Lesson 6
Municipal Elections

❶ How are municipal council members elected?

❷ How do voters decide who to vote for?

❸ Why should we research the candidates before voting?

OVERVIEW

Elections are contests of leadership, ideas, politics and power, where interested individuals campaign for your support and ultimately your vote.

In this lesson, students will learn about municipal elections in Ontario and the different election races in their community. Students will engage in the inquiry process to investigate factors when making their voting decision and to guide their research into the candidates. Afterwards, students share their candidate research with the rest of the class for analysis. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on the research process and evaluate different criteria when making their voting decision(s).

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- develop an understanding of the municipal election process and power dynamics;
- engage in the inquiry process to formulate questions, and to interpret, synthesize and analyze information;
- evaluate the candidates and analyze how they will respond to the same issue (Concepts of Thinking – Perspective);
- voice informed opinions on matters relevant to our community (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Participation).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I can...

- generate learning goals for the Student Vote program;
- explain how my municipal council is elected;
- ask questions, research information and critically analyze the candidates;
- compare and contrast how different candidates may view or interpret the same issue;
- analyze why it is important to research the candidates before voting.

Curriculum Links

B1. Application: assess responses of governments in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments, to some significant issues, and develop plans of action for governments and citizens to address social and environmental issues

B1.1 assess the effectiveness of actions taken by one or more levels of government, including Indigenous governments, to address an issue of national, provincial/territorial, and/or local significance

B3. Understanding Context: demonstrate an understanding of the roles and key responsibilities of citizens and of the different levels of government in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments

B3.1 describe the major rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada;

B3.8 explain why different groups may have different perspectives on specific social and environmental issues

Tips for Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- If the number of races and/or candidates is overwhelming, focus on the mayoral or councillor race only.

Supplies/Needs

- Slide Deck 6
- 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. Introduce the upcoming municipal elections and the Student Vote program.

   - Municipal government elections in Ontario are held every four years on the fourth Monday in October.
   - The next municipal elections will be held on Monday, October 24, 2022.
   - Throughout the province, voters will elect individuals to sit on their municipal councils, as well as their school boards (Lesson 7).
   - Elementary and high school students will also have an opportunity to learn about the election process and practice voting through a program called Student Vote.

2. Watch the "Ontario Municipal and School Board Elections - Elementary Students" video to hear students and teachers speak about their experience with the program for the 2014 municipal elections.

3. As a class, co-create a list of learning goals (knowledge and skills) that students want to achieve by the time they cast their Student Vote ballot. Keep this list posted in the classroom for the duration of the program.

Activities

1. Through a 'Placemat' activity, have students answer the question: What qualities or skills should an elected representative have?

   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).
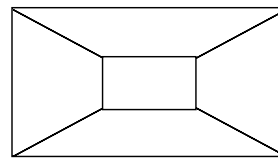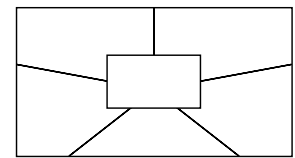
   Four person group   **Five person group**

   b) Ask students to respond to the question within their allotted space. 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) Next, have each group decide, collectively, on the five most important qualities and record them in the centre of the placemat — it is essential that all group members agree on the top five items.

   d) 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 qualities and skills.

   e) Have each group's share their top five with the rest of the class.

2. Review the process for municipal elections in Ontario. You can use Slide Deck 6 as a starting point and add specific information about the election races where you live (job titles and number of positions).

3. Find out which candidates are running for election in your area. Show students where they can find this information by visiting your municipality's website.

4. On a blackboard or whiteboard, write down the following question: How should we decide who to vote for?

   Through a class discussion, generate questions to frame this decision. For example:

   • Why do they want to be on council?
   • Would they make a good leader or council member?
   • What issues in our community matter to me? Do they matter to the candidates?
   • What ideas or goals do the candidates have for our community?

5. Divide students into pairs or small groups to research the candidates running for election.

   Co-create an investigation plan or checklist for developing a candidate profile and determine how the information will be presented (e.g., poster, slide deck, video, mock Instagram profile).

   Sample research profile:

   • Name and photo
   • Reason for running (Why do they want the job?)
   • Personal information (e.g., education, career, accomplishments)
   • Priorities (What issues are most important to the candidate?)
   • Goals (What do they want to achieve?)

