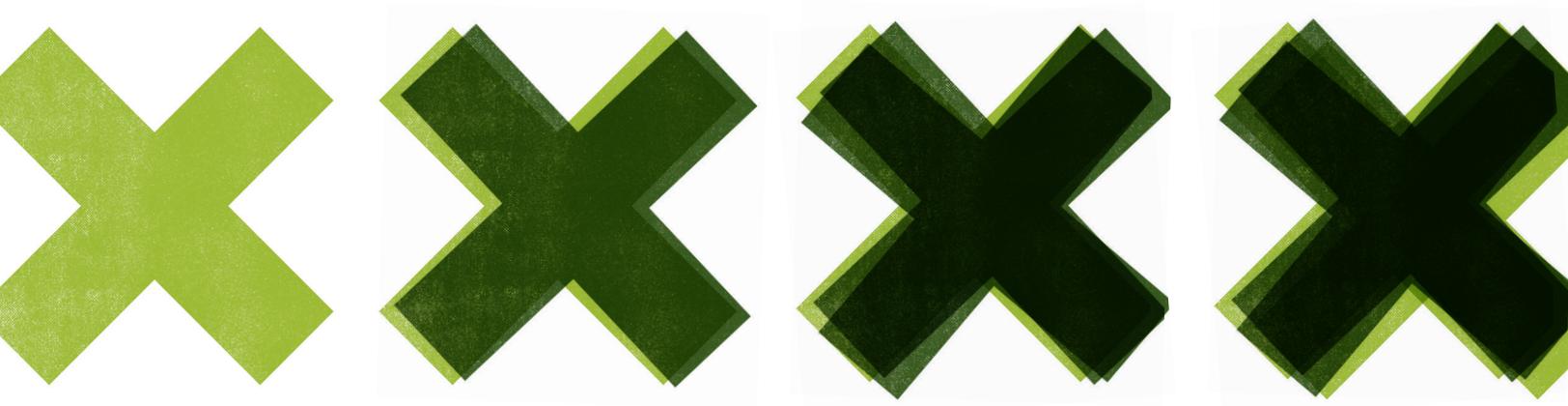


Engage.  
Empower.  
Learn.

Elections  
& Democracy

Teacher's  
Guide



# Voting Rights through Time

Exploring issues of  
inclusion since 1867

# Voting Rights through Time



## Big Idea

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The right to vote has not always existed for everyone in Canada. For a long time, voting was seen as a privilege: certain groups in the population were excluded at different times. Now almost all Canadian citizens over 18 have the right to vote.

**Inquiry Question:**

**How inclusive is our democracy?**

# Overall description

This activity can be used in a history, social studies, civics or citizenship class to show how federal voting rights changed over time for selected groups in Canada.

In this activity, students will reflect on the question of inclusion and exclusion, then work together to examine case studies—including primary sources and events—related to voting rights in federal elections for three different groups. They will create a “timeline with attitude” that shows how a particular group was included or excluded in Canadian democracy over time. Afterwards, they will find out about the history of the federal vote more generally through a video and an infographic.

## ✘ Time needed

60 min

## ✘ Competencies and skills

- Students will problem solve, manage information and think critically as they analyze historical events by
  - examining primary sources
  - placing events in chronological context
  - ranking events on the inclusion/exclusion scale
  - identifying potential turning points in history
- Students will collaborate to arrive at a consensus in decision making.
- Student will apply citizenship skills in considering issues of fairness and equity in voting rights over time.
- Students will communicate their thinking in small groups and their conclusions in whole-class discussions and through personal reflection to become self-aware of any changes in their thinking since the start of the activity.

## ✘ Materials

- Timeline\*
- Case study cards\*: Japanese Canadians, Women, Youth
- Turning Point frame\*
- Voting Rights through Time Video\*\*
- Background information (pages 8–17)
- Thinking guide (pages 19–20)
- Infographic: “The Right to Vote in Federal Elections: Then and Now” (page 21)
- Optional assessment rubric (page 22)
- Sticky notes (2 different colours, not included)

\* In your kit or online at [electionsanddemocracy.ca](http://electionsanddemocracy.ca)

\*\*Available online at [electionsanddemocracy.ca](http://electionsanddemocracy.ca)



# Instructions

To set up for this activity, choose which case studies your students will examine. You may find the background information (pp 8–17) and the case study cards helpful. You can choose to do 1, 2 or all 3 case studies simultaneously, depending on your learners' needs and your learning goals. Plan to divide your class into small groups to maximize engagement and learning.

