

Enfranchisement of First Nations: Educational Activity

This activity provides students with varied viewpoints on the issue of extending the franchise to the First Nations. Students will have the opportunity to examine documents and materials related to the position of the Canadian government, the First Nations, and international organizations like the United Nations. Consult the online primary documents and website text as resources.

Introduction

- Introduce students to the history of the *Indian Act*.
- Explain why the *Indian Act* was created.
- Explain the effects of the *Indian Act*:
 - It placed complete control of First Nations politics, culture, and education in the hands of the Federal Government.
 - It established rules that dictated who was Indian and who was not (Status/non-Status).
 - Most importantly (for this lesson): the Indian Act did not allow Aboriginal peoples to vote in federal elections until 1960, when they were enfranchised, or given the right to vote without an accompanying loss of Indian status.
- Explain some positive aspects of the *Indian Act*:
 - Prior to the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982 (and excluding negotiated treaties) it was the only government document to recognize Aboriginal peoples. Without it, Aboriginal peoples would not have any special status. It allows for certain rights including health services, education, subsidized housing and exemption from certain taxes, but all in exchange for land and other rights.
 - Some amendments have been made to the Indian Act, including lifting of the ban on ceremonies and fundraising, the right to vote, and Bill C-31 to re-establish some Aboriginal peoples' status.
- Encourage students to conduct background research to enhance this activity.

Refer to the following links:

- [Canada Treaty Information](#)
- [Historic Treaties \(Indian and Northern Affairs Canada\)](#)

Activity

- With the understanding of the multiple views on the issue of enfranchisement, divide students into three groups which represent the views of:
 - the Canadian Government
 - First Nations
 - the United Nations
- Introduce the issue of enfranchisement, while reminding the students that the discussion is occurring in the late 1950s when First Nations don't yet have the right to vote.
- Students can then view the online primary resources related to their position. Consider the following questions:

- How are Aboriginal Peoples described in your sources?
- What reasons are given for the support or denial of Aboriginal voting rights?
- Encourage your students to participate in a round-table discussion, expressing their opinions and responding to the ideas of others. There will not be a vote or any kind of formal decision made. If you have an Elder in your school community, consider asking them to facilitate a sharing circle.

Optional Activities

- There are several variations on this activity which can be utilized. In one, students are divided into four groups with the newest being designated “observers”:
 - The observers are instructed that they can speak for any side in the discussion, but each time their opinion changes they must physically move to join the group they support.
 - The observers are allowed to move around as the debate continues and their opinions change. The students will see that, from an objective standpoint, their arguments vary and appeal to different people.
- Another option is to pause the discussion halfway through and switch the groups to represent one of the different perspectives. This would require each group to appreciate the other groups' opinions when they become their own!
- Finally, **reflect** on the discussion. Return to being a regular student (outside of your role or the perspective you took) and ask within your group:
 - Did you all agree? Disagree?
- Additional resources available upon request from the Diefenbaker Canada Centre for extended learning opportunities.