

Student Handout #1: A Brief History of Canadian Citizenship

Section One: Citizenship

The concept of citizenship goes all the way back to ancient Greece. In the Greek city states, “citizens” were people who had special rights in society. In return for these rights they agreed to help in running the community. Modern citizenship reflects this idea and citizenship today refers to a range of civic, political, social and cultural rights, as well as the corresponding responsibilities.

The Greeks were very selective about who was eligible to become a citizen (e.g., women and foreigners could never get citizenship). The Romans on the other hand broadened the requirements for citizenship. As the Roman Empire grew, citizenship extended to include people from conquered world territories.

The meaning of “citizen” evolved over the years, becoming widely used during the French and American revolutions. These revolutions were violent rejections of the idea that monarchs were appointed by God and, therefore, must be obeyed. The revolutionaries in France and America sought to establish a system in which the people, or their representatives, decided who should be the leader. The term “citizen” came to refer to people who could participate freely and equally in government matters.

Traditionally, where a person was born and who his or her parents were determined whether that person was a citizen. It was difficult and sometimes impossible to become a citizen of another country. Over the years, people began to move around more easily and new methods of determining citizenship had to be developed. Different countries developed different laws governing who could and could not be granted citizenship, taking into account such factors as the length of time that someone lived in a country, and his or her character, education and, in some cases, race and religion.

Section Two: British Subjects

Prior to 1947, Canadian citizenship did not exist. Because of the close imperial ties with Britain, people living in this country were officially classified as British subjects, that is, subject to British rule. As a result, it was relatively easy for immigrants from across the commonwealth to come to Canada and gain full rights. In many cases, only one year of residency was required before being called a “Canadian.”

Many have called Canada a “nation forged in fire” because of the important part that the two world wars played in shaping Canada into a country. Canada emerged from these conflicts a respected and admired member of the international community. Our contribution to the war efforts and dedication to allied causes were considerable. As a result, many people began to believe that it was time Canada had its own citizenship, apart from Britain and British influence. One such person was Paul Martin, Sr., Secretary of State. In 1945 he visited a military cemetery in Dieppe and saw the terrible sacrifices that Canadian soldiers had made. At that moment he decided to do something to honour them. Creating Canadian citizenship would be his tribute to their memory.

On April 2, 1946, Martin introduced an Act Respecting Citizenship, Naturalization and the Status of Aliens. Apart from introducing the new status of the Canadian citizens, the Act also addressed certain problems that had previously existed in government and immigration laws. All Canadians, for example, would now have the automatic right of entry into this country. Of particular importance was the provision that married women would be treated as independent persons for citizenship purposes. Previously their status was linked to that of their husbands. As a result, Canada became recognized internationally as taking a leading role in increasing women’s rights.

There was a great deal of debate and conflict about the ideas of Canadian citizenship. Many people were afraid that more autonomy for Canada meant completely cutting ties to Britain, and they did not like the fact that immigrants from Commonwealth countries would have to wait a certain period of time, like other immigrants, before becoming Canadians.

Section Three: The Citizenship Act

In 1947 *The Citizenship Act* was an important milestone in Canadian history, helping to form a unique Canadian identity and advance a vision of Canada as a multicultural society. However, it tended to be prejudiced in nature because people were admitted into Canada who were from certain countries of origin, and many cultures were left out. It became a model for similar laws elsewhere in the Commonwealth and became the basis for how the concept of citizenship would unfold as Canada grew and prospered over the next few decades.

By 1977, Canadian society had evolved to the point where revisions to the 1947 Act were needed. Generally speaking, the 1977 *Citizenship Act* took a broader view of citizenship. It made Canadian citizenship more accessible to immigrants because the number of years people had to live in Canada before becoming citizens was reduced. It also eliminated discrimination on the basis of nationality and gender. Previously, Canada favoured giving citizenship to people from certain countries, such as Britain. The new act treated everyone who applied equally. Immigrants' education and professional skills became part of the new criteria, rather than their country of origin. As well, the 1977 revisions recognized *dual citizenship*, which allowed people to be legal citizens of one or more countries in addition to Canada.

In 1991 the Canada-Quebec Accord was signed, giving Quebec the right to select its own immigrants and oversee the integration of services for them. In 1993, the Canadian government formed the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to select new citizens for the rest of Canada, and to assist them as they settled into their new country.

Section Four: Citizenship Laws Today

Today, in order to become a Canadian citizen, an immigrant must:

- be 18 years of age or older (children under 18 may apply if their parent(s) are Canadian citizens)
- be a permanent resident who was lawfully admitted to Canada
- have lived here for three out of the previous four years
- speak and understand either English or French
- know information about Canada such as the rights and responsibilities that Canadians have (e.g., right to vote), and some things about Canada's history, geography and political system
- write a citizenship test
- take the *Oath of Citizenship*.