## × Minds on

10 min

Ask students to think of a time when they felt excluded from something. How did that feel? What did they do? Don't ask for specific details of the event, just the emotions and actions. Have students write down one or two words on one colour of sticky note. Then ask them to think of a time when they felt included in something and write down one or two words on a different colour of sticky note.

Collect the sticky notes on the board or on chart paper. Read out some of the words in each category. Discuss what inclusion and exclusion feel like and look like, and come up with criteria as a class.

Explain that students will now analyze a historical case study of inclusion and exclusion in Canadian history related to the right to vote in federal elections. Their job is to organize events chronologically and on an inclusion/exclusion scale using a “timeline with attitude,” so they will need to use these criteria to justify their ranking.

## × Activity

30 min

### 1. Getting ready

Place students in small groups. Distribute a set of case study cards and a timeline to each group.

Explain to students that each set of cards illustrates a historical case study related to the right to vote in Canada. Working in their small groups, students will begin by reading the context card. They will then examine the case study cards and place them on the timeline chronologically and by inclusion/exclusion. Note that there are no right answers in this activity, and every group's timeline will look different. The discussions and reasoning are the most important part.

You may wish to distribute the Turning Point frame as well. Write the definition of a turning point on the board: when the process of change shifts in direction or pace.

### 2. Creating a timeline

Give students time to discuss within their small groups and reach a consensus on the placement of the cards. The dates are included on the cards so students can quickly see when events happened in relation to each other. Once events are placed (possibly overlapping), students can see when there were times of more change, or more stability/lack of change.

This can lead to in-depth discussion around the historical thinking concept of Continuity and Change, and the potential identification of turning points.

Invite them to place the Turning Point frame (if you are using it). Circulate to listen to their conversations and justifications. Ensure that students are using the criteria for inclusion or exclusion to justify their reasoning, and note any misconceptions or false inferences. These will need to be addressed in the consolidation.

Once students have finished, you can invite them to reflect on their thinking using questions from the thinking guide:

- The most difficult item to place was...
- I was surprised by...
- I wonder about...

### 3. Sharing their thinking

Students will need to see each other's case study timelines. Choose the suggested activity that will work for your learners:

- Pair like groups (e.g., those who did the same case study) and have students share their thinking and justify their placement of events in a presentation to the class.
- Walking jigsaw: Ask students to number off within their groups and form a new group of four with members from each of the other case studies. Then, groups go to each timeline to hear the explanation from the group member who created it.

- Station rotation: Do the activity over two class periods, having students rotate among the stations and complete all three case studies in their original groups.

## ✘ Consolidation

20 min

### 1. Discussing the case study

In a class discussion, have students share their answers to the following prompts (from the thinking guide):

- Which events in the case studies were surprising to you? Which events do you have questions about?
- Does getting the right to vote always mean inclusion in democracy? What other ways are groups included in or excluded from democracy today?
- Were there turning points in the history of the vote in Canada? Would you change your initial placement of the Turning Point frame now that you've looked at the experiences of several groups?

## 2. Giving the big picture

Show the Voting Rights through Time video. Use this opportunity to clear up any misconceptions or false inferences. For example, some students may assume that all minority groups were excluded from the right to vote. You may want to point out that, contrary to what they might expect based on patterns of discrimination, some groups always had the right to vote. (For example, Blacks, Métis, LGBT and Jewish people have always had the right to vote.)

Then show the infographic comparing the percentage of the population that could vote in 1867 to the percentage today.

Ask students to reflect on and write individually in response to the following questions in the thinking guide:

- What surprised you about inclusion and exclusion in Canadian democracy?
- What is one question you have now?
- Are other changes needed to make Canada's democracy more inclusive?

### ✘ Optional extension activity

This activity can be used in a history class to examine the actions of individuals in the past and to further analyze these events using the Historical Thinking Concepts:

- **Change and continuity:** What has changed since then? What has remained the same? What were the turning points?
- **Perspectives:** What other perspectives are possible/missing from these case studies? What beliefs and worldviews motivated people's actions in the past?

