

6

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS



Municipal elections provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss and debate the future direction of their community.

An individual who seeks public office or competes for the role of an elected representative is called a **candidate**. It is their job to share their vision, ideas and commitment to the position in order to win the support of voters during a campaign.

On October 22, 2018, Ontarians will elect candidates to sit on their municipal councils. The size, arrangement and election of the council differs throughout the province.

Council members can be elected **at-large** (by all eligible voters in the municipality) or by **ward** where the municipality is broken down into smaller geographic areas that elect one or more representatives for their specific ward. The head of council is elected at-large in single-tier or lower-tier municipalities.

An **electoral system** is the way in which we elect our representatives. There are set rules for how preferences are recorded and the methods used for determining which candidate wins. There are many different electoral systems used around the world.

Most municipalities in Ontario use a system called **First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)**. A successful candidate must receive the most votes in order to be elected in their area. In some cases, more than one candidate is elected, either at-large or within a ward. This is called a **multi-member election**. For example, if there are six council members elected at-large, the six candidates with the most number of votes are elected.

Changes to the *Municipal Elections Act* on June 9, 2016 gave municipalities the option of using ranked ballots in municipal elections. In a **ranked ballot** election, you rank candidates according to your preference (first choice, second choice, etc.). Each winning candidate must have a majority of the vote. If all votes are counted and one candidate does not have at least 50 per cent plus 1 of the votes, the candidate with the fewest number of votes is eliminated and the ballots are counted again, this time using the next candidate choice from ballots where the first choice candidate was eliminated. The process is repeated until a winning candidate is determined. The City of London is the first municipality in the province to implement ranked ballots, starting with the 2018 elections.

In some municipalities, there will be numerous candidates running for a seat on council. In other municipalities, there may only be a few candidates and the race will be

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less contested. If a candidate has no opponents, or if the number of candidates match the number of council members to be elected, then the candidates automatically win. This is called **acclamation**. When this happens, no vote is held for that race.

To become a candidate in a municipal election in Ontario, you must be at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen and be eligible to vote in the election (*see explanation in Unit 8*).

There are many ways to gather information about the election candidates. Community groups and school councils hold town hall meetings or all-candidate debates where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the election issues and ask them questions. Information can also be found on radio and television, media websites or in newspapers and local magazines. Individuals may also visit candidates offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing. Information may also be found through candidate websites and social media pages.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How do municipal elections work? How do voters decide how to vote in an election?

OVERVIEW

Elections are contests of leadership, ideas, politics and power, where interested individuals campaign for your support and ultimately your vote.

In this unit, students will reflect on what they know about elections and create a class definition. Students will learn about municipal elections in Ontario and how their municipal council is elected. Individually or in groups, students will engage in the inquiry process to investigate factors when making their voting decision and to guide their research into the candidates. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on the process and why it is important to research the candidates and explore election issues.

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to...

- develop an understanding of the municipal election process and the dynamics and complex relationships within our political system;
- engage in the inquiry process to formulate questions, and to interpret, synthesize and analyze information (Global Competencies – Critical Thinking & Problem Solving);
- evaluate the candidates and analyze how they will respond to the same issue (Concepts of Thinking – Perspective).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I CAN...

- describe the purpose and meaning of elections;
- explain how my municipal council is elected;
- analyze different ways to make a voting decision;
- ask questions, research information and critically analyze the candidates;
- compare and contrast how different candidates may view or interpret the same issue;
- appreciate that different voters have different viewpoints.

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CURRICULUM LINKS

	<i>Overall Expectations</i>	<i>Specific Expectations</i>
Social Studies	<p>Grade 5 – B1. Application: assess responses of governments in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments, to some significant issues, and develop plans of action for governments and citizens to address social and environmental issues (FOCUS ON: <i>Interrelationships; Cause and Consequence</i>)</p> <p>Grade 5 – B3. Understanding Context: demonstrate an understanding of the roles and key responsibilities of citizens and of the different levels of government in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments (FOCUS ON: <i>Significance</i>)</p>	<p>Grade 5 – B1.1 assess the effectiveness of actions taken by one or more levels of government, including Indigenous governments, to address an issue of national, provincial/territorial, and/or local significance</p> <p>Grade 5 – B3.1 describe the major rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada;</p> <p>Grade 5 – B3.8 explain why different groups may have different perspectives on specific social and environmental issues</p>
Reading	<p>1. read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning</p>	<p>Demonstrating Understanding 1.4 demonstrate understanding of a variety of texts by summarizing important ideas and citing supporting details</p> <p>Extending Understanding 1.6 extend understanding of texts by connecting the ideas in them to their own knowledge, experience, and insights, to other familiar texts, and to the world around them</p>
Media Literacy	<p>4. reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts</p> <p>3. create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques</p>	<p>Metacognition 4.1 identify, with some support and direction, what strategies they found most helpful in making sense of and creating media texts, and explain how these and other strategies can help them improve as media viewers/listeners/producers</p> <p>3.4 produce a variety of media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques</p>

READINESS

Within a few days of the unit, ask students to survey at least five adults they know, who are eligible voters in the community, about the upcoming municipal elections (Activity 6.1).

In addition to or alternatively, ask students to bring in evidence or use their technology to take photos of the election campaign in their community.

MINDS ON

1. Ask students to write down the words that come to mind when they hear the word ‘election’ (Activity 6.2). Invite students to share any examples of the election happening in the community.

2. Create a class definition for ‘election’. Questions to prompt discussion:

- What is the purpose?
- What are the activities involved?
- Who is involved?

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Notes: What is an election?

