

Lesson: Are Canada's and Ontario's political processes and structures fair?

Big idea

Democracy and fairness are generally expected to go together. But what is fairness in a democracy? What role do democratic institutions, structures and processes play in ensuring fairness? Canadian democracy depends on citizens agreeing and accepting that its laws, institutions, and political process promote fairness. Thus, it is important to define what fairness is within Canadian democracy. Evaluating Ontario's electoral processes, government responsibilities and governance structures can help to determine whether fairness has been achieved. When it is determined that something is unfair, how can it be rectified? This may require a reimagining of political structures and processes.

Curriculum connections

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events, and developments of civic importance

A1.4 use the concepts of political thinking when interpreting and analysing evidence, data, and information relevant to their investigations; evaluating and synthesizing their findings; and formulating conclusions, predictions, and judgments about issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance

B2. Canadian and Indigenous Governance Systems: explain, with reference to a range of issues of civic importance, the roles and responsibilities of various institutions, structures, and positions in Canadian and Indigenous governance systems, treaty relationships, and other Crown-Indigenous relations

B2.2 explain, with reference to issues of civic importance, the roles and responsibilities of the two orders of government in Canada (federal and provincial), as well as of territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments, and of key positions within each

B2.3 describe Indigenous governing systems and structures, both those created by the *Indian Act* and those that predate or exist alongside the Act, and how they interact with the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments of Canada, and explain how treaties, Crown-Indigenous relations, and/or Indigenous claims to sovereignty affect a region of their choice in Ontario or Canada

B2.8 describe Canada's form of government, and demonstrate an understanding of the electoral process and the formation of governments in Canada

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- consider how fairness can be defined in a democracy
- apply the criteria for fairness to Ontario's electoral processes and system, Crown-Indigenous relations and the roles/responsibilities of government
- analyse how fairness could be achieved by reimagining political structures and processes

Success criteria

I can:

- create criteria for fairness in a democracy
- use criteria to evaluate whether Ontario's political structures and processes are fair
- select an unfair structure or process and explain how fairness can be achieved using criteria

Inquiry question

Are Canada's and Ontario's political structures and processes fair?

Required materials

1. Slide deck – [Principles of Democracy](#)*
2. Appendix A Student worksheet – [Investigating Canada's and Ontario's political structures and processes](#)
3. Stations
 - a. [Station 1](#) (Appendix B)
 - b. [Station 2](#) (Appendix C)
 - c. [Station 3](#) (Appendix D)
 - d. [Station 4](#) (Appendix E)

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

Minds on

1. Assign each student in the class to a partner.
2. Assign each partnership a space on the class blackboard or whiteboard. Or if you have multiple small whiteboards, give one to each partnership. Alternately, students can be given pieces of chart paper or butcher paper. If devices are available, a digital bulletin board or collaborative document can be used.
3. Ask students: What does the word ‘fair’ mean to you in a democracy? Students brainstorm with their partner and then record their responses in their assigned spots.

Teacher note: *If students have completed Lesson 1 of Elections Ontario’s Grade 10 educational resources ([How do the principles of democracy apply to my life?](#)), have students recall the principles learned in that lesson to refine their explanation of fairness in the context of a democracy. If students have not completed Lesson 1, the teacher can use the [Principles of Democracy](#) slide deck* to help students get thinking about what fairness would entail in a democracy.*
4. After recording their responses, students are asked to review their peers’ responses for the following: similarities, differences, and surprises. Students can do this by walking around to the assigned spots, reviewing the chalkboard or whiteboard in the class or accessing the digital product created by each partnership.
5. As a class, create a list of criteria for fairness in a democracy. Keep this posted in a visible location for the remainder of the lesson. Students might come up with criteria such as:
 - a. Everyone is treated equally
 - b. Everyone has equal opportunity
 - c. Inclusivity
 - d. Everyone benefits
 - e. One group is not favoured over another group
 - f. Honesty and transparency
 - g. Promises should be kept
 - h. No discrimination

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

Activity

1. Explain to students that they will now be investigating case studies about Canada's and Ontario's political structures and processes in order to evaluate whether they are fair. Students will then select one case study at the end of the lesson to evaluate independently and brainstorm ideas for things that can be done to "make it fair".
 2. Organize four stations around the classroom.
 - a. Station #1 (Appendix B)
 - i. Copies of **Case study #1: Elections Ontario processes**
 - ii. Device to play videos:
 1. **Accessible Voting video*** (Elections Ontario)
 2. **Ontario Register of Future Voters video*** (Elections Ontario)
 3. **Chief Electoral Officer video*** (Elections Ontario)
 - iii. **Voting in Ontario package** (Elections Ontario) (optional)*
 - b. Station #2 (Appendix C)
 - i. Copies of **Case study #2: First Nations governance**
 - ii. Copies of **Government of Canada Press Release: Canada and Anishinabek First Nations sign historic self-government agreement**
 - iii. Device to play video:
 1. **The Indian Act: A summary** (Canadian Encyclopedia via Historica Canada)*
 - c. Station #3 (Appendix D)
 - i. Copies of **Case study #3: Division of powers in Canada**
 - ii. Copies of the **Constitution Act 1867 (Section 91 and 92)**
 - d. Station #4 (Appendix E)
 - i. Case Study #4: **Copies of Ontario's electoral process**
 - ii. Copies of **Samara Canada's background on proportional representation**
 - iii. Device to play video:
 1. **TVO video: First Past the Post***
- *Available online at: elections.on.ca/learning
3. Students will rotate through the stations using the worksheet, **Investigating Canada's and Ontario's political structures and processes** (Appendix A). At each station, students can work independently or share ideas with other peers who are at the same station.

Teacher note: *The teacher can use this time to gather both observational and conversational evidence of student learning in real time.*

4. After an agreed upon time at each station, ask students to form partnerships or small groups to review their thinking. They can self-assess their work against others in the class and revise any of their thinking at this time.

Teacher note: Consider forming the students into four groups and assigning one of the case studies to each group to become experts by sharing their thinking with each other. Then, these groups can verbally present the case study and their thinking on whether fairness is reflected.

Consolidation

Making it fair

Organize students in partnerships or small groups. Students will select one of the case studies they feel represent an unfair political structure or process. Students will brainstorm with each other about direct actions that could repair and/or prevent the unfairness. Students should ask each other:

- From whose perspective is this unfair?
- What criteria of fairness are not being met?

After students have had some time to consider the questions above, distribute chart or butcher paper to each group (or have them use a digital space to brainstorm). Label the paper or the digital space “I wonder what might happen if...”

As students talk, have them record their ideas on paper or in the digital space. They should think in terms of “I wonder what might happen if...” to think about possibilities. Have students display their thinking for their peers to review at the end of the thinking session.

Assessment

Quick write

Ask students to stop and reflect in writing on what they are learning. Set an agreed upon time with students – three to five minutes is usually sufficient.

The teacher can say, “For the next three to five minutes, I want you to think about one of the case studies studied in this lesson. Jot down your thinking about whether fairness was achieved in the structures and political processes involved, connecting to specific criteria for fairness in a democracy.”

The teacher can collect the Quick Write and provide written feedback.