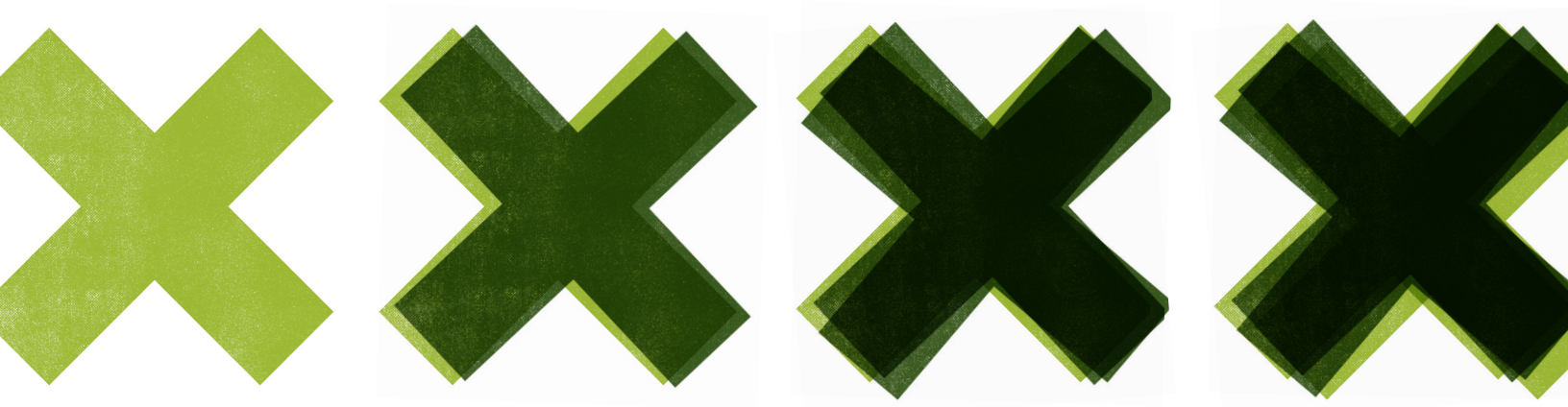


Engage.
Empower.
Learn.

Elections^{*}
& Democracy

Teacher's
Guide



Voting Rights through Time

Exploring issues of
inclusion since 1867

Voting Rights through Time



Big idea

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 all Canadian citizens 18 and over 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 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.
- Students 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 and context cards
- Turning Point frame
- Video: Voting Rights through Time*
- Background information (pages 9–28)
- Thinking guide (page 30)
- Infographic: “The Right to Vote in Federal Elections: Then and Now” (page 31)
- Optional assessment rubric (page 32)
- Sticky notes (2 different colours, not included)

*Available online at electionsanddemocracy.ca



Instructions

To set up for this activity, choose which case studies your students will examine. The kit includes five case studies: First Nations Peoples, Inuit, Japanese Canadians, Women, and Youth. You may find the background information and the context cards helpful. Plan to divide your class into small groups to maximize engagement and learning. Depending on the size of your class, you can download and print more case study cards and timelines at electionsanddemocracy.ca.

× 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, the relevant context card 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 examine 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 to further emphasize the historical thinking concept of continuity and change. You could write a definition of a turning point on the board. One definition is that a turning point is a time when there is a shift in direction or pace.

2. Creating a timeline

Within their small groups, ask students to begin the case study by having one person read the context card aloud. Then, students should read the case study cards.

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 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. Remind students that they can use 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 the discussion questions from the thinking guide.

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:

- **Quick share:** Ask each group to share their thinking with the class. Students can respond to one or more of the reflection prompts from the thinking guide.
- **Gallery walk:** Have students move around the classroom to look at the other case studies and share their observations about the different timelines. Ask them how they would describe the shapes of the timelines and what those shapes can tell us. Invite them to reflect on how similar or different the case studies are.
- **Walking jigsaw:** Ask students to number off within their groups and form a new group with members from each of the other case study groups. 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 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):

- What was the most difficult card to place?
- 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?
- Are other changes needed to make Canada's democracy more inclusive?

Refer to the background information to help you address student responses and questions.

