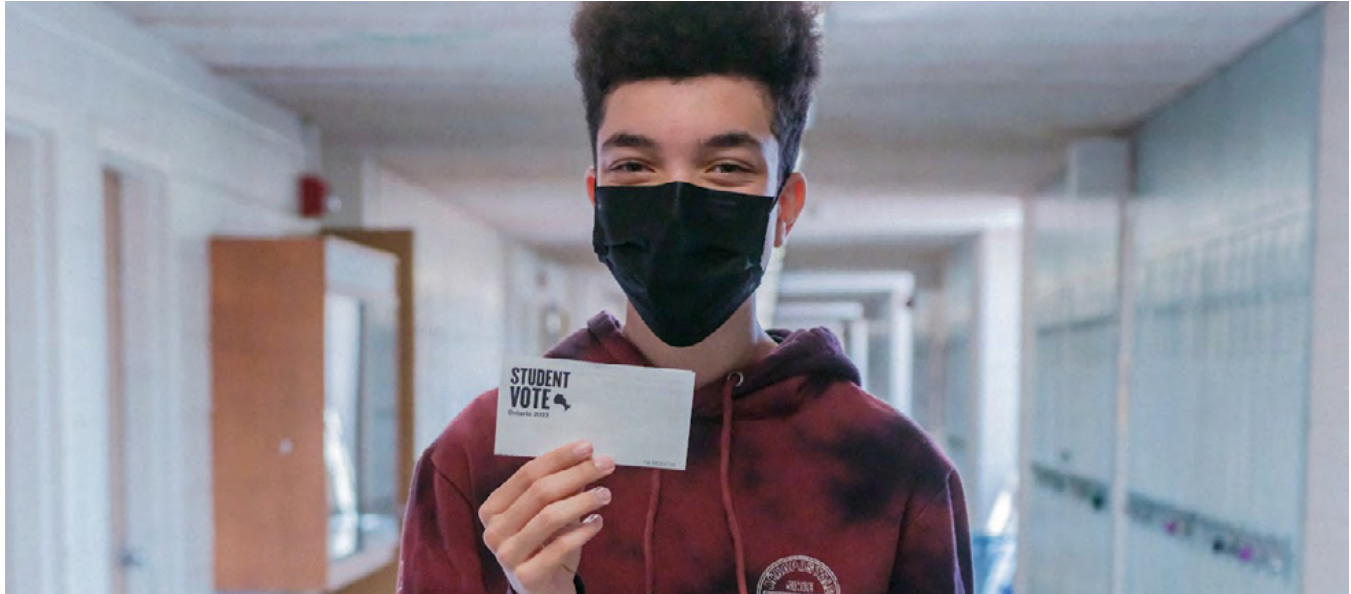# Lesson 8
The Voting Process

GUIDING QUESTIONS

❶ Is voting in elections important?

❷ How do I vote in municipal elections?

❸ What are some barriers to participating in the voting process and what does it mean for me?

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, students learn about voter turnout and barriers to electoral participation, and reflect on whether any barriers may be relevant to them in the future. In the *Consolidation* activity, students create a social media style video about whether they believe citizens should vote or whether they plan to vote in the future.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- explain the importance of participating in elections (Concepts of Thinking - Significance);
- describe how to participate in municipal and school board elections (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Citizenship);
- analyze issues related to personal and societal rights and responsibilities (Citizenship Education Framework – Attributes).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I can...

- evaluate reasons for voting in elections;
- explain key information related to voting in municipal elections;
- analyze barriers to voting in elections and its relevance to me; and,
- articulate reasons for voting in a persuasive manner.

Curriculum Links

Starter

Save the last word

1. Distribute one index card or piece of paper 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. Why do they think it was chosen? Is it meaningful for them? If so, why? After a few minutes, ask the student to read the back of their index card or to explain why they picked the reason and what it means for them. Repeat until each student has a turn sharing their selected quote/reason.

Activities

1. Explain to students that voting in municipal elections is done by secret ballot (Slide Deck 8). Voters mark their ballot behind a privacy screen and fold their ballot to conceal their choice. Using 'Think Pair Share', have students reflect on one or more of the following questions:

   - Why is voting in secrecy important?
   - What could happen if elections were held publicly?
   - Why is it important to ensure a fair and impartial electoral process?

2. Using Slide Deck 8, review key aspects of the voting process in municipal and school board elections in Ontario.

   Guiding questions:

   - Who is qualified to vote in municipal elections?
   - What is the voters' list?
   - What are different ways that voters can cast their ballot?
   - How do I mark my ballot?

3. Explain the term 'voter turnout' (Slide Deck 8) and various statistics from elections in Ontario.

   Review:

   - Voter turnout is the percentage of eligible electors or registered voters that cast ballots in an election.
   - Having the right to vote doesn't always mean that a person will show up at the polls to cast a ballot.

   > **TEACHER NOTE**
   > Voter turnout data for your municipality may be available online and, if available, would provide for a more relevant discussion on turnout.

4. Provide copies of Activity 8.1 and give students a few minutes to complete it. Ask students to answer each question as honestly as they can.

   > **TEACHER NOTE**
   > Encourage students to take the survey home and have a discussion with their parents.

5. Review some key research findings about voting and barriers to voting using Slide Deck 8. There are many different barriers to voting, including motivational barriers and access barriers.

   - Motivational barriers include low levels of political knowledge and interest in politics, lack of perceived importance, cynicism and lower sense of civic duty.
   - Access barriers include not knowing when and where to vote, lack of personal identification, challenges getting to the polling station, and language and literacy skills.

6. Independently or with a partner, have students reflect on how many zeros they recorded on the voting survey (Activity 8.1) and which barriers could affect their decision or ability to vote in the future.

7. In small groups, ask students to discuss actions they can take to reduce these barriers in the future. Afterwards, debrief as a class.

Consolidation

Create a social media style video highlighting three main points as a response to one of the following questions. Consider using visual graphics and a tag line.

- Should eligible citizens vote in elections?
- Does voting matter?
- Do you plan to vote in the future? Why?

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Language Learners	• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., election day, advance voting, vote by mail, ballot, accepted ballot, rejected ballot, voters' list).
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 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.
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**.