



## Global Voices Information Sheet

### Voter Apathy and the Canadian Federal Election



A child soldier in Sierra Leone

#### Background Info

- Sierra Leone is a country in West Africa that is rich in mineral resources, including diamonds.
- In 1991, rebel forces, The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attempted to overthrow the government and sparked a gruesome, eleven-year civil war.
- Initially, rebels took over territory that was rich in diamonds in Eastern and Southern Sierra Leone.
- In 1996, the government held an election with the slogan “The future is in your hands.” An elected government was then installed, but eventually violence erupted again.
- Rebel forces forcibly took thousands of child soldiers, often giving them drugs to make them angry, and forcing them to kill their parents.
- Young Santosh refused to fight with the rebels, and his hand was cut off.
- The civil war ended in 2002, but 50,000 people were killed.
- In Libya and Syria, citizens are rallying against corrupt governments and encountering violence.
- Canada’s federal election is on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Voter turnout has been on the decline, with the election in 2008 seeing historically low numbers. Canadians have rights that others are dying for.

#### Key terms

- **Apathy**— a state of indifference, showing a lack of concern, motivation, excitement or passion.
- **Subvert**— undermine the power and authority of an established institution, such as the government.
- **Compulsory voting**—a system in which eligible voters are obligated to vote in elections. If an eligible voter does not go to the polls, he or she may be subject to punishment.
- **Solidarity**— union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests. This could be between members of a group, or between people or countries.
- **Electorate**— the group of people entitled to vote in an election (for example: those over the age of 18).
- **Civic duty**— the feeling that voting should be valued for its own sake and for the sake of the overall well-being of the community.

## Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

### Note to Educators:

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. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

### Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: voting, the Canadian Federal Election, Prime Minister, election, democracy, political parties and politics.
- Course Connections: Language, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and Social Studies.

### Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Global Voices column

### Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

### Knowledge and Understanding

1. Voting (estimated time: 30 minutes)
  - a. Begin a discussion on voting by asking students if they have ever voted. Encourage them to brainstorm voting situations at school, at home in family decisions, at clubs etc. Record these suggestions on the board.
  - b. Ask students the following suggested questions about voting:
    - i. What is democracy?
    - ii. How are democracy and voting related?
    - iii. Why is voting important?
    - iv. What are the consequences if you choose not to vote?
    - v. What event is taking place in Canada that requires voting?
  - c. Explain to students that it is important to vote for the following reasons:

- i. The right to vote is a fundamental democratic right that is protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. It is the cornerstone of democracy.
    - ii. When we vote, we choose the representatives who will make the laws and policies that govern how we live together.
    - iii. The legitimacy of a government lies in the fact that it is elected. Low voter turnouts may call into question this democratic legitimacy.
    - iv. While democracy involves much more than holding elections every five years, voting is a powerful way to send a message to governments and politicians. The more votes, the more powerful the message is. In other words, every vote counts.
    - v. Compared to other forms of political participation, voting does not require a lot of time or effort – in other words, it is one of the easiest ways to have a say in how your society is governed.
  - d. Explain to students that voter turnout has been on a steep decline since the mid 1980s. Ask students the following suggested questions around this subject:
    - i. What are the voter eligibility requirements in Canada?
    - ii. What does it mean for the government and for the public when less people are voting?
    - iii. Being under the eligible voting age, what role can we play in the upcoming election?
    - iv. When you are of voting age, do you think it's important for you to vote?
  - e. When this discussion is complete on chart write the title: "I Pledge to Vote"
  - f. Ask students to come up to the front of the room one at a time and sign their name to this document, committing to place their vote when they are of voting age.
  - g. After each student has signed the document, discuss the importance of this commitment as a class.