- The process for choosing politicians to represent us
- The act of casting a ballot
- A chance for citizens to participate in political decision-making and have a voice in the future of the community
- An opportunity to discuss and debate important issues and potential solutions
- Candidates communicate their message and ideas, and try to gain support from voters
- Voters investigate the options and make a choice on election day

ACTION

1. Review your municipal council composition (titles, number of positions) and the election process in your municipality. You can use the accompanying slide deck as a starting point and add specific information about your municipality.

2. Reinforce the upcoming election on October 22. Demonstrate to students where you can find the list of registered candidates by visiting your municipality's website. Ask students to write down the name of the candidates running for each position (Activity 6.2).

Teacher note: Your municipality will likely have a dedicated election page or subsite dedicated to the election. Look for 'Election 2018' or 'Municipal Elections'.

3. On a blackboard or whiteboard, write down the following question: How do voters decide how to vote in an election? (Whom to choose)

Through a class discussion, create sub-themes and generate questions to frame this decision. Review information collected through the *Readiness* activity (adult/family survey). For example:

- CANDIDATES – Who is qualified for the job? What skills and qualities would make a good community leader? What do they care most about?
- ISSUES – What issues are the most important in the community? Who decides which issues matter? How will the candidates address these issues?
- ME – What matters to me? Which candidates share my opinions and viewpoints?
- MY COMMUNITY – What does the community need? Who can help us achieve this vision? What issues were most common in the readiness survey?

4. Through a class discussion, review different ways that you can collect information about the issues and candidates (e.g., news media, candidate campaign literature, candidate websites and social media pages, website searches, all-candidate debates or town halls, opinion polls, informal polls, discussion with family and friends).

Teacher note: It may be helpful to model researching candidate information using candidate websites/social media pages.

5. As a class or in groups, have students develop an inquiry or investigation plan to help them make their voting decision(s) (Activity 6.3). Students can work in a jigsaw format or another method where the research is shared, discussed and analyzed.

Teacher note: If you decide to pose questions to the candidates, organize the questions into one document and send it to each candidate running for office.

Alternative Activity

1. Through a whole class discussion, create a list about the most pressing issues in the community. Draw upon articles about the election, opinion polls, the survey completed in the *Readiness* activity and previous discussions from Unit 5.

2. As a class, establish criteria to evaluate which issues are most important. Guiding questions:

- Which issues directly affect you, your family and friends?
- Are many people affected in the community?
- Is the impact extreme – positively or negatively?
- Are many people for and/or against it?

Use the criteria, determine the top three issues facing the community.

3. Divide the class into pairs or small groups to research the candidates running for election. As a class, develop a checklist for creating a profile and formulate questions based on the top election issues. Have students choose how the information will be presented (e.g., poster board, slide deck, video, "fakebook" account, fake Instagram or Twitter feed).

Sample research profile:

- Name and photo
- Bio/Personal information (e.g., education, career, accomplishments)
- Priorities (What issues are most important to the candidate?)
- Issues (What is their position or response to the questions concerning the top issues?)

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Teacher note: Encourage students to use primary and secondary resources, including news articles and commentary, candidate websites and social media pages, or even contact the candidates directly.

4. Have each group present their candidate profile and research to the rest of the class. Alternatively, you can post the group work around the classroom walls or create stations, and use a Carousel format where students move in small groups from station to station.

CONSOLIDATION

Have a brief closing discussion about the candidates and the decision-making process in elections, who to vote for, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- What did you learn through this process? What did you find interesting? What did you find challenging?
- Do you feel ready to vote? How did your research make you feel more confident in your decision? What else would you like to know about the candidates?
- Which factors do you think are most important when deciding who you will vote for?

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- The creation of candidate profiles should be conducted over several periods/days.
- Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and even try to convince others to adopt their choices, while others may prefer to keep their politics personal. Remind students that all opinions should be respected.

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ASSESSMENT

Type of Assessment	Unit Area	Guiding Questions for Teachers
FOR LEARNING	MINDS ON	<p>Do students understand what an election is?</p> <p>Can students name different examples when an election or vote may be used (government, school)?</p> <p>Are student definitions in their own words?</p>
AS LEARNING	<p>ACTION</p> <p>ACTION <i>Alternative Activity</i></p>	<p>Can students identify a few of the categories that voters use to base their decision (me, community, issue, candidate)?</p> <p>Can students identify an aspect or issue that is important to them?</p> <p>Are student inquiry questions relevant to the municipal election? Do they have a personal connection so that the topic is relevant?</p> <p>Can students assess the top issues facing the community based on the class criteria?</p> <p>Are students posing questions while they research in order to spark new areas of interest?</p>
OF LEARNING	<p>ACTION</p> <p>CONSOLIDATION</p>	<p>Are students presenting information that is accurate and informative to their classmates?</p> <p>Can students identify a candidate they would vote for?</p> <p>Do students recognize that research can make it easier to come to a decision?</p> <p>Can they assess their learning along with what they might do differently in the future?</p>

LEARNING FOR ALL

Individual Education Plans	<p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may want to hold a brief pretend election in class to help with concept attainment before starting the unit. Provide advance access to vocabulary and CIVIX videos. <p>Enrichment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can enhance their understanding by comparing municipal elections to provincial or federal ones. Encourage them to take note of similarities and differences. Alternatively, they could compare municipal elections to those in other countries.
English Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to compare systems and especially local leadership positions to their home region and in their primary language. Provide advance access to vocabulary and CIVIX videos.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support discussions about diversity in politics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women in Politics: https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/women-politics/ Black Politicians: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/municipal-election-black-candidates-1.4815195 MP Carla Qualtrough: https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/08/27/blind-mp-to-draft-canadas-first-national-accessibility-law.html Refugees in Politics: https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/11/04/maryam-monsef_n_8468048.html Indigenous Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss local Indigenous governance and reference when local communities may have elections for Chief or band councils, etc.