- **Cause and consequence:** What were the most important factors in creating this historical change? What are the short-term and long-term consequences of that change? Were there unintended consequences?
- **Significance:** What are the most significant people, events and developments in the history of the vote in Canada?
- **Ethical dimension:** What is my responsibility, now that I understand this historical event?

### ✘ Teaching tips

This activity introduces and explores the historical thinking concept of Continuity and Change. The purpose of putting items on a timeline instead of just in chronological order is to get a sense of when events happened in relation to each other. Once students start to consider the ideas of inclusion and exclusion, more patterns can emerge.

It is good practice to have established norms or success criteria for a civic discussion. You may start by referring to guidelines in your provincial/territorial curricula. Establishing norms of discussion with your students (co-creating success criteria) is time well spent for engagement.

A jigsaw can be used in this activity as a protocol to increase engagement and accountability. The jigsaw ensures that all students understand their own topic and positions them as listeners and speakers. This helps to build confidence and ensure that all students have the opportunity to have their voice heard in the classroom.



# Background information

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For teachers



# A Brief History of Federal Voting Rights in Canada

## ✘ Background information

The Voting Rights through Time activity uses brief case studies of specific groups to show that not everyone has always had the right to vote. However, these examples do not tell the whole story. The following is a summary of some key milestones in voting rights at the federal level. Note that voting history is complex, and this information does not cover everything.

## Evolution of Federal Voting Rights

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**1867**

### ***British North America Act***

When Canada is formed, only men who are British subjects, who are 21 years of age or older and who have property are able to vote in federal elections. First Nations men who meet these criteria can vote if they give up their status and Treaty Rights. People who are excluded from voting provincially cannot vote federally.

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**1917**

### ***Wartime Elections Act and Military Voters Act***

During the First World War, all male and female members of the armed forces and female relatives of soldiers are offered the right to vote. This is the first time that some women, and some men under the age of 21, can vote in a Canadian federal election.

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**1918****Many women can vote federally**

Canadian women now have the right to vote in federal elections if they meet the same eligibility criteria as men. First Nations women who meet these criteria can vote only if they give up their status and Treaty Rights.

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**1920*****Dominion Elections Act***

A new elections law brings in major changes, such as the appointment of a Chief Electoral Officer, but does not provide consistent voting rights across Canada. Those disqualified from voting in their home province because of their race are ineligible to vote in federal elections. Across Canada, First Nations people living on reserves are not eligible to vote.

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**1934****Inuit are disqualified**

Legislation specifically excludes Inuit from voting in federal elections.

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**1948****All Asian Canadians gain the vote**

The federal vote is now open to Canadians regardless of provincial exclusions. (Japanese, Chinese and other Asian Canadians can vote federally, no matter which province they live in.)

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**1950****Inuit are able to vote**

Inuit obtain the right to vote in Canadian federal elections.

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**1960****First Nations women and men can vote**

First Nations women and men are able to vote no matter where they live and without giving up their status and Treaty Rights.

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**1982*****Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms***

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* affirms the right of every Canadian citizen to vote and to stand as a candidate.

## Facts of Interest

- **Confederation**

In 1867, voting was considered a privilege. Only select people could vote: men aged 21 or older who were British subjects by birth or naturalized citizens and who owned certain property or paid rent and had income. These rules excluded a large portion of the population of Canada from voting. Only about half the adult male population could vote.

- **Property ownership**

For many decades after 1867 and until 1920, a property-based qualification required voters either to own property to a certain value or to pay rent or to make a certain annual income.

- **Voters lists**

Voters lists indicate who may vote in an election. From 1867 to 1917, the responsibility for drawing up these lists shifted back and forth between the provinces and the federal government. This had the effect of disqualifying people in certain provinces.

- **First Nations**

First Nations men could vote from 1867 onward only if they gave up their status and Treaty Rights. During the First and Second World War, First Nations men and women who served in the military were given the right to vote. First Nations women and men would get the vote unconditionally in 1960.

- **Métis**

Voting restrictions were not formally imposed on Métis men, who were allowed to vote if they met the age, citizenship and property ownership conditions. A Métis man was elected to Parliament in 1871. Métis women got the vote in 1918 along with many Canadian women.

- **Inuit**

Inuit were not mentioned in federal election law until 1934, when they were explicitly excluded from voting. They gained the right to vote in 1950.

