



■ Messages about Democracy

What do you think about when you hear the word "democracy?" You may think about democracy as a form of government, but it is much more than that. **Democracy** happens when citizens have a say in decisions and in their **governance**, or the ways that they organize themselves in order to make decisions or accomplish goals. There can be evidence of democracy in many different places – in families, schools and communities.

Democracy can mean different things to different people. However, when democracy is defined and described, ideas like the following are often included:

- In a democracy, all citizens have a say in decision-making.
- People living in a democracy have the freedom to make choices and express opinions.
- In a democracy, there are equal rights and responsibilities for everyone.
- A democracy has a justice system that applies to everyone.
- In a democracy, the government is accountable, or responsible, for its actions and to the people.

What does a dictionary say about democracy?

a: government by the people; *especially*: rule of the majority

b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections

Merriam Webster Dictionary online: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy

1 Why does democracy need participation?



As you read, underline the words or phrases that you think are most important in helping you understand the meaning of "democracy."

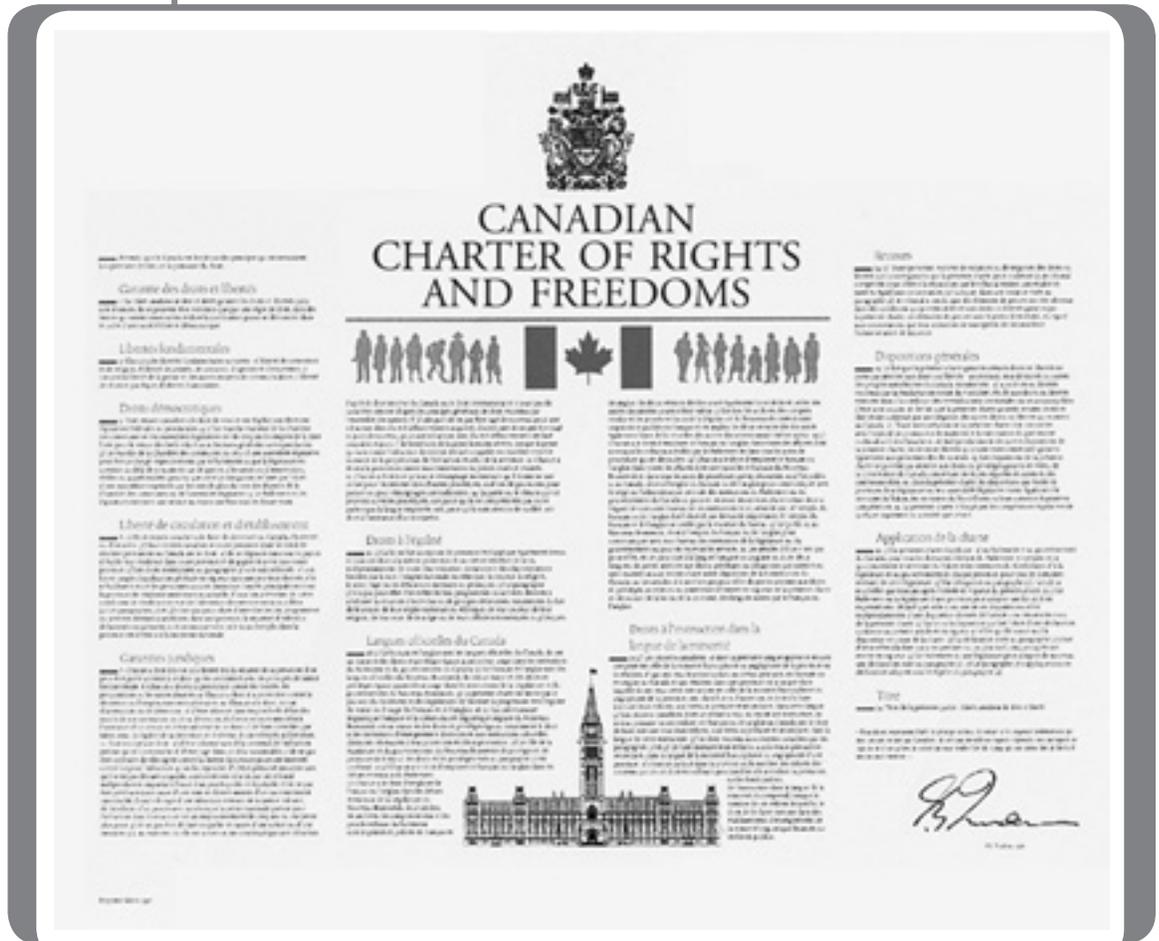
Find out more about democracy in **Democracy and Participation** on the **Building Future Voters** elementary webpage at www.buildingfuturevoters.ca.

democracy
people
elections
government



■ What does the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* say about democracy?

In Canada, democracy is protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The *Charter* protects the rights and freedoms of individuals.



Find Out More

Find and download the *Youth Guide to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* from the John Humphrey Society for Peace and Human Rights. Search the internet using the title of this resource.

- All citizens who are 18 years of age or older can vote in federal, provincial or territorial elections.
- All citizens who are 18 years of age or older can run for public office.
- No federal or provincial government can be in power for more than five years without calling an election. This rule ensures that voters can choose their government.
- A government must explain its actions to the people by holding a session at least once a year.

■ What do people say about democracy?



To me, democracy means voting, expressing my opinions and having a say in government.

I think democracy is more than just voting. It's important to get involved with others in my community.



I have the same rights as everyone else.

If the candidate I voted for doesn't win, I can voice my opinion and participate with government in different ways.



Pause and Reflect



Write your own definition of democracy.



Describe what democracy means, using the words and phrases that you underlined. Use a graphic organizer such as a **Wheel Chart** to identify four important aspects of a democracy.