

LESSON 5:

Local Candidates and Issues

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about their constituency, the candidates and local issues.

KEY WORDS

constituency, electoral system, candidate, independent, ballot, incumbent, issue, constituent, First-Past-The-Post

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a constituency?
- What is a candidate? How do candidates get elected?
- What is the name of my constituency and who are the candidates?
- What are the most important issues in my constituency?
- How can I learn about my local candidates?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 5: Local Candidates and Issues
- Worksheet 5.1: My Constituency
- Worksheet 5.2: Election Candidate Profile
- Handout 5.3: A Framework for Planning an All-Candidates Meeting
- Worksheet 5.4: Graphic Organizer

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10-15 min plus homework

1. Explain to students that the province is divided into 61 different areas or constituencies. Find your school's constituency on the provincial map and write the name on the blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard. If you do not know your school's constituency, use the 'Find My Constituency' tool on the Elections Saskatchewan website (www.elections.sk.ca).
2. Ask students if they notice any differences between their constituency and others across their province (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population, geography, landmarks).
3. Show students an individual map of the school's constituency, which can be found on the Elections Saskatchewan website. If your constituency has changed since 2011, compare your 2011 constituency to your current constituency. Answer the following questions:
 - What are the boundaries of the school's constituency? Have they changed since 2011?
 - Where is the school located?
 - What major landmarks or attractions are included in the school's constituency?
 - What makes your constituency unique?
4. List all of the candidates (and their party association, if applicable) running for election in your school's constituency. Give students an opportunity to fill out sections of Worksheet 5.1 or assign it for homework.

Instruction: 10-15 min

1. At the provincial level, there are 61 constituencies (also known as ridings, electoral districts or electoral divisions) in Saskatchewan and each has its own elected representative called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). The constituencies are divided in a way that allows each MLA to represent roughly 18,000 people. For example, constituencies will be smaller in cities (where the population is dense) while rural areas will have larger constituencies (where the population is spread out).

2. During an election, several people in each constituency compete against one another for the job of MLA. These people are called candidates. Candidates can be a part of a political party or have no association to one (called an independent).

3. A ballot lists the candidates (and political parties, where applicable) running for election in the local constituency. Each voter is allowed to choose one candidate. The candidate who receives the most votes becomes the MLA. This method of electing representatives is called First-Past-The-Post (or Single-Member Plurality).

4. Incumbent is the term given to the candidate who held the position of MLA before the election.

Discussion: 10 min

How should you evaluate candidates? What qualities and skills do you expect from an MLA? Why are these qualities necessary for the job?

Activity: 20-30 min plus homework

1. Have students organize and engage in a mock debate to gain a better understanding of the candidates and the issues. Divide the class into small groups, making sure every local candidate is represented. Select one student from each group to take on the role of a local candidate (and persona, if possible). The rest of the group will act as the candidate's campaign team and will help prepare their candidate for the debate.

Teacher Note: Visit the Elections Saskatchewan website (www.elections.sk.ca) to find an up-to-date list of candidates in your constituency.

2. Ask students to prepare for the debate by examining candidate websites, social media platforms, campaign literature, or by finding information through newspapers and media websites. For each candidate, students should focus on the following questions to narrow their research:

- What experience and skills does the candidate have? Consider careers, community involvement and volunteer experience.
- Why does the candidate want to be elected? What goals does the candidate or party want to achieve?
- What is their position or the party's position on the major election issues?

Worksheet 5.2 can be used to record the information collected. Encourage students to write up "talking points" to prepare for the debate.

3. During the debate, ensure that all candidates receive equal speaking time and the opportunity to make opening and closing remarks. Refer to Handout 5.3 for additional suggestions.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a closing discussion about local issues and candidates with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How can a voter learn about the issues and candidates?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Which candidate would you support and why?
- What does it mean to run as an independent? Why would someone choose to run as an independent?
- Would you ever consider running as a candidate? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Invite each candidate in your constituency for a class visit, conduct a phone or Skype interview, or hold an all-candidates meeting at your school. Students should record their impressions of each candidate and their overall experience. Encourage students to ask their own questions or select a representative to ask questions on behalf of the class. Refer to Handout 5.3 for additional suggestions. Alternatively, pose the questions to candidates through Twitter or email.

