

Lesson 6

My Candidates



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How are candidates elected to the provincial legislature?
- 2 How can I evaluate the candidates?

OVERVIEW

During provincial elections, we elect members to the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly to make decisions on our behalf.

In this lesson, students consider the qualities they look for in their Member of the House of Assembly before conducting their own research into the candidates. After learning about the election process, students analyze the distribution of electoral districts throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and investigate their school's electoral district. Next, students brainstorm questions they want to ask the candidates or to guide their research into the candidates. Afterwards, students reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates, and the

priorities that will shape their decision on Student Vote Day.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe the qualities and skills they would like their elected representative to have;
- explain the rules of our voting system and how candidates are elected;
- identify their electoral district;
- communicate questions they want to ask or learn about the candidates;
- analyze the candidate responses or research about the candidates;
- voice their opinion on matters relevant to their community.

Teacher Tips

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- To avoid any bias or partisanship, ensure that all registered candidates are invited to respond to questions.
- Supplies/Needs: internet access, Slide Deck 6, digital access to or copies of 6.1 and 6.2.
- Online templates for all activities and any videos and slide decks are available on the project website.

Starter

1. Review the concept of a **representative democracy**. Citizens elect political representatives to make decisions on their behalf and represent their community. At the provincial level in Newfoundland and Labrador, these representatives are called Members of the House of Assembly.
2. Through a 'Placemat' activity, have students answer the question: What qualities or skills would I (or my parents/guardians) like to see in our Member of the House of Assembly?

This cooperative learning strategy allows students to think about, record, share their ideas in groups and then reach a consensus.

- a) You can provide each group with one large sheet of paper divided into sections (one for each student and a centre block for the final group list) or you could provide each group of students with access to a Google Doc version of Activity 6.1. Alternatively, the activity could also be conducted through discussion.
- b) Ask students to respond to the question within their allotted space in one of the outside sections. Provide time for each student to share their recorded responses with the rest of their group without discussion or debate from the other students.
- c) Ask groups to decide, collectively, on the five most important/significant qualities and record them in the centre of the placemat — it is important that all group members agree on the top five items.
- d) Review each group's top five as a class.

Fundamentals

1. Review the election process in Newfoundland and Labrador using Slide Deck 6.
 - Provincial elections are managed by Elections NL.
 - The province is divided into 40 geographic areas called **electoral districts**. Each electoral district has

- its own election race, where interested individuals compete for the job of Member of the House of Assembly. These individuals are called candidates.
 - Voters can only choose one candidate on the ballot.
 - The candidate with the most votes wins.
2. Write the name of your school's electoral district on the blackboard, chart paper or interactive whiteboard. Demonstrate where you can find your electoral district by visiting the Elections NL website (www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/). Go to the 'Electoral District Search' page and enter your address.

TEACHER NOTE

The school's electoral district may be different from where some students call home. Please contact CIVIX if you would like your school to receive Student Vote ballots for multiple electoral district, to accommodate students who would like to vote for their local candidates.

3. Using the maps on the Elections NL website, compare the size and shape of electoral district in your jurisdiction, and across the province. Specifically, compare an urban electoral district to a rural electoral district. Ask students to consider why there are differences and what those differences might reflect (e.g., population, geographic features). If possible, use a physical geography map to further examine landforms and bodies of water.
4. Through a class discussion, answer the following questions:
 - What are the boundaries of the school's electoral district?
 - What communities or neighbourhoods are included in the electoral district?
 - What major landmarks are included in the school's electoral district?
 - What makes the electoral district different or unique compared to others?
 - Do you think people living in other electoral districts have similar concerns to the ones you have in your electoral district? Why or why not?
5. On the blackboard, interactive whiteboard or on chart paper, list the candidates running for election and their party, if applicable. Demonstrate to students where they can find this information by visiting the Elections NL website. Give students a few minutes to write down the names on Activity 6.2.
6. Divide students into groups and have them brainstorm possible questions to ask the candidates. Refer back to the *Starter* activity to foster ideas. Questions to prompt the brainstorming:

- What do you want to know about the candidates before casting your vote?
 - What information will help you evaluate the candidates?
 - Which issues do you want to see addressed in the community?
7. As a class, narrow down the questions and pose them to candidates through email, or by conducting a phone or virtual interview.

