



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 2nd. 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 Secondary 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: Canadian and World Studies, English, Mathematics, Civics, Social Sciences and Humanities, and Technological Education.

Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Computers and internet
- 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: 15 minutes)
 - a. Ask students to explain why it is important to vote, particularly addressing why it is important to vote in this Canadian federal election.
 - b. Add to students answers with 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.
- c. 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?
 - d. When this discussion is complete on chart write the title: "I Pledge to Vote"
 - e. 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.
 - f. After each student has signed the document, discuss the importance of this commitment as a class.

Thinking

1. Reading Comprehension: Global Voices Column (estimated time: 15 minutes)
 - a. Pre reading steps:
 - i. Introduce the topic and encourage students to discuss what they already know about the topic, making prediction around what the column is about.
 - b. Reading steps:
 - i. Read: students must read the text independently, highlighting important points throughout the column.
 - ii. Ask: students must ask themselves what the story is about, recording five questions they are unsure of after reading the column.
 - iii. Paraphrase: encourage students to write point form notes in their own words around what the column is about.
 - c. Post reading discussion:
 - i. What are the main points of the column?
 - ii. What emotions did this column evoke in you?
 - iii. What problem is identified in the column?
 - iv. What questions do you have about the column?
2. Media Literacy (estimated time: 15 minutes)
 - a. Ask students to practice their media literacy skills by working independently to identify the following:
 - i. Title: include the full title of the article (also called the headline).
 - ii. Author: give the author's full name.
 - iii. Newspaper: the full name of the newspaper from which the column is taken.
 - iv. Date: the day the column appeared in the newspaper.
 - v. Subject: the overall topic that the column is describing.
 - vi. Event: what event led to the writing of the column?
 - vii. Main Idea: identify what the author is proving or arguing. Is the author trying to convince readers to take a side? If so, what option is the author encouraging?

- viii. Evidence: list several facts/arguments that support the main idea and help to convince the reader or inform them of the issue. Does the author provide enough factual material to support his/her ideas?
 - ix. Significance: explain why this issue is important and whom it may affect.
 - x. Point of View: is the article, in your opinion, true, balanced or biased? Are different viewpoints presented? Which viewpoints are left out?
- b. When this is complete, bring the class back together and discuss student answers.

Communication

1. Preparing for the Election (estimated time: 1 hour)
 - a. Ask students to explain how a voter must prepare for the election. Write suggestions on the board.
 - b. Ask students to write a brief outline of the different political parties of Canada and their platform for the election. Encourage students to use the party websites to find out this information:
 - i. The Liberal Party of Canada - <http://www.liberal.ca/>
 - ii. The Conservative Party of Canada - <http://www.conservative.ca/>
 - iii. The NDP Party of Canada - <http://www.ndp.ca/>
 - iv. The Bloc Quebecois Party of Canada - <http://www.blocquebecois.org/accueil.aspx>
 - c. Send students to the general election information for voters page on the Elections Canada website - <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&lang=e>
 - d. Ask students to search through the website and gather all the appropriate information they would need to know if they were heading to the polls to vote.
 - e. Ask students to record this information in a short report.

Application

1. 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 on the news and the internet. As they are doing so, they must 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.
 - iv. Reactions of their local community.
 - v. Reactions of the country.
 - vi. What the results mean for Canada.
 - b. Encourage students to collect any evidence they can from the evenings events in terms of statistics, notes, newspaper columns etc.
 - c. 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

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>