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DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC ACTION



Democracy means rule by the people. There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. Citizens have a responsibility to uphold and support these principles.

Equality and Human Rights: All individuals are valued equally, have equal opportunities and may not be discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. Fundamental rights include freedom of thought, opinion and assembly.

Economic Freedom: The government allows some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose their own work and join labour unions. It is generally accepted that a free market should exist in a democracy and that government should not control the economy.

Protected Rights: In a democracy, there is a formal declaration of citizens' rights and freedoms. This document limits the powers of government, explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people and protects people from a government that might abuse its powers.

The Rule of Law: All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination. No one is above the law – this includes elected officials, the police and members of the military.

Control of the Abuse of Power: To protect corruption and abuses of power, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government offices and those who work for them.

Free and Fair Elections: Elected officials are chosen every few years by the people in a free and fair manner. Adult citizens have the right to vote and run for office regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or economic status.

Multi-Party Systems: Multiple-party systems provide the government with different viewpoints on issues and voters are given a choice of candidates, parties and policies to support.

Citizen Participation: Participation can take the form of running for office, voting in elections, becoming an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.

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Accountability and Transparency: Elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and are accountable to the people. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend. The press and the public are kept informed regarding decisions being made.

Independent Judiciary: Courts and the judicial system are impartial. Judges and the judicial branch are free to act without influence or control from the executive and legislative branches of government. They should also not be corrupted or influenced by other individuals, businesses or political groups.

Political Tolerance: People who belong to different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, all hold unique and valued political views. Democratic societies strive to be politically tolerant, and the rights of minorities and other groups are protected. Those who are not in power must be allowed to organize and share their opinions.

Accepting the Results of Elections: Free and fair elections have both winners and losers. The losers and their supporters must accept that they have lost an election as democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the next.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be a part of a democracy? What are some ways I can actively participate in the democratic process?

SUMMARY

The word democracy means ‘rule by the people’. There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy, such as equality and human rights, citizen participation and political tolerance. While people living in Canada have protected rights and freedoms, they have responsibilities associated with citizenship as well.

In this lesson, students explore what democracy means and what the implications are for them as members of a democracy. They consider their own definition of democracy and those of their peers, before interpreting and analyzing key democratic principles. In the culminating activity, they consider the political actions of individuals and groups, which can strengthen democracy.

LEARNING GOALS

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

- Describe some fundamental principles of democracy and how they are reflected in current civic actions;
- Use a graphic organizer to organize their thinking and analyze information;
- Assess how the principles of democracy contribute to stability in society and how they can be used to promote change as well (Concepts of Thinking – Stability and Change).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can interpret and make judgements about the principles of democracy and what it means for me;
- I can use a graphic organizer to help format my thinking and make connections between concepts, civic actions and political thinking;
- I can identify how democratic principles are reflected in citizen actions;
- I can use the concept of stability and change to analyze how the principles of democracy contribute to stability or help to promote change in society;
- I can assess my own life and actions and make connections to the principles of democracy.

CURRICULUM LINKS

CHV20 – 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
B1. Civic Issues, Democratic Values: describe beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, and explain how they are related to civic action and to one’s position on civic issues

CHV20 – Specific Expectations

A1.2 interpret and analyse evidence, data and information relevant to their investigations using various tools, strategies and approaches appropriate for political inquiry
B1.2 describe fundamental beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, and explain ways in which they are reflected in citizen actions

MINDS ON

What does democracy mean?

1. Give students time to work in pairs or small groups to activate any background knowledge they have about the term ‘democracy’ using a Frayer model (Activity 1.1). Students can also use images to communicate their thinking.

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2. Have students share their thinking with another pair or group.

3. Afterwards, debrief as a class and create a class definition for the term 'democracy'. Students can add to their Frayer model with the final class definition.

ACTION

Interpreting democratic principles

1. Have students refer back to their Frayer model and share characteristics and examples of democracy. Through a class discussion, highlight common themes that emerge.

For example, students probably identified some key principles such as freedom of expression, equality and free elections as characteristics of democracy. Distribute copies of Handout 1.2 and explain that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.

2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them interpret each principle by filling out Activity 1.3. For each principle, students should help each other summarize and internalize the meaning. They can include examples of the impact the principle may have on their own lives and/or background knowledge they may have.

3. Afterwards, review the responses as a class and ensure there is a solid understanding of the principles.

4. Students should then investigate how the principles look in practice. Provide students with reputable media sources (e.g., newspapers, journals, community bulletins) in print or online and have them search for stories in which they feel one of the principles is being put into practice. Students can also use examples from their own lives. Ask students to complete the second column of Activity 1.3.

5. Review the concept of stability and change with students.

*Teacher note: The concept of **stability and change** requires students to determine how political structures and decisions contribute to stability and change within various local, national and/or global communities. They analyze ways in which various institutions, groups, or individuals resist or support change, as well as how a variety of factors, including civic action, can contribute to change or stability. Students also apply this concept to help them determine when change is necessary and how they themselves can contribute to change or help ensure stability through civic action.*

6. Have students review their examples of the principles in practice and determine if the action contributed to stability in society or helped to bring about change.

7. Invite students to share their examples and analysis in a larger group discussion.

CONSOLIDATION

1. Ask students to reflect on which principle they put into practice most in their daily lives, or which principle affects their life the most. They can submit a Quick Write responding to either prompt below to demonstrate their understanding:

- The democratic principle that I practice most frequently is...
- The democratic principle that most affects my life is...

Next, students should respond to the following prompt to conclude their Quick Write.

- This principle contributes to stability and/or change in society by...

2. Provide examples of civic action from the recent headlines and ask students to identify which principle the story best represents in practice. This can be done through a digital survey or provide paper headlines to small groups and have students sort them under the appropriate categories of the principles investigated in this lesson.

Examples:

March for Our Lives: hundreds of thousands demand end to gun violence – as it happened

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2018/mar/24/march-for-our-lives-protest-gun-violence-washington>

Trump's lawyers, in confidential memo, argue to head off a historic subpoena

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-trumps-lawyers-in-confidential-memo-argue-to-head-off-a-historic/>

Barrie hockey coaches mandated to talk gender diversity issues with players this season

www.simcoe.com/community-story/8844734-barrie-hockey-coaches-mandated-to-talk-gender-diversity-issues-with-players-this-season/

Ring of Fire protest planned in Sudbury

www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/ring-of-fire-protest-planned-in-sudbury