2. Giving the big picture

Show the Voting Rights through Time video and/or the infographic. Both compare the percentage of the population that could vote in 1867 to the percentage today.

Next, 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:

- **Continuity and change:** 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

Students who need literacy support will benefit from pre-teaching of the key vocabulary they will encounter as they read the case study cards aloud.

The Minds On activity provides a way to assess the literacy level in your classroom. If most of the responses are “happy” or “sad,” you might want to spend some time building vocabulary.

An optional version for language learners and struggling readers is available. Plain language and simple sentences make this version ideal for lower-literacy, immersion and second language students. There are fewer activity cards, so students can complete the activity in the allotted time and achieve the same learning outcomes.

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.

For example, students may be able to see that the case studies are all quite different from each other. For each group, changes happened for different reasons. Some groups advocated for change, while others had little agency in change. Some events are less about inclusion or exclusion and more about agency, self-determination, political will or other social, political or economic factors.

It is good practice to have established norms or success criteria for a civics discussion.

You may wish to 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

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 chart presents some key milestones in voting rights at the federal level that students often pose questions about. Note that Canada's voting history is complex. To learn more about the changes to Canada's electoral system over time, please consult *A History of the Vote in Canada*, available at elections.ca.

Evolution of federal voting rights

1867

British North America Act

When Canada is formed, only men who are 21 years of age or older and who own property are able to vote in federal elections. People who are excluded from voting provincially cannot vote federally.

1876

Indian Act

First Nations peoples' lives are governed by the *Indian Act*. It grants First Nations peoples the right to vote, but only if they give up their Indian status. They can vote because the law no longer considers them "Indians."

1917

Wartime Elections Act and Military Voters Act

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

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.

1920

Dominion Elections Act

A new elections law brings in major changes, such as the appointment of a Chief Electoral Officer. One of their first tasks is to add women to the federal vote lists. However, voting rights across Canada are still inconsistent for some racial groups.

1934

Inuit are disqualified

Legislation specifically excludes Inuit from voting in federal elections.

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.

1950

Inuit are able to vote

Inuit obtain the right to vote in Canadian federal elections.

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 Indian status.

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 owned property. These rules excluded a large majority 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 1869 onward only if they gave up their Indian status. During the First and Second World Wars, First Nations men and women who served in the military were given the right to vote. First Nations women and men got the vote unconditionally in 1960.

Métis

Voting restrictions were not formally imposed on Métis: they were allowed to vote if they met the gender, age, citizenship and property ownership conditions. A Métis man was elected to Parliament in 1871. Métis women got the vote in 1918 along with most 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 and Second World Wars, 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.

Black Canadians

Black Canadians have always had the right to vote at the federal level if they met eligibility criteria, such as gender, age and property ownership.

Occupation

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

Intellectual disability

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

Incarcerated electors

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 2018, Canadians living abroad for extended periods of time were not allowed to vote unless they were serving in the military or in the federal civil service.



Japanese Canadians and the Right to Vote Case Study

Note: This lesson examines federal voting rights for Japanese Canadians. It does not cover the larger story of Japanese Canadians' experiences, such as the whole history of internment and redress.

✖ Background information for teachers

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.

Japanese Canadians experienced various forms of discrimination and prejudice, based on race and economic factors, from sectors of the general public and from the BC 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 other Canadians. 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.

At that time, federal election officials relied on provincial voters lists. That meant when BC took away provincial voting rights from Japanese Canadians living in the province, they also lost the right to vote at the federal level. Three years later, in 1898, the federal government passed a law creating new administrative measures to address the voting list barrier for Japanese Canadians living in BC. They could vote in federal elections if they contacted the federal election official (returning officer) to add their names to the federal voters list. In theory, this new provision went some way to restoring federal voting rights for Japanese Canadians living in BC, but in practice the measure was not widely known or used. It also required Japanese Canadians to make a special effort to vote federally, a burden that was not imposed on other Canadian citizens.

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 provincial voters list in BC. In the end, the courts ruled that BC could determine provincial voting rights.

During the First World War, Japanese Canadians joined the military to fight for Canada. While in military service, they were able to vote in the 1917 federal election

under the *Military Voters Act*. However, after the war, voting rights reverted to pre-war times.

