

Lesson 4

Our Voices, Our Democracy



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ❶ **How can we have our voices heard in our democracy?**
- ❷ **Why is accountability and transparency important?**
- ❸ **What would I like to see addressed in Budget 2020?**

OVERVIEW

All citizens in a democracy have a responsibility to uphold and support the guiding principles of democracy, including fundamental freedoms, citizen participation, and government accountability and transparency.

In the opening activity, students discuss different ways to influence government-decision making. Students examine the concept of fiduciary duty and the responsibilities of elected representatives and citizens in democracy. Afterwards, students participate in the 2020 Student Budget Consultation survey. In the culminating activity, students reflect on what they want to see addressed in the upcoming budget and what they have learned through this experience.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- Analyze why it is important to be an active and engaged citizen;
- Explain the concept of fiduciary duty;
- Demonstrate critical thinking and decision-making skills about public policies; and,
- Identify where they fit on the political spectrum.

Starter

1. As a class, brainstorm different ways that citizens can participate in their democracy and influence government decision-making. Examples include voting in elections, joining demonstrations and protests, starting a petition, meeting with your elected representative, and participating in government consultations or providing feedback to government officials.
2. Invite students to share any stories they have about participating in democratic processes and discuss the importance of being an active and engaged citizen.

Activity

1. Explain the concept of **fiduciary duty** in relation to elected representatives. Both elected members and ministers are in a fiduciary relationship with Canadians, based upon the trust granted to them to act solely in the public's interest, and not in their own best interests or special interest groups (e.g., corporations, advocacy groups, unions, lobbyists).
2. Using Think-Pair-Share, ask students to discuss the following:
 - What values and principles do you think are important for governments to uphold?
 - How do we hold government officials accountable for their actions?
 - Why is it important for citizens to share their interests and concerns with elected representatives?
3. Introduce the process of the Student Budget Consultation survey.
 - Students will be asked to respond to questions about spending decisions and budget priorities.
 - Their opinions, along with thousands of other students throughout Canada, will be shared with the Department of Finance, and all political parties, so that they can see what matters most to young Canadians.
 - After completing the survey, students will have a chance to preview some of the results to see where they sit on the political (economic) spectrum and see how their views compare to other young Canadians.
4. Provide students with 15-20 minutes to fill out the 2020 Student Budget Consultation survey, and an additional 5-10 minutes to review how some of their responses compare to other young Canadians who participated in last year's Student Budget Consultation.

TEACHER NOTES

- The online survey is compatible with smartphones and tablets.
 - Background information is provided within some questions to provide context and support critical thinking.
 - Paper copies of the survey are available on request. Please contact CIVIX at 1-866-488-8775 or by email at hello@civix.ca to coordinate timing.
5. Have a closing discussion about participation in the consultation and the results of the political spectrum questions.
 - Were you surprised about where you sit on the political spectrum? Do you think it is accurate?
 - Did you feel more strongly about some value statements than others? Explain.
 - What priorities would you like to see addressed in Budget 2020?
 - Why do you think it is valuable to participate in government consultations?

Consolidation

Have students fill out the reflection card (Activity 4.1).

- Three things I learned about federal budgets in Canada;
- Two priorities I would like to see addressed in the 2020 budget; and
- One way that this experience has developed my opinions or helped me better understand my own political viewpoints.

Extension Activity

Organize a 'Rep Day' meeting with your Member of Parliament to foster a discussion about budget priorities and issues of concern among students. Ask students to create a presentation outlining the budget priorities of the class. Activity 4.2 could be used to support this preparation.

In advance of the meeting, review the role and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament and ask students to prepare questions based on what they have learned about the budget process. See Slide Deck F for supporting information.