

# Lesson 1

## Voting and Elections



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do we have elections?
- 2 How do we vote in elections?
- 3 Is it important to vote?

### OVERVIEW

Voting in elections is an opportunity to shape your government and the future of your community, province and country.

In this lesson, students review the concept of elections and why it is important to vote. Afterwards, they practice voting through a mock vote and analyze the importance of voting by secret ballot. Next, students learn about the upcoming provincial election and the Student Vote program. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on what they learned about voting and what they want to learn before casting their ballot on Student Vote Day.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the purpose of voting in elections;
- describe the voting process;
- evaluate why it is important to vote;
- articulate what they want to learn through their Student Vote experience.

## Teacher Tips

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- Be sensitive to issues at home that may challenge perspectives around voting and democratic participation, such as religion or traditions, followed by certain groups.
- Recognize and acknowledge barriers that inhibit individuals or groups from voting (e.g., negative history, socio-economic class, language, newcomers).
- Supplies/Needs: "Why Voting Matters" video, "Student Vote Canada 2019" video, Slide Deck 1, digital access to or copies of 1.1 or 1.3, and paper or digital ballots (1.2 or the Google Forms templates).
- Online templates for all activities and any videos and slide decks are available on the project website.

## Starter

### Option 1:

Ask students what they know about voting. Students should talk with a partner first to generate ideas, and then write down their thoughts in the K quadrant on Activity 1.1 (What do I KNOW about voting?). You could also provide some key words to support their thinking (e.g., making choices, elections, government, democracy).

Now ask students to write down their next set of thoughts in the W quadrant on Activity 1.1 (What do I WONDER about voting?)

### Option 2:

Through a whole class discussion, ask students to share any past experiences with voting or participating in a poll.

- Have you ever voted for something or offered your opinion in a poll/survey? If so, what was it for?
- Did you like participating in the process? How did it make you feel?
- Do you think it is important to have a way to express your opinion or have a voice in decisions?

## Fundamentals

1. Discuss the concept of democracy and elections. See Slide Deck 1.
  - In a **democracy**, citizens have a say in their government by electing **politicians** to make decisions on their behalf.
  - An **election** is a process in which citizens choose their politicians.
2. Watch the "Why Voting Matters" video and listen to young people talk about why they think voting is important. Afterwards, ask students to share their opinions about voting.
3. Have students practice voting by holding a mock vote with your class. Use the Google Forms templates or Activity 1.2 to create a simple ballot with a fun question and three to four options for choices (e.g., favourite sport, food, movie, TV show or musician/band).
4. Using a sample ballot, show students how to fill out a ballot correctly. Students can use a check-mark, X, or any other mark as long as it clearly indicates their choice. Make it clear that students are only allowed to make one choice. If they mark the ballot for more than one option it will be rejected.
5. Conduct the vote and tally the results. Emphasize the importance of privacy and no one knowing how each person voted.
6. Reflect on the mock vote and review the idea of a secret ballot.
  - Were you happy with the results of the vote? Why or why not?
  - How would you feel if you didn't have a chance to express your choice?
  - Why do you think we vote by "secret ballot"?
  - Did you know that a long time ago elections were held in public? Voters would have to hold up their hand to express their choice. What problems do you think this could cause?
  - Is it important to participate in the voting process? Why or why not?
7. Introduce the upcoming provincial election and the Student Vote program.
  - In Canada, we have elections for each level of government (federal, provincial, municipal, and band council elections).
  - The next provincial election will take place on February 13, 2021. Voters throughout Newfoundland and Labrador will elect politicians to represent them in the provincial legislature.

- Elementary and high school students will also have an opportunity to take part in the election and practice voting through a program called **Student Vote**.
  - After learning about the political parties and candidates, students will vote in a parallel election.
  - Although the votes will not count in the official tallies, the Student Vote results are released publicly and shared with media. This allows young people to have a voice in the election and have their opinions shared.
- Watch the "Student Vote Canada 2019" video to hear students and teachers speak about their experience with the program (for the 2019 federal election). Afterwards, ask students to share their own thoughts about participating in the program and what they hope to learn from the experience.

