

LESSON 2:

Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

OBJECTIVE

Students will develop an appreciation for the fundamental rights and responsibilities that exist within a democracy.

KEY WORDS

representative democracy, right, freedom, responsibility, election, voter turnout, universal suffrage

QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What rights and freedoms do we have in Canada?
- What responsibilities come along with our rights?
- What is universal suffrage?
- Why is it important to exercise your right to vote?
- What is a democratic citizen?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 2: Rights and Responsibilities in a Democracy
- Video 1: Government and Democracy
- Video 2: The Right to Vote
- Handout 2.1: Highlights from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- Handout 2.2: History of Voting Rights in Canada
- Worksheet 2.3: The Right to Vote
- Handout 2.4: Voter Turnout by Age Group

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10 min

Canada is a representative democracy where politicians are selected by citizens through an election to govern their country, or their province/territory or city/town.

Citizen participation is an essential component of a healthy democracy. However, in recent years, fewer people have been exercising their right to vote. Canada has seen a steady decline in voter turnout over the last two decades at all levels of elections – federal, provincial/territorial and municipal/local. In the 2011 federal election, only 61 per cent of eligible voters participated in the election.

Use PowerPoint 2 to review voting trends in Canada and then hold a class discussion. Ask students to consider the following: What makes for a healthy democracy? Does Canada have a healthy democracy? Why do you think fewer people are voting?

Instruction: 15-20 min

1. All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. A right is a legal entitlement or protected freedom. Rights are more often fought for and claimed (in courts or even violently), and less often simply granted.

2. In Canada, our rights are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections that define our rights as Canadians: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official languages rights and minority language education rights. Democratic rights include the right for every Canadian citizen, aged 18 and older, to vote in an election (Handout 2.1). Elections are the process by which our elected representatives and government are chosen.

3. The right to vote in Canada has not always been universal. It has been withheld from many groups throughout history, including women and various ethnic and religious groups. See Handout 2.2 and other suggestions listed in the External Resources section.

4. With all rights come responsibilities. A responsibility is a duty or obligation. It is something you should do in order to respect certain rights.

Teacher Note: Assign Worksheet 2.3 for homework.

Discussion: 5-10 min

What is a responsibility? What responsibilities come along with our rights and freedoms? Make a list of rights and corresponding responsibilities on the board. Some examples include:

Right	Responsibility
The right to vote	The responsibility to cast a ballot and make an informed decision
The right for any person to not be discriminated against	To demonstrate tolerance and respect for diversity of background, gender, ethnicity, race and religion
Freedom of expression	The responsibility not to slander someone or to spread hate propaganda

Activity: 20-30 min

1. Using Handout 2.4, examine voter turnout rates by age group at the federal level and initiate a class discussion.

- Which age group had the highest voter turnout? Which group had the lowest?
- Discuss the impact of voter turnout among different age groups. How does it influence the results of an election? Which age groups would politicians want to speak to more?
- Consider possible reasons for these differences. What does it say about different age groups? What does it say about our election process?

2. Watch Rick's Rant — March 29, 2011 ("The Rick Mercer Report") with your class for a humorous but insightful look at voting in Canada and youth participation.

3. Ask students to imagine they are part of a marketing firm hired by Elections Canada to attract young voters to participate in the 2015 federal election. In small groups or independently, students should design an advertising campaign that will encourage youth participation in the election by incorporating social media, digital, print and/or audio-visual elements. Post advertisements around the school or play the videos in the lead-up to Student Vote Day. Submit your productions to CIVIX by email or share them through Twitter, YouTube or Facebook.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about the right and responsibility to vote. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- Is the decline in voter turnout disrespectful to those who had to fight for their right to vote? Why or why not?
- Is it ever a legitimate choice not to vote? What are some reasons for not voting?
- Should voting be mandatory? Why or why not?
- Will you vote when you become eligible? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. In groups or individually, have students promote various aspects of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Students can create a short speech, comic strip, dramatic presentation, essay, news article, poster or multi-media presentation.

B. Divide the class into five groups and provide each with a section from Handout 2.2. Ask students to create a dramatic or multi-media presentation to inform the rest of the class about the pathway to universal suffrage and improved accessibility. History of the Vote (www.elections.ca) may also be used for reference.

C. Using Handout 2.2 and additional research, have students design a chronological timeline of events depicting the history of voting rights in Canada and the contributions by various individuals, agencies and non-governmental agencies.

D. Australia has a governmental system similar to Canada's, but non-voters are fined \$20 by the Australian Electoral Commission if they do not have a valid reason for not voting. As a class or in small groups, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of such a system. Ask the following discussion questions:

- Would this make you more or less likely to vote?
- If Canada adopted this system, do you think it would enhance or decrease the value Canadians put on voting?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What is a representative democracy?

Canadians elect representatives to speak on their behalf and to pass laws. An election is the process of choosing politicians from among a group of candidates who will run a government.

What rights and responsibilities do we have in Canada?

A right is a freedom that is protected. The rights and freedoms of citizens are vital to a democratic government.

In Canada, citizens' rights and freedoms are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections that define our rights as Canadians: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official languages of Canada and minority language education rights.

Democratic rights include the right for every Canadian citizen, 18 years of age or older, to vote in an election and to be a candidate, as well as the requirement that governments hold elections at least every five years and that the elected representatives comprising them meet at least every year.

With all rights come responsibilities. A responsibility is a duty or obligation. It is something you should do in order to respect certain rights or rules.

The right to vote comes with the responsibility to cast a ballot in an informed and purposeful manner.

What is universal suffrage?

Universal suffrage is the extension of the right to vote to all adult citizens, including the removal of restrictions against women, various ethnic and religious groups and property ownership requirements.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right," *CBC Digital Archives* — www.cbc.ca
- "Women's Right to Vote," *Telling Times Documentary* — www.cpac.ca
- "Extending the Vote," *Canada: A People's History* — www.cbc.ca
- "A History of Voting Rights," *New York Times* — www.nytimes.com
- A History of the Vote in Canada, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- The Evolution of the Franchise, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- The Electoral System of Canada, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- Rick's Rant — March 29, 2011 ("The Rick Mercer Report")