

Democracy 4 Dummies

Study Guide

Democracy 4 Dummies is a film that teaches young people how to run for office by taking a bold leap and assuming that young people actually *want* to get involved in politics. Too often the belief that young people are apathetic about government discourages youth from entering politics in the first place. And the field is often looked at as something that's good for you, but undesirable, like vegetables.

Democracy 4 Dummies is a tool that will not only teach people about the electoral system in Canada and campaign strategies, but it also presents politics in a way that is fun, appealing and accessible to people of all ages and walks of life. The film doesn't focus on whether the system is fair or unfair, but about what is involved in running for office and how positive that action can be. Students will find the film entertaining as well as educational, and the candidates featured are people that students will relate to.

Before watching the Film

A good idea to get students thinking about their political system is to test them on how much they already know about it. Here are some questions to get started:

1. **Q:** What are the qualifications to run for office in Canada?

A: Only two: You have to be a Canadian citizen and be 18 years or older on election day.

2. **Q:** Do you need to live in the riding you are running in?

A: No. Many candidates run in ridings they don't live in, but it's preferable to live there in order to know the people you will be representing.

3. **Q:** Does it cost money to run for office?

A: Yes. In order to declare your candidacy, you need to provide a \$1,000 deposit. After you provide all the necessary paperwork for your accounting after the election, you will receive your thousand dollars back. In addition, if you get over 10 percent of the popular vote in your riding, you get 60 percent of your campaign funds back. (What do students think of this? Is it fair?)

4. **Q:** Other than a deposit, what else does a candidate need to declare his/her candidacy?

A: The main requirement other than \$1000 deposit is to have at least 100 signatures from people in the riding in which the candidate is running. Each signature means that the individual agrees to have the party and/or the candidate on the election ballot, but does not imply an obligation to vote for that candidate.

Every candidate and party, from the most popular to the most obscure, needs the public approval of 100 voters. These signatures are checked against the elector's list, so it is wise to collect more than the number required in case people give fake names, their writing is illegible, or they are not on the voter's list.

(Other correct answers are: an auditor's statement, a witness to take an oath, and your party leader's endorsement (if applicable).)

5. Q: What type of electoral system does Canada use?

A: Canada uses the "First Past the Post" system. A discussion on different electoral systems would be appropriate and interesting if students know the different types of systems. The Web sites below can provide more information.

6. Q: What is Canada's voter turnout among young people?

A: It's at an unprecedented low and has been declining since the beginning of the '80s. This is a good topic for discussion. Ask students if they vote (or would vote if they could) and explain why or why not. They may mention that they don't "relate" to many politicians, which is a good intro since *Democracy 4 Dummies* presents young, non-traditional politicians.

After Watching the Film

A lively discussion on politics is bound to ensue. Have any of the students changed their ideas? Could they see themselves running for office? As an assignment, ask each student to imagine their candidacy for a particular office, choose a riding, plan their media strategy, design flyers, and really think about how they would like to see the world around them. This project urges students to be creative and also to imagine themselves as leaders. Another context is to show the film during student elections to inspire more students to get involved in school politics. The more political young people are early on, the more likely they are to remain involved in politics in the future.

Further Research

"A History of the Vote in Canada," Published by the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada – 1997

Elections Canada: <http://www.electionscanada.ca>

The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES): <http://www.cses.org>

Canadian Election Study: <http://www.ces-eec.umontreal.ca/links.html>

Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies:

<http://www.crcee.umontreal.ca/index.html>

Apathy Is Boring: <http://www.apathyisboring.com/>

Fair Vote Canada: <http://www.fairvotecanada.org>