

Democracy in Action

Imagine if you wanted to join a team and you were told, “No, you can’t!” Would that seem fair to you? If you didn’t agree with the reasons you were being told “No,” is there some action you could take?

On these two pages, you will learn about a girl who was in that exact position. When she and her parents were told “No,” they didn’t give up. They believed that what they wanted was fair and just.

“I can play, but may I?”

In 1983, Justine Blainey was 10 years old and a gifted hockey player. To improve her game, she went to hockey school and decided to try out for a boys’ team.

After winning a place on the Metro Toronto Hockey League team, Justine was shocked to learn that she would be benched forever. No matter how well a girl played, only boys could join the Hockey League. Although she was well qualified, Justine would never have a chance to play.

- Was what happened to Justine fair? Explain.
- What action do you think Justine could take?
- What would you do if you were in Justine’s position?



She Could Play Hockey

Justine and her parents decided to fight for justice. They complained to the Ontario Human Rights Commission. But the Commission could not help because an Ontario law stated sports teams could **discriminate** on the basis of gender. That meant they could legally refuse to let girls play on their teams.

Justine's family **challenged** the Ontario law. Her parents hired a lawyer who went to court five times to argue that Justine should be able to play on the boys' team. Each time, the court ruled against Justine. Eventually, the case reached the Supreme Court of Canada, the highest court in the country.

The judges of the Supreme Court said that, according to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, everyone has the right to fair and equal treatment. They ruled that the Ontario law ignored Justine's equality rights under the Charter. Because of the ruling, it is no longer legal to exclude girls from participating on male teams.

Today, Dr. Justine Blainey-Broker shares a chiropractic practice with her brother and continues to promote equality through public speaking.



words matter!

When you **discriminate** against someone, you treat them in a certain way because of their race, gender, age, or other factor.

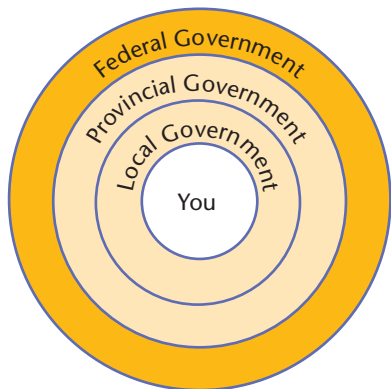
To **challenge** a law, you go to court to try to get it changed.

? Inquiring Minds

Having the right to fair and equal treatment is an important part of living in a democracy. In this chapter, you will be learning about democracy and rights. As you read the chapter, think about the following questions:

1. Why is it necessary to set out rights and freedoms in a democracy?
2. How can active citizens bring about change in a democracy?

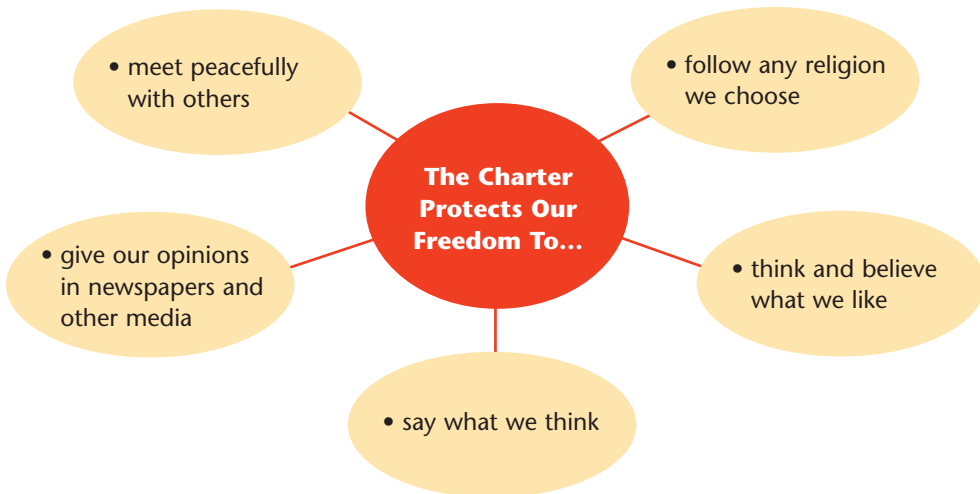
What Are Our Rights and Freedoms?



How was Justine's case an example of democracy at work? Democracies protect the rights of all citizens. The most important source of people's rights in Canada is the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Identify the images on the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Why do you think each image was chosen?

The Charter is a document that protects the essential rights and freedoms of people living in Canada. It begins by naming the freedoms. A freedom is the ability to choose for yourself what to think, say, or do.



Individual Rights

Most rights and freedoms in the Charter protect individuals. These Charter rights and freedoms are known as **individual rights**.



This Montreal woman is protesting against global warming. Her sign reads, "With love, for the health of the world." How are her actions an example of freedom of expression?

Section 1 of the Charter guarantees our rights and freedoms. It also states that they are "subject to reasonable limits." In other words, the government can limit a person's right or freedom, but it must show why the limit is necessary. For example, your freedom to state your opinions and speak out on issues is limited by the rights of others. This is why it is against the law to try to ruin a person's reputation by writing or saying things about the person that you know are not true.

