

# Canada: The Road to Democracy

CANADA IS A DEMOCRACY. WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY?

## Democracy Defined

The word *democracy* describes a political system.

In a democratic country, all eligible **citizens** have the right to participate, either directly or indirectly, in making the decisions that affect them. Canadian citizens normally **elect** someone to represent them in making decisions at the different levels of **government**. This is called a **representative** democracy. Countries like Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom all have representative democracies.

Before European people came to Canada, many different Aboriginal people governed their regions using many different political systems, including a democratic one.

### TALK ABOUT IT

Students in your class may come from many different countries. Are these countries democracies? How many of your classmates have experience with other political systems? How are they similar to democracies? How are they different?



**DID YOU KNOW?** – Creating official designs for coats of arms is the responsibility of the Canadian Heraldic Authority. The **Governor General** is in charge of this organization.



**CANADIAN COAT OF ARMS** – A coat of arms is a symbol used to identify someone or something. Sometimes a coat of arms appears on an important building, or at the top of an official letter. This is the coat of arms of Canada. It contains many symbols that give us clues about Canada's history and what Canadians feel is important. See if you can spot:

- 1 the flag of the United Kingdom
- 2 the royal flag of France (fleur-de-lis)
- 3 symbols of England (golden lions, roses)
- 4 symbols of Scotland (red lion, thistles, unicorn)
- 5 symbols of Ireland (harp, shamrocks)
- 6 Canadian symbols (maple leaves)
- 7 symbols of monarchy (crowns, royal helmet)
- 8 the words (in Latin) *desiderantes meliorem patriam*, which means *they desire a better country*
- 9 the words (in Latin) *a mari usque ad mare*, which means *from sea to sea*



**WORD BUILDER** – The word *democracy* comes from the Greek word *demos* (meaning *the people*) and *kratos* (meaning *rule*). Early forms of democracy began around 2,500 years ago, in Athens and other Greek cities.

Using a dictionary, look up some other words that start with *demo*. List them with your class. Think about what they mean.

### TALK ABOUT IT

What symbols identify you? Your family? Your community? Look around your neighbourhood. Can you see symbols that identify other people or things? Make a list of these symbols. List the other symbols your classmates collected. Do you all agree on what the symbols mean?



## WORD BUILDER – Aboriginal peoples

People have lived in Canada for at least 12,000 years. In Canada, we usually describe the ancestors of these first peoples as *Aboriginals*. There are three main groups of Aboriginal people in Canada.

- First Nations people live all across the country in cities, on traditional lands and on reservations (land reserved for them).
- Inuit people live in the Far North, and they share ancestors with the Aboriginal peoples of Siberia, Alaska and Greenland.
- Métis people have a combination of ancestors of First Nations and European origin.

### THINK ABOUT IT

Does your school have a student council? How do you decide which students will represent you? What decisions does a student council have to make? Why is it important that you have a representative?

We have had a type of democracy in Canada since the mid-1300s! Did you know that the Iroquois Confederacy in Canada was the first democracy in North America?

## Confederation

Canada became a nation, the Dominion of Canada, in 1867. Before that, British North America was made up of a few provinces, the vast area of Rupert's Land (privately owned by the Hudson's Bay Company), and the North-Western Territory. By 1864, many leaders felt that it would be good to join into one country. Known as the Fathers of **Confederation**, these leaders met and wrote a **constitution** for the new country, which had to be passed by the **Parliament** of the United Kingdom. Once passed, it became known as the *British North America Act*, or the *BNA Act*. This Act brought together the three provinces of Nova Scotia,

New Brunswick and Canada (which became the provinces of Ontario and Quebec). The *BNA Act* described the structure and main **laws** of the new country, as well as the division of powers between the new provinces and the **federal government**.



Photo reproduced with the permission of Natural Resources Canada 2008, courtesy of the Atlas of Canada

**CANADA IN 1867** – Canada was much smaller in 1867. It included only four provinces: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Where do you live? Was it part of Canada in 1867?

**DID YOU KNOW?** – The rest of Canada's provinces and territories joined Confederation (became a part of the country) at later dates:

1867 Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia	1873 Prince Edward Island
1870 Manitoba, Northwest Territories	1898 Yukon Territory
1871 British Columbia	1905 Alberta, Saskatchewan
	1949 Newfoundland and Labrador
	1999 Nunavut



1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000



House of Commons Collection, Ottawa



**THIS PAINTING, CALLED "FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION"** is based on the original, "Meeting of the Delegates of British North America." The men shown here helped make the final agreement that created Canada. After years of political **debate**, there were three historic meetings in Quebec City, Charlottetown and London, England to decide the future creation of Canada.

The artist, Robert Harris, worked mostly from photographs of the men.