Alternatively, you can use the candidate's website or news reports to analyze how the candidate may respond to the questions. You can assign each group a candidate and have them share their research or candidate profiles with the rest of the class.

8. Review the responses and/or group research and encourage students to share their thoughts about the candidates.

Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about the candidates running for election, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Which candidate will you vote for and why?
- Does your preferred candidate belong to the same party you like best? Share your thoughts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Elections NL is the province's impartial, independent, election management body. Given a mandate from the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly, it organizes, manages and oversees provincial elections.

A **voting system** (or electoral system) is the way in which we elect our representatives. The voting system includes set rules for how preferences are recorded and the method used for determining which candidate wins. There are many different voting systems used around the world.

Newfoundland and Labrador uses a system called **Single-Member Plurality** or **First Past the Post** (FPTP). The province is divided into smaller geographic areas called electoral districts. Newfoundland and Labrador is currently divided into 40 **electoral districts**.

In FPTP, voters choose a single candidate on the ballot and 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. This is called **plurality**.

In our system, each electoral district is represented by one Member of the House of Assembly (single-member districts). The size of electoral districts is determined by factors such as population size, demographic make-up and geography. The most important factor is making sure that the number of people represented is as equal as possible, so that every vote counts the same.

Urban electoral districts are often geographically smaller due to dense populations, while rural electoral districts are often geographically larger with less dense populations.

Under Newfoundland and Labrador's parliamentary system, the party that elects the greatest number of representatives to the Legislative Assembly usually forms government and their leader becomes the **premier**.

Newfoundland and Labrador has **fixed-date election legislation** and, as required by *The Election Act*, a general election is to be held on the second Tuesday in October in the fourth calendar year following the previous election. Regardless of fixed-date election legislation, a provincial election can be held at any time if the government loses the confidence of the legislature or if the lieutenant governor were to dissolve the legislature on the advice of the premier. Additionally, in the event that a premier leaves office during their

term, the new premier is required to call an election within 12 months of taking office. The previous provincial election was held on May 16, 2019, and the upcoming provincial election is scheduled for February 13, 2021.

The election campaign period starts when the lieutenant governor, on the advice of the premier, dissolves the House of Assembly. During an election campaign, an organized course of action is taken by a political party and its candidates to share its vision and platform with voters.

There are many ways to gather information about the provincial election candidates. Information may also be accessible online through party and/or candidate websites and social media pages. Community groups hold in-person or virtual town hall meetings or all-candidate debates where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the issues and ask questions. Information can also be found on radio and television, media websites or in newspapers and local magazines. Individuals may also visit campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they are canvassing in the community. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, you can expect to see a much greater focus on virtual outreach compared to traditional methods.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Starter	<p>Are students grouped so that they feel comfortable contributing?</p> <p>Are students thinking critically about the qualities and skills needed for community leadership?</p>
Fundamentals	<p>Can students understand the provincial election process?</p> <p>Are students analyzing their electoral district and drawing conclusions about what makes it unique?</p> <p>Are students posing good questions to evaluate the candidates?</p>
Consolidation	<p>Can students articulate their priorities when evaluating candidates?</p> <p>Are students able to think critically about the choices and come to a decision? Can they provide evidence to support their thinking?</p>

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	<p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Starter</i> – Make a list on the board of personality traits, qualifications and skills, so that students can choose ones important to them. • Group students so they are comfortable in sharing their ideas. <p>Enrichment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group stronger students together so that they can challenge each other. • Have a mock debate where students take on the roles of the election candidates and use research to form their responses.
English Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide vocabulary for qualities an elected representative might possess.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss specific questions marginalized groups may have for the candidates. • Discuss specific challenges your community is facing. • Analyze the diversity of the candidates running in your municipality and discuss the need for diversity in politics.
Accessibility & Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, considering using Google Docs for collaborative discussion/brainstorming. • Coordinate virtual Q&A sessions with the candidates in place of in-person meetings.