More About . . .

Charter Rights

Everyone in Canada has certain rights. But only citizens have democratic rights and mobility rights. Democratic rights allow citizens to vote. Mobility rights give citizens the right to travel freely within Canada and to move anywhere in the country to live and work. Citizens can also enter, remain in, or leave Canada whenever they wish.

words matter!

Individual rights are rights that you are entitled to as a person. One of the jobs of government is to identify and protect people's individual rights.

Thinking It Through

1. What rights do you have at school? Are there any limits to these rights?
2. What limits might there be to the freedoms shown in the web on the opposite page?
3. Why is it necessary to have limits on rights?

Equality Rights

words matter!

Equality means treating everyone the same regardless of factors such as gender, race, or religion.

Accommodating the needs of others means adjusting or changing the way something is done so that everyone has an equal chance.

Equality, or regarding all people the same, is an important value to most Canadians. Equality is an example of a right that is protected by the Charter. Equality means that all Canadian laws must treat each individual with dignity and respect, regardless of the person's race, religion, national or ethnic origin, colour, gender, age, or physical or mental disabilities.

When citizens in a democracy believe that they are being denied these rights, they can seek protection. In Justine's case, she and her family went to court. They sought protection of Justine's right to equality through the court system. How had an Ontario law taken away Justine's equality right?



Canadians of all abilities share the same rights.

The Charter protects individuals' right to equality, but does that mean that everyone receives the same treatment? Treating people equally means providing each individual or group with respect and equal opportunity. For example, some people or groups have a disadvantage or special disability that others do not have. In this case dealing with them equally would not be treating them fairly. Treating people or groups with special needs equally means **accommodating** their disabilities.

Under the Charter, a program that tries to help disadvantaged groups is allowed. For example, a company could have a policy that encouraged hiring people who were members of a group that had suffered past injustices.

Collective Rights

You have looked at rights that the Charter gives to individuals. Some rights, however, are also given to groups. These are known as **collective rights**. Collective rights are based on the idea that a certain group has a claim to particular rights.

The Charter gives collective rights to Aboriginal people and to English- and French-speaking people. The collective rights of these groups are rooted in the history of Canada.

words matter!

Collective rights protect a group. Individuals who are part of a group that has collective rights are entitled to these rights.

Aboriginal Rights

Many Aboriginal people argue that they have certain rights as the original occupants of the land that is now Canada. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed. It ruled that Aboriginal people have rights to their traditional territories even where there are no treaties. Exactly what these rights mean is still being worked out by Aboriginal people, the federal and provincial governments, and the courts.



These demonstrators are holding a rally in Vancouver to raise public awareness about Aboriginal rights.

In one famous case, Donald Marshall, a member of the Mi'kmaq nation, was charged with breaking fishing regulations. He was found guilty in Nova Scotia courts, but he appealed his case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. Marshall argued that treaties from the 1760s gave him the right to catch fish for sale and excused him from fisheries regulations. The Supreme Court ruled in Marshall's favour. Many non-Aboriginal fishers were angered by the decision. They argued that Aboriginal fishers should have to follow the same rules as everyone else.

Language Rights

The Charter identifies French and English as Canada's **official languages**. Both languages have equal status in the Government of Canada. This means that our representatives in Parliament can speak French or English during discussions and debates. Also, people can communicate with the federal government in English or French. The Charter recognizes the rights of the English- and French-speaking communities because of the unique role each played in the founding of Canada.

words matter!

An **official language** is a language that has been given legal status.

Equity means treating people fairly. Sometimes accommodations need to be made so that things will be equal or fair for everyone.



All government-related signs and literature must appear in both official languages.

Thinking It Through

Explain how accommodating certain groups in society and protecting collective rights show that the Charter supports the democratic principle of **equity**.

Democracy and Participation

Democracy is different from other forms of government in that all citizens can participate in shaping their communities and society. They can participate in making and changing the rules they live by. The more people participate, the more democratic a society becomes.

When people become involved in an issue that benefits them personally, their actions often benefit others as well. Justine Blainey won the right not only to play hockey herself, but for other girls to play as well. Wheelchair ramps and elevators can be used by everyone, not only people who have a disability. When citizens participate to make things better for many people, they are contributing to the **common good**.

words matter!

The **common good** is a condition that benefits the majority.



Thinking It Through

1. Clean air is an example of a common good. How does clean air benefit the majority?
2. What are other examples of a common good? How does each example benefit the majority?

Governments promote the common good by creating parks so that people can be active in the outdoors. Citizens can contribute to the common good by using litter bins and keeping parks clean for others to enjoy.

Contributing to Community

Richard, Marie, and Jana have just visited the site of a new youth recreation centre in their community. Their city council plans to renovate a historic building and make it the new youth centre. Once on the site, the students discovered a problem.