B. Ask students to collect articles related to their constituency and the candidates. These could be shared on a daily basis to follow the news and events from the campaign. Using Worksheet 5.4, students should identify the who, what, where, when, why and how. Post the articles on a bulletin board for reference.

C. Ask students to engage family and friends in a conversation about the election and the local candidates. Students could create a short take-home poll, or simply record the views of their family and friends based on a few specific questions. Have a follow-up discussion the next day. Do students share the same opinion as their parents? What are the reasons for shared or differing opinions?

D. Have students take on the role of an actual local election candidate and write a campaign speech to attract supporters. Students should focus on three main arguments or points, and use information from the candidate's website and campaign literature to guide their arguments. Students can be assessed on their persuasive writing skills.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What is a constituency?

A constituency is a geographical area with defined boundaries represented by an elected official. Also known as a riding, electoral district or electoral division.

In Saskatchewan, the elected official is called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Each

constituency has an MLA who represents the local needs and interests of their constituents (people living in the constituency) in the legislative assembly. An MLA can also address issues at the local level.

The number of constituencies in the province has increased over time to reflect changes and movements in Saskatchewan’s population. The number of constituencies has increased by three since the last election, and Saskatchewan residents are electing 61 MLAs to the legislative assembly in the current election.

What is an electoral system?

An electoral system is the way citizens’ choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats. All electoral systems have three basic elements:

- District magnitude: The number of members elected per district.
- Ballot type: The way in which choices are presented and voters express their preferences.
- Electoral formula: The method for determining which candidate gets elected (or which candidate wins).

How does First-Past-The-Post/Single-Member Plurality work?

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used across Canada, including Saskatchewan. Another name for FPTP is Single-Member Plurality.

- The district magnitude is single-member districts. Citizens elect one representative per constituency.
- The ballot type is categorical or exclusive ballot. Voters are allowed to choose one candidate on their ballot.
- The electoral formula is plurality. The successful candidate must receive at least one more vote than any of the other candidates (the most votes).

Example of FPTP: In a constituency with 100 ballots cast.

VOTE TOTALS BY CANDIDATE

Lisa (Banana Party)	40
Mohamed (Pear Party)	15
Emma (Apple Party)	11
Thomas (Independent)	34

In this case, Lisa becomes the elected representative because she has the most votes. Lisa wins even though 60 per cent of the voters chose other candidates. Under FPTP, it is not necessary to win more than 50 per cent of the votes—the candidate simply needs to win the most votes.

How does one find out which constituency they are in?

You can visit the Elections Saskatchewan website and search using your address or postal code to find your constituency. During a provincial election campaign, Elections Saskatchewan also posts a list of candidates

running for election in each constituency. The list is updated regularly and the final list is posted after nominations close (sometime between March 12 and 19) and once all candidacies have been confirmed.

What are the most important issues facing my constituency?

An individual’s political views are personal and highly subjective. They are unique and shaped by their experiences, values, knowledge and feelings. Therefore, each person is responsible for forming their own opinions. These opinions can be formed by listening to other people whose opinions you respect, researching an issue or idea, discussing with your parents/guardians, elders and peers and thinking seriously about what matters to you in order to come to your own conclusions.

No one can tell you how to vote, although this is the primary objective of all candidates and political parties. It is up to you—the voter—to decide what is most important, who you should listen to and, ultimately, who you will support.

How can I learn about my candidates and the issues they support?

There are many ways to gather information about local candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings where constituents are invited to listen to candidates speak on various issues of local and provincial importance. Information can also be found on radio and television and in local or regional newspapers. Individuals may also visit local campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to the candidate when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing. Information can also be found on party websites, media websites and social media platforms.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Provincial constituency maps — www.elections.sk.ca/voters/maps
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, social media sites, campaign flyers)
- Electoral Systems — www.parl.gc.ca