In 1920, the federal election law changed again. Provincial voting exclusions were upheld and provincial voting lists were to be used in federal elections without exception. Since most Japanese Canadians continued to live in BC, this meant that most Japanese Canadians were deprived of their federal voting rights. In 1936, a delegation of the Japanese Canadian Citizens' League travelled to Ottawa to speak before the House of Commons. The delegates, all Canadian-born professionals, spoke at length before a special committee. Some parliamentarians were sympathetic to their pleas, but others were opposed, especially some members from BC. Their request for voting rights was denied.

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 for something to be done about the risk to national security 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.

The forced relocation of Japanese Canadians to areas outside of BC meant that they were no longer subject to the voting restrictions in BC; technically, they

gained the federal right to vote. However, Parliament closed this loophole before the 1944 federal election so that Japanese Canadians who had been removed from BC could not vote, no matter where they now lived.

Japanese Canadians gained the federal right to vote unconditionally, regardless of province of residence, in 1948.

After years of lobbying for recognition of their treatment, Japanese Canadians negotiated a redress agreement and received an official apology from the federal government in 1988.

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

Racial prejudice

There was widespread prejudice against Japanese Canadians because of their perceived foreignness and cultural differences from Canadians of European background. Racial prejudice affected all aspects of daily life. For example, Japanese Canadians were paid lower wages than white workers and were often refused entry into trade unions.

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?

Human rights

The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* had an impact in Canada on notions of racial inequality and democratic and civil rights.

Peace

The wartime fear of the Japanese faded after the war ended.

Agency

Japanese Canadians continued to speak out to have their rights recognized.

What is the situation now?

Japanese Canadians are able to participate fully in Canadian political life. The right to vote of all Canadian citizens is protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.



Youth and the Right to Vote

Case Study

✘ Background information for teachers

In 1867, at Confederation, the minimum voting age for federal and provincial elections was set at 21. This had been the voting age in the British North American colonies before Confederation and was a standard voting age in democracies around the world.

The voting age of 21 for federal elections remained the case, with some exceptions for young people in the military, until 1970, when the voting age was lowered to 18.

Throughout these 100-plus years, relatively little attention was paid to the question of voting age. The main exception related to voting rights for those serving in the military. During the First World War, a special wartime elections law gave voting rights to everyone involved in the war effort, even if they were under 21. After the war, the voting age went back to 21 for everyone.

The Second World War had a more lasting effect on voting age. Starting in 1942 and for the next 50 years, military electors could vote even if they were younger than the official voting age.

It is worth reflecting on how many young people served the country during the Second World War. Some 700,000 people, more than half of all of Canada's military personnel, were under the age of 21. This national service by youth, many still in their teens, prompted some governments to change rules about voting age requirements, starting at the provincial level.

In 1944, Alberta lowered the provincial voting age to 19; in 1945, Saskatchewan offered the provincial vote to people age 18 and up. Other provinces followed suit, lowering their voting ages to 18 over several decades.

At the federal level, there was little interest in lowering the voting age below 21 until the late 1960s, when Canada and much of the world experienced a youth revolution. Young Canadians were becoming more socially aware, and many teens became politically active. Although there was no organized public campaign to lower the voting age, the idea became widely accepted. With little debate, Parliament lowered the voting age to 18 in 1970.

Interestingly, the exception that allowed individuals serving in the Canadian Armed Forces to vote at any age persisted. Since people could enlist in the military at 17, they could also vote at that age. It was not until the 1990s that this special status was eliminated.

In 1991, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing studied the question of lowering the voting age to 16. Reasons to support a change included avoiding age discrimination under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and encouraging youth voting while young people were still in school and could take part in civic education.

Arguments against lowering the voting age included the fact that the legal age of majority is 18. Minors are treated differently than those 18 and over in many different spheres of Canadian life, including the criminal justice system. For those

under 18, parental consent is required for many important decisions, such as getting married or seeking certain medical treatments. The Commission carried out public opinion surveys on the matter and found that most Canadians, including teens, did not support lowering the voting age.

The Commission concluded that decisions on voting age involve a judgment by a society about when individuals reach maturity as citizens. It recommended that the voting age be set at 18 for all, including military electors. It also suggested that the question of voting age be reconsidered from time to time as society changes.

