The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom. In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

**Core Skill Sets:** These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at [www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/](http://www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/).

**Key Terms**

- **Civics**—The study of governmental systems, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- **Curriculum**—The subjects one studies in school.
- **Democracy**—A system of government where all citizens may participate and choose their representatives for government through free and universal elections.

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**Background Information**

- Canada is a constitutional monarchy. The official ruler of our country—our Head of State—is the Queen of England. The Monarch is represented in Canada, in our parliament, by the Governor General. ([Elections Canada](https://www.elections.ca/))
- Canada's constitution was established in 1867 and approved by the parliament of the United Kingdom. Canada was a colony of the UK, all laws had to be approved by the Monarch and UK parliament. In 1982, Canada patriated the constitution, giving Canadian parliament the power to make laws without further approval. ([Canadian Encyclopedia](https://www.canada.ca))
- Canada's system of government is based on the UK. National laws are made by parliament which has two parts, or “houses”—the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons is made up of 338 representatives—called Members of Parliament (MP)—who represent specific geographical areas called ridings. The Senate has 105 members, or Senators, who are appointed by the Governor General following the recommendations of the Prime Minister. ([Elections Canada](https://www.elections.ca/))
- The Prime Minister is Canada's Head of Government. Under the constitution, a government can be formed by any Member of Parliament who has the “confidence” of parliament—meaning they have the support of at least half the MPs. By tradition (not law), government is formed by the political party that has the most representatives in the House of Commons. The leader of this party becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then chooses their ministers, usually from members of her/his political party. ([Elections Canada](https://www.elections.ca/))
- The Prime Minister is referred to as “the first among equals” because although s/he is the leader of their party, s/he is just a Member of Parliament. Canadians do not vote directly for our Prime Minister the way Americans vote for their President. ([Library and Archives Canada](https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca))
- The election system used by Canada's national and provincial governments is often referred to as “first past the post.” In each riding, the candidate who gets the most votes becomes the MP for that riding. And the political party with the most winning MPs becomes the government. However, this means a party can become the government even if less than half of voters chose that party. ([Huffington Post](https://www.huffpost.com))
- In the last national election, Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau—now Prime Minister—promised to change Canada's national election system to a system like proportional representation or a ranked ballot. ([Huffington Post](https://www.huffpost.com))
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

• Themes: Education, Politics, Local Issues
• Course Connections: Civics, English, Canada and World Studies

MATERIALS

• Front board
• Paper and writing utensils
• Computer/tablet with Internet access

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:
• Recognize the importance of active citizenship
• Understand the way Canadian government is formed and works
• Develop an understanding of how bills are formed and passed into laws

DISCUSS

1. What does it mean to be a Canadian citizen? What responsibilities do you have as a Canadian citizen? What are the differences in citizenship between someone who is born in Canada and someone who immigrates and obtain Canadian citizenship? Consider process and expectations.
2. How can we as citizens get involved? Why is it important to have well informed and involved citizens?
3. In the Global Voices article “Canada gets poor grade in civics literacy” Tidridge is quoted to say “[Youth] have no knowledge of how to engage with their democracy.” Do you agree? Explain your answer.

DIVE DEEPER

Engage students in a civics lesson by holding a House of Commons style bill debate or have students participate in the deserted island government activity from the article.

Activity A

For a House of Commons style bill debate students will model the second reading of a bill proposal. Divide students into three or four uneven groups that will represent the current political parties in Canada. For authenticity, have students research and calculate the proportions for each group based on the election results.

Next, have students research how debates take place in the House of Commons. Create a clear set of rules and expectations based on this research.

Select a topic for debate. In the House of Commons this would take the form of a bill. In the first reading of a bill the party presenting it provides it to the whole House for consideration. Parties and Members of Parliament then have time to research, poll and consider constituents and form opinions and arguments for or against the proposed bill in preparation for the second reading when the bill will be discussed and debated.

Topics may be classroom or school related or consider using one of the following:
• Mandatory voting for citizens aged 19 or older
• Lowering the voting age to 16 years of age
• Changing the voting process to proportional representation
• Changing the voting process to ranked ballot
• Making voting electronic or online

Allow students time to research the proposed bill and consider the stance of the party they are representing. Groups should develop arguments, counter-arguments and decide on members who will voice them.

Hold the debate. After the debate, discuss the process students took preparing for and holding the debate. What do they think of the process? Were they aware that this is how bills are passed and laws are made? What would they do differently? What do they think are the next steps for the bill?

Activity B

For the deserted island government activity have students work in groups of two to four. Reread the following to the class:

“You’re stranded on a deserted island with 100 others. Organization is vital for survival. How will you choose a leader and make group decisions? What laws will you pass for your little society?”

Allow groups time to create their plan for government and governing. Students may use the Internet for research. After the allotted time has passed, have students present their ideas to the class.

Then reflect as a class on the similarities and differences between the groups. Consider how Canadian government and governing currently works, what is different or similar to the group presentations?

As a class, vote on a whole style or components from a selection that they think form ideal government and governing.

RESOURCES

Parliament of Canada, “Making Canada’s Laws”
www.lop.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/GuideToHoC/making-e.htm

Waterdown Civics www.waterdowncivics.org/