A person may not become a Canadian citizen if he or she:

- is under a deportation order and is not allowed, legally, to be in Canada at the time of application
- has been charged with a crime or an indictable offence
- was convicted of an indictable crime in the past three years
- is or was in prison, on parole or on probation in the last four years.

The *Citizenship Act* states that applicants must disclose all this information when applying for citizenship. The Canadian government checks with police to learn if the applicant has a criminal record, and checks with immigration officials to determine if he or she is in Canada legally.

Section Five: Applying for Canadian Citizenship

Immigrants or refugees applying for Canadian citizenship apply in one of the three following categories:

- **Family Class:** A relative in Canada who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident may act as a sponsor and assist the applicant in immigrating to Canada. The relative is required to guarantee the applicant's finances during the first few years of his or her residency in Canada. A sponsor can be a parent, spouse, fiancée, child and, in some cases, another relative who can show that he or she has the means to provide assistance to the applicant upon arrival in Canada.

- Independent Class: The immigrant applies on his or her own merit. This involves demonstrating that he or she will be successful in financially supporting him or herself in Canada. The applications in this class are assessed under the "points system," which gives a certain number of points in several categories related to the person's abilities and experiences, including employment skills, work experience, language ability and education. There are also several sub-categories that earn the applicant points. The sub-categories include investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed applicants. In most cases, the applicant must achieve at least 70 out of 100 points to be successful in becoming a Canadian citizen.
- Refugee Class: People who are in danger if they remain in their own countries and seek protection in Canada are called refugees.

At times Canada encourages immigration of people with certain education and expertise in order to meet certain needs. For example, in 1999, Canada encouraged people experienced and educated in the field of information technology to apply for Canadian citizenship because of the shortage of these skilled people in the country.

Immigrants in each category must meet certain health and security requirements as well as the specific requirements related to the category in question. Applications from persons facing criminal charges in Canada or abroad cannot be processed until the charges are dealt with.

Clients can make an application to Citizenship and Immigration Canada by using an application kit. A different application kit exists for each class

Student Handout #2: Decision Making and Citizenship

Federal Elections

Canadians vote in elections for the people they want to represent them in Parliament. With each election, the people may re-elect the same Members of Parliament (MPs) or choose new ones.

Federal elections are usually held about four years apart. The Prime Minister may ask the Governor General to call an earlier election. According to Canada's constitution, an election must be held within five years of the last election.

Canada is divided into over 300 electoral districts. An electoral district is a geographical area represented by a member of the House of Commons. The citizens of each electoral district elect one Member of Parliament, who sits in the House of Commons.

Any Canadian citizen who is at least 18 years old can run in a federal election. The people who run for office are called candidates. There can be many candidates in an electoral district.

The people in each electoral district vote for a candidate of their choice. The candidate who receives the most votes becomes the MP for that electoral district.

An elected MP represents everyone who lives in his or her electoral district, even the people who did not vote for the MP. An MP is the people's link to the federal government. An MP helps by:

- representing citizens' ideas when new laws are being imposed
- asking questions about the government on behalf of its citizens
- helping individuals who need information from the government or if they have any problems with the government.

Political Parties

Most candidates in federal elections belong to a political party. A political party is a group of people who share ideas about how government should work. Some political parties have been around for a long time but Canadians can create new political parties at any time.

Members of political parties hold meetings where they discuss their ideas and opinions. They develop plans for what they would do if their candidates were elected to form the government. The plans they make are called the party platform.

Members of political parties help to:

- decide on party platform
- choose the party leader
- choose the party's candidates
- campaign for party candidates in elections.

Candidates who do not belong to a political party are called independent candidates.

Voting in an Election

One of the privileges and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship is the right to vote. **Elections Canada** is the non-partisan agency of Parliament responsible for conducting federal elections and referendums.

People can vote in a federal election or cast a ballot in a federal referendum if they are:

- Canadian citizens
- at least 18 years of age

The voters lists used during federal elections and referendums are produced from the national Registrar of

Electors, a permanent data base of Canadian citizens 18 years of age and older, qualified to vote in federal elections.

Once an election has been called, Elections Canada mails a notice to each elector whose name is in the national Registrar of Elections, telling him or her when and where to vote. The notice is called a Notice of Confirmation of Registration.