Provincial Voting Age 1944–1992

Year	Province	The provincial voting age is lowered from:
1944	Alberta	21 to 19
1945	Saskatchewan	21 to 18
1952	British Columbia	21 to 19
1964	Québec	21 to 18
1967	Prince Edward Island	21 to 18
1969	Manitoba	21 to 18
1970	Alberta	19 to 18
1970	Newfoundland and Labrador	21 to 18
1970	Nova Scotia	21 to 19
1971	Ontario	21 to 18
1971	New Brunswick	21 to 18
1973	Nova Scotia	19 to 18
1992	British Columbia	19 to 18

Why was the general voting age set at 21 for so long?

Tradition

The age of 21 was the standard age of voting in many places around the world until the 1960s. Few people questioned it.

Responsibility

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

Political gain

During both the First and Second World Wars, conscription (compulsory military service) was a contentious issue in some federal elections. The governments of the day thought that people serving in the military would support the government's stance on the issue.

What changed?

Service

Military service by those under age 21 in both the First and Second World Wars showed that youth contributed to the country and had a stake in its future. Their service also showed young people's maturity, courage and loyalty.

Baby boom generation

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 and became a political force.

Global change

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.

What is the situation now?

The topic of lowering the voting age to 16 comes up regularly in legislatures across Canada.



Women's Right to Vote

Case Study

✘ Background information for teachers

When Canada was formed in 1867, only men could vote in federal elections. Each province had different rules, but women were essentially excluded from the vote everywhere in the country. Change happened slowly for Canadian women. Women (and men) took action in many ways and faced opposition from men and women alike. Women's suffrage groups were first established in the 1870s in Toronto, led by activists such as Dr. Emily Stowe. Other groups soon formed and created alliances with international organizations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

In the early 20th century, long-held ideas about women's role in 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 others and presenting public lectures on equality. Their efforts saw success when Manitoba became the first province to grant some women the vote in 1916. Saskatchewan and Alberta followed a few months later. Within a year, women had also been added to provincial voters lists in BC and Ontario, but not in Quebec or the Maritimes.

In terms of voting rights for women in federal elections, there was a limited advance in 1917 during the First World War. 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. A year later, in 1918, Parliament passed a law removing 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, though. 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 in 1940, and First Nations women were excluded from the federal vote until 1960. Today, women are prominent in Canadian political life, yet they are still underrepresented in the House of Commons and 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 belief that men were better suited to public life and women were more suited to private or domestic life.

Role in society

Many thought that women occupied a special role that included household duties, child rearing, and being caregivers and supporters to men. This role was seen as inconsistent with politics.

Implied weakness

There was a belief that women would not contribute to political life. They were considered too weak, 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?

Agency

Women wanted change: they organized, mobilized, coordinated their efforts and made their voices heard.

Political gain

Women made up approximately 50 percent of the population and represented untapped votes for political parties.

Effects of the First World War

During the First World War, women took on a number of jobs previously reserved to men. Women proved that their abilities had been underestimated. After the war, women also gained the right to vote in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Equality

Ideas were changing about gender equality, fairness and the positive contribution of women to Canadian public life.

What is the situation now?

Women are active in Canadian political life. They are still underrepresented in the House of Commons and face obstacles to full participation in political life.



First Nations Peoples and the Right to Vote Case Study

Note: This case study was developed in consultation with historians at Indigenous Services Canada and key First Nations educators, including those on Elections Canada's Advisory Circle of Educators. It examines the history of federal voting rights for First Nations peoples in Canada from 1867 to today.

This lesson does not cover the larger story of First Nations' rights, governance and law, or the voting rights of Inuit and Métis.

✘ Background information for teachers

Hundreds of distinct First Nations governed themselves for thousands of years before European settlers arrived in what is now Canada. Each First Nation had its own ways of making decisions based on its community's needs and values. These ways were different from the systems that European settlers introduced. Many of these distinct First Nations ways of governance continue today.

After Europeans arrived, the French and British colonial administrations had several types of governance arrangements, such as treaties with First Nations peoples. At Confederation in 1867, responsibilities were divided between federal and provincial levels of government.