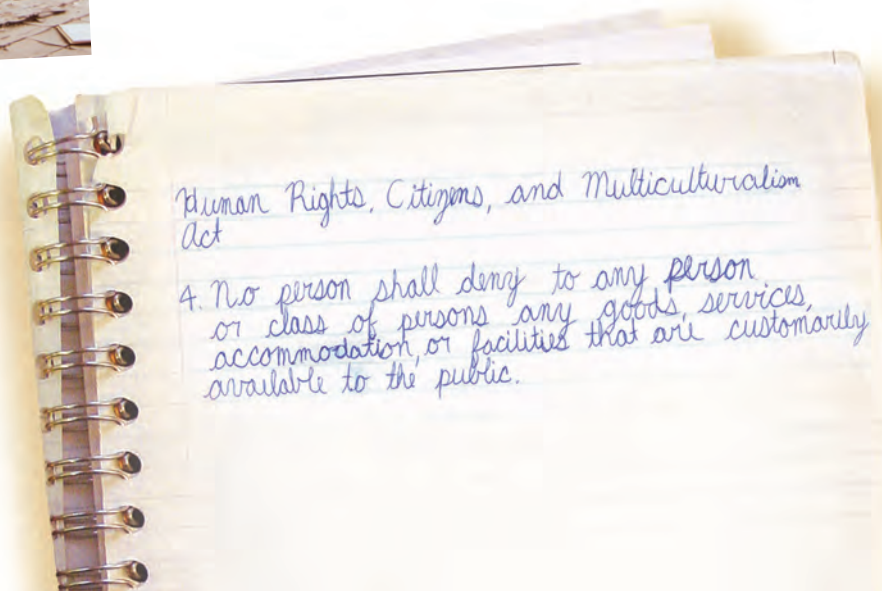
JANA: *Only Marie and Richard could actually enter the building. Because of my wheelchair, I couldn't get in! It's an old house that was built in the days before people thought about wheelchair access.*

RICHARD: *We've been studying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and we know that it forbids discrimination against people with disabilities.*

MARIE: *Richard's mother is a lawyer, so we asked her if we could use the Charter to get the city to build ramps and install elevators. She said the first thing we should do is check to see if there is a local bylaw or Alberta law that forbids this kind of discrimination. After all, the Charter is the last step in fighting discrimination. We have to research that first.*

Richard went to the library to research provincial laws that forbid discrimination on the basis of disability. Read his notes below to learn what he discovered.

Richard's photo of the inside of the recreation centre.





Mr. Kahn explained that a class of persons means a group of people.

RICHARD: *So that means that people like Jana would definitely be protected under the law in Alberta. I have a question, though, Jana. I hope you won't be offended by it. I heard somebody say that people shouldn't have special rights and that construction plans shouldn't have to be changed just because of a few people.*

JANA: *That's okay, Richard. I have heard it all before. Look at it this way. What if it were a school that I couldn't attend? Or a medical clinic? Then I wouldn't have access to the services I need, and I wouldn't have the same opportunities other people have. I can't get another pair of legs. So I need special protection to give me an equal chance in life. That's why the Charter says no one can discriminate against people with disabilities.*

MR. KAHN: *The word you are looking for, Jana, is equity. Equity means everybody starts with an equal chance. For example, if you couldn't even get on a bus, imagine how many other things you might be prevented from doing. Some people need to be accommodated so that things will be fair for everyone.*

Jana, Marie, and Richard decided to write to the mayor and councillors. They explained that people with disabilities had a right to use the centre. The mayor contacted them personally. He assured them that the building would include ramps, an elevator, and open-door buttons. He thanked them for their input.

MR. KAHN: *Ramps and elevators are designed to help a minority of people with particular needs, but in this case, you can see how everyone benefits from these features.*



Mr. Kahn

Over to You

1. What have you learned about equity by reading about the community centre?
2. In a group, brainstorm situations that you see as being unfair for some people.
3. Discuss these situations and how accommodations might be made.

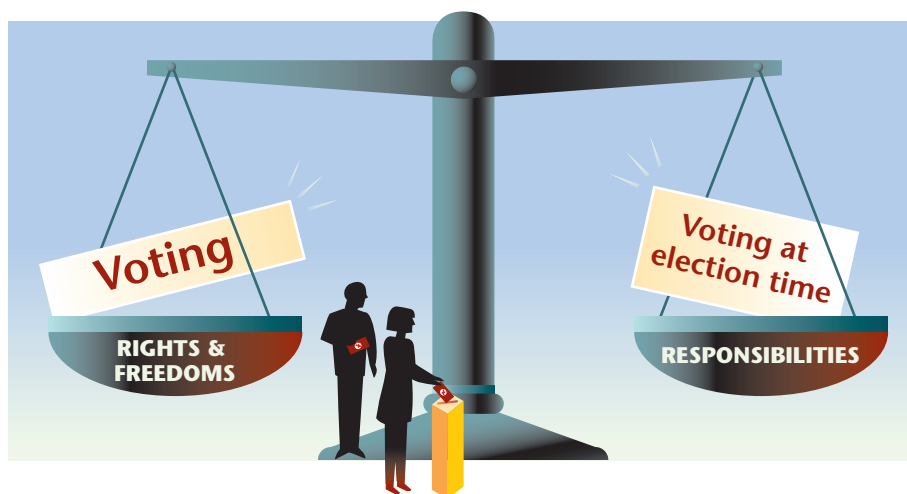
What Are Our Democratic Rights?