## Consolidation

### Option 1:

- Ask students to write down a couple things that they learned about voting in the L quadrant on Activity 1.1.
- Ask students to write down their thoughts about how they could learn more about voting in quadrant H on Activity 1.1 (How can I learn more about voting?).

### Option 2:

- Co-create a list of learning goals that students want to achieve by the time they cast their Student Vote ballot (e.g., How do I decide who to vote for? How do I find information about my candidates, and the parties they represent? What skills or qualities should I look for in the candidates? What issues are important in my community, and throughout the province?). Keep this list posted in the classroom for the duration of the program.
- Ask students to complete the *Reflection Card* (Activity 1.3). Question: The first thing I will share with my family tonight is...

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Voting in elections is an opportunity to shape your government and the future of your community, province and country.

During provincial elections, we elect members to the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly to make decisions on our behalf. Provincial representatives in Newfoundland and Labrador are called **Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs)**.

The next provincial election will take place February 13, 2021. Voters throughout Newfoundland and Labrador elect politicians to represent them in the provincial legislature.

To be eligible to vote in an Newfoundland and Labrador provincial election, you must:

- be a Canadian citizen;
- be at least 18 years old;
- A resident of the province the day before polling day;
- A resident of the district and polling division on polling day.

Voting in elections is done by **secret ballot**. This ensures the privacy of each voter's preference. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

A **ballot** lists the names of the candidates running in your electoral district and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot. As long as you clearly

mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be **valid**.

A **rejected ballot** is a ballot that cannot be counted due to a deliberate or accidental unrecognizable or unclear 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 or identifying who the voter is.

A **cancelled 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 writes 'cancelled' on the back of the ballot and places it in the cancelled ballot envelope.

## ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

<b>Starter</b>	<p><b>Option 1:</b> Can students generate questions about what they wonder about voting?</p> <p><b>Option 2:</b> Can students appreciate the value of having their voices heard?</p>
<b>Fundamentals</b>	<p>Are students able to recognize the importance of voting?</p> <p>Are students accurately casting a ballot?</p> <p>Can students analyze the importance of voting by secret ballot?</p>
<b>Consolidation</b>	<p>Can students articulate what they learned about voting and how they can learn more?</p> <p>Can students generate learning goals for the Student Vote program?</p>

## ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

<b>Individual Education Plans</b>	<p><b>Modifications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide key terms and definitions in advance.</li> <li>• Use additional CIVIX video resources on voting to help students develop prior knowledge before class discussions and activities (i.e., "Government and Democracy" video).</li> </ul> <p><b>Enrichment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fundamentals</i> – Provide the opportunity to conduct alternative research into the different election officer roles and/or ways the voting process has evolved to be more accessible over the years.</li> </ul>
<b>English Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (democracy, government, elections, candidate, political party, ballot).</li> </ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind students that new immigrants, adults who have difficulty reading, English Language Learners, persons who are homeless and other specific groups may face challenges understanding or accessing the election system. Keep the focus on ideas to increase access and the benefits our society gets from hearing different voices, not only on the disadvantages these groups face.</li> </ul>
<b>Accessibility &amp; Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure students can access ballot templates (alternative colours in printing, electronic copies).</li> <li>• Consider using a voting survey or platform to conduct the vote (e.g., Google Forms).</li> <li>• If using a stationary polling station for the mock vote:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ask students to use their own pencils/pens to avoid sharing</li> <li>- practice physical distancing</li> <li>- provide mobility accommodations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider having students vote at their desk in order to ensure physical distancing. But make sure to show a photo or video of a polling station so that students become familiar with the set-up and purpose of a privacy screen. See Slide Deck 1.</li> <li>• Demonstrate examples of valid ballots and rejected ballots so that students understand the difference, even if they are voting online. See Slide Deck 1.</li> </ul>