

LESSON 2:

Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

OBJECTIVE

Students will develop an appreciation for the fundamental rights and responsibilities that exist within a democracy.

KEY WORDS

representative democracy, right, freedom, responsibility, election, voter turnout, universal suffrage, women's suffrage

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What rights and freedoms do we have in Canada?
- What responsibilities come along with our rights?
- What is universal suffrage?
- Why is it important to exercise your right to vote?
- What is a democratic citizen?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 2: Rights and Responsibilities in a Democracy
- Video: Student Vote 2015
- Video: The Right to Vote
- Handout 2.1: Highlights from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- Handout 2.2: History of Voting Rights in Canada
- Worksheet 2.3: The Right to Vote
- Handout 2.4: Voter Turnout by Age Group (Federal Elections)

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10 min

1. Introduce the Student Vote program to your class. Student Vote is an election for elementary and high school students held alongside government elections. During the 2015 federal election, more than 900,000 students from across Canada cast Student Vote ballots, representing schools from every province and territory. Watch the 'Student Vote 2015' video with your class.

2. Explain to students that the purpose of the Student Vote program is to give students a chance to practice voting so that they will be more prepared to vote in the future. The Student Vote results are released publicly and shared with the media, which allows young people to have a voice in the political process and for parties to reflect on the views of the next generation of voters.

3. Several hundred schools will be participating in Student Vote for the 2016 Saskatchewan provincial election. After learning about the parties and candidates and debating the choices, students will cast ballots on Student Vote Day. The results will remain confidential until they are released after the close of the official polls on April 4.

4. Have a follow-up class discussion:

- What skills do you practice? (e.g., sports, driving, video games)
- Is it important for students to practice voting? Why or why not?
- Why should young people have the opportunity to share their views and opinions?

Instruction: 15-20 min

Teacher Note: Watch the "Right to Vote" video with your class.

1. All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. A right is a legal entitlement or protected freedom. Rights are more often fought for and claimed (in courts or even violently) and less often simply granted.

2. In Canada, our rights are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official languages rights and minority language education rights. Democratic rights include the right for every Canadian citizen, aged 18 and older, to vote in a federal election (Handout 2.1). Elections are the process by which our elected representatives and government are chosen.

3. The right to vote in Canada has not always been universal. It has been withheld from many groups throughout history, including women and certain ethnic and religious minorities (Handout 2.2). Women in Canada eventually gained the right to vote following years of persistent protest. Manitoba was the first province to pass legislation in January 1916, followed shortly by Saskatchewan in March 1916. By 1918, women in Canada had nearly the same voting rights as men in federal elections and gained the right to run for federal office in 1919.

Men and women of several ethnic and racial minorities, such as Canadians of Chinese and Japanese origin and Aboriginal peoples, were still disenfranchised for several decades after women achieved the right to vote. Universal suffrage was not achieved until 1960.

4. With all rights come responsibilities. A responsibility is a duty or obligation. It is something you should do in order to respect, promote and maintain certain rights.

Teacher Note: Assign Worksheet 2.3 for homework.

Discussion: 5-10 min

What is a responsibility? What responsibilities come along with our rights and freedoms? Make a list of rights and corresponding responsibilities on the board. Some examples include:

Right	Responsibility
The right to vote	The responsibility to cast a ballot and make an informed decision
The right for any person to not be discriminated against	To demonstrate tolerance and respect for diversity of background, gender, ethnicity, race and religion
Freedom of expression	The responsibility not to slander someone or to spread hate propaganda

Activity: 20-30 min

1. 2016 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the introduction of women’s suffrage (the right to vote) in Saskatchewan and Canada. Ask students to create a campaign to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary

of women’s right to vote or to depict the path to universal suffrage. In small groups or independently, students should design promotional materials incorporating social media, posters or audio visual elements that will illustrate the history of women’s suffrage or universal suffrage, or that emphasizes our right and responsibility to vote.

2. Share the promotional materials and creative presentations with the school in the lead up to your school’s Student Vote. Submit your productions to CIVIX by email or share them through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or YouTube.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about the right and responsibility to vote. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How would you feel if you were denied the ability to share your views or opinions?
- Is it ever a legitimate choice not to vote? What are some reasons for not voting?
- Should voting be mandatory? Why or why not?
- Will you vote when you become eligible? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. The number of people participating in government elections has been decreasing in recent years. Voter turnout is the percentage of eligible people who cast ballots in an election. Only 66 per cent of citizens voted in the last provincial election, compared to 83 per cent in 1991. Is this decline acceptable? Is it disrespectful to those who fought for the right to vote? Ask students to write a letter to their local newspaper or to their parents/guardians about the importance of voting.

B. Divide students into five groups and provide each with a section from Handout 2.2. Ask students to create a dramatic or multi-media presentation to inform the rest of the class about the pathway to universal suffrage.

C. Have students design a chronological timeline of events depicting the history of voting rights in Canada and the contributions by various individuals, agencies and non-governmental agencies. Additional research is suggested (see *External Resources*).

D. Using Handout 2.2 and additional research, ask the class to research the history of Canada’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) peoples and how they gained the right to vote.

E. Voter turnout among youth is generally much lower than older age groups. Using Handout 2.4, examine voter turnout rates by age group at the federal level and initiate a class discussion.

- Which age group had the highest voter turnout? Which group had the lowest?
- Discuss the impact of voter turnout among different age groups. How does it influence the results of an election? Which age groups would politicians want to speak to more?
- Consider possible reasons for these differences. What does it say about different age groups? What does it say about our election process?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What is a representative democracy?

Canadians elect representatives to speak on their behalf and to pass laws. An election is the process of choosing politicians from among a group of candidates who will form government.

What rights and responsibilities do we have in Canada?

A right is a freedom that is protected. The rights and freedoms of citizens are vital to a democratic government.

In Canada, citizens' rights and freedoms are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections that define our rights as Canadians: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official languages of Canada and minority language education rights.

Democratic rights include the right of every Canadian citizen, 18 years of age or older, to vote in an election and to be a candidate. Governments are also required to hold elections at least every five years and elected representatives must meet at least once every year.

With all rights come responsibilities. A responsibility is a duty or obligation. It is something you should do in order to respect certain rights or rules.

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

What is universal suffrage?

Universal suffrage is the extension of the right to vote to all adult citizens, including the removal of restrictions against women, ethnic and religious minorities and property ownership requirements.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right," *CBC Digital Archives* — www.cbc.ca
- "Women's Right to Vote," *Telling Times Documentary* — www.cpac.ca
- "Extending the Vote," *Canada: A People's History* — www.cbc.ca
- A History of the Vote in Canada, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- The Evolution of the Franchise, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- The Electoral System of Canada, Elections Canada — www.elections.ca