Lesson 8
The Voting Process

GUIDING QUESTIONS

❶ Is voting in elections important?

❷ Why do we vote by secret ballot?

❸ How do I vote in municipal elections?

OVERVIEW

The right to vote comes with the responsibility to vote in an informed and purposeful manner.

In this lesson, students analyze different reasons for voting in elections. Students review essential information about voter eligibility and when, where and how people vote in municipal elections. Afterwards, they practice voting and counting ballots through a mock vote. To consolidate their knowledge, students create a poster or pamphlet detailing how to vote or to encourage their family and friends to vote in the upcoming election.

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- explain the importance of being an active and engaged citizen (Concepts of Thinking – Significance);
- understand how to participate in municipal and school board elections (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Citizenship);
- describe the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada (Concepts of Thinking – Significance);
- demonstrate effective communication skills to share information and messages using our words and graphics.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I can...

- communicate reasons for voting in elections and understand why people have different viewpoints;
- describe when, where and how to vote in municipal and school board elections;
- mark my choice on a ballot correctly;
- use words and images effectively to convey my thoughts about voting and knowledge about the voting process.

Curriculum Links

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 (FOCUS ON: Significance)

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

B3.5 describe different processes that governments can use to solicit input from the public

Tips for Teachers

- Please use or adapt the activities in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- Show students a Student Vote ballot for your municipality so they know what to expect on Student Vote Day. Please refer to your ballot package.
- Be sensitive to issues at home that may challenge perspectives around voting and democratic participation, such as religion or traditions.
- 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
- Index cards for students
- Internet access
- Slide Deck 8
- Access or copies of 8.1
- All digital files, videos and slide decks can be found on the project website

Starter

Save the last word

1. Distribute one index card to each student. Introduce the activity by posing the following question: Does voting matter?

2. Watch the "Why Voting Matters" video and ask students to select one quote or reason for voting that stood out to them. They should write down the quote or reason on the index card. You may want to play the video twice in order to support this selection.

3. Ask students to explain why they chose the reason they did from the video by writing an explanation on the back of the card (e.g., what it meant to them, reminded them of, how it connects to prior learning).

4. Divide students into groups of three. Invite one student to read their chosen reason to rest of their group. Then ask the other two students to discuss the reason. What do they think it means? Why do they think these words might be important? After a few minutes, ask the student to read the back of their index card or to explain why they picked the reason. Repeat until each student has a turn sharing their reason/quote.

Activities

1. Using Slide Deck 8, discover some of the key aspects of voting in municipal elections.

   - Why do we vote by secret ballot?
   - Who is able to vote in municipal elections?
   - Who organizes municipal elections in Ontario?
   - What are different ways a person can cast their ballot?
   - How do I mark my ballot?

2. Organize a mock vote with your class. You can use the ballot sample provided (Activity 8.1) or create your own ballots (physical or digital).

   a) Show students how to fill out a ballot correctly. It is important to demonstrate that there are sometimes different rules for different races. Students can use a checkmark, X, or any other mark as long as it clearly indicates their choice(s). Remind students that they must follow the rules for each race – if only two choices are permitted, you cannot vote for three candidates.

   b) Set-up a polling station with one voting screen and one ballot box in your classroom.

   c) Distribute the ballots and invite each student to go behind the voting screen to mark their ballot. Afterwards, ask them to re-fold their ballot to ensure privacy and place it in the ballot box.

3. Review the ballot terms 'accepted' and 'rejected'.

   Accepted: A ballot that is clearly marked for the correct number of candidates (or less).

   Rejected: A ballot that cannot be counted because the choice was not clear or more options were selected than permitted.

4. Divide students into small groups and ask them to review and count a portion of the ballots from the mock vote. They should count one section (category) at a time. One person should show the ballot to the rest of the group and as a group, they should decide whether should be 'accepted' or 'rejected'. One person should be selected to tally the votes.

5. Add up the results from each group and announce the results.

6. Have a whole-class discussion and answer any remaining questions about the voting process.

   • Do you think voting is easy or challenging? Why?
   • Do you feel ready to vote in the Student Vote election? Why or why not?
   • What other questions do you have about voting?

Consolidation

Have students demonstrate their knowledge by creating a poster or pamphlet about how to vote or to encourage people to vote in the upcoming elections. It could be designed for a parent, guardian, or an adult they know. This could also be done in a digital poster format, or as a video.

Ideas for possible content:

   • List the qualifications to vote in municipal elections;
   • Describe different ways you can cast your ballot (when/how);
   • List the steps to cast your ballot;
   • Make a pitch with reasons for voting.

Co-create criteria with your class. Sample criteria for a poster/pamphlet is below.

   • The tagline and/or graphics are used to capture interest.
   • Headings are meaningful and appropriate
   • Information is helpful or accurate (e.g., date, eligibility requirements)

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON SECTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS
Starter	Can students identify a reason for voting that is meaningful to them and explain their choice? Are students actively listening? Can students analyze different reasons for voting?
Activities	Are students able to understand the reason for voting in private? Can students explain who is qualified to vote? Are students accurately casting a ballot? Can students evaluate an accepted ballot and tally the votes?
Consolidation	Can students communicate an accurate and informative voting pitch to family members or adults they know that demonstrates their knowledge?

