

LESSON 7:

The Voting Process

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the voting process and evaluate the campaign issues, party platforms, leaders and local candidates.

KEY WORDS

ballot, secret ballot, elector, ballot box, voting screen, voting place, constituency, voters list, advance voting, valid ballot, rejected ballot, absentee ballot, impartial

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- Who can vote in Saskatchewan provincial elections?
- How does the voting process work?
- How do I mark my ballot?
- Why is voting by secret ballot important?
- How do I make my decision about who to vote for?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 7: The Voting Process
- Video: Student Vote 2015 Results Summary with Peter Mansbridge
- Video: Organizing Student Vote Day
- Handout 7.1: Sample Ballots
- Worksheet 7.2: Preparing to Vote
- Worksheet 7.3: A Trip to the Voting Place
- Worksheet 7.4: How to Vote

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10-15 min

1. Demonstrate the process of filling out a ballot by holding a mock vote with your class. Create a simple ballot for the class with a fun question and three to four options for responses (e.g., favourite sport, holiday, food, movie, TV show or musician/band).
2. Show students how to mark their ballot. Students can use a checkmark, X or use any other mark as long as it clearly indicates their choice. Remind students that they can only vote for one option otherwise it will not count.
3. Distribute the ballots and invite each student to go behind the voting screen to mark their choice. Afterwards ask them to re-fold their ballot to ensure privacy and place it in the ballot box.
4. Count the ballots and review the terms valid and rejected. Share the results of the vote.

Instruction: 15 min

1. Voting in elections is done by secret ballot. This means that no one except the voter knows the choice that was made. Voters mark their ballot behind a privacy screen and the ballot is put in the ballot box without identifying who the voter is.
2. Elections Saskatchewan is the province's election management body and is responsible for organizing, managing and overseeing provincial elections. In order to ensure a fair election process, Elections Saskatchewan remains impartial and independent. They are not responsible for federal or municipal elections.
3. You are qualified to vote in a Saskatchewan provincial election if:
 - You are 18 years of age or older,
 - You are a Canadian citizen,
 - You have lived in Saskatchewan for at least six months before the election is called.

4. A regular ballot lists the names of the candidates running in your constituency and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark your preference. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be valid (e.g., checkmark, X, shading in).

5. Any qualified voter who is unable to vote on election day or on a day when advance voting takes place can apply for an absentee ballot. The absentee ballot differs from a regular ballot because it may need to be used before all the candidates are nominated. Instead of selecting one candidate from the list, the voter has to write the name or political affiliation of the candidate they prefer in the space provided.

Teacher Note: Show students an example of a regular ballot and absentee ballot (Handout 7.1).

Discussion: 5-10 min

Discuss the importance of voting by secret ballot in elections and the effort to preserve individual choice and fair elections. What sort of consequences could develop if elections were held publicly or voters' choices were known? What does voting in private ensure? Why is it important to ensure a fair electoral process?

Activity: 20 min and homework

1. Review the list of candidates (and their parties) that students are able to vote for in the election.
2. Using Worksheet 7.2, have students reflect on the campaign issues, parties, leaders and local candidates.
3. Allow students the opportunity to share their views. Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and even try to convince others to adopt their choices, while others may opt for silence and prefer to keep their politics personal. Remind students that opinions should be respected and accepted.

Teacher Note: This could turn into a fruitful discussion about the privacy of voting decisions.

4. Encourage students to take their worksheets home and start discussions with their families and friends. Have students ask their parents or guardians if they plan to vote and whether they have chosen a candidate to support. Suggest to students that they visit the Elections Saskatchewan website (www.elections.sk.ca) to find out where and when their parents/guardians can vote, and encourage them to accompany them to the voting place. See Worksheet 7.3 and/or Extension Activity D.

Debrief: 10 min

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

- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- What research or activity has helped you make your decision? Is there more research you would like to do?
- Do you feel that you know more about the election than your parents?
- Why is voting important?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Watch the "Student Vote 2015 Results Summary with Peter Mansbridge" video with your class to review the final results of the 2015 federal Student Vote program and the general election. The complete results can also be found on the Student Vote federal election website (www.studentvote.ca/results). Following the video, ask students to consider and discuss the following questions: How did the Student Vote results compare to those of the official election? What do you think were the cause of any similarities or differences in the results?

Allow students to make predictions regarding the Student Vote and/or official election results. Who do you think is going to win locally? Which party do you think will form government? Why do you think this will be the outcome?

B. Using Worksheet 7.4, have students illustrate the steps to voting at the voting place. Watching the "Organizing Student Vote Day" video may be helpful. Encourage students to share their worksheet with their family.

C. Create a 'pledge to vote' activity for all Student Vote participants. This could include a ceremony or an official "I am a Voter" agreement, in which students pledge to vote when they turn 18 or agree to be a life-long voter.

D. Sometimes adults can be intimidated by the voting process, so encourage students to "take" their family members to the voting place and support them in casting their ballot. Ask students to observe the process while at the voting place and fill out Worksheet 7.3.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

When will the election take place?

Saskatchewan has fixed-date election legislation and, as required by *The Election Act*, a general election is to be held on the first Monday of November in the fourth calendar year following the previous election. However, the act includes a provision to postpone the election until the first Monday of the following April if the provincial election is scheduled to overlap with

a federal election. A provincial election was initially scheduled for November 2, 2015 but, due to an overlap with the 2015 federal election campaign, the date of the current election was moved to April 4, 2016.

Fixed election dates ensure consistent election timing and reduce the likelihood of a party calling an election earlier than required for political gain. The chief criticism of fixed-date elections is that it leads to long periods of campaigning, like those seen in the United States.

