

LESSON 7:

The Voting Process

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the voting process and evaluate the campaign issues, party platforms, leaders and local candidates.

KEY WORDS

ballot, secret ballot, elector, ballot box, voting screen, polling place, polling division, advance voting, valid ballot, rejected ballot, spoiled ballot

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- Why is voting by secret ballot important?
- Who can vote in federal elections in Canada?
- How does the voting process work?
- How do I mark my ballot?
- How do I make my decision about who to vote for?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 7: The Voting Process
- Video: How to Organize Student Vote Day
- Worksheet 7.1: Preparing to Vote
- Handout 7.2: How to Vote – 6 Easy Steps
- Worksheet 7.3: How to Vote
- Worksheet 7.4: A Trip to the Polling Place
- Worksheet 7.5: Voter’s Checklist

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10 min

1. Ask students to answer the following questions in their head, or choose other questions that will work better for your class. Consider questions that may not always elicit truthful answers.

- a) What is your favourite TV show?
- b) What is your favourite song?

2. Now ask students the same questions again, but this time ask students to stand up and share their answers aloud in front of the class.

3. Have a follow-up discussion. Did anyone answer the questions differently when they had to share their answers aloud with the class? If so, why?

4. Voting in elections is done by secret ballot. This means that no one except the voter knows the choice that was made. Voters mark their ballot behind a privacy screen and the ballot is put in the ballot box without identifying who the voter is.

Discuss the importance of voting by secret ballot in elections. What are the benefits of voting in private? Emphasize the lack of opportunity for violence and intimidation.

Instruction: 15 min

1. In May 2007, the *Canada Elections Act* was changed to include fixed-date elections. Now, a general election is to be held on the third Monday of October in the fourth calendar year following the previous election. As a result, the federal election will take place on October 19, 2015.

However, elections can still be held earlier if the government loses the confidence of the legislature, and nothing restricts the ability of the governor general to dissolve parliament on the advice of the prime minister.

2. You are qualified to vote in a Canadian federal election if:

- You are a Canadian citizen,
- You are at least 18 years of age on election day,
- You can prove your identity and address.

3. In order to cast a ballot in the election, you must be registered to vote. Voters can visit the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca/register) to check, update or complete their registration online or by completing and mailing a form. Voters can also register at the local Elections Canada office in their polling division during the campaign period or at their polling place on election day. In order to register and vote, voters must prove their address and identification. Information on how to do this is available on the Elections Canada website.

4. Each riding is divided into defined geographic areas called polling divisions. Eligible voters living within each polling division vote at the polling place designated for their area. People who are qualified to vote and are on the voters list will be sent a Voter Information Card (VIC) in the mail. The voter information card tells them when, where and how to vote.

5. There are many different opportunities to vote in federal elections: at an Elections Canada office, by mail, on one of four advance voting days, or on election day itself.

6. A ballot lists the names of the candidates (and their political parties) running in your riding. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark your choice. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate (e.g., checkmark, X, shading in), your choice will be counted (valid ballot).

Teacher Note: Show students what a ballot looks like and how to fill it out correctly. Review the following ballot terms: valid, rejected and spoiled. Use ballot examples (refer to the Student Vote Election Manual).

Activity: 20 min and homework

1. Review the list of candidates (and their parties) that students are able to vote for in the election.
2. Using Worksheet 7.1, have students reflect on the campaign issues, parties, leaders and local candidates.
3. Allow students the opportunity to share their views. Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and even try to convince others to adopt their choices, while others may opt for silence and prefer to keep their politics personal. Remind students that opinions should be respected and accepted.

Teacher Note: This could turn into a fruitful discussion about the privacy of voting decisions.

4. Encourage students to take their worksheets home and start discussions with their families and friends. Have students ask their parents or guardians if they plan to vote and whether they have chosen a candidate to support. Suggest to students that they visit the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca) to find out where and when their parents/guardians can vote, and encourage them to accompany them to the polling place. See Worksheet 7.4, Worksheet 7.5 and/or Extension Activity D.

Debrief: 10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about voting and making your decision. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- What research or activity has helped you make your decision? Is there more research you would like to do?
- Do you feel that you know more about the election than your parents?
- Why is voting important?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using Worksheet 7.3, have students illustrate the steps to voting at the polling place. Handout 7.2 can be used to support the activity. Encourage students to share their worksheet with their family.

Teacher Note: The 'Organizing Student Vote Day' video may be helpful. Elections Canada's website (www.elections.ca) also has several videos and infographics about the registration and voting process.

