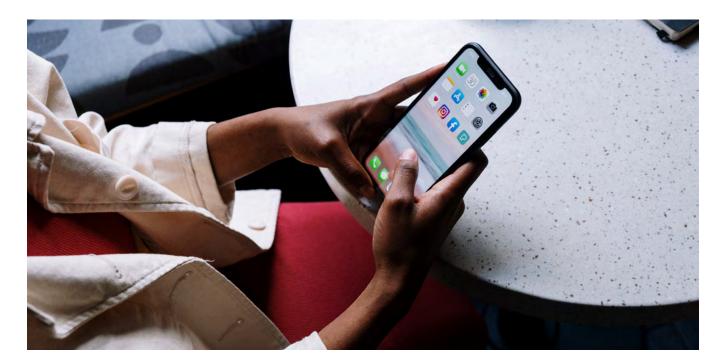# Lesson 4: Informed Citizenship

GUIDING QUESTIONS

❶ **How does information influence my decisions?**

❷ **What should I consider when using online platforms?**

❸ **How can I make sure to hear different perspectives on important issues?**

OVERVIEW

Being a responsible citizen involves seeking out information from a variety of sources and comparing perspectives on issues of importance.

In this lesson, students experience the relationship between the information we consume and the decisions we make through a hands-on interactive activity. Before participating in a mock election, students learn about the candidates and election issues by reviewing information from one of two polarized social media feeds. After the vote, students discuss how what they read may have influenced their decision. Next, students learn about how the internet has changed the way we consume and share information, and discuss the importance of being exposed to different perspectives when analyzing issues and events.

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- analyze how news and information can influence our opinion on people, events and issues;
- explain how algorithms personalize the information we see online;
- evaluate the opportunities and challenges associated with receiving information through online platforms; and,
- describe strategies for being an informed citizen and accessing multiple viewpoints.

Tips for Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class. If you want to focus on sources of information and different perspectives only, you can skip Activities 2 and 3.
- Although students are not necessarily on social media, learning about the challenges early on is important. The underlying message about being exposed to different perspectives is important regardless.

Supplies/Needs

- Computers and access to the internet for the *Feed for Thought: Election Edition* (newsliteracy.ca, requires free registration), if proceeding with the online version of the activity
- Social media feeds (online version) or copies of the PDF feeds (printed version)
- Slide Deck 4
- Paper ballots on 4.1 (if desired), copies of 4.2 or digital access for students
- "Behind the Screens: Who decides what I see online?" or "CIVIX Explains: Algorithms" videos
- All digital files, videos and slide decks can be found at the project website

Starter

Start with an opening conversation about sources of information. Ask students to discuss in pairs or small groups, before a wider discussion as a class.

- Where do you get your news and information?
- Which sources of information do you think are most trustworthy and why?
- Do you think it is important to be informed about issues in your community? Why or why not?

Activities

1. Complete the *Feed for Thought: Election Edition* activity found at the CIVIX website newsliteracy.ca. The activity can be completed with online scrollable newsfeeds (requires creating a class and assigning the activity) or using the paper version of the newsfeeds.

   a) **Introduce the Scenario.** There is a high-stakes election coming up, and you are going to vote in it. There are two candidates to choose from, and people in your community feel strongly about who should win. It will likely be a close race. Before you cast your ballot, you will learn about the candidates and election issues by reviewing information to help make your choice. The newsfeed has a mix of articles from the media and posts from friends and community members.

   b) **Read the Feeds.** Distribute the link provided by the online system and it will randomly assign students one of the two feeds (each feed supports one of the two candidates). Alternatively, print and shuffle the two paper feeds and hand them out. Do not inform students about the two different feeds. Give students 15 minutes to review the information.

   c) **Vote.** Have students vote for the candidates. For the digital activity, use the online voting button located at the bottom of the social media feed. You can access the results from your newsliteracy.ca dashboard. You may also use a show of hands, or a paper ballot (Activity 4.1). Announce the vote totals to the class.

   d) **Debrief.** Through a whole-class discussion, ask students why they voted the way they did and what information shaped their decision.

   Over the course of the discussion, it should become obvious that some students were provided with different information than others. At an appropriate point in the discussion, share the fact that there were two different newsfeeds. You can also review the feeds side-by-side to compare the differences (preview links are available newsliteracy.ca).

   Further questions to prompt discussion:

   - How did you feel about the results of the vote before you knew there were two different newsfeeds? Were you surprised by the outcome? Why or why not?
   - How might two people end up with such different newsfeeds?
   - What are the consequences of people consuming different facts and opinions?
   - Do you think people should be exposed to different perspectives or more than one side of an issue before making their decision?

2. Watch the "Behind the Screens: Who decides what I see online?" video and/or the "CIVIX Explains: Algorithms" video, and/or review Slide Deck 4 to introduce the concepts of algorithms and filter bubbles, and the effects of online platforms.

> **TEACHER NOTE**
> The content in the videos is very similar. You can choose either option, or both.

Afterwards, discuss the following through a whole class discussion.

- Have you ever noticed information or advertisements online that were based on your previous internet searches?
- How do algorithms personalize your internet experience?

3. Using a Think-Pair-Share protocol, ask students to discuss the following prompt:

- What happens if we only see information we like or agree with?

'Think-Pair-Share' protocol:

a) Ask students to think about the prompt individually.

b) Divide students into pairs and ask them to exchange their thoughts and ideas.

c) After students have shared with their partners, expand the sharing into a whole class discussion.

d) Optional: Ask students to reflect on the activity and to write down what they learned or how their thinking changed or expanded based on the conversation with peers.

Consolidation

In small groups, ask students to respond to one or more of the following questions. Afterwards, discuss the responses as a class. To focus the discussion further, the class may choose one current news event from which to draw examples.

- Why is it important to think critically about online information?
- What are the opportunities and challenges of getting information through online platforms?
- How can we make sure we are informed citizens and consider different viewpoints?

Assessment Activity

Ask students to fill out the '1-1-1 Exit Card' (Activity 4.2).

- What is one key takeaway from today?
- What is one action you may take based on what you learned?
- What is one question you still have?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

As citizens living in a democracy, we have a responsibility to stay informed about the issues that matter to us and to society. This is true all the time, but especially when we must make a meaningful choice at the ballot box.

The introduction of the internet and the rise of social media have been significant for news and information, and complicated for citizens.

Where traditional news organizations were once the **gatekeepers** of information and the only ones with the resources to disseminate it — printing presses and TV stations are costly to purchase and operate — the internet allows anyone, anywhere to be a publisher.

The rise of blogging and social media a generation ago was widely viewed as the democratization of information, bringing new voices into public discourse and leading to positive social change. The reality of online communication has been more complex.

When news came only from traditional or **legacy media** — newspapers, TV, and radio — there was always someone who stood between audiences and information, a person or process that filtered the stories or content, checked facts and packaged stories for public consumption.

Where human editors and producers were once the only gatekeepers who decided what news audiences saw, on the internet, that job belongs to **algorithms**, which are sets of instructions that tell computers how to perform specific tasks, like sorting information.

Social media algorithms work in such a way that we are more likely to see content that is similar to what we already like or agree with. Our social media feeds never give the whole picture.

Since people have become such heavy adopters of **social media**, they now rely on these sites (such as Facebook or TikTok) for news. The problem is that social media platforms never intended to be news organizations, and there are consequences for informed citizenship when people rely on friends and the results of algorithms to find out about what is happening in the world.

Informed citizenship involves seeking out news and information from a variety of sources, comparing perspectives and keeping up with new developments. There are things you can do to make sure you are informed, particularly when there is so much information available online.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON SECTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS
Starter	Can students identify where they get their news and information?
	Can students explain why it is important to be informed about issues in their community?
Activities	Can students explain why they voted the way they did, and what information shaped their decision?
	Can students identify the consequences of people being presented with different facts and opinions?
	Can students explain how algorithms personalize our internet experience?
Consolidation	Can students describe the opportunities and challenges of getting information through online platforms?
	Can students communicate how they can be informed citizens and consider different viewpoints?

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	**Modifications**
	• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., online platforms, algorithms, filter bubbles).
	• Share the "Behind the Screens" and/or "CIVIX Explains: Algorithms" videos before class discussions and activities.
	• Use ability grouping to support students.
	
	Enrichment
	• Provide the opportunity for alternative research:
	  - *Starter* segment: Where do your friends/family get their information?
	  - *Activities* segment: Compare your social media feed(s) with those of your friends/family. How are they different? How are they the same?
	• Encourage students to relate concepts to current affairs and make connections to their thinking.
	• Modify terms and tasks to include terminology that is more challenging. Consider providing the words or information from the *Background Information for Teachers* section.

Language Learners	• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance. • Share the "Behind the Screens" and/or "CIVIX Explains: Algorithms" videos before class discussions and activities. • Ensure that subtitles are on during the videos.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	• Students may come from households with varying access to the internet, and have different levels of familiarity with social media. Not all students will have prior knowledge of the social media feeds being emulated in the 'Feed for Thought' activity. • Encourage students to share their own experiences with online platforms and social media. • Ensure that you are open and encouraging of diverse viewpoints your students may share.
Accessibility & Accommodations	• If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, considering using Google Docs for collaborative discussion/brainstorming.