

## Whole World in our Hands: Experiential Activities

# Provincial Governance *Fair Representation*

### Theme:

Provincial Governance, Democracy & Fair Representation

### Prerequisite:

Students should be familiar with the term democracy, and the basic ideas that it encompasses. They should be aware of whom government decisions affect (in terms of ethnic groups, gender groups, worker groups, age groups, etc). Since most of the students are under the legal voting age, they may not be familiar with the voting process. Making sure students have a basic understanding of this process and its implications is important.

### Curriculum Entry Points:

Grade 9 Social Studies, Grade 11 Global Studies, Grade 12 World Issues, Grade 12 Political Science, Grade 12 Law

### Overview:

Students will gain an understanding of how governments must make decisions based on different arguments that may exist. The activity will also show students that sometimes not everyone is given a fair chance to have their views represented in the decision making process. Students will see the importance in making sure each group has a chance to have their concerns heard, as otherwise uninformed or biased decisions will be made.

### Objective:

To have the students recognize the responsibility government has to accurately represent all members and groupings of society. Students will come away from this activity better understanding democratic decision making, and will understand that not everyone comes away from these decisions happy, but ideally a consensus can be reached.



### Main Concepts and Vocabulary:

#### CONSENSUS:

An agreement that was come to by a group of stakeholders, as a whole.

#### DEBATE:

The discussion of a certain issue, where opposing views are argued by various people or groups.

#### DELIBERATE:

To think about an issue carefully before coming to a decision, making sure to consider the views of all of the stakeholders.

#### DEMOCRACY:

Governing for the people by the people, in the case of New Brunswick through elected representatives.

#### GOVERNMENT:

The organization which holds the political authority in the region, ideally democratically elected by the public.

#### LOBBY:

To try to sway the thinking of the government or other group in one way or another, in order to achieve a favorable outcome (in the eyes of those lobbying).

#### STAKEHOLDERS:

A person or group that has an interest in the actions and decision making of another group (e.g. the government) because it has a direct or indirect effect on their situation.



# Classroom Activity: *Who Gets Heard?*

## Time required:

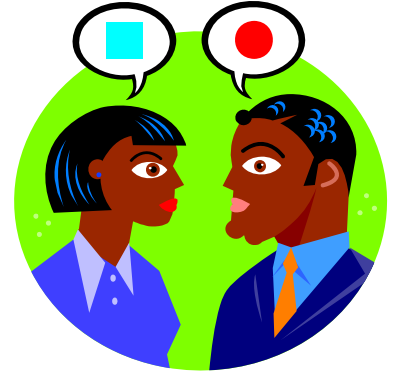
One 60 minute period

## Materials:

- Seats that can be moved to form opposing sides for the classroom debate
- Copies of the situation and each argument to be represented
- A stopwatch

## Background:

This activity is designed to help students improve their skills in debating and deliberation. They will discuss a hypothetical government issue (changing the legal age of voting), and debate their arguments as would be done in government. Finally they will come to a decision that will consider the viewpoints of all stakeholders. The twist to this activity is that there will be three debate teams (for a large group debate), but only two will be given the chance to express their point of view. They will not know this until the last possible minute- so it should be a surprise for everyone. This will upset the group who had prepared their arguments and hadn't been given a chance to present them. They will see how frustrating it is to have no input, and the other two teams will see that this is unfair. After the debate, the third group will get a chance to express how they felt, and will have a chance to contribute their thoughts. A final decision will be made which will consider all viewpoints.



## Opening Questions:

1. Is it important to consider the viewpoints of other groups even if you disagree with them? Why or why not?
2. Who might some stakeholders in government decisions be? *Women, men, children, university students, the elderly, visible minorities, gays and lesbians, business owners, civil servants, etc.* This list is not exhaustive by any means, as government decisions have impacts in every area of society.

## Activity Instructions

1. Give students the question and the side they'll be arguing for a few days beforehand. This will allow them time to do any research they will need, and to collect their thoughts on the issue. In an earlier class allow students to get together in their groups so that they can have their arguments as solid as possible (maybe breaking up the points so each student has something to say).
2. Go over the rules of debates with the class. (see Handout Debate vs. Deliberative Dialogue)
3. Assign a timekeeper, a moderator, a recorder (teacher may wish to do this so that all students can participate).

## DEBATE QUESTION

The legal voting age in New Brunswick is 18 years old. Group A is happy with the voting age being 18. They feel that this is a good age, as people are old enough to be making responsible decisions. Group B feels as though the age should be lower. They feel as though younger people should have a say, as decisions affect them too. Members of Group C, on the other hand, believe that the age should go up, because they feel the level of maturity and political awareness is too low at age 18.

