

LESSON 12

DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What are ways in which we can participate in our democracy? What reasons do people have for voting or not voting?

SUMMARY

A healthy and vibrant democracy is based on an active and engaged citizenry, where all citizens are ready, willing and able to participate. Engagement includes staying informed, debating issues, engaging with politicians and participating in the voting process.

In this lesson, students will examine voter turnout statistics over the last thirty years and consider the significance of the trends and impact of varying rates among age groups. Students will discuss the concept of political socialization and reflect on their own attitudes towards democratic engagement. After reviewing the electoral participation research, students will work in groups to design a marketing campaign to promote democratic engagement among youth. In the consolidation activity, students will debate different proposals to increase voter turnout.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Use the concept of *political significance* to explain the impact of low voter turnout among youth and the importance of democratic participation;
- Analyze factors influencing voter participation (Citizen Education Framework – Active Participation);
- Use the concept of *political perspective* to identify some agents of political socialization and analyze how these agents affect their own attitudes towards politics and those of others;
- Use the concept of stability and change to develop and communicate a strategy to encourage democratic participation and engagement;
- Use the concept of *objectives and results* to assess the impact of different proposals on improving voter turnout.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can understand the impact of low voter turnout among youth and the significance of participating in the electoral process;
- I can interpret data and representations of data to analyze factors influencing voter participation;

- I can identify agents of political socialization and discuss their impact on my own attitudes towards politics and engagement, and those of others;
- I can apply the concepts of political thinking and identify effective strategies needed to encourage youth to engage in the electoral process;
- I can assess the impact of different ideas to increase voter turnout.

CURRICULUM LINKS

CPC30 – Overall Expectations

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events, and developments of civic importance

A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through investigations related to civics and citizenship education, and identify some careers in which civics and citizenship education might be an asset

B1. Factors Affecting Political Engagement: analyse how various factors can contribute to, and present a barrier to, their own and others' political engagement

CPC30 – Specific Expectations

A1.4 interpret and analyze evidence, data, and information relevant to their investigations using various tools, strategies, and approaches appropriate for political inquiry

A2.3 apply the concepts of political thinking when analyzing current events relating to issues of political importance at the local and national level in order to enhance their understanding of these issues and their role as informed citizens

B1.1 identify some agents of political socialization, and analyse how these agents affect their own personal political beliefs and engagement and the beliefs and engagement of others

B1.2 describe their own personal attitudes towards political engagement, including the extent and type of involvement they think appropriate

LESSON 12: DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

MINDS ON

Teacher Note: Slide Deck 12 can be used to support all steps below.

1. Explain the term **voter turnout**. Voter turnout is the percentage of eligible electors (those able to vote) or registered voters that cast ballots in an election.
2. Review voter turnout statistics at the federal level from 1970 to 2011 (Slide Deck 12).
 - Voter turnout has steadily declined in Canada since the 1990s. Voter turnout reached an all-time low of 59 per cent in the 2008 federal election.
 - Young voters are usually less likely to vote than older voters. The difference is around 20% on average.
 - Each generation is less likely to vote than the previous generation. For example, in 1965, about two thirds of first-time electors voted in their first election. By 2004, the number of first-time voters had fallen to just over one third.
3. Using a Think-Pair-Share strategy, have students discuss the significance of the research and statistics by reflecting on the following questions:
 - What is the significance of the generational phenomenon? What does it suggest? What will happen to Canada's democracy if each generation continues to vote less than the one before? If young people do not vote now, are they likely to vote in the future?
 - What is the impact of varying rates of turnout on actions of political parties or governments?
 - What are some other ways in which democratic engagement can be measured? How do you and your peers engage in our democracy? (e.g., consuming news and staying informed, engaging with politicians, debating political issues with friends)
4. In a closing discussion, ask students to speculate on the voter turnout numbers in the 2015 federal election, overall and for youth only. Afterwards, use Handout 12.1 to disclose the official numbers and consider reasons for the increase by posing questions to your students.
 - Overall, voter turnout increased to 68 per cent.
 - Youth voter participation had the largest increase on record. Electoral participation among 18-24 year olds increased by 18 percentage points to 57 per cent (up from 39 per cent in 2011).
 - Turnout considerations: "change" election (new governing party), younger political leader, more advertising on social media platforms, enhanced civic education in schools, early opportunities for practice (Student Vote) and better get out the vote campaigns.