Do you think the following situations should be allowed in a democracy? Why or why not?

- Only some citizens are allowed to vote.
- Only citizens born in the country are allowed to run for positions in government.
- An elected government decides that it will stay in power for 20 years without an election.
- A government is elected but years may go by without the representatives getting together to make laws.

There are three sections in the “Democratic Rights” part of the Charter that explain the democratic rights of citizens. See what the Charter has to say about the above situations.

Democratic rights of citizens	All Canadian citizens have the right to vote for representatives for federal and provincial government. They also have the right to run for office.
How often elections must happen	Federal and provincial elections must happen at least every five years. The exceptions are emergency situations, such as war, invasion, or rebellion.
How often government must meet	Federal and provincial governments must meet at least once every 12 months.



With rights and freedoms come responsibilities. What responsibilities can you suggest for some of the other rights and freedoms that you have read about?

Participation and Voting

Imagine if every time a decision was made in Alberta, everyone in the province came together to discuss it. Where would they all meet? How would people take turns talking? Making decisions this way is not practical.

In Canada, we choose people who form the government and they make decisions for us. This is called **representative democracy**. These representatives have a responsibility to listen to the needs of all citizens. We choose our representatives by voting for them. Voting is a basic right in a democracy.

How might you participate in representative democracy? Imagine, for example, that a new school playground is being built. Your principal asks each Grade 4, 5, and 6 class to send one student to be on the playground planning committee. Your class votes for a representative who brings your ideas about the new playground to the committee meeting.

words matter!

In a **representative democracy**, citizens elect people to represent them in government. These people make decisions on behalf of citizens.

Speaking Out

There is no magical point when you hit eighteen that you suddenly become interested in politics and voting. It has to start really early.

Eryn Fitzgerald

More About . . .

The Right to Vote

In 2001, there was a municipal election in Edmonton, but Eryn Fitzgerald and Christine Jairamsingh could not vote because they were only 16 years old. In Canada, a citizen has to be 18 to vote. Eryn and Christine felt the law on voting discriminated against them because of their age. They took their case to court. The judge agreed that the 18-year-old voting age did violate equality rights in the Charter, but he concluded that the limitation on this right is reasonable. He said this limitation is meant to ensure that people who vote are mature enough to make good decisions.



Eryn and Christine's case made people think about what an appropriate age to vote might be.

Thinking It Through

Eryn and Christine's case shows that in a democracy, there are certain restrictions on what citizens can do. What are other examples of restrictions on actions? Why do you think these restrictions exist?

John Corbiere



John Corbiere (left) was the chief of the Batchewana Nation for many years. His son Gary Corbiere (centre) represented him in the Supreme Court of Canada.

On May 20, 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada made a decision that affected the voting rights of many First Nations people. Before this time only band members who lived on reserves were allowed to vote in elections for band chief and council. The person who brought this case to the Supreme Court was John Corbiere of the Batchewana Nation.

Many band members—more than half—do not live on reserves. John Corbiere argued it was unfair that these off-reserve band members did not have voting rights. “Membership in a band is ascribed [given to a person] at birth,” said Corbiere, “and that membership is secure whether or not the Indian was born on the reserve or ever set foot on the reserve land.”

Band elections were run according to Section 77 (1) of the *Indian Act* which stated that only those who were “ordinarily resident” on reserves could vote. The judges of the Supreme Court ruled that Section 77 (1) did violate equality rights under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The judges wrote in their decision that Section 77 (1) made it seem like off-reserve band members were less important than members who lived on the reserve. They decided that off-reserve members were being discriminated against. John Corbiere was very happy about the Supreme Court’s decision. He believed that his community’s government would be improved because of it.

Speaking Out

Democracy must prevail [win out]. It has to be one person, one vote. The best person, man or woman, who puts their name forward should win the position and they should establish a more democratic system on-reserve where all Indians are being served and all Indians are treated equally.

Harry Daniels, former president of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

Over to You

1. How did the Supreme Court judgment benefit people who lived both on and off reserves?
2. Although people who lived off reserve were given voting rights, they were still not allowed to run for chief or council. What might have been the thinking behind this decision?

Winning the Right to Vote

Christine and Eryn are not the first people to fight for the right to vote in Canada. For many years voting in Canada was restricted to certain groups. When people first started voting in Canada, only men from Europe who owned property could vote. For over a hundred years, individuals and groups have pressured the government to expand the right to vote to include more citizens. Over time, laws on voting have changed so more citizens can participate and share in decisions that affect them.

Skill Smart

Find out more about voting rights in Canada. Add three more items to the voting rights timeline on this page. Share your timeline items with your class and work together to create an expanded Canada Votes: Timeline.

These people are from the Rice Lake First Nation in Ontario. They are exercising their right to vote for the first time in 1960.