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	**Modifications** • Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., secret ballot, voting location, election day, advance voting, rejected ballot). • Share the "Why Voting Matters" video before class discussions and activities. • Ensure that subtitles are on during videos. **Enrichment** • Activities — Have students conduct research into the roles of different election officials (see Election Manual) or design a plan for organizing Student Vote Day at your school.
Language Learners	• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., secret ballot, voting location, election day, advance voting, rejected ballot). • Share the "Why Voting Matters" video before class discussions and activities. • Ensure that subtitles are on during videos.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	• Remind students that new immigrants, adults who have difficulty reading, language learners, persons who are homeless, newly arrived refugees, and other specific groups may face challenges understanding or accessing the voting process. • 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.
Accessibility & Accommodations	• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative discussion/brainstorming.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Every four years, voters across Ontario decide who will represent their interests and lead their communities by electing the members of their municipal councils and school boards.

The provincial government sets out common rules that all voters and candidates must follow. However, municipalities are responsible for conducting elections for their municipal council and school boards within their jurisdiction. Every municipality has a municipal clerk who is in charge of running the election.

You are eligible to vote in the municipal council election in Ontario if:

- you are a Canadian citizen
- you are aged 18 or older
- you qualify to vote in the municipality*

*You may qualify in one of three ways:
1. You are a *resident elector* if you live in the municipality.
2. You are a *non-resident elector* if you own or rent property in the municipality, but do not live there.
3. You are the spouse of a *non-resident elector*.

There is also a special rule for students who may be living away from home while they attend school. If you are a student and consider your "home" to be the place where you live when you are not attending school (i.e. you plan on returning there), then you are eligible to vote in both your "home" municipality *and* in the municipality where you currently live while attending school.

You are eligible to vote in the school board elections in Ontario if:

- you are a Canadian citizen
- you are aged 18 or older
- you qualify to vote for that particular school board

If you are a resident elector in a municipality, you are eligible to vote for a school trustee that represents the municipality or ward where you live.

There are four types of school boards, but you can only vote for one type.

- English-language public school board
- English-language Catholic school board
- French-language public school board
- French-language Catholic school board

Voters are automatically eligible to vote for the English-language public school board unless they take steps to become a supporter of a different kind of school board. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) keeps the provincial record of school support.

If someone wants to change which type of board they vote for, they must contact MPAC. When they contact MPAC, they can only change which type of board they vote for if:

- they or their spouse are Roman Catholic and want to be an English-language Catholic school board supporter;
- they have French-language rights** and want to be a French-language public school board supporter;
- they or their spouse are Roman Catholic and are a French-language rights holder and want to be a French-language Catholic school board supporter.

**According to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*, in Ontario, a French-language rights holder is defined as either someone whose native language is French, someone who has received French-language education in elementary school, or someone whose child has received or is receiving French-language education in elementary or secondary school.

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) is responsible for preparing the preliminary list of electors for each municipality. Your municipality receives the preliminary list from MPAC and then creates and posts their own **voters' list**.

A voter's name must be on the **voters' list** in order to cast a ballot. While a voter's name can be added on voting day, it is helpful to do this in advance. In some municipalities, being on the voters' list ensures you receive a voter information card, which indicates your voting place on voting day and the dates, times and locations of advance voting locations. Voters can check and see if they are on the voters' list by contacting their municipality or by visiting the Voter Lookup website (www.voterlookup.ca).

Each municipality is responsible for conducting their own election and determining the voting method. Options include paper ballots, online voting, voting by mail, voting by phone or a combination of these methods. Please consult with your municipal clerk's office or local elections office to find out specific information about your municipality's election process.

When a voter arrives at a voting place, they must show identification to prove that they are the person whose name appears on the voters' list. The identification must show their name and address. Photo identification is not required.

The **ballot** lists the names of the candidates running in each race. There is a space beside each candidate's name on to mark the selection. In **First-Past-the-Post** elections, voters are permitted to mark their choice for as many candidates as are members elected in the race. For example, in a multi-member race where five council members are elected **at-large**, voters can vote for up to five candidates. Alternatively, if only one candidate is being elected in a ward, it is only possible to vote for one candidate.

A ballot is declared invalid by the **deputy returning officer** because it was not properly marked. This is called a **rejected ballot**. For example, the voter selected more than the maximum number of candidates they were allowed to choose or if the ballot was not marked clearly. In the case of municipal elections, one race or section may be declared valid and another may be deemed invalid.

Ontario's Municipal Act allows voters to decline their ballot. To **decline** their ballot, voters must inform the election official that they are declining their right to vote when they receive their ballot. This is a public process and the choice is expressed aloud. The election official will mark "declined" on the election documentation and the ballot will not be placed in the ballot box but in an envelope for **declined ballots**.