

LESSON 2:

Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the fundamental rights and freedoms that exist in a democracy and the associated responsibilities.

KEY WORDS

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

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What does it mean to live in a democracy?
- What is a right?
- What rights and freedoms do we have in Canada?
- What responsibilities come along with our rights?
- How is voting both a right and a responsibility?

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: Presentation Planning Sheet
- Worksheet 2.4: Our Rights and Responsibilities
- Worksheet 2.5: Voting Rights in Canada
- Worksheet 2.6: The Right to Vote

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10-15 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 Canadian students from every province and territory cast Student Vote ballots. 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.

3. Several hundred schools will be taking part 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, video games, math formulas)
- 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?

Discussion: 10 min

What is a right? What is a responsibility? What are some of the rights we have in the classroom or at school? What responsibilities come with these rights? For example, every child has the right to learn, but every child also has the responsibility to arrive at school on time and complete their homework. The right to a safe classroom comes with the responsibility to follow the rules.

Teacher Note: Record the examples on the blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard so that students can see their responses.

Instruction: 20-25 min

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

1. All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. Some of these basic rights include the ability to form your own opinion and express it freely (freedom of thought and expression), the choice to worship in your own way (freedom of religion) and the right to gather and meet with one another or to protest (freedom of assembly).
2. In 1982, the federal government created the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to protect our rights (Handout 2.1). One section is dedicated to democratic rights, which include the right of every Canadian citizen, 18 years of age and older, to participate or vote in government elections. Elections are the method of choosing our elected representatives and government.
3. The right to vote in Canada has changed over time. In the early days, only wealthy men who owned property/land could vote. For many years, women and people of certain ethnic and religious backgrounds could not vote. Manitoba was the first province to give women the right to vote 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.

However, there were still restrictions based on ethnicity and religion. Canadians of Chinese and Japanese origin and Aboriginal peoples were still not allowed to vote until several decades later. Universal suffrage is the granting of the right to vote to all adult citizens and it was not achieved in Canada until 1960.

Teacher Note: See Handout 2.2 and other suggestions listed in the External Resources section.

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 visual displays to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of women’s right to vote or to depict the path to universal suffrage for all Canadians. In small groups or individually, have students design a poster, PowerPoint or other presentation that illustrates the history of the suffrage movement, or that emphasizes our right and responsibility to vote.

Teacher Note: Worksheet 2.3 can be used as a planning tool.

2. Share the visual displays with the school in the lead up to Student Vote Day. Submit your productions to CIVIX by email or share them through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or YouTube. Afterwards, ask students to share their work with their families and encourage them to vote in the provincial election.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about rights and responsibilities. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How does living in a democracy affect you?
- How would you feel if you were denied the ability to share your views or opinions?
- How important is it that individuals are responsible members of society?
- Will you vote in elections when you turn 18 years old? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using Handout 2.1, review the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as a class. Individually or in pairs, ask students to consider the responsibilities that go along with each right using Worksheet 2.4.

B. Review and interpret the history of voting rights in Canada using Handout 2.2 and other sources. Using Worksheet 2.5, have students record the date when a particular group received the right to vote and how or why it was granted to them. Afterwards, ask students to create a visual timeline showing when various groups received the right to vote or when access was improved.

C. Ask students to recall a time when they finally received a privilege (e.g., walking to school on their own, having a sleepover, extending their bedtime). Ask students to imagine they are a member of one of the groups that struggled to obtain the right to vote and ask them to write about their feelings and experiences in a diary. Students should write two diary entries: one before being granted the right to vote and one after receiving the right to vote. Students can use Worksheet 2.6 to record their entries.

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. Have students write a summary or article based on their research, including the who, what, where, when and how.

E. 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.

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