The federal government (Government of Canada) gave itself responsibility for First Nations. (They were called Indians at that time.) First Nations were not consulted about this change.

Federal officials of the day thought that First Nations peoples lacked the knowledge and ability to make responsible decisions about public matters. As a result of this viewpoint, the lives of First Nations peoples in Canada were governed by laws that the federal government passed without any input from the people affected by them. The most significant of these laws was the *Indian Act*, which was passed in 1876. Under this law, First Nations peoples did not hold the same rights as other Canadians.

The *Indian Act* has been amended many times and is still in force today. This complex law was based on the premise that it was the Crown's responsibility to care for and protect the interests of First Nations by acting as a "guardian" until First Nations could assimilate into Canadian society. It defined "Indian status" and set out rules and rights for First Nations peoples who were considered status Indians.

First Nations peoples did not have the right to vote federally without conditions until 1960. Sometimes they were excluded from voting because they did not meet the qualifications, such as owning property. Mostly, however, they were excluded because they were "Indians."

With some exceptions, until 1960, First Nations peoples had to give up their Indian status through *enfranchisement* to gain the right to vote in federal elections. Enfranchisement gave citizenship rights but stripped the person of their Indian status. If a man was enfranchised, his wife and children were automatically enfranchised with him.

The government encouraged First Nations men to enfranchise as part of its effort to assimilate them into Canadian culture. At the time, only men had the right to vote in federal elections. Voluntary enfranchisement was introduced as early as 1869. A First Nations man who wished to become enfranchised had to reject his own language, culture and traditions and adopt mainstream Canadian ways. He also had to leave the reserve and would no longer be allowed to live there. Federal officials would decide whether a person was ready to be enfranchised.

Few First Nations men chose to become enfranchised voluntarily.

The federal government introduced involuntary *enfranchisement* in different ways at different times. In the 1890s, First Nations men who earned a university degree or became a doctor, lawyer or religious official were automatically enfranchised. They lost their Indian status under the law and gained citizenship benefits, including the right to vote, when they obtained their degree or started their professional career. In an effort to increase enfranchisement in the 1920s, the government enfranchised over 5,000 First Nations individuals of various professions and levels of education without their consent.

During the First and Second World Wars, First Nations men and women who served in the military gained the right to vote in federal elections without giving up their Indian status. After the wars ended, those veterans who lived on a reserve lost the right to vote.

A parliamentary committee studied the *Indian Act* after the Second World War; this process included hearing testimony from First Nations leaders. In 1948, the committee recommended that First Nations peoples have the right to vote in federal elections without restrictions. However, in 1951, amendments to the *Indian Act* did not grant this right to First Nations peoples.

In 1960, First Nations men and women were granted the right to vote in federal elections without conditions. They could vote whether they lived on or off reserve, and they no longer had to give up their Indian status under the law to vote. Voting rights for all Canadian citizens were enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982.

Why was the right to vote in federal elections restricted for First Nations peoples before 1960?

Indian Act

At Confederation and under the *Indian Act*, First Nations peoples were seen as incapable of managing their own affairs or voting.

Assimilation policies

The federal government took various actions to assimilate First Nations peoples into mainstream Canadian society. One such action was to give voting rights only to First Nations people who gave up their Indian status.

What changed?

Military service

The military service of First Nations people during the First and Second World Wars led Canadians to feel that First Nations people should have the full rights of citizenship.

Integration policies

The goal of Indian policy in Canada was shifting from assimilation to integration.

Political leadership

During the 1957 election campaign, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker promised to extend the vote to First Nations peoples. He kept his promise and changed the electoral law in 1960.

What is the situation now?

First Nations peoples in Canada have had the right to vote without conditions since 1960.

About half of all First Nations people in Canada live on reserve. Voter turnout for them has tended to be lower than for the general population. (Turnout rates are available only for those living on reserves, not for all First Nations voters.)

Among First Nations voters, opinions about voting in federal elections are mixed. Some see it as going against principles of self-government. Others see it as an important way to participate in the country's democratic process.

In 2015, voter turnout on reserves was approaching the general population turnout, but in 2019, it declined. Voting rates change over time. For the most up-to-date information, check elections.ca.

