

## LESSON 8:

# The Voting Process

### OBJECTIVE

Students will acquaint themselves with the voting process while evaluating 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 BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- Why is voting by secret ballot important?
- Who is eligible to vote in federal elections?
- 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 8: The Voting Process
- Video: How to Organize Student Vote Day
- Worksheet 8.1: Preparing to Vote
- Worksheet 8.2: Voter's Checklist
- Handout 8.3: How to Vote – 6 Easy Steps
- Student Vote Election Manual

### TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### Hook: 10 min

1. Demonstrate the importance of voting by secret ballot through a mock vote or through the following discussion points:

- If you had to share the name of your favourite song, which would you choose? What song would you choose if your choice was private or announced anonymously? Would your answer be different?
- Have you ever voted publicly (e.g., voting by raising hands)? Did you vote honestly? Why or why not?

2. There are a lot of people in the world who do not have the chance to vote at all due to violence, intimidation, discrimination or corrupt politics. Discuss the importance of voting by secret ballot in federal elections and the effort to preserve individual choice and fair elections. What sort of consequences could develop if elections were held publicly? What does voting in private ensure? Why is it important to ensure a fair electoral process?

#### Instruction: 20 min

1. In May 2007, the *Canada Elections Act* was amended to incorporate fixed-date election legislation. 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 general 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](http://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 residing 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 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 will be valid (e.g., checkmark, X, shading in).

*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).*

### Discussion

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of fixed election dates? How does it impact the governing party versus the opposition parties?

### Activity: 20 min and homework

1. Using Worksheet 8.1, have students evaluate the campaign issues, party platforms, leaders and local candidates.

2. Allow students the opportunity to share their views of the parties, candidates and the campaign. Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and try to persuade others to adopt their choices, while others may prefer to keep their politics personal.

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

3. 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 to find out where and when their parents/guardians can vote, and encourage them to accompany them to the polling place. Worksheet 8.2 can be used as a voter's checklist.

### Debrief: 10 min

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

- Politics and voting decisions are private and should not be discussed with others. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- Have the class activities, campaign events, dialogue with family and friends, and media had any impact on your decision to vote for a particular party or candidate? Reflect on why your decision has changed or remained the same over the course of the election.
- What moment or event in the election campaign has attracted the most attention from the media? Why do you think this is the case?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Plan out the roles and process for Student Vote Day with your class or election committee. What voting system will you use at your school? Where and how will the polling place be set up? Who is going to take on the various roles (e.g., deputy returning officers, poll clerks)? What should students know in advance in order to ensure a smooth Student Vote Day? Refer to the Student Vote Election Manual.

B. Have students create a tutorial, presentation or visual display to prepare the rest of the school for Student Vote Day. This presentation should demonstrate what happens at the polling place and/or how to fill out a ballot. Schedule time to make the presentation in each participating classroom or broadcast it on the AV system, or post the visual display in a noticeable area in the school.

C. Online voting has been suggested as a way to improve voter turnout. What are potential advantages and disadvantages of online voting? Is it more or less convenient or efficient? Is it more or less expensive? Is voter coercion a risk or not? Would the system be more or less secure? Have a class discussion or ask students to write an opinion piece about why they do or do not support online voting.

D. A voter registration drive is an effort aimed at getting people to register who are eligible but not yet registered, such as first-time voters. If there are 18 year old students in your school, have students coordinate a registration drive to help them get on the voters list and feel prepared to participate in the voting process.

E. Ask students to make predictions about the election results in the Student Vote and/or general election, and provide a rationale for the outcome (e.g., seat count, popular vote percentage). Collect the predictions and reveal the student who is closest to the actual outcome after the election.

### 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 it leads 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, you may not be correctly registered. You can visit the Elections Canada website ([www.elections.ca](http://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](http://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](http://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 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](http://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 or leader, 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

- "My Voter's Guide," *Elections Canada* — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- Elections Canada's Voter Information Service