Lesson: What is democracy?

Big idea

Democracy means rule by the people and has a long history, originating in Athens hundreds of years ago. There are many democracies around the world. Each has its own voting system, ways of representing citizens, rights and responsibilities. Our Canadian system of government is called a "parliamentary democracy". Understanding the characteristics of democracy and its strengths and weaknesses is an essential component of civic literacy.

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.

> **B3.1** describe the major rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada (e.g. rights: equal protection under the law, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to vote; responsibilities: to respect the rights of others, to participate in the electoral process and political decision-making, to improve their communities).

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- collaborate with my classmates and contribute to group discussions
- understand the characteristics of a democracy

Success criteria

I can:

- explain what a democracy is and what it is not
- develop a definition of democracy using my thoughts and my classmates' ideas
- assess how our school and classroom do or do not model the characteristics of democracy
- complete a report card assessment of democracy in my school and classroom or select/create an image that communicates my understanding

Inquiry question

What is democracy?

Required materials

1. Appendix A Printable material:
   Aspects of democracy – Images

2. Appendix B Student handout:
   Student backgrounder – What is democracy?

3. Appendix C Student handout:
   Frayer model

4. Appendix D Group handout:
   Democracy/Not a democracy – Cards

5. Appendix E Student handout:
   Assessment – Exit card

6. Appendix F Student handout:
   Democracy report card

7. Appendix G Teacher resource:
   Democracy report card sample

8. TVO video:
   Brief History Of Democracy*

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

Minds on

1. Post **five pictures** (Appendix A) depicting various aspects of democracy around the classroom. Make sure they are visible to all students.

Teacher note: There are more than five images to choose from. The teacher can select five that will work best for their students or use images of their own choosing.

2. Ask students to walk to each image and then select the one that best matches their current view of what a democracy is. They are to remain by the image to form a group with others selecting that image.

3. Once all students have selected an image, provide each group with a large chart paper or another shared document on which to record their thinking. Ask students to write down key words of which the image makes them think.

4. Once students have recorded their thinking, conduct a whole group discussion, with groups sharing their thoughts. Select a note taker from the class or the teacher can record the big ideas coming out of the class discussion. Keep these big ideas in a visible spot.

5. Ask each group to consider the class discussion and develop a definition of democracy. Have students post their definitions in a visible spot. Through consensus in a group discussion, arrive at a class definition of democracy. Post this definition in a visible spot for the remainder of the lesson.

Teacher note: After student groups have come up with a working definition, consider having the class vote on the best definitions. This can be done with an online voting tool or simply a show of hands. Use majority rule to select the best definition. Try to get the class to practise reaching a consensus through this activity by asking if perhaps two definitions should be combined. A quick discussion could follow about whether the way the definition was developed was a democratic process.

Activity

1. Organize students into groups of 3-4 and distribute the **Student backgrounder – What is democracy?** (Appendix B) handout as well as the **Frayer model** (Appendix C) handout.

2. Working in their groups, students should read the backgrounder and begin to fill in the different sections of the Frayer Model as they consider more deeply what democracy is.

Teacher note: Consider assigning roles in the groups to organize the workflow. Possible roles are note taker, reader, summarizer, presenter.

3. After students have completed the reading, discussed in groups, and recorded their thinking, discuss as a class to assess their comprehension.

4. Refer to the class definition of democracy and ask each group to think about whether it needs to be revised. Make any revisions as suggested by the class. Continue to keep the definition in a visible location.

5. The teacher should then create some scenarios that will help students further understand what a democracy is. These scenarios can be formatted into cards. One sample scenario has been included for reference on the group handout – **Democracy/Not a democracy – Cards** template (Appendix D). Once the teacher creates the scenarios on the blank card templates, print and cut them up into cards for the students.

6. Using their understanding from the reading, group and class discussions on what democracy is, students will sort the cards into two piles: "Sounds like a Democracy" and "Does not sound like a Democracy".

7. Once they are happy with their piles, the teacher can lead a brief discussion with students assessing their understanding based on where they sorted the cards and having students explain their choices. Students can add to their Frayer Model definition handout as they further their understanding of what democracy is.

8. As a class or in each group, students can view the TVO video, **Brief History Of Democracy*,** which can help them to add points to their **Frayer model** definition handout.

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Consolidation

There are three options for students to consolidate and communicate their learning.

Option 1: Exit card (Appendix E)

Each student should complete an exit card responding to the lesson inquiry, "What is Democracy?". Provide time for students to do this individually and then share with an elbow partner to help them finalize their thinking. This can be used as a formative assessment.

Option 2: Democracy report card (Appendix F)

Tell students they will now evaluate the ways in which their classroom and school model the characteristics of a democracy as determined by their learning in this lesson. Distribute the **Democracy report card** to each student and have students suggest criteria on which to make their evaluation. For example, Criterion #1 might be "Different voices have a chance to be heard". Once the criteria have been set (see teacher resource – **Democracy report card sample** in Appendix G), students can work in small groups or individually to assess their school's democratic nature. Students then provide a final leveled evaluation and rationale to conclude their thinking.

Option 3: A picture says it all

Students select an image or create their own that best exemplifies their understanding of democracy based on this lesson. A brief explanation connecting the image to two characteristics of democracy can be used to assess their understanding.

Assessment

The teacher can provide formative written feedback on one of the three consolidation tasks. This will allow the teacher to communicate to students how well they grasped the big ideas. These products can lead to teacher student conversations directed at what students reveal about their learning.