✘ Optional extension

Have your students watch the video *Marcie's Story* from the resource *Does Voting Matter?* to see a first-hand account of one First Nations woman's experiences with voting in a federal election.

✘ Terminology

Aboriginal rights

Rights that apply to all First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada. These are legal rights that were affirmed in the Constitution in 1982.

Enfranchisement

In most other historical contexts, *enfranchisement* simply means gaining the right to vote. *Enfranchisement* has a specific meaning in relation to First Nations peoples in Canada. Through this process, a status Indian could gain full citizenship, including the right to own property and vote, but would no longer be considered an Indian under the law.

A First Nations person who was enfranchised lost Indian status and treaty rights. This meant they lost the right to live on a reserve and lost all rights associated with being an Indian. *Enfranchisement* could be voluntary (through applying for it) or compulsory (such as by earning a university degree).

First Nations

First Nations are distinct and separate peoples from Métis and Inuit. There are more than 600 First Nations in Canada.

Indian

From the arrival of the first Europeans until the 1990s, the most common term for First Nations individuals was "Indian." That is why this term appears in the resource. The registered status for First Nations peoples is still legally referred to as "Indian status" today.

Indian status

Indian status is the legal status of a person who is registered as an Indian under the *Indian Act*. Under the *Indian Act*, status Indians may be eligible for a range of benefits, rights, programs and services offered by the federal and provincial or territorial governments.

Time immemorial

This term refers to the past beyond memory or record. In the context of First Nations, the term "since time immemorial" is often used to describe their presence in what is now known as Canada.

Treaty rights

Treaties are agreements between specific groups of First Nations and the Crown (the federal government) that recognize certain rights, such as rights to land and resources. Some treaties were signed before Confederation, while others are very recent; all of them are still in effect. These nation-to-nation agreements create binding obligations on both parties.



Inuit and the Right to Vote

Case Study

Note: This case study was developed in collaboration with the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami to tell the story of federal voting rights for Inuit. It does not cover the larger story of Inuit rights, governance and law, or the voting rights of First Nations peoples and Métis.

× Background information for teachers

Inuit are a distinct Indigenous people who live primarily in northern Canada and around the circumpolar world. In Canada, they are one of three constitutionally recognized Indigenous peoples, along with First Nations and Métis.

The Inuit traditional homelands in Canada span Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories). Together, this land is called Inuit Nunangat. It makes up nearly one third of Canada's land mass and 50 percent of its coastline. There are also Inuit populations in Alaska, Greenland and Russia.

For thousands of years, most Inuit lived in small, close-knit communities. They lived in traditional ways, drawing on the resources from the land and sea to sustain themselves. Inuit values are built on cooperation and respect, and decisions were usually made by consensus.

When Canada was founded in 1867, Inuit homelands were not part of the country. For that reason, Canada's Constitution made no reference to Inuit. No treaties had been negotiated with them, nor were Inuit mentioned in the *Indian Act*. This meant that when Canada's borders expanded to include the traditional territories where Inuit live, the relationship between Inuit and federal and provincial governments was undefined in many ways—including whether Inuit had the right to vote in federal elections.

In theory, Inuit gained the right to vote in federal elections when Canada expanded north and their homelands became part of Canada. In reality, Inuit continued to live and govern themselves in traditional ways. Interactions with the federal government were limited, and Inuit were not offered voting services.

In 1934, federal election laws were changed to specifically exclude Inuit from voting. The reason for this exclusion was the emerging view that Inuit were a federal responsibility, like First Nations peoples. Since First Nations peoples were denied voting rights, Inuit were also excluded from voting.

Over the next decade and after the Second World War, the federal government began to change its view of the North and of Inuit. There was a greater focus on the North for economic resources and Arctic sovereignty. Seeking to provide better services for Inuit and Northerners, the federal government created a network of service centres across the North and settled Inuit around them.

Inuit were given the right to vote at the federal level in 1950, when Parliament decided that Inuit were distinct from First Nations peoples. The parliamentary committee reviewing the changes to electoral law stated that Inuit should be given “the privilege of voting” since, unlike First Nations peoples, they were not exempt from paying taxes. So, Inuit gained voting rights a full decade before First Nations.

