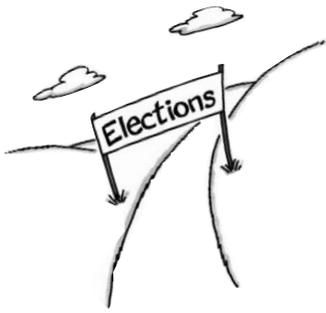


Make Sure You Count at Election Time



A federal election campaign is under way in Canada. The date is set for Monday, January 23, 2006. Election time is an important time to tell politicians and other voters how you feel about literacy, adult education and other important issues.



Here are some questions you might have:

What is a federal election?

Why is it important for me?

How do I decide who to vote for?

How do I know where candidates stand on literacy issues?

Where can learners and people who work with learners find more information?

How do I find out *where, when and how* to vote?



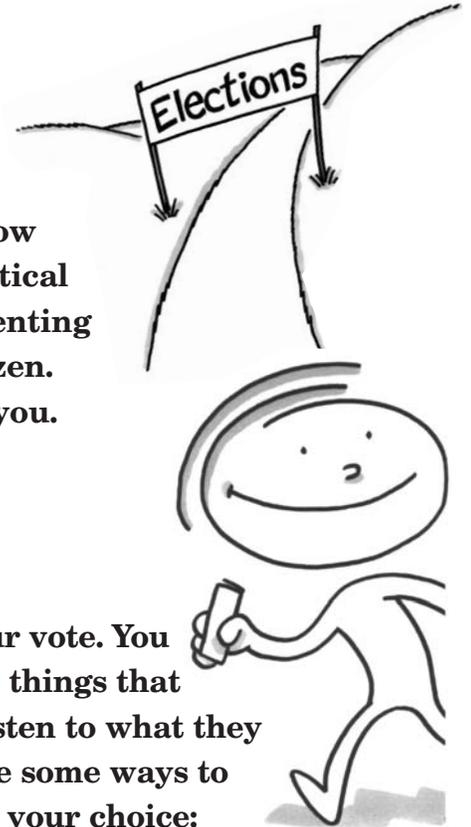
What is a federal election?



Voting in a federal election is about choosing the government that will run the country. You can choose a candidate to represent you in the House of Commons (Parliament) in Ottawa. There are 301 Members of Parliament, or MPs. Each MP represents an area of Canada. When you vote, you choose which candidate you would like to represent your area in Parliament.

Why is this election important for me?

We live in a democracy, which means that we all have a say in how the country is run. We do this by choosing the person or the political party we think has good ideas and will do the best job of representing us. Voting is an important right and responsibility for every citizen. This is the time to choose leaders whose ideas are important to you.

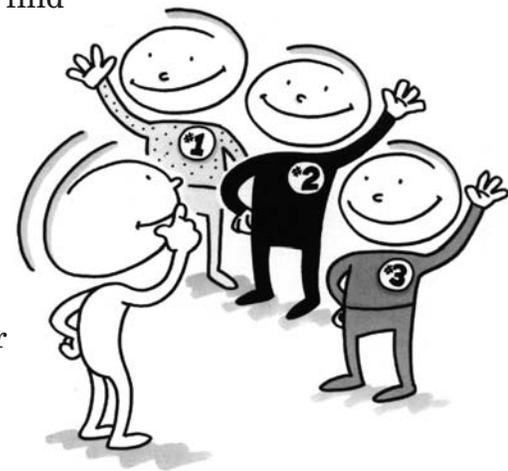


How do I decide who to vote for?



During an election, the candidates want your vote. You want to make sure that they understand the things that are important to you. So it is important to listen to what they say but also to talk and ask questions. Here are some ways to meet, see and hear the candidates before you make your choice:

- **Listen to radio** call-in shows.
- **Attend debates** or all-candidates meetings or watch them on TV.
- **Watch the news on TV** for stories about the election. Most TV stations and newspapers also have websites you can check.
- **Call or write the candidates.** Ask for their schedules so you can find out where to meet them.
- **Read the newspapers**— including the smaller local papers— for election news.
- **Talk to other groups** and organizations that matter to you, like your church, your tenant association, the local food bank, literacy organizations, etc. Find out what they think about the candidates.
- **Check the websites** of the political parties and/or individual candidates to find out what's important to them. A list of the major political parties is on the MCL website at www.literacy.ca (click on “Links,” then “Other Important Links,” then “Government Relations”).



How do I know where candidates stand on literacy issues?



Candidates need to understand the needs of citizens in their area so your voice is important. You are a “literacy expert” because of your own experiences. Dozens of other literacy learners have helped make literacy a national priority by speaking out with their stories. But more politicians still need to hear from literacy learners so they can learn about the issue and become literacy supporters. Here are some ideas:

- **Write a letter** about your own literacy challenges and how they affected your own life. Send it to the editor of your local daily or community paper— or to the candidates in your area. Ask your literacy program if you need help.
- **Go to all-candidates meetings** to hear the debates. Before you go, think of questions you want to ask the candidates.
- **Think of some things you’d like to say** and take the time to talk to the candidates who come to your door. Encourage your literacy class to focus on the election. Together you can learn about the system of government in Canada and what to expect on Election Day. Learn how to write letters, ask questions and make your voice heard. Your program could invite political candidates to speak. You could even hold a “mock” election as a class project.
- **VOTE** and encourage everyone to vote.

How do I find out where, when and how to vote?



- Elections Canada has several plain language guides on voting and elections. To request your free booklets, call: 1-800-INFO-VOTE (that's 1-800-463-6868) or visit: www.elections.ca.
- If your name is on the list of electors, you will receive a Voter Information Card in the mail soon after the election is called. This notice is important because it tells you when and where to vote. If you do not receive this notice, you can phone Elections Canada to make sure you get on the list. Their number is 1-800-INFO-VOTE.
- You can still vote without being on the list. Find out where to vote by calling 1-800-INFO-VOTE, then bring identification with you on voting day.
- If winter weather might prevent you from voting on January 23, find out about voting early or voting by mail. Call 1-800-INFO-VOTE.
- Call a local politician’s office to ask for information. They can sometimes even help you get to the polling station.



Also check the MCL website for tools, resources and links at www.literacy.ca.



Where can learners and people who work with learners find more information?

- Elections Canada has some great free resources including:
 - **I Can Vote**— a user-friendly guide to make people more comfortable about voting. This is a good tool for both teaching and learning. You can also get it online at www.nald.ca/clr/vote/cover.htm.
 - **Canada at the Polls**— an election simulation kit designed for school and community groups. You can order your own copies of these materials through Elections Canada. Unfortunately they will not mail out class sets. However instructors are allowed to make copies of any of the educational materials. Call **1-800-INFO-VOTE** (463-6868) or check www.elections.ca.
- Visit the Government of Canada Parliamentary website at www.parl.gc.ca (click on “About Parliament,” then “Education”) to find some great learning activities on Parliament, democracy, governance and citizenship.
- Find out more about the structure of Canada’s government at the Government of Canada’s General Information website at www.gc.ca (Click on “About Government,” then “Structure of the Government of Canada”).



Something to think about!

The “voter turnout” (the percentage of registered Canadian voters who actually voted) in the 2004 federal election was 60.9%. That’s the lowest turnout since 1896! The average voter turnout at Canada’s three federal elections in the 1980s was 73%.



So Vote!

Get stickers and posters like this from www.sovote.ca.