

# Lesson 1: Democracy and Voting

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What are some different types of decision-making models?
- 2 What does it mean to live in a democracy?
- 3 Why do we have elections?

## OVERVIEW

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

In this lesson, students experience different types of governance through a tower building activity. Afterwards, students review what it means to live in a democracy and discuss the upcoming mayoral by-election. In the Consolidation activity, students reflect on what they learned during the lesson.

## LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- analyze different ways that groups make decisions and understand the consequences of each;
- explain what it means to live in a democracy;
- describe the process of elections.

## STARTER

1. As an introduction to the activity, explain that there are different types of governments around the world. Governments can be compared with regard to who holds power, who has access to power and decision-making, and the rights granted to citizens.

2. Create four or more table stations and assign four to six students to each station.

3. Explain to students that each group will be tasked with building the tallest, most stable structure that holds the jumbo marshmallow on top, using the group instructions and only the materials provided.

- 20 sticks of spaghetti/linguine
- 1 metre of tape
- 1 metre yarn/rope
- Jumbo marshmallow
- Scissors

Alternatively, you can use 20 small marshmallows and 20 sticks of spaghetti.

4. Provide each station with one card from Activity 1.1, which details the process for each group. They must build the tallest tower they can using the government system described on their card. There are four suggestions, but you can provide additional building materials as necessary, depending on the size of your class.

- Team of 1 (dictatorship) – Only one person is in charge, and they make all the decisions without ideas from other group members. They can complete the task by themselves, or direct who they want to help or not help. They can also ask the other group members to leave the table if they want. The person in charge is the oldest person in the group.
- Team of 2 (oligarchy) – Only two people will work together on the task. No one else is involved. The team of two consist of the shortest person in the group, and this person’s choice of another person from the group.
- Team of all, with roles (democracy) – All group members are involved in the task. They must choose a leader and determine different roles for the rest of the group members based on consensus or majority rule.
- Team of all, no roles (anarchy) – All group members are involved in the task, but there are no roles or planning in advance of the task.

5. Provide groups with three minutes to plan their structure and ten minutes for building. Once the time is up, measure each tower and announce a winner.

6. Give students time to reflect on the experience within their groups. What are the pros and cons of the style of leadership and group involvement? How did each group member feel during the process?

7. Afterwards, have each group share their government type and summarize their experience.

- What made the building process successful or unsuccessful?
- What feelings developed among group members and why?

## ESSENTIAL LEARNING

1. Using the "[Voting in a Democracy](#)" video, review the concept of democracy and the process of elections.

- A **democracy** is a system of government where citizens get to have a say in decision-making.
- Canada is a democracy.
- Not all people live in a democracy. In some places in the world, citizens have little power or influence over their government.
- Voting in elections is an important way we influence our government. It is the method for choosing representatives to make decisions on our behalf.
- A candidate is a person who competes for the job of an elected representative. There are usually several candidates in each election race. Their job is to convince voters to choose them.
- On election day, citizens express their choices by voting, usually by marking a ballot paper.

2. Discuss the upcoming **mayoral by-election** and the Student Vote program.

- On June 26, Toronto residents will vote for a new mayor for our city.
- The mayor is the head (leader) of the Toronto city council and the Chief Executive Officer.
- The mayor is responsible for managing the growth and well-being of the city and addressing the needs of the community. They provide information and recommendations to the city council to support decision-making.
- A by-election is a special election because it is not held at a regularly scheduled time.

- There are many candidates running for mayor and sharing their ideas for the city.
- Toronto students will have a chance to vote in a parallel election called **Student Vote**.

3. Watch the "[Why Voting Matters](#)" video to hear students talk about why they believe voting is important.

### **CONSOLIDATION**

Use a 'Whip Around' protocol to finish the lesson. Ask students to quickly and verbally share one thing they learned in the class today. You can have them toss a ball from one to another or just have volunteers.