

■ GRADE 9-12: CIVICS / HISTORY

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

**Purpose:** Students will create a timeline of events highlighting the milestones of voting rights in Canada and the journey First Nations and Inuit Peoples took before they were granted the right to vote. Within this timeline students will explain the evolution of roles, rights and responsibilities.

**Instructional method(s):** Timeline development, research, independent or collaborative work

**Estimated time:** 90 minutes

**Activity:**

1. To help students understand what it feels like to be disenfranchised, hold a class vote. What the vote is about is not as important as the process of preventing some students from participating in the vote.
2. Predetermine select students who will not be allowed to participate in the vote, but do not reveal this to the class. When it is time to vote, proceed as normal by having students either vote by show of hands or by ballot. Either way, when the predetermined selection of students try to vote, tell them that they cannot vote unless they give up something they value (e.g., a month of Saturdays to schoolwork, a full week of evenings, involvement with a school sports team or club, etc.). If they do not agree to give something up they are not allowed to vote. Be firm with these students. Taking into account the reaction of your students, finish the voting process then address the class or begin a class conversation on disenfranchisement before the vote is finished.
3. Explain to students that for almost 100 years after Confederation, First Nations People were not allowed to vote unless they gave up their treaty rights and renounced their status.  
Ask students:
  - a. What does it mean to you to have the right to vote?
  - b. What are treaty rights? (e.g., inherent, collective rights that stem from the original occupation of Canada. These rights are agreements between First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples and the Canadian government that cover land rights, hunting and fishing rights, and more.)
  - c. What does it mean to renounce status? (e.g., giving up rights.)
  - d. Who, in Canada, has the right to vote? (e.g., Canadian citizens over the age of 18.)
  - e. Has this demographic always had the right to vote? Provide examples.
4. Tell students that they will be researching the evolution of First Nations and Inuit Peoples receiving the right to vote in Canada by examining the changes in roles, rights and responsibilities for these voters. Then they will plot the key milestones on a timeline. Students may work individually or in small groups to make an 8 ½ x 11 inch paper timeline, large Bristol board sized timeline or, as a class, a wall mural-sized timeline. Students may also examine how First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples achieved the vote in general or look at the path First Nations or Inuit Peoples took to receive the vote. The timelines will be shared with the school community to raise awareness so students may also consider using multiple mediums to appeal to many types of learners.
5. Students should highlight the key moments in the evolution and explain the circumstances and beliefs behind the moments. For each point on the timeline have students consider who, what, when, where and why.
6. Key moments and facts in the evolution for First Nations and Inuit Peoples to receive the right to vote (mainly federally) include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Pre-Confederation—Mainly men were allowed to vote since property ownership or assets of a certain value or a specific threshold for taxes and/or rent were required in order to vote.
  - b. 1867—Confederation regulated these rights so that males who were property owners and 21-years of age or older, could vote. However, they deferred to the provinces to set the rules. First Nations People and any person "residing among Indians" were not allowed to vote.
  - c. Between 1867 and 1920 only 250 "Indian" persons were eligible to vote in all of Canada.
  - d. In British Columbia, Chinese and Japanese descendants were not allowed to vote (this lasted until 1948). Other minority groups across the country were also unable to vote.
  - e. 1885—The Franchise Bill allowed any male over 21-years of age who was a British subject by birth or naturalization to vote, but this still excluded all First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples.
  - f. 1917—The Military Voters Act allowed all "military voters" the right to the vote. This included British subjects, male or female, actively serving in or retired from the Canadian Armed Forces including any First

Nations or Inuit Peoples and those under 21 years of age. There was no residency requirements attached to eligibility.

- g. 1918—Women receive the right to vote if they are 21 years of age or older, British subjects by birth and meet any provincial property requirements.
  - h. 1934—The Dominion Franchise Act explicitly disqualified First Nations and Inuit Peoples from voting in federal elections.
  - i. 1948—Following World War II, where many First Nations and Inuit Peoples served with distinction, Inuit People received the right to vote. However, First Nations People were denied unless they renounced their treaty rights.
  - j. 1960—All First Nations and Inuit Peoples were granted the right to vote in federal elections without restriction.
  - k. 1949-1969—All provinces granted First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples the right to vote. British Columbia being the first province and Quebec the last.
  - l. 1970—People aged 18 to 20 received the right to vote.
  - m. 2002—Convicted felons received the right to vote in federal elections.
7. Allow students time to research and compile their timelines.
8. Once the timelines are completed, ask students to hand them in to ensure their understanding. Display the completed timelines in the classroom or hallway to share the important milestones with the rest of the school community.
9. To conclude the lesson, ask students to explain the importance of all Canadians having the right to vote.

Educator's note: Métis Peoples voting rights followed essentially the same rules and restrictions as all Canadians since they weren't covered by treaty rights. An important vote many Métis People participated in took place when Louis Riel was elected to parliament in 1873.

## ■ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the lesson plans, share these resources with your students:

Canadian Encyclopedia:

- "Aboriginal Rights" [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca)
- CBC Digital Archives [www.cbc.ca/archives](http://www.cbc.ca/archives)
- "Expanding the Franchise: Aboriginals and the Vote" [www.histori.ca](http://www.histori.ca)
- Elections Canada "A History of Voting in Canada" [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)