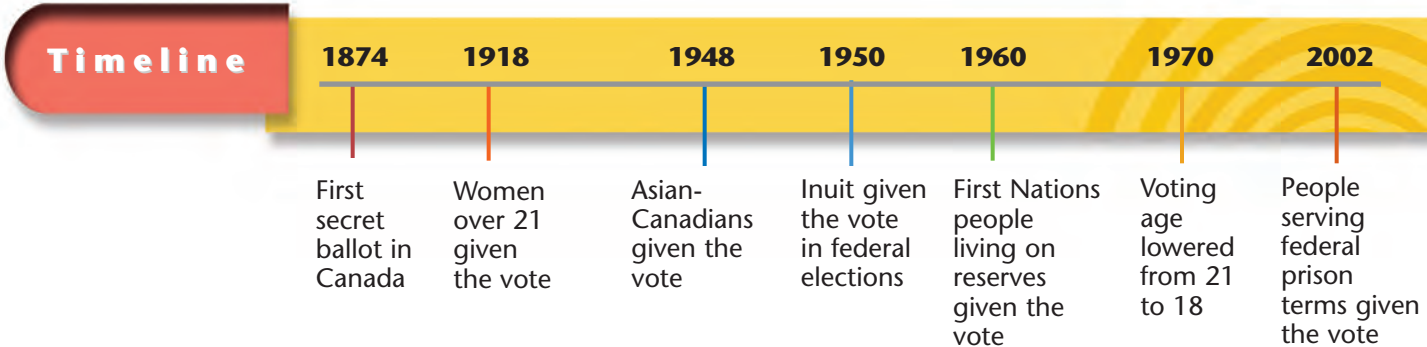


Nellie McClung worked hard to win the right for women to vote in Canada.

Thinking It Through

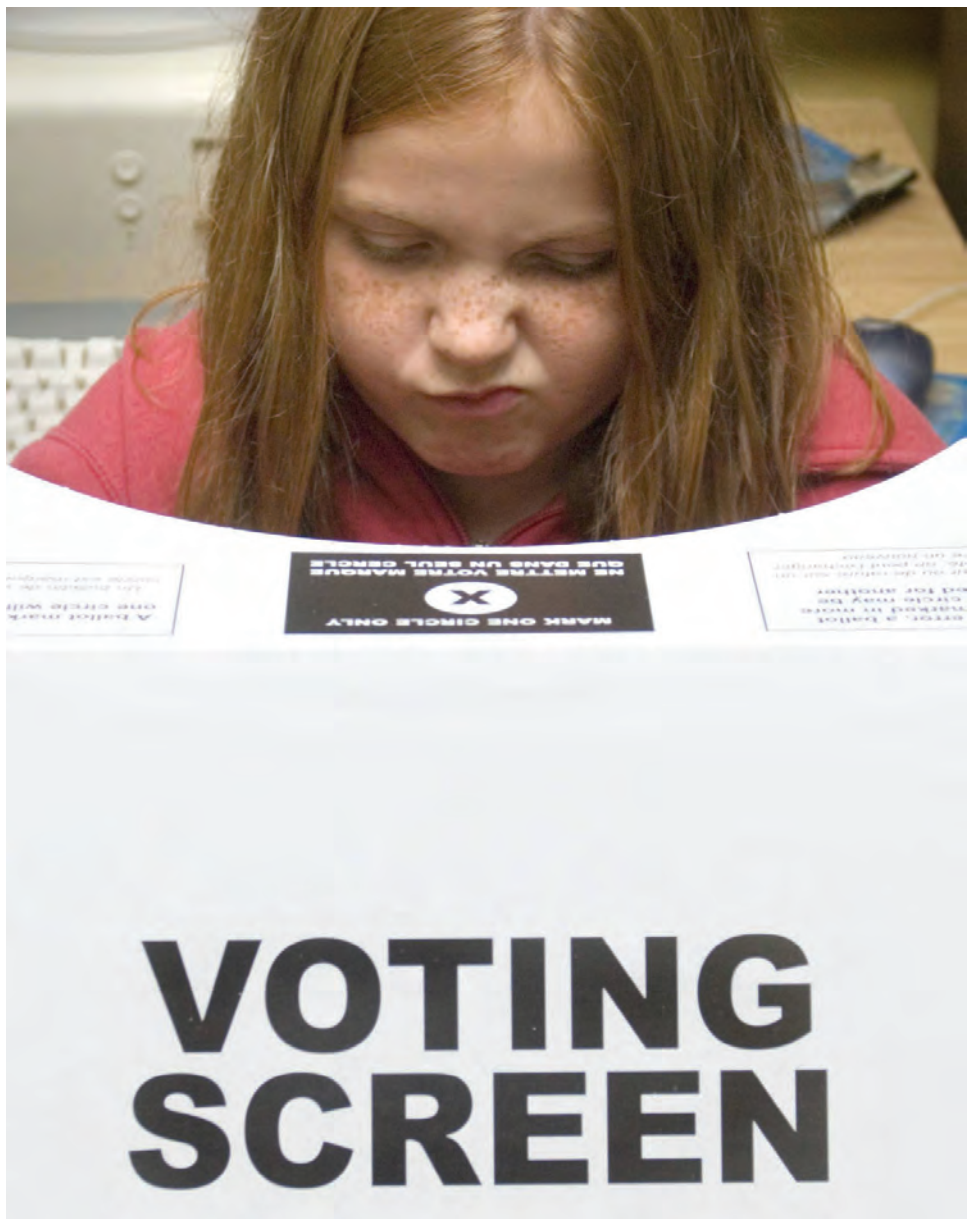
1. What groups in the past have not been allowed to vote in Canada?
2. Why do you think people fought to change the law to allow more people to vote?

Canada Votes



Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to 16?

Imagine that the Grade 6 students at your school are deciding where to go on a school outing. Only students who are aged 12 and over are allowed to vote on the choices the principal gave you. But you are only 11. How would you feel? That is how Eryn and Christine felt about not being able to vote. As a result of their actions, many people have started thinking about the voting age in Canada. Here are some of their points of view.





I'm 17 years old and if I wanted to I could quit school and get a job. Then I would have to pay taxes to the government. Right now I'm taking lessons to get my driver's licence. I'm also old enough to get married, although I don't want to right now. The point is, if I am old enough to do these things, why shouldn't I be allowed to vote?

Viewpoint 1



My concern is that young people don't know enough about politics or important issues to make a wise decision. I know some students have an interest in the environment and other issues, but many just don't care about politics right now. They don't have much experience. And they don't understand politics. I think 16 is too young for such a big responsibility.

Viewpoint 2



Last year our classroom set up an election. We created parties and chose leaders. We talked about some problems in our community and how the leaders could solve these problems. We even had a real politician come in and talk to the class. Then we all voted. I learned a lot. I'm not 16 yet, but I think I should be able to vote when I am.

Viewpoint 3



I think lowering the voting age is a good idea. Many of the laws affect 16-year-olds, so why shouldn't they have a say in these matters? The young people I talk to are very informed, they know a lot. If they have the right to vote, they will become more involved in their community. Some of them might even become our leaders.

Viewpoint 4

Over to You

If the voting age was lowered to 16, do you think some people might then want it lowered to 14 or even younger? Should there be an age limit? Have a class horseshoe debate on the voting age. What are your criteria for deciding on who is mature enough to vote?

words matter!

Suffrage means the right to vote. **Suffragettes** were women who fought for women's right to vote.

Skill Smart

Many newspapers have cartoons on their editorial pages. Editorial cartoons express a point of view about a current issue. They also use humour to entertain the reader.

- What details of the cartoon do you think the cartoonist included for humour?
- Cartoonists at this time were men. How do you think the cartoonist's gender might have affected his point of view?

This cartoon drawn in 1910 shows the mayor of Toronto and **suffragettes**. How does the cartoonist portray the suffragettes?



Early in Canada's history, many people believed that only men should participate in politics. However, by the late 1800s, women began to demand the right to participate in government. It wasn't easy for these women to get together to discuss important issues. Often husbands or fathers did not allow them to attend meetings. Some women decided to organize what they called Pink Teas. Women were invited for tea at places with frilly pink decorations. If any men came, the women discussed topics of interest only to women. If only women attended then the discussion usually turned to women's **suffrage**.



These women were organizing a meeting for women's suffrage in Newfoundland.

Getting the Vote

By 1918, some women in Canada had been given the right to vote in federal and provincial elections. Because of their religion, background, or country of origin, other women had to wait for almost another 50 years.

Women's Position in Canadian Society

Did you know that October is Women's History Month? Each year Status of Women Canada, an agency of the federal government, prepares materials that tell about women's history and their contributions to Canadian society. The poster on the right from 2007 celebrates immigrant women in Canada. Women's position in our society has changed dramatically since the days of the suffragettes.

- **Women's rights.** When the Charter was being negotiated in 1981, 1300 women went to Ottawa to demonstrate in favour of having sexual equality guarantees in the Charter. The result was section 28 of the Charter, which guarantees that rights and freedoms are guaranteed equally to men and women.
- **Women in government.** In 1929, five suffragettes won the right for Canadian women to be considered "persons" and be appointed to the Senate.
- **Women's education.** In the early 1900s, women were discouraged and even barred from studying in fields like business, medicine, engineering, and law. By 1998, over 55 percent of graduates at the university level were women. Today there are more women than men in law schools, and society encourages women to enter all fields of study.



The coloured bracelets on the woman's arm symbolize the diversity of immigrant women in Canada, who come from all the nations of the world. What do you think the woman's action represents?

Over to You

1. Why do you think women's suffrage led to changes in women's position in Canadian society?
2. Why is having equality between men and women a democratic value?
3. Why do you think the government started Women's History Month?

How Does Democracy Support the Rule of Law?

words matter!

The **rule of law** is a basic part of democracy. It means laws apply to everyone equally.

Have you ever played a game in which one player or one team didn't follow the rules? How did that change the game? How did you feel about playing the game that way?

About 800 years ago in England, the king did exactly that. King John made all the rules for the people of his country, but he didn't have to follow any of them. He taxed, arrested, and punished people for his own reasons.

In 1215, a group of nobles rebelled and forced King John to sign a document called the **Magna Carta**. In return, the nobles promised to be loyal to the king. The Magna Carta introduced the idea of the **rule of law**. This means that everyone, no matter how important she or he is, has to obey the law. The Magna Carta was really the first charter of rights.

More About...

The Magna Carta

The Magna Carta protected the rights of individuals in England long ago. One important idea from the Magna Carta is part of our Charter today. It protects the rights of a person who is arrested. The person must be told why he or she has been arrested and must be brought in front of a court and charged with a crime within a reasonable amount of time. Why is this rule necessary in a society?

The words Magna Carta mean "Great Charter" in Latin.

Making the Rules

To carry out the rule of law, certain steps have to be followed that allow people to participate fairly. Under the rule of law:



- Citizens have a say in making and changing the law. In a democracy, they make the laws, either directly or through the representatives they elect. If the representatives pass laws the people think are unfair, they may not be re-elected.

THEREFORE HER MAJESTY, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, enacts as follows: Recognition and declaration of rights and freedoms

1 It is hereby recognized and declared that in Alberta there exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms ...

— Alberta *Bill of Rights*

- People are informed about the law. In democracies, governments find ways to publish or announce laws so everyone has a fair chance of knowing what they are.

Thinking It Through

What are ways people can learn about new laws? Why is it important to know the law?



- People are treated equally under the law regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, gender, age, or mental or physical disability.

- People participate in applying the law. In many democracies, people accused of a crime must be judged by ordinary citizens like themselves. This group of citizens is called a jury. Members of the jury listen to arguments from both sides during the trial. Then, based on what they have heard, they decide on a person's guilt or innocence. In Canada, the identity of jury members is protected and juries cannot be photographed in the courtroom.

The idea of justice is often represented by the statue of a woman with a blindfold and scales. Why do you think the statue is blindfolded? What do you think she is weighing with the scales?



How Can People Make a Difference?

Being a citizen involves rights and responsibilities. Those responsibilities can go beyond casting your ballot or obeying laws. Sometimes they involve making our communities and the world a better place.

Speaking Out

Ryan treats everyone he meets in the same way. In his heart we all make a difference whether we are prime ministers, gas station attendants, or Grade 7 students.

Susan Hreljac, Ryan's mother

Skill Smart

The young people on these pages took action and made a difference. Use computer technology to create a comparison chart to summarize their projects. (See the Skill Power on pages 180–181.) The headings you use for your chart should reflect the kind of information that is given about all three projects. Compare your completed chart in a small group and evaluate your choice of headings.

Young and Determined to Help

Ryan Hreljac from Ontario decided to make a difference when he was only six years old. His teacher told the class about people in Africa having to walk many kilometres every day for fresh water. Ryan decided to raise money to help pay for one well. Soon, he had convinced his parents, brother, and many friends to help. Before long they were raising thousands of dollars for water projects.



Ryan (left) and his pen pal Jimmy. Ryan and his family have established an organization called Ryan's Well Foundation. The foundation has raised money and built many wells in a number of countries.

Volunteering to Help Others

When Amy Brandon was in high school, she noticed many special education students ate lunch by themselves. Then Amy read about a program called Lunch Buddies. Students in this program volunteered to meet and talk with special education students during lunch. Amy decided to volunteer too.

She liked the program so much she convinced many of her friends to join. Eventually Amy was in charge of the program. The number of volunteers grew from 10 to 40 and the special education students began feeling much more a part of the school.

Giving People a Voice

Alanis Obomsawin is a member of the Abenaki Nation. She grew up in Québec. When she was a young girl, she listened to the history of her people from the Elders. As Alanis grew older, she saw that these stories were not taught in schools. Alanis decided the best way to tell these stories to young children was by making films that everyone could see. The first film she made was *Christmas at Moose Factory*. It tells the story of young Cree children growing up in the community in James Bay, and some of the difficulties they have.

Alanis has since made more than 20 films about the history of First Nations people. These films have been seen by students across Canada. Alanis has received many awards for her work.



In the film *Christmas at Moose Factory*, young children tell about life in their community through drawings they have made.

Thinking It Through

1. How did Ryan, Amy, and Alanis contribute to society?
2. Why do you think Amy wanted students at her school to mix with each other? Who benefited from her actions?
3. Why do you think Alanis wanted to tell the story of her people? Why is it important for people to learn about the history of others?
4. Brainstorm things that you could do in your community to make it a better place.



Amy Brandon volunteered for a program in her school called Lunch Buddies. She also started a Lunch Buddies program in an elementary school in her community.

Speaking Out

The reason I make films is to give a voice to our people, a place to express themselves in dignity, to expose injustices (wrongs) and tell our history.



Alanis Obomsawin

Detecting Bias

Imagine you are reading an article or listening to a speech. Your first job is to understand what the writer or speaker is saying. Then you need to decide whether he or she has a particular point of view, or “bias,” toward the subject.

Compare these two sentences. Which writer do you think is giving a factual report of the event? Which writer do you think has a bias? Which words in the sentence show this bias?

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CITIZEN ACTION COMMITTEE COMPLAINED THAT HIS RIGHTS WERE NOT BEING RESPECTED.

ONE PROTESTER FROM A SMALL GROUP WAS CONSTANTLY WHINING ABOUT THE WAY HE WAS BEING TREATED.

Everyone has biases. You may have a bias toward a sport’s team in your town or city. You may think it is the best team even though it doesn’t win the most games. Your society or culture may bias you in favour of certain attitudes or beliefs.

When you do research, read newspapers, or watch the news on television, you need to be aware of the biases these sources may have. For example, a source may favour one political party over another, one viewpoint over another, or even one part of the country over another. Biased sources might present only one side of an issue, contain emotional language or exaggeration, or label people or groups.

Here are two photographs of a protest that might appear in a newspaper. How would each image affect your thinking about the protest?



Practise the Skill

How can you figure out if a source of information is biased? Here are some questions that you might ask yourself.

- What is the subject of this article?
- What is the source of this article?
- Does this source represent a viewpoint? If so, what is it?
- How does the language in the article support this viewpoint?
- Who is quoted in the article? Do the quotes support a viewpoint?
- Does any of the information in this source need to be checked for accuracy?

Use these questions to discuss the following selections about the Calgary Stampede. Do you think the selections are biased? Explain your thinking.

Stampede celebrating everything Canadian

Parade expected to draw hundreds of thousands

Source: CALGARY SUN

Hundreds of thousands of Calgarians and tourists are expected to flock downtown in the morning to jockey for a curbside spot at the annual kickoff to the Calgary Stampede.

The 150 entries include heavy horses, colourful floats, Treaty 7 First Nations in traditional dress, mounted colour parties, pioneers and descendents in vintage rigs and on horseback, chuckwagons and outriders, stampede royalty, antique vehicles carrying dignities and local celebrities and 20 marching bands.

Nine Horses Perish: Calgary Stampede Death Toll Continues to Rise

Source: PETA

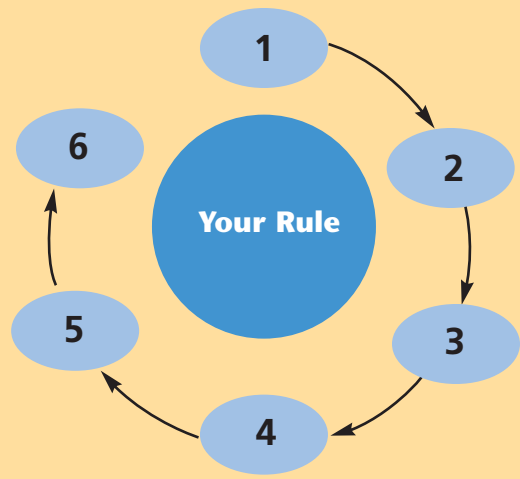
The Calgary Stampede touts [advertises] itself as the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth," but animals pay a high price at the annual rodeo and exhibition...The deadliest events in the Stampede are the chuck wagon races, in which teams of four horses pull old-fashioned "pioneer" wagons and race around a track at breakneck speed. Many horses have suffered and died during these races, including six in 2002 alone. There is nothing entertaining about a "sport" in which animals pay with their lives.

1. Use the questions in Practise the Skill to check for bias in an article you find in a magazine or newspaper or on the Internet. Consider how reliable the information is in the article.
2. Write a newspaper article about the Justine Blainey story. It can be either a biased or an unbiased article. Share your article with a classmate and have him or her identify whether or not the article is biased.

Explore More!

? Inquiring Minds

- In Getting Started, you talked about democratic values and principles. How does the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* reflect the values we share as Canadians?
 - Think about one rule you would like to change in your school. Write the rule in a circle on a sheet of paper. Now make a diagram around it showing the steps you would follow to change that rule using the democratic process. Discuss your steps with a classmate. Are there any steps you would change?



- Bias exists in newspaper articles, in speeches, and in people's points of view. Bias also exists in how we interpret photographs and pictures. Choose a photograph or picture from a book, a magazine, or from the Internet. Write two captions: one that expresses a particular bias and one that gives a factual interpretation of the picture or photograph.
- Identify the situations below as examples of equality or equity. Explain your thinking.
 - The girls' hockey team gets the same amount of ice time as the boys' team.
 - Grade 1 students have recess early so they can have a better chance to use the playground equipment.
 - Every student has to have a letter of permission from home in order to go on the class trip.

Your Turn

Find two examples of citizens in your community who have taken action to help others in the community. Look for examples in the local newspaper or on the Internet. For each example, find out what the issue or problem was. Who did the problem affect? Were people affected differently by the problem? What action did these citizens take? What was the outcome? Use computer technology to present the results of your research.



Democracy in Action Journal

Be on the lookout for situations around your school or in the community that seem unfair or unjust. Consider what actions you might take to help change the situation. Is it always easy to do the right thing? Discuss this question with your friends. Record your thoughts in your journal.