   Review different ways that you can collect information about the candidates (e.g., candidate websites and social media pages, web searches, news media, candidate debates or town halls, discussion with family and friends). Tell students they can even contact the candidates directly and ask them what they want to know.

6. Have each group share their candidate profile with the rest of the class through a presentation or Gallery Walk. Students can make notes on all the candidates using Activity 6.1.

Consolidation

Ask students to complete Activity 6.3 or write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

• Why should we research the candidates before voting?
• Which factors do you think are most important when deciding who you will vote for?
• Analyze the different viewpoints of two or more candidates on a particular issue. Who do you agree with and why? Why do people have different viewpoints?

Extended Learning

You can also consider inviting candidates to visit your class/school or organizing a candidates' debate (Handout 6.2). Alternatively, you can use the candidate's website or news reports to find the answers or analyze how the candidate may respond to the questions. You can assign each group a candidate and have them share their research and responses with the rest of the class.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON SECTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS
Starter	Can students generate learning goals for the Student Vote program?
Activities	Can students generate a list of qualities or skills they would like to see in their elected representative? Can students collectively agree on the top skills/qualities? Can students identify different considerations when deciding for whom to vote? Can students identify what is important to them or their community and help them narrow their research? Can students design a research plan that supports their inquiry? Are students presenting information that is accurate and informative? Can students assess their learning and what they might do differently in the future?
Consolidation	Do students recognize that research can make it easier to reach a decision? Do students understand different considerations when making voting decisions?

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	**Modifications** • Review the concept of elected representatives using other CIVIX video resources ("Elected Representatives" and/or "Levels of Government"). • Provide access to key terms in advance. • Use ability grouping to support students. **Enrichment** • Students can enhance their understanding by comparing municipal elections to provincial or federal elections. Encourage them to take note of similarities and differences. Alternatively, they could compare municipal elections to those in other countries.
Language Learners	• Allow students to compare electoral systems and especially municipal leadership positions to their home region and in their primary language. • Provide access to key terms in advance.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	• Analyze the diversity of the candidates running in your municipality and discuss the need for diversity in politics.
	  - Lack of council diversity puts municipalities at risk: https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2018/lack-of-council-diversity-puts-municipalities-at-risk/
	  - Women in Politics: https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/women-politics/
	  - London's first female Muslim councillor believes representation can inspire others: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-s-first-female-muslim-councillor-believes-representation-can-inspire-others-1.6252907

Accessibility & Accommodations	• The 'Placemat' activity for the *Starter* activity can be conducted using the Google Doc available online or using a 'Think-Pair-Share' strategy. • If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, considering using Google Docs for collaborative discussion/brainstorming. • Provide mobility accommodations for any activities that require movement. • Coordinate virtual Q&A sessions with the candidates in place of in-person candidate debates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Municipal elections provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss and debate the future direction of their community.

An individual who seeks public office or competes for the role of an elected representative is called a candidate. It is their job to share their vision, ideas and commitment to the position in order to win the support of voters during a campaign.

On October 24, 2022, Ontarians will elect candidates to sit on their municipal councils. The size, arrangement and election of the council differs per municipality.

Council members can be elected **at-large** (by all eligible voters in the municipality) or by **ward** where themunicipality is broken down into smaller geographic areas that elect one or more representatives for their specific ward. The head of council is elected at-large in single-tier or lower-tier municipalities.

An **electoral system** is the way in which citizens elect their representatives. There are set rules for how preferences are recorded and the methods used for determining which candidate wins. There are many different electoral systems used around the world.

Municipalities in Ontario use a system called **First-Past-The-Post** (FPTP). A successful candidate must receive the most votes in order to be elected in their area. In some cases, more than one candidate is elected, either at-large or within a ward. This is called a **multi-member election**. For example, if there are six council members elected at-large, the six candidates with the most number of votes are elected.

In some municipalities, there will be numerous candidates running for a seat on council. In other municipalities, there may only be a few candidates and the race will be less contested. If a candidate has no opponents, or if the number of candidates match the number of seats on council, then the candidate(s) automatically win. This is called acclamation. When this happens, no vote is held for that race.

To become a candidate in a municipal election in Ontario, you must be at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen and be eligible to vote in the election.

There are many ways to gather information about the election candidates. Information can also be found on media websites or in newspapers, radio and television, and local magazines. Town hall meetings or all-candidate debates are also organized where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the election issues and ask them questions. Individuals may also visit candidates' offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing. Information may also be found through candidate websites and social media profiles.