After an Election

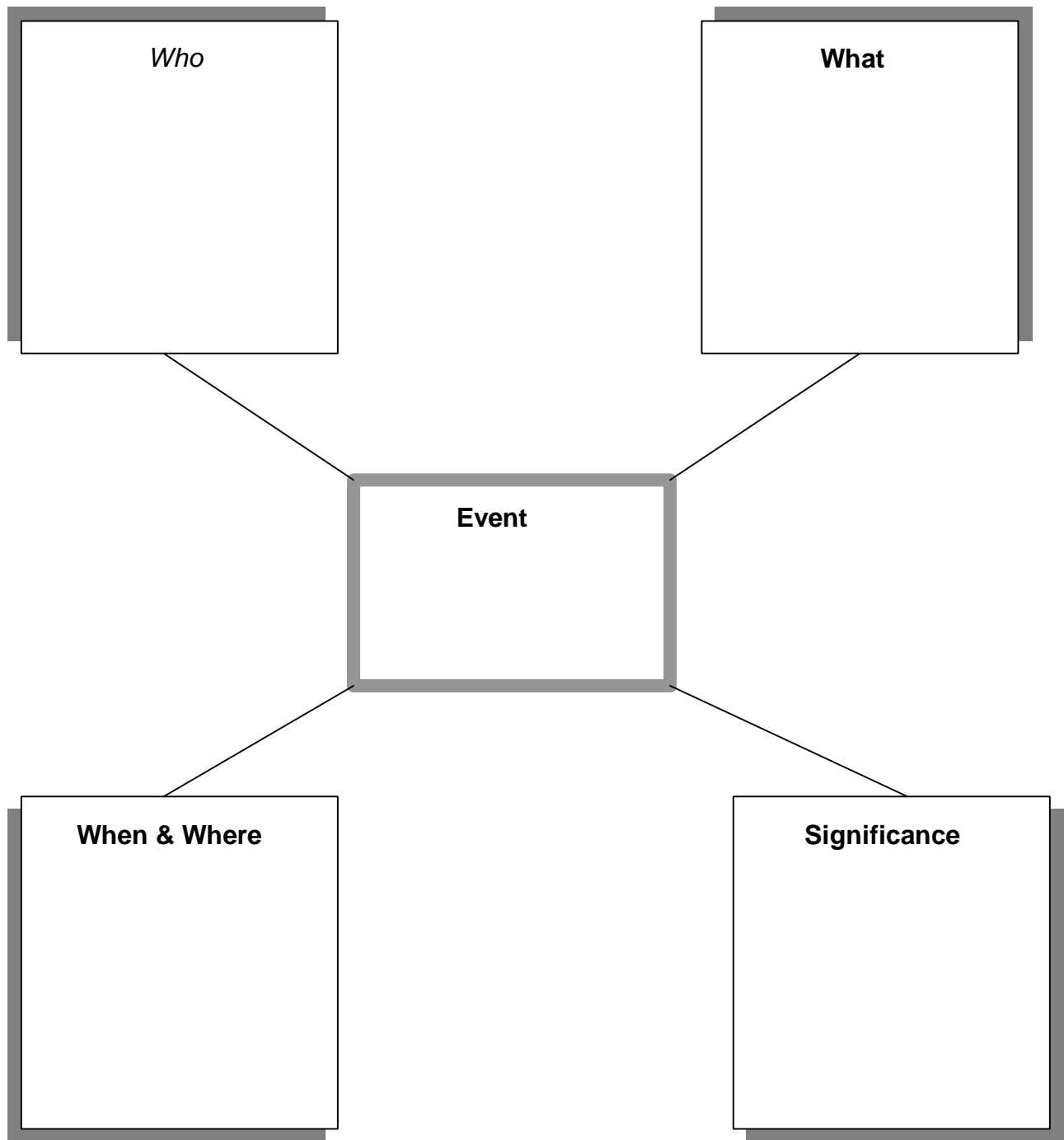
After an election, the party with the most elected representatives becomes the party in power. The leader of this party becomes the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and the party in power run the government as long as they have the support of the majority of MPs in the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister chooses several MPs to become cabinet ministers. Cabinet ministers are responsible for running federal government departments. The Prime Minister and cabinet ministers are called the Cabinet and make important decisions about how to run the country. They also propose most new laws. Their decisions can be questioned by all MPs in the House of Commons.

If a majority of the MPs vote against a major government decision, the party in power is defeated. The Prime Minister resigns and a new election is usually held.

The parties that are not in power are called the opposition parties. The opposition party with the most MPs is the Official Opposition. The role of the opposition parties is to oppose or try to improve government proposals.

Student Handout #3: Graphic Organizer for an Historical Event



Clarify and extend your understanding:

- Turn this handout over and write two or three paragraphs that explain what you have learned about the event. Use the data collected on the graphic organizer to help you.
- Turn to a partner and share, orally, what you have learned about the event. Only refer to your summary if you have to do so in order to continue.

Student Handout #4: Levels of Government Comparison Chart

| | <i>Federal</i> | <i>Provincial</i> | <i>Municipal</i> |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Official Head | | | |
| Legislative Body | | | |
| Representatives | | | |
| Areas of Responsibility | | | |

Student Handout #5: Levels of Citizenship

| Level | Citizen Contributions/Actions |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Family | |
| Community | |
| Province (Saskatchewan) | |
| Nation (Canada) | |
| Global (World) | |