) and the final list of candidates is available a few days afterwards.

What are the most important issues facing my riding?

An individual’s political views are personal and highly subjective. They are unique and shaped by their experiences, values, knowledge and feelings. Therefore, each person is responsible for forming their own opinions. These opinions can be formed by listening to other people whose opinions you respect, researching an issue or idea, discussing with your parents and peers, and thinking seriously about what matters to you to come to your own conclusions.

No one can tell you how to vote, although this is the primary objective of all candidates and political parties. It is up to you – the voter – to decide what is most important, who you should listen to and, ultimately, who you will support.

How can I learn about my candidates and the issues they support?

There are many ways to gather information about local candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings where constituents are invited to listen to candidates speak on issues they and their parties support. Information can also be found on the radio, on television, in newspapers and in magazines. Individuals may also visit local campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to the candidate when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing. Information is easily found online through party websites, media websites and social media platforms.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Federal electoral districts and lists of candidates — www.elections.ca
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, social media sites, campaign flyers)
- Electoral Systems — www.parl.gc.ca