Through several federal elections in the 1950s, election services were provided to about half of the communities in the Arctic. There were many challenges for election officials in enumerating Inuit across vast distances with limited technology. Election material was brought in by ship, helicopter, snowmobile and even parachute. By 1962, all Arctic communities had access to voting services.

At the time, one electoral district (or riding) covered all of what is now the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. But in 1976, as part of the review of electoral boundaries that takes place every 10 years, this vast area was divided in two. This created a new federal riding in the Eastern Arctic with an Inuit majority population.

In the following federal election, for the first time, all three candidates in a federal riding were Inuit, and the first Inuit member of Parliament was elected.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Inuit became more politically active at the national and regional levels. A new organization, which has come to be known as the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, was created to advocate for self-governance and land claims.

Inuit land claims agreements have been signed in all four Inuit regions:

- the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in Nunavik in 1975
- the Inuvialuit Final Agreement in 1984
- the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement in 1993
- the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement in Nunatsiavut in 2005

Inuit living in these four land claims regions (Nunavik, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut and Nunatsiavut) have a form of Inuit democracy. They vote for representatives of their Inuit land claims organization who work with the federal, territorial or provincial governments to administer the terms of the land claims agreements; Inuit also manage the land and resources and work to preserve and promote their language and culture.

Along with this Inuit democracy in these regions, everyone who is a Canadian citizen aged 18 and over—whether they are Inuit or non-Inuit—has the right to vote in provincial/territorial and federal elections.

Why were Inuit granted the right to vote in 1950?

Parliament gave federal voting rights to Inuit in 1950 due to many converging factors.

Legal distinction

A Supreme Court decision confirmed that Inuit were distinct from First Nations peoples and were not subject to the *Indian Act* under the law.

Federal presence

More interactions between the federal government and Inuit led to a growing understanding of Inuit as a people distinct from First Nations peoples.

Strategic considerations

Cold War tensions between western democracies like Canada and communist countries like the Soviet Union made the North more interesting, strategically speaking, to Canada.

Changing attitudes

The idea of universal voting rights for all citizens became more widespread due to a growing awareness of human rights.

What is the situation now?

Inuit are active in Canada's democracy, whether they live in southern Canada or in Inuit Nunangat.

✘ Terminology

Consensus

General or widespread agreement. The Nunavut and Northwest Territories legislatures are consensus governments, which means the members do not represent political parties and they work together closely to pass legislation.

Inuit Nunangat

Inuit homelands. It covers the four regions of the Arctic defined by the Inuit land claims agreements: Nunatsiavut (in Labrador), Nunavik (in northern Quebec), Nunavut and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (in the Northwest Territories). Inuit vote to elect representatives in their Inuit land claims organization as well as in federal, provincial or territorial, and municipal elections.



Materials

To be photocopied

✖ Thinking Guide

Discussion questions

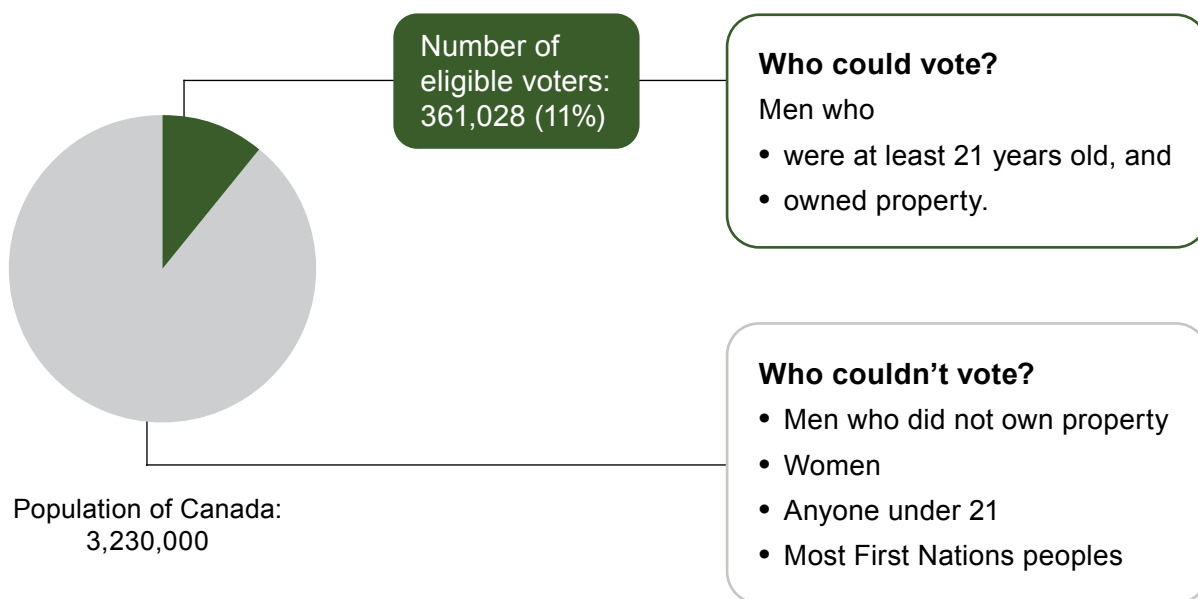
1. What was the most difficult card to place?
 2. Which events in the case studies were surprising to you? Which events do you have questions about?
 3. Does getting the right to vote always mean inclusion in democracy?
 4. Are other changes needed to make Canada's democracy more inclusive?
-