- **Religion**

Religion was not normally a factor in voting eligibility after 1867, but during wartime, Mennonites, Doukhobors and Hutterites, among others, were restricted from voting because they opposed military service. Conscientious objectors were deprived of their voting rights in 1917 and again from 1938 to 1955.

- **Wartime**

During the First World War, some Canadians were denied the vote if they were born in an enemy nation or if their primary language was that of an enemy country. They got back the right to vote in 1922.

- **Persons of colour**

There was no formal rule prohibiting Canadians of colour from voting. They could vote if they met the gender, age, citizenship and property ownership conditions.

- **Occupation**

Certain occupations (government workers, judges and election officials) were excluded from voting for many years, with federally appointed judges first voting in 1988. Today, only the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada is unable to vote.

- **Mental disability**

From 1898 to 1993, many citizens with an intellectual disability were disqualified from voting in federal elections.

- **Prisoners**

Prison inmates were disqualified from voting from 1898 until 2004, when all prisoners got the right to vote, no matter the length of their sentence.

- **Residence**

Until 1993, Canadians living abroad were not allowed to vote, unless they were serving in the military or in the federal civil service.



# Case Study 1: Japanese Canadians and Democratic Rights

## ✘ Background information

Japanese Canadians began immigrating to Canada during the last decades of the 19th century, settling primarily in communities along the coastal areas of British Columbia (BC). They found work in the resource industries, such as fishing, farming and logging, and operated small businesses in urban areas.

These immigrants experienced various forms of discrimination and prejudice, based on race and economic factors, from sectors of the general public and the provincial government. This discrimination intensified during the latter part of the 19th century as Japanese Canadians entered the workforce in larger numbers and were seen to be taking jobs away from Caucasian workers. Anti-Asian sentiment, stoked by newspapers and BC politicians, resulted in the passing of laws that took away Japanese Canadians' right to vote provincially in 1895. Japanese Canadians living in BC then lost their right to vote federally in 1920, since the federal law recognized provincial exclusions.

Many Japanese Canadians struggled against this prejudicial treatment and advocated for their right to participate in the democratic process like other citizens. In 1900, Tomekichi Homma launched a legal suit to get on the voters list, and in 1936, a delegation travelled to Ottawa to speak before the House of Commons. These initiatives were met with opposition, especially from BC parliamentarians.

Discrimination against Canadians of Japanese origin intensified when the United States and Canada went to war with Japan following the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. Along Canada's west coast, the Japanese population came to be seen as a security threat. Many people in BC advocated noisily for something to be done about the risk to national security allegedly posed by Japanese Canadians. Eventually responding to these calls, the federal government, under the *War Measures Act*, suspended civil and democratic rights and, in 1942, relocated all Japanese Canadians from the coast of BC. Ironically, the relocation of Japanese Canadians outside BC had the unintended effect of giving them the right to vote in federal elections, as they were no longer subject to BC law. The federal Parliament then took measures to disenfranchise them in 1944.

Japanese Canadians did not regain the right to vote in federal elections until 1948. After years of lobbying for recognition of their treatment, Japanese Canadians received an official apology from the federal government in 1988.

### **Why were Japanese Canadians discriminated against and denied their democratic rights?**

- **Economic fears**

Japanese Canadians seemed willing to work for lower wages, which trade unions and many workers saw as stealing their jobs.

- **Racial prejudice**

There was widespread prejudice against Japanese Canadians because of their perceived foreignness and cultural differences from Canadians of European background.

- **Fear of Japanese militarism**

The brutal struggle with Japan during the Second World War and questions about Japanese Canadian loyalty had the effect of intensifying anti-Japanese sentiment across Canada, especially in BC.

### **What changed?**

- The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* had an impact in Canada on notions of racial inequality and democratic and civil rights.
- The wartime fear of the Japanese faded after the war ended.
- National ideas about fairness, equality and basic rights of citizens evolved.



# Case Study 2: Women's Right to Vote

## ✘ Background information

When Canada was formed in 1867, only men could cast a ballot in Canadian elections. Each province had slightly different rules, but essentially women were excluded from the vote everywhere in the country. Change happened slowly and incrementally for Canadian women. Women (and men) actively mobilized in a multitude of ways, and often faced opposition from men and women alike. Women's suffrage organizations were first established in the 1870s in Toronto under the leadership of pioneer activists such as Dr. Emily Stowe. Other groups formed soon after and created alliances with international organizations, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

In the early 20th century, long-held ideas about the suitability of women for public life began to shift. The greatest momentum for women's equality came from the Prairie region of Western Canada. Manitoba women were especially active, presenting numerous petitions to the legislature, lobbying politicians, partnering with organizations, lecturing on equality and building public support. Their efforts bore results, with Manitoba being the first province to grant some women the vote in 1916, followed a few months later by Saskatchewan and Alberta.

