

Lesson: What role do political parties play in Canadian democracy?

Big idea

A political party is a group of members who have similar beliefs and values that try to win elections and influence policy decisions. It can be confusing trying to understand the difference between the different parties in Ontario, and even more so trying to compare them to their federal counterparts. Understanding the role political parties play and how they are governed is a key aspect of civic literacy. Voters, when they turn 18, should make informed decisions at the ballot box. This means learning about where the parties stand on issues of civic importance like health care, education and the environment. Learning how to have political conversations and sharing ideas about political ideas and events is also an important civic literacy tool. A civil society relies on being informed and being able to have civil conversations, respecting differences and sharing ideas.

Curriculum connections

B1. Civic Issues, Democratic Values: describe beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, and explain how they are related to civic action and to one's position on civic issues

B1.1 describe some civic issues of local, national, and/or global significance, and compare the perspectives of different groups on selected issues

B1.5 communicate their own position on some issues of civic importance at the local, national, and/or global level, explaining how their position is influenced by their beliefs/values

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

B2.1 identify the political parties in Canada and their position on the political compass, and explain objectively how the beliefs/values that underpin these parties may affect their perspectives on and/or approaches to issues of civic importance

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- understand the roles and responsibilities of various institutions like Elections Ontario and political parties
- identify the political parties in Ontario and Canada and their beliefs/values and approaches to issues

Success criteria

I can:

- explain the role institutions like Elections Ontario and political parties play in governing the province of Ontario
- explain the main party ideas and compare them to each other
- analyse and explain party approaches to issues of civic importance at the political party

Inquiry question

What role do political parties play in Canadian democracy?

Required materials

1. Appendix A Student handout - [Anticipation guide - Political parties](#)
2. Slide deck - [Political parties in Ontario*](#)
3. Appendix B Student handout - [Preparing for the political party](#)
4. Appendix C Student handout - [My political appointments](#)
5. Appendix D Student handout - [Confer, compare, clarify](#)

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

Minds on

1. Distribute a copy of the [Anticipation guide - Political parties](#) (Appendix A) to each student. Tell students to complete the 'before lesson' section. The teacher can keep a tally of how many students voted True or False for each question visible in the class. There are online polling tools available as well.
2. The teacher can decide to partner students and have them complete online research to find the correct answers and supporting details for each statement. Then, students can form small groups to compare their findings. A whole class discussion can follow to review the correct responses.

3. Alternately, the teacher can review the slide deck [Political parties in Ontario](#)* with the class and students can self-assess their initial responses in the Anticipation Guide with the information presented. Students can use the information in the slide deck to gather the supporting information for each statement.
4. Discuss with students which statements were confusing, had the most misperception among students before the lesson and/or which supporting information was surprising.

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Activity

1. Invite students to a Political Party that will take place on an agreed upon date.

Teacher note: *The political party can be as simple or as complex as the teacher and students wish it to be. Some possibilities are:*

- *Students can plan creative fashion choices for the party like wearing party T-shirts or all the same colour clothing*
 - *Refreshments can be served – it could be a tea party or dinner party*
 - *Music can be played while guests mingle*
2. At this party, students will represent political parties. Each student will be assigned to a political party and complete research with the rest of their party members. The teacher can use many ways to assign students to parties such as numbering students, having students pull party names out of a hat, etc.

3. Once students have been assigned to their parties, distribute the student worksheet [Preparing for the political party](#) (Appendix B) to each student. Students then work together to prepare their talking points for the party.

Teacher note: *Students can use online resources like party websites, news articles and videos, as well as social media posts from real party members, to complete their research.*

Although federal and provincial parties are different, their ideas are generally similar so students can use research about Canada's national parties to help with grasping the big ideas.

4. The teacher can circulate while students are researching to help answer any questions and make some observational assessments about whether students are grasping the big ideas from each party. Encourage students to work individually or with one other party member at the beginning in order to generate the most amount of research.
5. When students have completed their research, have them discuss with their entire party to make sure they are all on the same page.
6. Announce the beginning of the party. Distribute a copy of [My political appointments](#) (Appendix C) to each student and have them circulate in the class making appointments with members of other parties at the beginning of each stage.

7. For each stage, present the students with a political conversation topic. The topic should connect to one of the big party ideas (e.g. economy, environment, health care, etc). Consider using current events as inspiration for these topics. Then set a timer to allow them to network and converse. A reasonable time is 2-3 minutes. Allow students time to reflect on their conversations at the end of each stage and complete their **My political appointments** **handout**.
 8. After four stages, the party is over. Students can say goodbye to their fellow attendees!
 9. Provide time for students to finalize their **My political appointments** **handout**.
5. Ask students to join other pairs, creating groups of four, and share their summaries.
 6. Each student then takes a few minutes to record any questions they have regarding the party system and party ideas. Students then share their questions with each other
 7. Ask one volunteer from each group to share their group questions, creating a class list of questions.
 8. Address the questions with the class through a whole group discussion.

Consolidation

Confer, compare and clarify

1. Distribute a copy of the handout **Confer, compare, clarify** (Appendix D) to each student.
2. Ask each student to write down a one-sentence summary of what they believe was their greatest learning from this lesson.
3. Ask students to pair up. They do not have to pair with people from their party. Any partner is fine.
4. Students will compare their summaries. Let students know that they are encouraged to borrow ideas from their partners and add them to their own.

Assessment

The teacher may collect the Appendix B handout, **Preparing for the political party** (one from each group) before beginning the party with the class to gain formative assessment data on students' ability to grasp the main party ideas. The teacher can then address any gaps before moving on to the role-playing in the party activity.

The teacher may collect the Appendix C handout **My political appointments** from each student and provide formal written feedback on student learning.