## Thinking

1. Guided Reading: The Global Voices Column (estimated time: 20 minutes)
  - a. Have students sit in a circle and distribute one copy of the Global Voices column to each student.
  - b. Pre-reading steps:
    - i. Make predictions: ask students to read the title of the column and view the pictures. After doing so, ask them to make predictions as to what the column is going to be about.
    - ii. Introduce vocabulary from the column.
    - iii. Assess prior knowledge: ask students to discuss what they already know about these topics.
  - c. Reading steps:
    - i. Go around the circle and have each student read a section of the column to the class, so that everyone gets a turn to read.
    - ii. As students are reading, offer guidance and coaching by providing prompts, asking questions, and encouraging attempts at reading strategy application.
  - d. Post reading steps:
    - i. Encourage students to provide a summary of the column in order to ensure they have understood the series of events.
    - ii. Ask questions about the text to judge comprehension.
2. Media Literacy (estimated time: 15 minutes)
  - a. Divide the class into small groups and distribute chart paper to each group.
  - b. On the chart paper, ask each group to write the heading of the column in the center of the page.

- c. Ask each group to write all the words that come to mind after reading the column around the center title, creating a word web.
- d. When students have completed their word webs, ask them to answer the following questions in their groups:
  - i. What is the message of this column?
  - ii. Who created this message?
  - iii. What creative techniques are used to attract the readers' attention?
  - iv. How might other people understand this message differently than me?
  - v. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in this column? Which ones are left out?
  - vi. What statistics or facts are listed in the column?
  - vii. Why has this message been created?
  - viii. Do you agree with this message?
  - ix. What do you know? What are you unsure of? What would you like to know?
- e. As a class, discuss the students' word webs as well as their answers to the above questions. Discuss why it is important to understand the source and potential bias of a resource offering news information.

## Communication

1. Cookie Monster Election (estimated time: 30 minutes)
  - a. Explain to the class that they need a new classroom helper who will act as an assistant to the teacher.
  - b. Announce that Cookie Monster and The Countess are in the running for this position and that we can only select one of them.
  - c. The Cookie Monster's promise is: "a cookie for every student!" He intends to deal with problems and difficult work by handing out cookies to those in need of help. The Countess's promise is: "You can count on me!" promising to help students think about how to solve problems and to teach them how to find the right answers.
  - d. Discuss with the class which candidate would be most helpful in specific situations using the following suggested questions:
    - i. In what situations would the Cookie Monster's leadership tactics benefit the class the most?
    - ii. In what situations would the Countess's leadership tactics benefit the class the most?
    - iii. In the short term, who provides the best solution?
    - iv. In the long run, who provides the best solution?
  - e. Place a ballot box at the front of the room. On a blank piece of paper ask students to write the names of both of the candidates, placing a check mark beside the candidate they would like to vote for.
  - f. When the voting polls have been closed, ask two student volunteers to count the votes, revealing each candidate's total and the winner to the class. Discuss the results as a class using the following suggested questions:
    - i. Is anyone disappointed by the results?
    - ii. Is anyone excited about the results?
    - iii. How is the class going to benefit from the results of this election?
    - iv. How are the dynamics of the class going to change now that this candidate has been elected into this position?
  - g. Ask students to relate this voting experience to the one happening today for the Canadian Federal election.
  - h. Create small badges for each student in the class reading: "I voted." Ask students to wear these badges on their shirts for the remainder of the day.

## Application

2. The Canadian Federal Election: Homework Assignment (estimated time: continuous project)
  - a. Explain to students that when they go home tonight they are required to watch the happenings of the election and discuss these events with their family.
  - b. Students must watch the election on the news and the internet and collect the following information:
    - i. The winner of their local riding.
    - ii. The voting results in terms of winning party, opposition, number of seats etc.
    - iii. The elected Prime Minister.
  - c. Students must also perform a short interview with one of their family members, asking them the following questions:
    - i. How do you feel about the election results?
    - ii. How will the election results affect you and your family?
    - iii. What would you like to see come out of this federal election?
  - d. Encourage students to collect any evidence they can from the evenings events in terms of statistics, notes, newspaper columns etc. and bring them into class the next day.
  - e. Ask students to come into class the following day, ready to have an active discussion around everything they observed the night before.

## Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Free The Children – [www.freethechildren.com](http://www.freethechildren.com)

Elections Canada - <http://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>

The Liberal Party of Canada - <http://www.liberal.ca/>

The Conservative Party of Canada - <http://www.conservative.ca/>

The NDP Party of Canada - <http://www.ndp.ca/>

The Bloc Quebecois Party of Canada - <http://www.blocquebecois.org/accueil.aspx>