

Lesson: What is a strong democracy?

Big idea

While democracy is an established form of government that has a long history, it is never a guarantee. Citizens have a duty and responsibility to strengthen democracy and keep it healthy, as do elected governments not only in Canada but around the world. In the 21st century, new forms of media have presented both benefits and challenges for democracies.

These can present opportunities for citizens with similar and differing beliefs and values to engage with one another, the government, and other institutions more easily. At the same time, digital/social media platforms can spread misinformation and disinformation that weakens democracy and undermines democratic institutions. It is important for people to engage in civic action and to know their rights and responsibilities of citizenship in order to keep democracy strong and healthy.

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

A1.2 select and organize relevant evidence, data, and information on issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance from a variety of primary and secondary

sources, including media forms such as social and traditional media, ensuring that their sources reflect multiple perspectives

B3. Rights and Responsibilities: analyse key rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship, in both the Canadian and global context, and some ways in which these rights are protected or may be infringed upon

B3.2 analyse key responsibilities associated with Canadian citizenship

B3.5 analyse rights and responsibilities of citizenship within a global context, including those related to international conventions, laws, and/or institutions

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- identify signs that a democracy is healthy and strong or weak and distressed
- identify examples of democracy in action in Canada

Success criteria

I can:

- explain the characteristics of a strong and healthy democracy
- explain the characteristics of a weak or distressed democracy

- use media sources, including social media, to locate examples of democracy in action and label those actions as examples of strong/healthy or weak/distressed

Inquiry question

What is a strong democracy?

Required materials

1. Slide deck – [Principles of Democracy*](#)
2. Appendix A Student handout – [Democracy scale](#)
3. Appendix B Teacher resource – [Sample case studies](#)
4. Appendix C Student handout – [Democracy in action](#)

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

Minds on

Teacher note: *If students have completed Lesson #1 ([How do the principles of democracy apply to my life?](#)), review the principles of democracy to refresh student memory. Skip to Step #2 below.*

1. Show students the slide deck, [Principles of Democracy](#),* and briefly discuss how each one is necessary for a democracy to be healthy and strong. Explain to students that all citizens have a responsibility to keep democracy alive and well. Consider making a list together of words or phrases associated with a strong democracy and then a list of words and phrases associated with a weak democracy.

2. Next, tell students they will consider events from democracies around the world as well as in Canada and place them on a scale from Healthy/Strong to Weak/Distressed using the [Democracy scale](#) handout (Appendix A). This can be done individually or in groups.

Teacher note: *Three [sample case studies](#) (Appendix B) are included for reference. Students can search for current events using news sources online or newspapers brought into the classroom.*

3. In their partners or small groups, students should locate a news story that provides an example of democracy being strengthened or weakened. They should gain a basic understanding of an event and determine where it should be placed on the scale from Healthy/Strong to Weak/Distressed. They will write the name of the event on the scale once they have made their decisions.
4. Discuss student placement on the rating scale after they have finished the task. Encourage students to share their events and ratings with an explanation. Come to a class consensus on where each event should be placed as much as is possible and keep the class copy in a visible location for the remainder of the lesson.
5. Add to the class list of words/phrases associated with strong/healthy and weak/distressed democracies now that students have been exposed to the case studies. Students can add these words along the top and bottom of their rating scales.

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Activity

1. Distribute copies of the student handout, **Democracy in action** (Appendix C) to students. They should work in partners or small groups, but this activity can also be completed individually.
2. Students will use print, and/or online news sources, including social media, to find examples of the principles of democracy in action – these can be examples of the principle being practiced in a strong and healthy way or examples in which the democratic principle is weak and distressed.

Teacher note: *There are several accommodations that can be made to this activity to meet student needs. The teacher can pre-select the news stories and provide print copies to each student or small group. Alternately, the teacher can provide a small selection of news stories and complete the activity with the whole class, reading the news sources together and completing the handout together.*

If available, devices can be given to students and the teacher can briefly explain how to identify a reliable source before beginning this activity. There are many online resources on how to locate credible sources and identify misinformation/disinformation that can be used.

3. Ask each student or small group to present one news story to the class and connect it to one of the principles of democracy, explaining whether it shows a strong/ healthy democracy or one that is weak/ distressed.

Consolidation

Four corners

To check for students' understanding of the principles of democracy and how they can be strengthened or challenged, use the four corners of the room as designated areas. The areas are: Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Students go to the corner that matches their choice regarding the statement and discuss.

Here are some examples of statements.

- a. Canadian democracy is strong and healthy.
- b. Democracies around the world will continue to be democracies forever.
- c. A healthy democracy means people vote.
- d. I have a role to play in keeping democracy strong and healthy.
- e. Weak and distressed democracies cannot be saved.
- f. Democracies around the world have a responsibility to help other democracies stay healthy.
- g. I can recognize the signs of a weak or distressed democracy.

Assessment

The Four Corners assessment allows teachers to gather observational information and conversational assessment information by engaging students with questions that delve deeper into the student learning. An exit card or quick write can follow responding to the lesson's inquiry question ("What is a strong democracy?") to provide more assessment information on student learning.