# Activity Instructions Cont'...

4. Have students arrange the chairs in a debating fashion (opposing teams- in the pattern of a triangle since there will be three groups). The three groups are: those for keeping the legal voting age as it is; those for lowering it; and those for making it higher.
5. Have Group A (those for keeping it as is) speak, giving all of their points. They will have 5 minutes to do so.
6. Have Group B (those for lowering it) speak, and to include their counter arguments to the first arguments. They will have 7 minutes to do so.
7. Now, instead of allowing Group C to speak and to give their counter arguments, go back to the first group and allow them to make their rebuttal. They will have 2 minutes to do so.
8. After final comments (1 minute each) from both Group A and Group B, make a tentative decision. At this point Group C should be quite upset and be voicing their displeasure with how things have gone.
9. Allow Group C a short period of time to explain how they're feeling. Do they think that was fair? How did it make them feel to be unable to voice their concerns and view point on the issue? Did they feel disempowered? Angry? Frustrated?
10. Enter into a period of deliberation, where the issue is reviewed with input from all three groups. Guide the group discussion, and help them make a decision based on the group consensus. This way everyone has had a democratic input in the decision making process.
11. Ask the students to reflect on the debate and deliberation. How did they feel it went? Did they learn anything new about the process of democratic decision making? Ask them to provide examples of voicelessness in the real world (based on gender, religion, race, etc.)

## Field Trip Activity

Book a class tour of the **Legislative Assembly** Complex in Fredericton and observe Question Period in action!

### Contact:

Tour Coordinator  
Legislative Assembly Complex  
P.O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5H1  
Tel: (506) 453-2527  
Fax: (506) 453-7154



### Questions:

How are issues debated in the parliament? What works and what doesn't seem to work? Prepare a bill for parliament on an issue important to the students in your class and submit to the appropriate Minister for consideration

### Web Resources:

- Democracy Watch: <http://www.dwatch.ca>
- Government of New Brunswick: <http://www.gnb.ca>
- Listing of all elected MLAs in New Brunswick, along with biographical information on each member. <http://app.infoaa.7700.gnb.ca/gnb/pub/ListMLA1.asp>
- Open Democracy-online magazine: [www.opendemocracy.net/home/index.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/home/index.jsp)

<b>Debate Versus Deliberative Dialogue</b>	
<b>Debate</b>	<b>Deliberative Dialogue</b>
Oppositional	Collaborative
Looking to win	Looking for common ground
Determination to be right	Openness to being wrong
Listening to find flaws and details in the others' arguments to help you win	Listening to find meaning and understanding
Defending your own perspectives against others	Accepting that others' thinking can improve your own
Promoting your position	Discovering new possibilities
Criticizing others' points of view	Re-examining all points of view
Assuming there is a right answer (and you have it)	Assuming that others have pieces of the answer
Defending your assumptions	Revealing your assumptions to deepen discussion

# Community Activity:

## *The Greatest New Brunswicker!*

A new take on the recent CBC “The Greatest Canadian” survey. Students can use this opportunity as a fun way to learn about people who have been involved in democratic politics and/or positive social change in the province of New Brunswick.

- Each student will research one particular person (suggestions can be given by the teacher if need be, but it would be better for the students to do the initial research on their own).
- Once each student has their New Brunswicker selected, they can do a short write up about their choice. These write ups will be displayed in a high traffic area of the school for a week.
- The students of the school will be asked to vote on their choice. This can be done by distributing ballots to all teachers (enough for each student to have one), or by setting up a table at lunch hours and breaks.
- Ask the students to note who made the list, and who didn't. Are there equal amounts of men and women? Are there many visible minorities? Why or why not?

Also ask the students to note who's voting, and who doesn't bother (if the vote is taken voluntarily in a high traffic area). Why do they think this is? Do they think the students are apathetic to issues such as these? What about issues that impact their lives more?

After the school vote is completed, the local library could be contacted to see if the display could be moved there. Perhaps another informal vote could be taken there to involve the general public. On the ballots an anonymous and informal survey could be taken to see the demographic that is voting voluntarily. This informal study would be an informative exercise for students, while sharing information about “The Greatest New Brunswickers” with the general public.

### **Extension Activities:**

To build on the concepts of governance and democracy, students should be encouraged to get involved in the following things:

- Student Council
- Lobbying for causes students believe in at school and government levels
- Spearheading (or volunteering at) Children's Parliament Activities at local elementary schools