

CHV2O Unit 2: Rights and Responsibilities

Activity 1: Democracy: Rights and Responsibilities

Overview

In this Activity, you will identify the rights and responsibilities of citizenship expected and practiced in Canadian society. You will first examine a variety of democratic "rights" that are provided to citizens and then consider responsibilities that should accompany these rights as part of the obligations of democratic citizenship. A study of the relationship between rights and responsibilities will not only be looked at in relation to Canadian society, but also applied to the context of briefly examining a high school setting. Finally, you will create a visual poster graphically depicting the relationship between rights and responsibilities in Canadian society.

Lesson

Democracy: Rights and Responsibilities



In a society such as Canada's, we have a number of rights, but with those rights come responsibilities to do certain things. In order to have a truly free society, we must adhere to both. But what do these terms mean?

Knowing Your Rights

As democracy has evolved, so have our ideas of what rights citizens should have. Today, democracies recognize a wide variety of rights such as civil, political and social.

Civil Rights: Emphasized in the 18th century, civil rights include equality before the law, liberty of person, freedom of speech, thought, and religion, and the right to own property.

Political Rights: The 19th century saw a shift in emphasis. Political rights include the right to participate in elections, run for office, hold office, and vote.

Social Rights: Today, the emphasis is on social rights, including the right to attain a certain standard of economic well being, and the right to participate fully in society.

Majority Rule versus Minority Rights

Ancient Athens called itself a democracy because all citizens could take part in political decisions. "All citizens" did not mean "all adults", however, and it definitely did not mean "all young people." Women, slaves, and residents from other Greek cities had no right to participate in government decisions. Young people were not allowed to participate either. In most early democracies, the rights of citizenship were limited, usually to adult men.

As time passed, however, expectations changed. Today, the rights of citizenship have been extended to a much greater number of people in democratic countries. When we say that, in a democracy, "the people decide," we assume that the majority of people make decisions. Nevertheless, many questions remain: How should decisions be made when different perspectives exist about a public issue? How do we ensure that the rights of minorities are respected?

Many democracies rely on a simple majority (that is, 50 per cent plus one) to make decisions when different opinions about a public issue exist. This is considered fair, and the majority is thought more likely to have the correct opinion than the minority. Majority rule means that the majority is entitled to have its way, even if the minority disagrees. Yet we also believe that all citizens have equal rights. How, then, can we ensure that the majority doesn't deny the rights of the minority? How can minority rights be protected, if the needs or wishes of the minority clash with those of the majority? This has always been one of the most difficult issues of democracy. As far back as the early 1800s, a French scholar named Alexis de Tocqueville traveled in the United States. Based on the new forms of democracy he saw there, he warned against "the tyranny of the majority."

As a result, documents such as the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** and the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** do more than lay out rights for the majority. They recognize the rights of all groups. In addition, minority rights are protected to some extent by the responsibilities that all citizens have.

Knowing Your Responsibilities

While citizens have rights, they also have responsibilities. Often the two are directly linked. For example, if we have the right to drive a car, we also have the responsibility to drive safely and obey traffic laws. If we have the right to vote, we also have the responsibility to use our vote to express our opinions in elections. With the privilege of free medical care and subsidized education that we enjoy as Canadians, comes the duty to pay taxes. Just as we are promised equality, so we are obliged to avoid discrimination against others.

Some of these responsibilities are drawn up in laws that can be enforced. Others are based on morality and social conscience - that is, on what we believe to be right and fair. Some are general responsibilities that include:

- becoming informed about the issues that our society faces
- listening to the ideas of others and respecting their rights
- using our skills and abilities in a socially useful manner
- being actively and thoughtfully involved in protecting our own and other people's rights
- participating in improving our communities

The Rule of Law: Let's look at responsibilities that are based in law. Democracies are governed by the rule of law. This means that there are laws that apply to everyone equally, including those in positions of power. The rule of law protects people from the changing whims of their rulers or leaders. In other words, the rule of law protects the rights of all citizens. At the same time, every citizen has the responsibility to obey the laws of the land. Laws carry consequences, including penalties, if they are disobeyed. For instance, law enforces speed limits on highways and roads, and speeders are fined if they are caught. There are other legal responsibilities. Every Canadian citizen, for example, has a legal responsibility to serve on juries when asked, to pay taxes and to assist police in maintaining order.

Assignment

Quiz: Do Schools Balance the Rights and Responsibilities of Students?

Answer True or False to the following quiz questions.

1. The police can arrest you for skipping school.
2. You do not have to go to school if your parents are teaching you at home.
3. Your principal cannot suspend you just because you swear in class.
4. No one is allowed to go through your personal things at home or in your locker.
5. You can be punished for expressing your opinions in class if they are not what your teacher believes.
6. Your teacher is allowed to hit you.
7. You can protest without fear of being punished if you feel your school is treating you unfairly.

Answers

1. **True.** Truancy is a crime.
2. **True.** If you are receiving 'satisfactory instruction' at home, you do not have to go to school.
3. **False.** You can be suspended for using 'profane and improper' language.
4. **True.** Technically, you are protected against 'unreasonable search and seizure.' What 'unreasonable' means, however, is debatable.
5. **False.** Technically, everyone has the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, although limits may be placed on this freedom.
6. **True.** Teachers are given the same power as parents, which include using force by way of correction, as long as the force is not unreasonable under the circumstances. Many school boards, however, will not allow teachers to use this power.
7. **True.** As a Canadian citizen, you have the freedom of peaceful assembly, but limits may be placed on this freedom.

Poster Assignment

Now that you understand clearly that democratic "rights" bring with them responsibilities, you are to create a visual poster titled "Rights and Responsibilities in a Democracy". Your poster will be submitted for evaluation and should include the following:

- Identify and list what you believe to be the 5 most important rights provided to citizens in a democratic state (captions and brief descriptions may be helpful here). For each right listed, include an appropriate visual image that symbolizes that democratic right.
- Include also a corresponding democratic responsibility that accompanies each right you have listed (again captions and brief descriptions may be helpful here). Select and include a graphic image that you believe symbolizes each of the responsibilities you have listed.
- Creativity and originality in design and layout should be evident. Your display should capture your viewer's attention and provoke thought.

Poster Rubric

Categories	Level 1 (50 - 59%)	Level 2 (60 - 69%)	Level 3 (70 - 79%)	Level 4 (80 - 100%)
Knowledge and Understanding Understanding of rights and responsibilities	- demonstrates limited understanding of rights and responsibilities	- demonstrates some understanding of rights and responsibilities	- demonstrates considerable understanding of rights and responsibilities	- demonstrates thorough understanding of rights and responsibilities
Thinking Uses critical and creative thinking process in connecting rights and responsibilities	- uses critical/creative thinking skills with limited effectiveness	- uses critical/creative thinking skills with some effectiveness	- uses critical/creative thinking skills with considerable effectiveness	- uses critical/creative thinking skills with a high degree of effectiveness
Communication Expression and organization of ideas and information about rights and responsibilities in written and visual forms	- expresses and organizes ideas and information with limited effectiveness	- expresses and organizes ideas and information with some effectiveness	- expresses and organizes ideas and information with considerable effectiveness	- expresses and organizes ideas and information with a high degree of effectiveness
Application Transfer of knowledge about rights and responsibilities to a new context	- transfers knowledge about rights and responsibilities to a new context with limited effectiveness	- transfers knowledge about rights and responsibilities to a new context with some effectiveness	- transfers knowledge about rights and responsibilities to a new context with considerable effectiveness	- transfers knowledge about rights and responsibilities to a new context with a high degree of effectiveness