

LESSON 4

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be a part of a democracy? What are my responsibilities as a democratic citizen?

SUMMARY

Democracy means rule by the people. There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy, such as rule of law, protected rights and freedoms, free and fair elections, and accountability and transparency of government officials. Citizens have a responsibility to uphold and support these principles.

In this lesson, students explore what democracy means and what the implications are for them as citizens. They consider their own definition of democracy and those of their peers, before interpreting and analyzing key democratic principles. In groups, they consider how they can support or uphold democratic principles through their own actions. In the culminating activity, they consider how democracy relies on the political action of individuals and groups.

LEARNING GOALS

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

- Use the concept of *political significance* to describe fundamental principles and values associated with democracy;
- Use the inquiry process to interpret and analyze information, and make judgements about the principles of democracy;
- Use the concept of *political significance* to explain the role of citizens and groups in a democracy;
- Use the concept of *political perspective* to reflect on my own attitudes and behaviours towards being a democratic citizen;
- Develop attitudes that foster civic engagement and explore issues related to personal and societal rights and responsibilities.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can use the concept of *political significance* to describe what democracy means;
- I can interpret and make judgements about the principles of democracy and what it means for me;
- I can use the concept of *political significance* to explain the role of citizens and groups in supporting democracy and causing political change;
- I can assess my own attitudes and contributions towards being a democratic citizen;
- I can explain why it is important to be an active and responsible citizen.

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: analyze how various factors can contribute to, and present a barrier to, their own and others' political engagement

C3. Political Change in Democratic Societies: demonstrate an understanding of factors that facilitate and present challenges to democratic political change

CPC30 – Specific Expectations:

A2.1 describe some ways in which political inquiry can help them develop skills, including the essential skills in the Ontario Skills Passport, and those related to the citizenship education framework, that can be transferred to postsecondary opportunities, the world of work, and everyday life

A2.2 demonstrate in everyday contexts attributes, skills, and work habits developed through investigations into issues of political importance

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

B1.4 describe personal attributes, attitudes, and skills that enhance an individual's ability to be a responsible citizen and contribute to the common good

C3.1 describe some key characteristics of a democracy, and explain how they affect the practice of making political change

C3.2 identify various skills and strategies that can be used when seeking political change in democratic societies, and assess their effectiveness

LESSON 4: DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

MINDS ON

What does democracy mean?

1. Give students five minutes to write a sentence or draw a picture that represents the word 'democracy' using Activity 4.1.
2. Have students share their sentence or picture with the students sitting around them.
3. Afterwards, debrief as a class and create a class definition or image of democracy. What were the most common descriptions/images? Which do you agree with the most and why?

ACTION

Interpreting democratic principles

1. Distribute copies of Handout 4.2 and explain that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy, or rather a democracy 'checklist'.
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them interpret and analyze each principle by filling out Activity 4.3. For each principle, students must answer the following questions:
 - What does this principle mean for me? How can I support the principle through my own actions?
 - What are examples of when the principle is not being upheld?

Teacher Note: Alternatively, you can divide up the principles among groups or select five to do as a class.

3. Afterwards, review the responses as a class and have students add supplementary information to their activity sheets.
4. As a class or in small groups, co-create criteria to rank the principles in order of significance when assessing the health or strength of a democracy.

*Teacher Note: Recall the definition of **political significance** when developing the criteria. Political significance is a political thinking concept that looks at the importance of particular policies, civic actions, issues, events or developments, based on their impact on government or citizens. Students develop the understanding that the political significance of something may vary for different groups of people.*

CONSOLIDATION

Democracy in Action

The recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida sparked leadership from the teenage survivors and has inspired a movement against the inaction on gun legislation in the United States. On March 24, an impactful rally took place in Washington, along with 800 marches throughout the U.S. and around the world.

Use media reports to highlight the actions of students to share their message against gun violence and the gun lobby to the seats of power. Below are a few possible resources:

- *Washington Post* video
- Student marchers call Washington's inaction on gun violence unacceptable (*CNN*, March 24 – article and videos)

Have a class discussion using the following guiding questions:

- Is this an example of "democracy in action"?
- Which specific principles of democracy are relevant in this situation?
- Have you ever become an active participant in your community? What spurred you into action?
- How does political change happen in a democracy?

Afterwards, re-evaluate your class definition of democracy and determine if you need or want to make any changes.

ASSESSMENT IDEAS

A) Ask students to write a reflection answering the following questions:

- Why is it important that we act as active and engaged citizens in a democracy?
- In what ways do you believe you demonstrate the attributes of a responsible democratic citizen? In what areas do you think you could improve?
- Who or what has influenced your attitudes towards being a responsible citizen?

B) Evaluate the health of Canada or Ontario's democracy by researching examples of where a principle is or is not working (e.g., voter turnout, number of parties represented in the legislature, percentage of women or minorities in the legislature, infringement of certain rights). In the end, students should assign Canada and/or Ontario a letter grade (A, B, C, D, E or F) for its overall success in its application of the principles of democracy using the criteria or evaluation matrix constructed in the 'Action' section.

ACTIVITY 4.1: WHAT DOES DEMOCRACY MEAN?

My definition or image:

Our first class definition or image:

Our final class definition or image:

How did the final definition or image compare to my original idea of democracy?

HANDOUT 4.2: THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY



All individuals are valued equally and have equal opportunities. Individuals may not be discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. The human rights of all citizens are protected. For example:

- Everyone has the right to freedom to live and move within their own country.
- Everyone has the right to leave and return to their own country.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- Everyone has the right to organize and take part in peaceful protests.



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.



An established list of citizens' rights and freedoms. This document explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people and protects people from a government that might abuse its powers. Canada's Bill of Rights, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, is entrenched in the Constitution of Canada and can be enforced by the courts.



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. Laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently.



Corruption occurs when government officials use public funds for their own benefit or they exercise power in an illegal way. To protect against corruption, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government offices and those who work for them.



Elected officials are chosen by the people in a free and fair manner. Elections are held regularly, usually every few years. Adult citizens have the right to vote and run for office regardless of gender, background or economic status. There are no obstacles to voting and no intimidation or threats to citizens before or during an election.

HANDOUT 4.2: THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY



Multi-Party Systems

More than one political party participates in elections and plays a role in government. Multiple-party systems provide the government with different viewpoints on issues and voters are given a choice of candidates, parties and policies. Countries with only one party are usually dictatorships/autocracies.



Citizen Participation

Citizen participation in government is more than just a right – it is a responsibility. Participation can take the form of running for office, voting in elections, being an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.



Accountability and Transparency

Elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and are accountable to the people. Officials must make decisions and perform their duties according to the wishes of those they represent, not for themselves. For government to be accountable, people must be aware of the actions their government is taking. 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

Society is comprised of people with different cultural backgrounds, who practice different religions, form part of different races, have different gender identities or sexual orientations. The voices of these different groups are valued. Democratic societies strive to be politically tolerant and the rights of minorities 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. Democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the next.

Adapted from: *Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas* (2011). Originally excerpted and adapted from *Democracy for All* (Street Law, Inc. 1994).

ACTIVITY 4.3: DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE	What does it mean for me? How can I support the principle through my own actions?	What are examples of the principle not being upheld?
Equality and Human Rights		
Economic Freedom		
Bill of Rights		
The Rule of Law		
Control of the Abuse of Power		
Free and Fair Elections		
Multi-Party Systems		
Citizen Participation		
Accountability and Transparency		
Independent Judiciary		
Political Tolerance		
Accepting the Results of Elections		