

## 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, Single-Member Plurality, First-Past-The-Post

### QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a riding?
- What is an electoral system and which system is used in Canada?
- What is the name of my riding and who are the candidates running?
- What are the most important issues in my riding?
- How can I learn about my candidates?

### SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 5: Ridings and Local Candidates
- Video 4: Our Electoral System
- Worksheet 5.1: Election Candidate Profile
- Handout 5.2: A Framework for Planning an All-Candidates Meeting

### TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### Hook: 10-15 min

1. Find your school's riding on the federal riding map. Ask students if they notice any differences between their riding and others across Canada (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population size, demographic make-up, geography, landmarks).

2. Show students an individual map of the school's riding ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca), under 'Maps Corner'). Answer the following questions:

- What are the boundaries of the riding?
- What major landmarks or attractions are included in the riding?
- What makes the riding unique?

*Teacher Note: If your riding has changed since 2011, compare your 2011 riding to your 2015 riding. How has it changed?*

3. Following the riding analysis, ask students to consider and discuss the following questions:

- What issues do you expect people in the riding to be talking about?
- What promises or commitments do you expect the local candidates will be making?

#### Instruction: 15 min

1. A riding (also known as a constituency or electoral district) is a geographical area represented by an elected official. Each province has a different number of ridings, and each territory comprises its own riding.

- At the federal level, the elected official is called a Member of Parliament (MP).
- Canadians will be electing 338 MPs in the 2015 election (an increase of 30 seats since 2011).

2. The size of each riding is determined by factors such as population size, demographic make-up and geography. Urban ridings are often smaller and more populous, while rural ridings are larger with less dense populations.

- The riding of Nunavut, for example, sprawls over 2,093,190 square kilometres. In sharp contrast, the smallest riding of Toronto Centre, in Ontario, occupies only 6 square kilometres.
- Each MP will represent 72,747 electors on average.

3. An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats in the parliament or legislature.

- Different types of electoral systems are used around the world and they differ by the number of representatives elected per riding (or district), the type of ballots used and the formulas used for declaring winning candidates.

4. Canada uses a system called Single-Member Plurality or First-Past-The-Post (FPTP).

- One representative is elected per riding (single-member districts).
- Voters are only allowed to choose one candidate on the ballot (categorical or exclusive ballot).
- The candidate with the most votes wins. The successful candidate does not need more than 50 per cent of the vote; they only require one more vote than any of the other candidates (plurality).

*Teacher Note: It would be helpful to demonstrate FPTP with a sample ballot and voting results for your riding in the last election.*

#### Discussion: 10 min

How should you evaluate candidates? What qualities and qualifications do you expect from a Member of Parliament? Why are these qualities necessary for this job?

#### Activity: 30 min or more

1. List the candidates and their party association (if applicable) running for election in your school's riding. Explain or show students where they can find this information ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)).

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

- What experience, skills and qualifications does the candidate possess?
- Why does the candidate want to be elected? What are their priorities? What goals do they want to achieve?
- What do you like or dislike about the candidate?
- Would you feel confident if this candidate represented your riding in the House of Commons?

*Teacher Note: This activity can be completed independently or by jigsaw method using Worksheet 5.1. Ensure that all candidates in your riding are researched. Have students share their findings with the class.*

3. Have students prepare questions for each of the candidates to help evaluate candidates' priorities and capacity to take on the role of MP. Before they prepare their questions, ask students to consider the following:

- Which issues facing the country do you feel need to be addressed?
- Which issues facing your community do you feel need to be addressed?
- Which issues impact you, your family and friends?
- What can you ask a candidate in order to evaluate their abilities to become an effective MP?

4. As a class or in groups, email each candidate with three or four well-written questions.

*Teacher Note: Alternatively, consider inviting each candidate for a class visit, conducting a phone or Skype interview, or holding an all-candidates meeting at your school (refer to Handout 5.2).*

#### Debrief: 5-10 min

Review each candidate's profile and their responses to the questions. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Who is best suited for the job? Who do you feel will most effectively serve the community?
- Do you share the same opinions or values expressed by any of the candidates? Explain.
- Refer back to the results of the political spectrum quiz. Do the candidates you relate to most align with your position on the political spectrum?
- Which candidate would you support and why?

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Canada is a very large nation with different needs and issues. Have a class discussion about geographical differences in an election campaign. Questions to consider: Does an MP from Labrador have the same priorities as an MP from Toronto Centre or Vancouver South? Are MPs in rural New Brunswick dealing with the same issues as an MP from urban Saskatchewan? What geographical, cultural or socio-economic differences might there be between the people of these different ridings? How might these differences affect interactions between MPs in the House of Commons?

B. Have students organize and engage in a mock debate to gain a better understanding of the job of a candidate in a local campaign. In small groups, select one student to take on the role of each local candidate (and persona, if possible); the rest of the group will be that candidate's campaign team. Using existing arguments taken from media coverage, candidate websites and campaign literature, have each group prepare for the debate.

C. Examine different electoral systems used around the world (e.g., proportional representation, two-round/runoff voting system, mixed member proportional). Research and debate the strengths

and weaknesses of each system. Do you think Canada should investigate electoral reform? Why or why not?

D. Have students attend an all-candidates debate organized by the community or a local organization. Students should record their impressions of each candidate and their overall experience at the debate. Encourage students to ask one of their own questions, or select a representative to ask a question on behalf of the class.

E. Ask students to engage family and friends in a conversation about the election and the local candidates. Students could create a short take-home poll, or simply record the views of their family and friends based on a few specific questions. Have a follow-up discussion the next day. Do students share the same opinion as their parents? What are the reasons for shared or differing opinions?

### 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 at the federal level 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 Riding Maps — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca) (Under 'Maps Corner')
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, campaign flyers)
- Electoral Systems — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)