ACTION

1. Introduce or review the concept of 'political socialization'. Political socialization is an ongoing process by which people form political beliefs and values, and attitudes towards democratic engagement. Using a Turn and Talk or Stop and Jot strategy, have students respond to the following questions. Afterwards, review as a class.
 - What attitudes do you have about participating in the electoral process?
 - What has shaped your attitudes towards politics and democracy?

Teacher Note: Be mindful and aware that there are barriers to democratic participation by certain groups due to language, class and negative historical experiences.

2. Using Slide Deck 12 (Electoral Participation Research), review the research conducted by Elections Canada regarding the factors and barriers influencing participation among youth.
3. Review the fact that low voter turnout is a challenge at all levels of elections. Provincial and municipal elections tend to be even lower than federal elections. In the last two provincial elections, voter turnout was 48% in the 2011 and 51% in 2014. While there may have been an increase in voter turnout among young people in the 2015 federal election, the trend is fragile and needs attention.
4. Divide students into groups and ask them to imagine they are part of a marketing firm hired by Elections Ontario to encourage participation and engagement in the 2018 provincial election. Students will design an advertising campaign that incorporates social media, digital, print and/or audio visual elements. These products can be used to promote participation in Student Vote and/or democratic engagement in the community.

Prior to beginning the work, co-create criteria as a class for an effective advertising campaign targeted at youth. Recall the concepts of political thinking when developing the criteria:

- **Political significance:** explain how people, ideas, and events contribute to political change in society
- **Objectives and results:** identify the intended rationale or motives for political responses to issues
- **Stability and change:** explain links between past and current political policies, decisions and responses
- **Political perspective:** identify the influence of beliefs/values on peoples' political viewpoints and actions

LESSON 12: DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

5. Have each group present their marketing campaign, as well as the rationale behind it. Guiding questions:

- What was the inspiration behind the campaign? Where did the ideas come from?
- How will this ad campaign increase youth engagement?
- Are there any connections to the research findings?
- What are the intended outcomes?

6. Post advertisements around the school or play the videos in the lead-up to Student Vote Day and the election. Submit your productions to CIVIX by email or share them through Twitter, YouTube or Facebook.

CONSOLIDATION

Reflect on and discuss different ideas to increase voter turnout or general youth democratic engagement through a Four Corners Debate. Designate the four corners of the classroom as “Strongly Agree”, “Somewhat Agree”, “Somewhat Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”. Select a small object (e.g., tennis ball, bean bag) to be used as a ‘conch’ to determine whose turn it is to speak.

Proposals to increase voter turnout:

- Voting should be a legal requirement and those that do not vote should be fined
- Voting day should be a holiday so that people have sufficient time to vote
- Online voting would make it easier to cast a vote

Proposals to enhance democratic engagement among youth:

- The voting age should be lowered to 16 years of age
- Expand civics and citizenship education in school
- Reform school council elections and give the council more decision-making power
- Increase interactions between youth and elected representatives
- More government consultation with youth

After each statement is read aloud, students must move to the corner of the room that corresponds most closely with their own point of view and be prepared to justify their selected perspective. Students can move around the room if their opinion changes as a result of the discussion.

ASSESSMENT

Ask students to propose one change or action to increase voter turnout through a written paragraph. They must make two arguments to support their proposal and end with a call to action.

EXEMPLARS

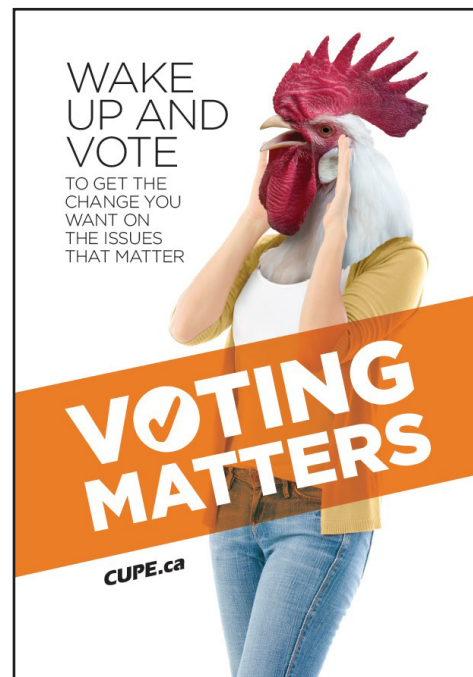
Sample get out the vote campaigns.

Videos:

Elections Ontario “Road Trip” (0:30)

Elections Canada ad: [Health Care, First Nations](#)

Print ads:



Credit: Canadian Union of Public Employees.

HANDOUT 12.1: FEDERAL ELECTION VOTER TURNOUT BY AGE GROUP