While things were changing in the provinces, the federal vote remained closed to women. However, there was a limited advance in 1917 during the First World War, when women serving in the military or who had a relative serving in the armed forces became the first women in Canada to have the opportunity to vote in a federal election. The momentum continued: a year later, in 1918, Parliament passed a law that removed the gender barrier to voting and gave many Canadian women the right to vote. This did not mean that all women had the right to vote. Exclusions remained—not on the basis of gender, but for other reasons, such as race.

The struggle for women's equality did not end in 1918, as many women continued to be denied the right to vote. Women in Quebec obtained the provincial vote only in 1940, and First Nations women were excluded from the federal vote until 1960. Today, women are prominent in the political life of Canada, yet they still face obstacles to full participation in the democratic process.

## Why was there so much resistance to women getting the vote?

- **Assumed male superiority**  
Many religious and cultural beliefs held that women were subordinate to men.
- **Public versus private domains:**  
There was a long-standing belief that men were better suited to public life (politics and business) and women were more suited to private (domestic) life.
- **Role in society**  
Many thought that women occupied a special role, inconsistent with politics, that included household duties, child rearing, and being caregivers and supporters to men.
- **Implied weakness**  
There was a common notion that women would not contribute to political life, as they were considered not strong enough, too easily led, not logical in their thinking and overly emotional.
- **Knowledge**  
Women were thought to lack the knowledge essential to casting an informed vote.
- **Family vote**  
It was assumed wives and daughters would vote the same way as their husbands and fathers, and so provide an unfair advantage.

## What changed?

- **Political gain**  
Women made up approximately 50 percent of the population and represented untapped votes for political parties.
- **Agency**  
Women wanted change and so they organized, mobilized, coordinated their efforts and made their voices heard.
- **Effects of the First World War**  
Women's role in the First World War, taking on a number of jobs previously reserved to men, proved that their abilities had been underestimated. After the war, both the United Kingdom and the United States also enfranchised women.
- **Equality**  
Ideas about gender equality, fairness and the positive contribution of women to Canadian public life were constantly evolving.



# Case Study 3: Youth and the Vote

## ✘ Background information

For much of Canada's history, 21 was the "age of majority," when a person was considered mature enough to participate in the democratic process and vote in elections. However, this presented a distinct contradiction, as people under 21 could be called to serve in the military, work and pay taxes, and get married and have children of their own.

In 1867, the minimum voting age was 21. This remained the case, with a couple of exceptions during the two world wars, until 1970, when the voting age was lowered to 18. Throughout these 100-plus years, debates and discussions took place in Parliament and in living rooms across Canada about lowering the voting age. A major change took place when people under 21 were recruited to fight for Canada during the First and Second World Wars. Their service was recognized, and during these conflicts all military personnel were offered the vote, no matter their age. When the wars ended, the privileges that had been granted to them as soldiers disappeared, and the minimum voting age went back to 21.

Starting in the 1940s, things began to change; Saskatchewan offered the vote to 18-year-olds in 1944. Other provinces followed suit, lowering their voting ages to 18 and 19. However, the federal voting age continued to be set at 21 well into the late 1960s, when Canada and much of the world experienced something of a youth revolution. Young Canadians were becoming more socially and politically aware and radicalized. They wanted to be involved, and they pushed for ways to participate in deciding their own democratic present and future. Parliamentarians heard their arguments and debated lowering the voting age. A series of bills proposing legislation were introduced in 1969, and the voting age was eventually lowered to 18 in 1970.

## Why was the voting age not lowered from 21 sooner?

- **Maturity**

Many thought that young people were not prepared to participate in the democratic process, as they were seen as lacking sufficient knowledge and life experience to make good choices.

- **Responsibility**

Voting was viewed as a serious responsibility and privilege that individuals could exercise only once they were old enough.