Exit card

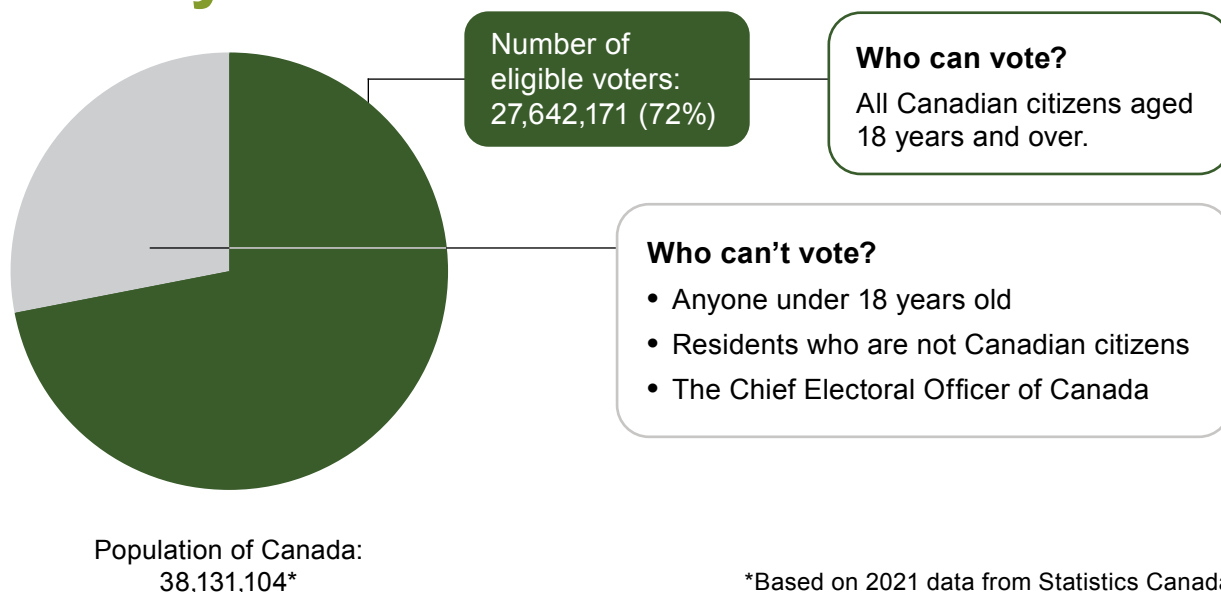
1. What surprised you about inclusion and exclusion in Canadian democracy?
2. What is one question you have now?
3. Are other changes needed to make Canada's democracy more inclusive?

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

1867



Today



*Based on 2021 data from Statistics Canada

✘ 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)
Understanding Content (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
Understanding Context(s) (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)
Applying Critical Thinking Skills (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
Using Collaborative Group Learning Skills (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
Demonstrating Civic Disposition (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, language arts and math.

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Notes:



