

Exploring elections and democracy with language learners

By Zoe Flatman, Canada

Finding age-appropriate resources to engage language learners can be a challenge. Elections Canada provides educators with free classroom-ready resources to support literacy development. These resources support action-oriented approaches by providing tools and activities that engage language learners in meaningful conversations about elections and democracy in Canada.

Each resource includes teaching tips to support both oral and written language development. We provide several discussion protocols to develop students' speaking and listening skills. For example, a think-pair-share protocol is suggested in [Elections by the Numbers](#) to help students develop their ideas individually and then share them with a partner before discussing in a small group or with the whole class. This gives language learners the time they need to think through their ideas and select their vocabulary before speaking. It is also an opportunity to give students feedback on their oral communication skills. In addition to discussion protocols, helpful vocabulary lists and graphic organizers are provided to scaffold students' learning and help them collaborate and communicate, no matter their literacy level.

Regardless if students are Canadian, they can learn about the history of voting in Canada or ways to take civic action outside of voting. [Voting Rights Through Time](#) and [Civic Action: Then and Now](#) engage students in these complex ideas in simplified ways. These resources are available in language learner versions with fewer words, simpler sentence structures, and shorter activities. The critical thinking and age-appropriate conversations remain the same, but the text is more accessible. Conversations about inclusion and exclusion in Canada's democracy, or how students can take action to bring about change, will bring elections and democracy to life in language learner classes.

Other resources engage students in critical thinking and inquiry on elections and democracy with minimal reading and writing. For example, [Geography of Elections](#), [Elections by the Numbers](#), and [Mapping Electoral Districts](#) invite students to complete different types of analytical activities that support literacy and numeracy. Students interpret information on maps and graphs and represent data in infographics, Venn diagrams or maps. The emphasis is on critical thinking and collaboration about real world issues while exploring Canada and its democracy.



After an active lesson with plenty of conversation and interaction, it is important for students to have the opportunity to quietly reflect on and consolidate their learning. Each resource includes a personal reflection in the form of an action plan or exit card where students can respond to a choice of suggested prompts or sentence stems. This helps language learners to express their ideas while reducing barriers to self-expression.

Elections Canada's resources support language learners with an action-oriented approach to language instruction. They can be easily adapted to various age levels and provide a variety of strategies to support oral communication. Whether or not students are on the path to citizenship, instructors can engage them in conversations about Canada's elections and democracy.

About Elections Canada

Elections Canada is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for running federal elections in Canada. Elections Canada's civic education program provides information, tools and cross-curricular resources for teachers across Canada. The goal is to support instructors in preparing their students to participate in electoral democracy or understand the process in general regardless of eligibility. For more information or to order a free resource, visit electionsanddemocracy.ca.

Author Bio

Zoe Flatman is the Elections Canada Education Coordinator who has been providing professional learning services in the Greater Toronto Area since 2018. Zoe has more than 25 years of experience teaching for the Toronto District School Board and is a member of the Ontario College of Teachers. She has worked in a variety of schools with diverse student communities across Toronto. She has a passion for global citizenship and civic education. She has been a curriculum writer for the Ontario Ministry of Education and is a recipient of several awards for teaching excellence.