## What changed?

- Military service by those under age 21 in both the First and Second World War was a positive factor demonstrating maturity, courage and loyalty.
- Youth became an increasingly significant group. The population of young people grew significantly after the Second World War, and more and more young Canadians entered the workforce.
- In the 1960s, Canadian youth organized and sought to engage in the democratic process and have a voice in how they were governed.
- Change was happening not only in Canada but around the world, as other countries also recognized that youth were ready to participate and so lowered their voting age.



# Materials

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To be photocopied

## ✘ Thinking Guide

# Voting Rights through Time

### Before the activity

1. Think of a time when you were **excluded** from something. In one or two words:

How did you feel?

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What did you do or not do?

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2. Think of a time when you were **included** in something. In one or two words:

How did you feel?

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What did you do or not do?

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### During the timeline activity

1. The most difficult item to place was...

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2. I was surprised by...

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3. I wonder about...

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### After the activity

1. What events in the case studies were surprising to you? What events do you have questions about?

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2. Does getting the right to vote always mean inclusion in democracy? What other ways are groups included in or excluded from democracy today?

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3. Were there turning points in the history of the vote in Canada? Would you change your initial placement of the Turning Point frame now that you've looked at the experiences of several groups?

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### For individual reflection

1. What surprised you about inclusion and exclusion in Canadian democracy?

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2. What is one question you have now?

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3. Are other changes needed to make Canada's democracy more inclusive?

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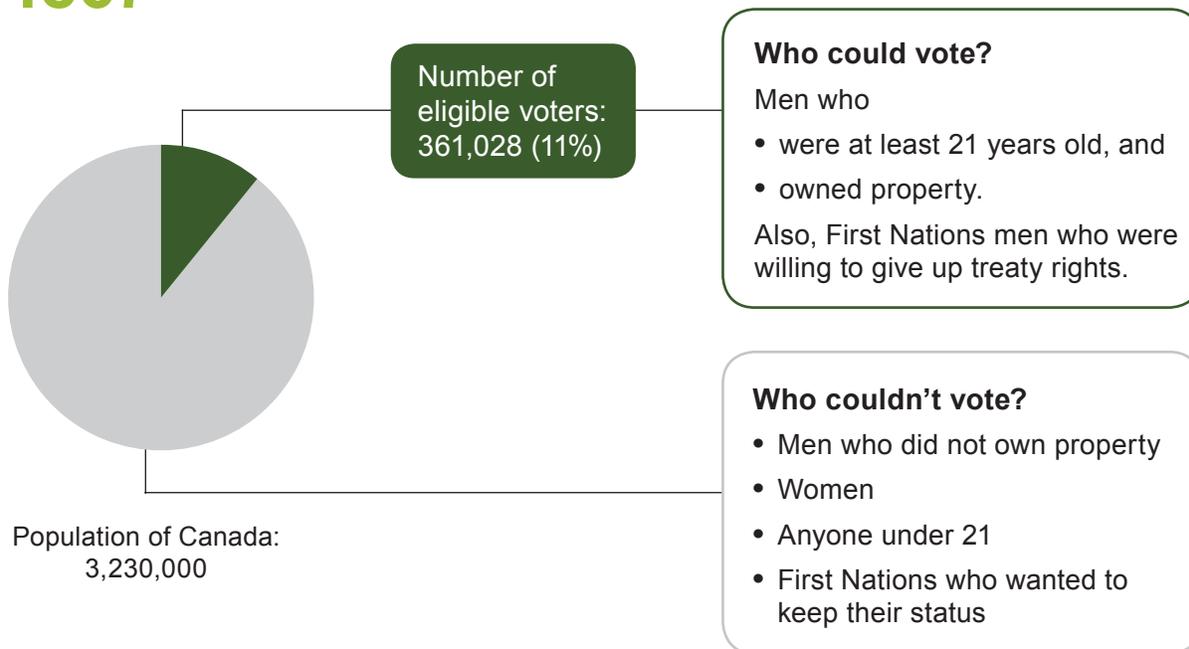
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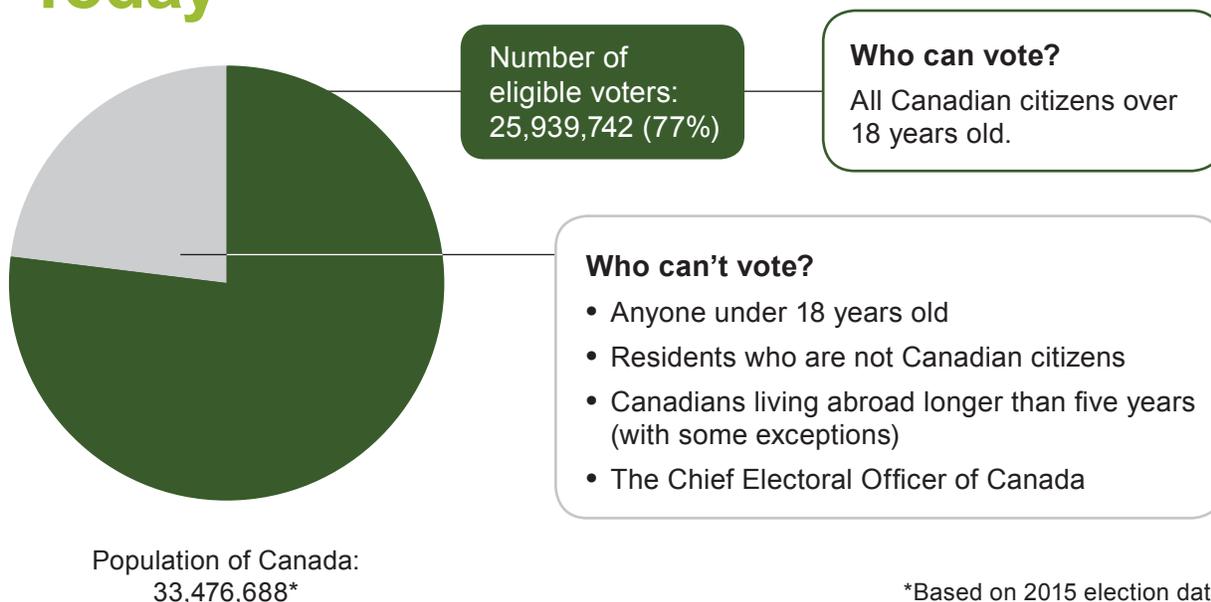
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## ✘ The Right to Vote in Federal Elections: Then and Now