- 1 the **Right Honourable** Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first **Prime Minister**

---

- 2 the **Honourable** Sir George-Étienne Cartier

---

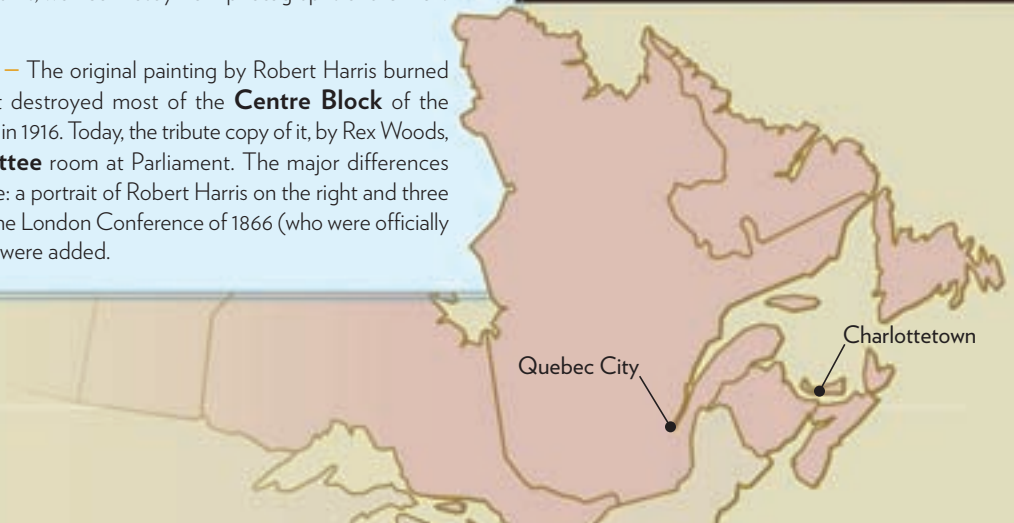
- 3 Thomas D'Arcy McGee



**DID YOU KNOW?** – The original painting by Robert Harris burned during the fire that destroyed most of the **Centre Block** of the Parliament Buildings in 1916. Today, the tribute copy of it, by Rex Woods, hangs in a **committee** room at Parliament. The major differences between the two are: a portrait of Robert Harris on the right and three more delegates to the London Conference of 1866 (who were officially recognized in 1927) were added.

**THINK ABOUT IT**

Why are there no women in this painting?





**THE QUEEN IS SIGNING THE CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982.**

- 1 the Honourable Gerald Regan (Minister of Labour)
- 2 the Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau (Prime Minister)
- 3 the Honourable Michael Pitfield (Clerk of the Privy Council)
- 4 the Honourable Michael Kirby (Secretary to the **Cabinet** for Federal-Provincial Relations and Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council)
- 5 Queen Elizabeth II

Based on Robert Cooper, Canada. Office of the Prime Minister Collection, Library and Archives Canada, e02282980



**The Constitution**

The Constitution is the highest law in Canada. It includes several different laws, decisions by judges, agreements between the federal and **provincial governments**, and traditions. The main written parts of the Constitution of Canada are the *Constitution Act, 1867* (this used to be called the *British North America Act*) and the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

**Constitution Act, 1982**

In 1982, the Queen and the Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau, Prime Minister, signed the *Constitution Act, 1982*, which includes the *British North America Act* and the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**.

**WHAT ABOUT ME?**

List some of the rules or laws that affect you. Does your family or your school have rules? Are these rules written down? Who is responsible for enforcing the rules? Are these rules easy to change? What would happen if the rules were easy to change?

**WORD BUILDER**

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE
colony	colonize	colonial
government	govern	governable
symbol	symbolize	symbolic

- Try using some of these words in sentences. Notice the endings on the adjectives: *-ial*, *-able*, *-ic*.
- See if you can fill in the table with some of these other nouns: contact, collection, identity, democracy.

**WORD BUILDER** – Many words can be changed from a verb to a noun by adding *-ment*:

- amend → amendment
- govern →
- argue (careful of the *e!*) →
- assess →
- assign →

Brainstorm with your class. What other words follow this pattern? Try using both the verbs and the new nouns in sentences.

The *Constitution Act* is difficult to change. For some parts of the Act, the **Senate**, the **House of Commons** and all provinces must agree to any amendments (changes). Other parts can be changed with the agreement of the Senate, the House of Commons and at least seven provinces with more than 50% of the total population of all the provinces.





- 1** CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS
- 1** the Canadian coat of arms
  - 2** the flag of Canada
  - 3** the Parliament Buildings (Centre Block)
  - 4** signature of the Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau (Prime Minister in 1982)

1

2



### Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* forms the first part of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Here are some protections that the *Charter* guarantees:

- freedom of religion, of thought, of expression, of the press and of peaceful assembly
- the right to participate in political activities and the right to a democratic government
- the freedom to move around and live within Canada, and to leave Canada
- legal rights such as the right to life, liberty and security
- equality rights
- language rights

#### TALK ABOUT IT

What rights are most important to you and to your family and friends? Although most human rights are protected in Canada, sometimes citizens challenge the *Charter's* interpretation of these rights. Look in the newspaper. Can you find stories about these challenges?

3



#### WORD BUILDER – Look closely at this word:

##### FREEDOM

The word divides into two – *free* and *dom*. The word *free* comes from the old German *frei* (meaning *beloved*) and the Sanskrit *priyah* (*beloved*); *-dom* is sometimes added to the end of a word to make it a noun (wisdom, kingdom). What other words contain the word *free*?

4

