

Lesson: What makes a good political decision in a democracy?

Big idea

Ontario is divided into 124 electoral districts. An electoral district (ED) is a geographical area of the province that is defined by law and is represented by a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Each ED is represented by one MPP so that is why there are 124 MPPs at Queen's Park in Ontario. Millions of people live in Ontario; some MPPs represent well over 100,000 constituents. It can be hard to make sure everyone is represented so making good political decisions is an important part of Ontario's democratic process. When these decisions are made, some people may be happy and others disappointed or frustrated. However, that is what democracy is about. Everyone has the right to vote for their representative in an electoral district. The candidate that then represents that electoral district must work hard to make decisions that represent the majority of the electors.

Curriculum connections

B2. Inquiry: use the social studies inquiry process to investigate Canadian social and/or environmental issues from various perspectives, including those of Indigenous peoples as well as of the level (or levels) of government responsible for addressing the issues.

B2.3 analyze and construct maps in various formats, including digital formats, as part of their investigations into social and/or environmental issues

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.

B3.7 describe key actions taken by governments, including Indigenous governments, to solve some significant national, provincial/territorial, and/or local issues

B3.8 explain why different groups may have different perspectives on specific social and environmental issues

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- interpret a map of Ontario’s electoral districts
- understand what makes a good political decision in a democracy
- compare different perspectives about a political decision

Success criteria

I can:

- ask good questions about Ontario’s map of electoral districts to understand the differences and similarities between them
- create criteria for a good political decision using my background knowledge and learning about democracy
- make a political decision that fulfills my criteria
- explain what issues are most important in my own or my school’s electoral district

Inquiry question

What makes a good political decision in a democracy?

Required materials

1. Appendix A Student handout:
[Map of Ontario’s electoral districts*](#)
2. Appendix B Student handout:
[I see, I think, I wonder](#)
3. Appendix C Teacher key:
[I see, I think, I wonder](#)

4. Appendix D Student handout:
[Elections in Canada - Infographic](#)
5. Appendix E Student handout:
[Electoral district profiles](#)
6. Appendix F Group handout:
[Making a good political decision](#)
7. Appendix G Group handout:
[My electoral district profile](#)
8. Appendix H Student handout:
[Assessment - Exit card](#)

*Teachers can order a print copy online at:
elections.on.ca/learning

Minds on

1. Organize students into small groups or partners. Provide each group with a copy of the [Map of Ontario’s electoral districts](#) (Appendix A) as well as the handout, [I see, I think, I wonder](#) (Appendix B). This is a thinking protocol that helps set the stage for inquiry and emphasizes the importance of observation as the basis for thinking. This is a great thinking tool to use at the start of a new lesson or unit.

Teacher note: A sample [completed handout](#) (Appendix C) is provided in the learning materials for this lesson as a guide.

2. Provide a brief explanation to students about the map: Ontario is currently divided into 124 electoral districts. An electoral district (ED) is a geographical area of the province, defined by law, and is represented by a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Each ED is represented by one MPP so that is why there are 124 MPPs at Queen’s Park in Ontario.

3. Allow time for students to make their observations and wonderings. Some question prompts the teacher can use are:
 - a. Are all the EDs the same size?
 - b. Do they all have the same climate?
 - c. What do you notice about the concentration or amount of EDs in the different areas of Ontario?
 - d. Do you notice any difference between the north and south of Ontario?
 - e. What physical characteristics of the land are unique to some of the EDs?
 - f. Would all the people living in the EDs be similar? Different languages and cultural groups?
4. Have students rotate groups or provide a space for students to post their wonderings so that students can share ideas.
5. Conduct a brief whole group discussion about the differences and similarities between Ontario's electoral districts, emphasizing how many there are, the different people and groups they represent and how the political representatives are responsible for meeting the needs of the whole province. Would this be easy or hard? Why?

Additional materials

This **infographic** (Appendix D) about the different ways elections are organized in Canada provides students with background information on the different levels of government and their relevant terminology and processes. This Elections Ontario video, **Which Election***, also provides relevant information for students.

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

Activity

1. If students completed lesson 1 from Elections Ontario's Grade 5 curriculum resources, **What is democracy**, they may remember that Ontario is a representative democracy and that a key characteristic of democracy is the common good. It is important that political representatives make good political decisions.
2. In their groups from the Minds On, ask students to brainstorm what they think constitutes a good political decision. How would you know if the government is making a good decision? Give students chart paper, sticky notes or a digital brainstorming tool to record their thinking. These can be short phrases (e.g. common good, everyone is happy), single words (e.g. fair, well-researched, smart) or sentences (e.g. makes good financial sense, there were many voices heard, a lot of people will benefit).
3. As a class, create a checklist of criteria for what constitutes a good political decision. This can be digital or on paper and students may wish to tweak it as the activity continues. Make sure to keep this posted in a visible location.
4. Distribute a copy of the handout **Making a good political decision** (Appendix F) to each group.

Teacher note: The group handout has space for five criteria. Students may select the five from the class list they prefer, or the class can narrow down to five that on which most students agree.

5. Tell students that they will now consider a political decision that needs to be made that affects three electoral districts. Using the criteria of a political decision they co-created, they will try to make a good political decision.

Teacher note: *It may or may not have emerged from previous lessons that a key feature of democracy is that sometimes there are winners and sometimes there are losers when decisions are made. Members of a democracy compromise and recognize that sometimes their needs are sacrificed when a decision is made.*

6. Distribute copies of **Electoral district profiles** (Appendix E) for the following provincial ridings to each group:
 - a. **Kiiwetinoong**
 - b. **Parry Sound—Muskoka**
 - c. **Chatham—Kent—Leamington**
7. In their groups, students will deliberate over where the government should increase its health funding based on the electoral district profiles. They can record their thoughts in Part B of the group handout, **Making a good political decision** (Appendix F). Groups will then present their decision explaining how they met the criteria. They can use Part C of the group handout to plan their talking points.

Consolidation

1. Using the sample ED profiles from the previous activity, students will conduct some research into their own electoral district. This can be where they live or the one in which their school is located.
2. They will complete the **My electoral district profile** (Appendix G) handout using their research and then consider which issues are the most significant in their ED.

Using their own background knowledge and some additional research, students will rate the issues on the significance scale. The **Electoral district profiles** student handout has many issues already entered but there is also space for students to enter their own thinking about issues that are important in their districts.

Teacher note: *Remind students of the levels of government responsibilities; review the list of provincial responsibilities to refresh their memories of what issues the province can address.*

3. This activity can be completed in pairs, small groups or individually. For each significance rating, students should explain their thinking with at least one fact from their lived experience in the riding (electoral district) or from their research.

Assessment

Distribute an **exit card** (Appendix H) to each student and ask them to reflect on their learning.