### 1867



### Today



\*Based on 2015 election data

# ✘ Elections Canada Civic Education Assessment Rubric

## Task: Voting Rights through Time

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	Absent / Incomplete	Level 1 (Below expectations)	Level 2 (Approaches expectations)	Level 3 (Meets expectations)	Level 4 (Exceeds expectations)
<b>Understanding Content</b> (e.g., ideas, opinions, concepts, relationships among facts)		Demonstrates limited understanding of content	Demonstrates some understanding of content	Demonstrates considerable understanding of content	Demonstrates thorough understanding of content
<b>Understanding Context(s)</b> (e.g., relationship of content to big ideas, such as “fairness,” “democracy,” and “inclusion vs. exclusion;” themes; frameworks)		Demonstrates limited understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates some understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates considerable understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates thorough understanding of context(s)
<b>Applying Critical Thinking Skills</b> (e.g., analyzing, evaluating, inferring, interpreting, revising, refining, reviewing, reflecting, forming conclusions, detecting bias, synthesizing)		Uses critical thinking skills with limited effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with some effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with considerable effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Using Collaborative Group Learning Skills</b> (e.g., communication skills, questioning, active listening, problem solving, focus on task, level of engagement, teamwork)		Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with limited effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with some effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with considerable effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Demonstrating Civic Disposition</b> (e.g., respects diversity of opinion, recognizes that rights come with responsibilities, considers what is good for society as a whole)		Expresses few civic dispositions	Expresses some civic dispositions	Expresses many civic dispositions	Expresses a considerable number and range of civic dispositions

Comments:

## Learn more

If you and your students enjoyed this lesson, we encourage you to use Elections Canada's other educational resources. These cross-curricular materials can be taught in a variety of subjects, including history, geography, social studies, civics and math.

All resources are available in English and French, and there are versions for language learners.

Visit [electionsanddemocracy.ca](http://electionsanddemocracy.ca) to browse our complete list, download or order. You can also contact us using the information beside.

## Contact us

To share comments or ask questions, or if some of your kit components are missing, write or call us:

**Email:** [info@elections.ca](mailto:info@elections.ca)

**Telephone:** 1-800-463-6868

**TTY:** 1-800-361-8935

**Fax:** 1-888-524-1444

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