

Lesson: What does it mean to be an active citizen?

Big idea

Active citizenship is important to a democracy, and it can take many forms. A successful democracy relies on everyday ways citizens help each other and society. Sometimes this can mean fundraising for important social issues or organizing a protest against a government policy. Other times, this means making your community better by treating each other fairly and equally. Everybody has a role to play.

Curriculum connections

B3. Understanding Context: demonstrate an understanding of the roles and key responsibilities of citizens and of the different levels of government in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments.

B3.9 describe some different ways in which citizens can take action to address social and environmental issues (e.g. by determining the position of their local candidates on various issues and supporting/voting for the one whose position they agree with; through the court system; by organizing petitions or boycotts; by volunteering with organizations that work on specific issues; by writing to their elected representatives or to the media; by creating or participating in art projects that bring attention to an issue).

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- identify and explain what active citizens do
- understand different kinds of social action
- become an active citizen

Success criteria

I can:

- sort and categorize my ideas and the ideas of others to develop an understanding of active citizenship
- explain which activists inspire me and connect their actions to what I can do to be an active citizen
- analyse the actions different Canadians have taken to address social issues
- apply my learning about active citizenship to explain how I can be an active citizen

Inquiry question

What does it mean to be an active citizen?

Required materials

1. Appendix A Group handout:
[What do active citizens do? - Cards](#)
2. Appendix B Group handout:
[Active citizenship profiles](#)
3. Appendix C Student handout:
[What is active citizenship?](#)
4. Appendix D Student handout:
[My active citizenship profile](#)
5. Appendix E Teacher resource:
[Assessment check-brid citizenship profile](#)
6. Slide deck:
[Civic Action*](#)

*Available online at: elections.on.ca/learning

Minds on

1. Organize students into small groups (three to four students). Have students label themselves Student A, Student B, etc.
2. Hand a stack of blank cards to students. These can be cue cards, or just blank paper cut into strips or squares. A [template](#) (Appendix A) has been provided in the supporting materials for this lesson.
3. Groups will brainstorm what active citizenship looks like by writing down words, phrases or sentences on the cards. Students should ask each other: What do active citizens do? The teacher should display the question in a visible spot so groups can see it during their brainstorming session.
4. Groups can use the “Brainstorm and Pass” structure:
 - a. One student (Student B, for example) begins by offering an idea related to the question. For example, “I think active citizenship means reading the news and learning about the world you live in.”
 - b. The group discusses this idea, asks questions and writes it down on a card once everyone understands and agrees on the idea.
 - c. Group members can pass whenever they want (conduct multiple rounds) but are still included in subsequent rounds.
 - d. Students continue to add ideas down onto their cards until the brainstorming session is over. This can be after a predetermined number of rounds.
 - e. After brainstorming, groups consider all their ideas on the cards and begin to sort them. They can include similar ones together, circle or highlight important words or put some aside.
 - f. Each group then generates a list of the three most important things that active citizens do. Each group should post them in a visible spot for all other groups to see (e.g. on chart paper or a digital board). Keep these lists visible during the lesson.

Teacher note: Here are some ideas students can generate in their discussions:

- Active citizens vote
- Active citizens listen to others' ideas and offer their own ideas
- Active citizens participate in things like public meetings, social groups, committees, councils
- Active citizens help their society by doing good to help others
- Active citizens help their neighbours
- Active citizens speak out against hatred, injustice, inequality
- Active citizens keep their environment clean, pick up garbage, don't litter
- Active citizens try to make their communities a better place for everyone
- Active citizens protest
- Active citizens pay attention to social issues
- Active citizens debate
- Active citizens care about what is happening in the world and try to help victims of injustice, conflict and war

Activity

1. Introduce the concept of Civic Action through the [Civic Action slide deck](#)* included in this lesson.
2. Organize students into groups of 3 or 4 and distribute the [Active citizenship profiles](#) (Appendix B) to each group. Use a jigsaw strategy to complete this activity. Group 1 receives Citizenship Profile #1, Group 2 receives Citizenship Profile #2, etc.

Teacher note: A Google Search on these civic activists may result in videos that can also be used as an alternate source for students who are visual learners or early language learners.

3. Each group completes an analysis using the student handout, [What is active citizenship?](#) (Appendix C). Each student should complete the handout individually by recording their group's thinking, so they are ready for the next round.
4. Once this phase of the group work is over, continue to the next phase. Students go into a second group where they share their group analysis with others. In this phase, there should be at least one student representing each profile. Give students an agreed upon amount of time to share their citizen profiles with each other, taking note in part B of the [What is active citizenship?](#) handout.
5. After groups have completed sharing and any questions were asked for clarification, students will individually consider the questions asked in Part C of the handout.

*Available online at: elections.on.ca/learning

Consolidation

1. Provide sticky notes or use a digital tool (e.g. Jamboard, Padlet) for students to share their thoughts from Part C of the handout. Discuss the examples given as a class and keep this visible to all students.
2. Show video **Everybody Plays a Part***, and ask students to jot down any additional ideas that did not come up in this lesson yet about what it means to be an active citizen. This video emphasizes examples from everyday life.
3. Distribute the student handout, **My active citizenship profile** (Appendix D). Students create a brief bio of themselves and how they can be active citizens in their communities. These can be displayed in a visible spot in the classroom and can be used for assessment.

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Assessment

A **check-bric** (Appendix E) has been included with this lesson for the teacher to assess student citizenship profiles.