

# Lesson 1

## Democracy



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

**❶ What does it mean to live in a democracy?**

**❷ Which principles of democracy are most important?**

### PURPOSE

There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy, such as fair elections, fundamental freedoms, political tolerance, citizen participation and the rule of law.

In this lesson, students explore what democracy means and what the implications are for them as members of a democratic society. After learning about key democratic principles, they investigate how the principles look in practice. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on the significance of democratic principles for themselves and society.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the meaning and characteristics of democracy;
- analyze fundamental principles of democracy and how they are reflected in real-world examples;
- evaluate the significance of democratic principles and which principle they think is most important.

## Starter

1. Give students time to work in pairs or small groups to activate any background knowledge they have about the term 'democracy' using a *Frayer Model* (Activity 1.1). Students can also use images to communicate their thinking.

### TEACHER NOTE

Consider providing some key terms to support their thinking, such as political power, leadership, government, citizen participation, viewpoints, rights and freedoms.

1. Watch the "Government and Democracy" video and have students add to their notes on Activity 1.1.
2. Afterwards, debrief as a class and create a class definition for the term 'democracy'. Students should add the class definition to their activity sheet.

## Activities

1. Using the "Democratic Principles" video, Slide Deck 1 and/or Handout 1.2, explain to students that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.
2. Have students work together to complete Activity 1.3. For each principle, students should summarize the meaning in their own words. Afterwards, review the responses as a class and ensure there is a solid understanding of the principles.
3. Next, students should investigate what the principles look like in practice through real-world examples and complete the second column of Activity 1.3.

### Option A:

Ask students to come up with examples from their own lives or to find examples through news stories from reliable sources. Students can work independently or collaboratively.

### Option B:

Provide students with news stories and have students identify which principle is relevant to the issue or event (see list below). One approach is to divide students into small groups and have each student review one news story and share their findings with the rest of their group.

Sample news stories:

- **Trudeau prorogues parliament, ending WE investigations and leaving Commons empty for weeks** <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/liberals-to-prorogue-parliament-until-fall/wcm/d0649671-0e12-4646-a6f8-f12efc4a2c36/> (Democratic principles: accountability and transparency, citizen participation)
  - **MLA defends attending rally against New Brunswick's COVID-19 restrictions** <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/new-brunswick-mla-miramichi-1.5950459> (Democratic principles: citizen participation, human rights and equality)
  - **Muslim group calls for 'serious action' after mosque vandalized for 6th time since June** <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-mosque-vandalized-for-sixth-time-since-june-1.5692084> (Democratic principles: human rights and equality, political tolerance)
  - **MPs convene first special virtual sitting via Zoom amid security questions** [www.ctvnews.ca/politics/mps-convene-first-special-virtual-sitting-via-zoom-amid-security-questions-1.4915386](http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/mps-convene-first-special-virtual-sitting-via-zoom-amid-security-questions-1.4915386) (Democratic principle: accountability and transparency, citizen participation)
  - **Raptors' Masai Ujiri releases statement: 'Keep demanding justice'** [www.sportsnet.ca/basketball/nba/raptors-masai-ujiri-releases-powerful-statement-keep-demanding-justice/](http://www.sportsnet.ca/basketball/nba/raptors-masai-ujiri-releases-powerful-statement-keep-demanding-justice/) (Democratic principles: rule of law, human rights and equality)
  - **Prisoners say they were denied their constitutional right to vote** <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/prisoners-say-they-were-denied-their-constitutional-right-to-vote/> (Democratic principles: human rights and equality, free and fair elections)
  - **New Brunswick to appoint a commissioner to address systemic racism** <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/brunswick-appoint-commissioner-address-systemic-172157610.html> (Democratic principles: human rights and equality, citizen participation)
4. Invite students to share their own examples, or findings from the news stories provided.
  5. Afterwards, ask students to rank the principles in order of importance on Activity 1.3.

## Consolidation

Using a 'Quick Write' strategy, have students reflect on the significance of democratic principles using one of the prompts below. Provide students with 3-5 minutes to write a response within their learning journal. Inform students that they will be assessed on their ideas and content, not grammar or organization, so they should write freely.

- The democratic principle that most affects my life is... because....
- The democratic principle that I think is most important is... because....

## SUPPORTS AND ADAPTATIONS

<b>Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance.</li><li>• Share the lesson videos before class discussions and activities.</li><li>• Ensure that subtitles are on during videos.</li><li>• Support students' understanding of democratic principles with real-world examples.</li><li>• The sample media articles could be replaced with articles at a lower-reading level, or with fictitious examples.</li></ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compare democracy to other forms of governance representing different countries and cultures that have meaning for your students.</li><li>• Students will come from different backgrounds and may have different opinions on democracy. Ensuring a safe place for respectful discussion is encouraged.</li><li>• Review democratic principles in various social settings, inclusive of Acadian, Black New Brunswickers, Gaels, Mi'kmaq, and additional diverse cultural groups.</li><li>• Discuss the systemic barriers to equality faced by Mi'kmaq and Black communities.</li></ul>
<b>Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion.</li></ul>

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

**Democracy** means rule by the people. It is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making.

There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. Citizens have a responsibility to uphold and support these principles.

**Human Rights and Equality:** In most democracies, individuals are valued equally regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. Fundamental rights include freedom of thought, opinion and assembly.

**Economic Freedom:** The government allows some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose their own work and join labour unions. It is generally accepted that a free market should exist in a democracy and that government should not control the economy.

**Protected Rights:** In a democracy, there is a formal declaration of citizens' rights and freedoms. This document limits the powers of government, explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people and protects people from a government that might abuse its powers.

**The Rule of Law:** All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination. Laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently. No one is above the law – this includes elected officials, the police and members of the military.

**Control of the Abuse of Power:** To protect corruption and abuses of power, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government offices and those who work for them.

**Free and Fair Elections:** Elected officials are chosen every few years by the people in a free and fair manner. Adult citizens have the right to vote and run for office regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or economic status.

**Multi-Party Systems:** Multiple-party systems provide the government with different viewpoints on issues and voters are given a choice of candidates, parties and policies to support.

**Citizen Participation:** Participation can take the form of running for office, voting in elections, being an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.

**Accountability and Transparency:** Elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and are accountable to the people. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend. The press and the public are kept informed regarding decisions being made.

**Independent Judiciary:** Courts and the judicial system are impartial. Judges and the judicial branch are free to act without influence or control from the executive and legislative branches of government. They should also not be corrupted or influenced by other individuals, businesses or political groups.

**Political Tolerance:** People who belong to different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, all hold unique and valued political views. Democratic societies strive to be politically tolerant, and the rights of minorities and other groups are protected. Those who are not in power must be allowed to organize and share their opinions.

**Accepting the Results of Elections:** Free and fair elections have both winners and losers. The losers and their supporters must accept that they have lost an election as democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the next.