B. Create a 'pledge to vote' activity for all Student Vote participants. This could include a ceremony or an official "I am a Voter" agreement, whereby students pledge to vote when they turn 18 or agree to be a life-long voter.

C. Allow students to make predictions regarding the Student Vote and/or official election results. Who do you think is going to win locally? Which party do you think will form government? Why do you think this will be the outcome?

D. Sometimes adults can be intimidated by the voting process, so encourage students to "take" their family members to the polls and support them in casting their ballot. Ask students to observe the process while at the polling place and fill out Worksheet 7.4. Worksheet 7.5 can also be used as a voter's checklist to prepare family members.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

When will the election take place?

Canada has fixed-date election legislation and, as required by the *Canada Elections Act*, a general election is to be held on the third Monday of October in the fourth calendar year following the polling day of the preceding general election. As a result, the 42nd Canadian general election will take place on October 19, 2015.

Fixed election dates ensure consistent election timing and reduce the likelihood of a party calling an election earlier than required for political gain. The chief criticism of fixed-date elections is that fixed election dates lead to long periods of campaigning, like those seen in the United States.

However, nothing restricts the royal prerogative of dissolution (the ability of the governor general to dissolve parliament on the advice of the prime minister). This can come at the request of the prime minister seeking a new mandate or if the governing party loses a non-confidence motion, such as a budget bill.

Who can vote?

You are eligible to vote in a Canadian federal election if:

- You are a Canadian citizen,
- You are at least 18 years of age on election day,
- You can prove your identity and address.

In order to cast a ballot in the election, you must be registered to vote.

How do I get registered?

If you are an eligible elector, your contact information will be added to the National Register of Electors. The National Register of Electors is used to create the voters list for each election.

If you have moved, recently become a Canadian citizen, will be voting for the first time or are a student living away from home, your information may no longer be valid. You can visit the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca) to check, update or complete your registration.

How do I know where to vote?

Each riding is divided into defined geographic areas called polling divisions. Eligible voters residing within each polling division vote at the polling place designated for their area.

If you are qualified to vote and your name is on the voters list, you will be sent a Voter Information Card (VIC) in the mail. The voter information card tells you when, where and how to vote.

You can also find out by visiting the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca) or calling 1-800-463-6868.

What are the ways to vote?

Voters may choose to vote in one of the following ways:

1. On election day — Your polling place will be open for 12 hours on election day. Start and end times will vary per province. Details can be found on your VIC or at www.elections.ca.
2. On an advance voting day — There are four days of advance voting. You can vote on the 10th, 9th, 8th, and 7th day before election day (October 9-12, 2015) from noon to 8:00pm.
3. At an Elections Canada office (Returning Office) — You can visit your local Elections Canada returning office any day during the election campaign, up until the Tuesday before election day (October 13, 2015).
4. By mail — If you are away from your riding during the election, or if it is more convenient, you can vote by mail. You must fill out an application by 6:00pm on the Tuesday before election day in order to receive a voting kit. The voting kit must be returned to Elections Canada in Ottawa by election day.

What do I need to confirm my identity and address on election day?

To vote, you need to prove your identity and address. You have three options:

1. Show one piece of government-issued ID with your photo, name and address;
2. Show two pieces of ID. Both pieces must have your name, and one must also have your address;
3. Show two pieces of ID with your name and have someone who knows you confirm your address. This person must show proof of their identity and address, and be registered in the same polling division and can only attest for one person.

Visit the Elections Canada website (www.elections.ca) for a list of the different pieces of ID and proof of address that are accepted.

How does the voting process work?

1. When you enter the polling place, an election worker greets you and shows you to the right table.
2. At your table, show your proof of identity and address.
3. The election worker will initial, fold and hand you a ballot.
4. Go behind the voting screen, mark and refold your ballot to keep it secret.
5. Return your ballot to the worker so they can verify it is an official ballot.
6. Put your ballot in the box.

What is a secret ballot?

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.

How do I mark my 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.

What is a rejected ballot?

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.

What is a spoiled 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.

How do I prepare to vote?

Get informed. Learn about the candidates, the political parties and the issues. When preparing to vote, you can consider reasons to support a local candidate for MP, a political party, a specific issue or a whole party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the time.

How do you know if you are ready to vote?

You feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- “My Voter’s Guide,” *Elections Canada* — www.elections.ca
- Elections Canada’s Voter Information Service — www.elections.ca