Regardless of fixed-date election legislation, a provincial election can be held at any time since it does not restrict the ability of the lieutenant governor to dissolve the legislature at the request of a premier seeking a new mandate, or if the governing party loses a non-confidence motion, such as a budget bill.

Who can vote?

You are eligible to vote in a Saskatchewan provincial election if:

- You are 18 years of age or older,
- You are a Canadian citizen,
- You have lived in Saskatchewan for at least six months before the election is called.

In order to cast a ballot in the election, you must be registered to vote.

How do I get registered?

Most eligible voters in Saskatchewan received a letter in the mail in June 2015 with their voter information. If your information was correct, you are ready to vote. You are registered and no further action is required.

If you did not receive a letter, or need to register or update your information, call Elections Saskatchewan at 1-877-958-8683. You can also register to vote or update your voter information online by visiting the Elections Saskatchewan website (www.elections.sk.ca).

March 22 is the deadline to get on the voters list and to update your own information. On March 23, you can only register in person at your local constituency returning office.

If you're not on the list after March 23, you can still vote by registering in person at advance voting (March 29 to April 2) or on election day (April 4).

What is enumeration?

The traditional approach to compiling the list of voters in Saskatchewan has been through door-to-door enumeration. The list that is compiled by enumeration is discarded after the election and the process begins again every four years in preparation for the next election. This is a labour intensive and costly activity. Additionally, fewer people are at home when the enumerator visits and people are becoming more reluctant to open their doors to someone they do not know.

The current election will be the last to use a voters list compiled partly from enumeration and a permanent register will be in place for future elections. A permanent register of voters will be regularly updated and maintained using a variety of data sources, such as tax returns, and in coordination with Elections Canada.

How do I know where to vote?

Each constituency is divided into defined geographic areas called polling divisions (also called voting areas). Eligible voters residing within each polling division vote at a designated voting place in their area.

If your name is on the voters list, you will be sent a Voter Information Card (VIC) in the mail soon after the election is called that will tell you when and where to vote.

You can also find this information by visiting www.elections.sk.ca or calling 1-877-958-8683.

What are the ways to vote?

Voters may choose to vote in one of six ways:

1. Vote on election day: Voting places will be open on April 4 from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. CST. Details can be found on your VIC or at www.elections.sk.ca.
2. Vote in advance: Advance voting is held for five days at various locations the week before election day (March 29 to April 2).
3. Vote in a personal care home: Voting places are set up in select personal care homes and seniors' homes around Saskatchewan.
4. Vote in a hospital: If you are a patient on April 4 you can vote in the hospital you are in, even if it is not in your home constituency.
5. Vote in your home: If you are homebound due to a disability, you can make arrangements to have an election worker come to your home so you and your caregiver can both cast a ballot.
6. Vote by mail: You can vote by mail (absentee ballot) if you are away from your constituency during the election, or if it is more convenient. Contact Elections Saskatchewan for more information. To vote by mail, you must apply for an absentee ballot by the deadline.

For more information, please visit the Elections Saskatchewan website (www.elections.sk.ca).

Do I need to show ID to vote?

You must prove your identity and address in order to vote. You have three options:

1. Show one piece of government-issued ID with your photo, name and address.
2. Show two pieces of ID. Both pieces must have your name, and at least one must also have your address.
3. If you do not have sufficient ID, you can sign a declaration, and a registered voter from your constituency, such as a neighbour or roommate, may vouch for you. Each person can only vouch for one person.

Visit the Elections Saskatchewan website (www.elections.sk.ca) for a list of the different pieces of ID and proof of address that are accepted.

How does the voting process work?

1. When you arrive at your voting place, an election worker greets you and directs you to the right table.
2. At your table, show your ID and your name is crossed off the voters list.
3. An election worker hands you a ballot.
4. Go behind a voting screen, mark your ballot for one candidate and refold your ballot to keep it secret.
5. Return your ballot to the worker so they can verify it is an official ballot. They will direct you to which ballot box to use.
6. Put your ballot in the box.

What is a secret ballot?

Voting in elections is done by secret ballot. This ensures the privacy of each voter's choice. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

How do I mark my ballot?

A ballot lists the names of the candidates running in your constituency and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark your preference. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot is valid. This includes a checkmark, X, shading in or another marking.

If you are using an absentee ballot, the process is different. Absentee voters are required to write the name of the candidate or their party affiliation in the space provided on the ballot.

What is a rejected ballot?

A rejected ballot is a ballot that cannot be counted due to a deliberate or accidental unrecognizable or unclear choice. This can include marking the ballot for more than one candidate (even if different symbols are used), ranking the candidates, leaving the ballot blank or identifying who the voter is.

What is a declined ballot?

A voter may also choose to use their vote to express their dissatisfaction with the options given. This is called a declined ballot. In Saskatchewan, this is done by receiving a ballot, then giving the unmarked ballot back to the deputy returning officer. The voter states that they wish to decline to vote. The deputy returning officer writes the word "declined" on the ballot and places it in the envelope for spoiled or declined ballots.

What is a spoiled ballot?

A spoiled ballot is a ballot that has been kept separate and never placed in the ballot box because it was mistakenly marked or torn during the voting process. The deputy returning officer writes the word "spoiled"

on the ballot and places it in the envelope for spoiled or declined ballots. The voter receives another ballot.

How do I prepare to vote?

Get informed. Learn about the candidates, the political parties and the issues. When preparing to vote, you can consider reasons to support a local candidate for MLA, a political party or leader, a specific issue or a whole party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time.

How do you know if you are ready to vote?

You feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Student Vote Election Manual
- Elections Saskatchewan Voters Guide — www.elections.sk.ca/votersguide