**Lesson A: Pre-Debate**

*Teacher Note: In order to provide context for students and further their understanding of upcoming activities, we suggest watching the following videos:* Government and Democracy*,* Our Electoral System *and* The Levels of Government *available on our website:* [*http://civix.quebec/en/206-2/*](http://civix.quebec/en/206-2/)

An election campaign is a competition for votes, where candidates try persuade voters they are best-suited to hold power.

During an election, one of the main ways the leaders of political parties communicate with voters is through leadership debates, where party leaders present and defend their positions.

Candidates tell stories about themselves and their parties, making pledges and promises. These are often based on opinions about what the biggest problems in society are, and ideas of how best to fix them.

Part of this process of persuasion involves reducing complex social and economic issues to simplified stories that are easy to understand and relate to. Promises and claims are often based on facts — data, statistics and the like — but disagreements can arise regarding the interpretation of facts, as well as which facts are important at all.

Some individuals believe politicians have a reputation for misrepresenting the truth, or even lying to persuade people and to achieve political goals. This perception can be heightened by the adversarial nature of politics, with candidates attacking each other’s positions.

An important part of the job for the media is to fact-check the claims of politicians, evaluate their arguments, and put their assertions into perspective. This has always been the case, but it has become even more important in recent years.

Misinformation is more abundant and travels faster than ever before, hence the job of fact-checking has become especially important. Citizens, too, are increasingly called on to fact-check, and evaluate the credibility of claims.

To have an informed opinion during elections, it is necessary to pay attention to what politicians are saying and have the tools to evaluate their assertions.

*NB: Please note that the term “leaders” was kept for this lesson as a generic theme to describe spokesperson and leaders of political parties.*

**GRADE LEVEL(S) -** Elementary

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

What is politics? What is a debate? Why is it important to think about what political candidates say?

**MINDS ON**

1. Ask students what they know about political debates. Students should write down their thoughts in the K column on Activity 1.1 (What do I KNOW about political debates?).

2. Now ask students to write down their next set of thoughts in the W column on Activity 1.1 (What do I WANT to know about political debates?).

**ACTION**

1. Using an imaginary scenario, inform students that the Quebec provincial government will be providing money to school boards for schoolyard renovation projects. Since money is limited, schools will need to determine where, why and how they would spend the money, and convince the school board to approve of their choices.

2. Lead a class brainstorming session on how the money could be spent such as building something new, fixing something or purchasing equipment. The focus could be social or environmental. Record the ideas on the blackboard, chart paper or interactive whiteboard.

3. As a class, group similar ideas together so that there are four to six main ideas. Help students form groups based on their interest in one of the main ideas. Ask each group to discuss their idea in more detail and record the reasons why their idea should be considered. Questions to prompt discussion: Does it solve a problem? What would be the impact on students? How many students would be affected by the idea?

4. Ask each group to put together a pitch to share with the class. You can model a pitch by taking a ‘crazy’ idea (e.g., building a treehouse for raccoons) and tell the class why they should agree with you. Alternatively, you could provide an example of a good pitch (Exemplar – [The Drip Drop, Shark Tank](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5nmwuu6RX0))

5. Co-develop criteria for a ‘good pitch’ with your students. Sample criteria can be found below.

· One clear idea;

· A great “hook” to get the audience excited;

· Short and to the point;

· Shared with passion and excitement;

· Explains why it is the best idea or what problem it will solve.

6. After the pitches, ask students to vote for the idea they liked the most. You can do this through a show of hands or a secret ballot. Tell students they cannot pick their own idea.

7. Review the concept of political debates, where politicians ‘pitch’ their ideas to the citizens, and question each other about their ideas and proposals.

Make clear connections to the school renovation activity.

· In any given place - a neighbourhood, municipality, province or country – anywhere that groups of people live together and where rules and decisions affect everyone, there will be differences in opinion about how things should work. This includes deciding which issues are most important and how best to take action.

· In a democracy, we elect politicians to make decisions on our behalf. A candidate is person who competes for the job of a politician.

· During elections, candidates try to convince voters that their goals and ideas are the best. Citizens express their choices through voting.

· Politics can be described as the activities, ideas and actions that are used to gain power in society, or the ways that citizens try to influence a government.

· People have different values and beliefs, which influence their viewpoints and desired actions on specific issues. It is important to respect others’ opinions, even if they differ from our own.

8. Show a clip o f Québec leaders’ debate from 2014. Ask students to compare what they see from the politicians to their own pitches.

**CONSOLIDATION**

1. Have a brief closing discussion about opinions and politics or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions.

· Did any group make you want to re-consider your own preferences for improving the schoolyard? Why or why not?

· What do you think shapes people’s views and opinions? Provide some examples.

· Why should we respect others’ opinions even if they are different from our own?

· Why is it important that people can influence their government? Give examples of how people impact government actions.

2. Ask students to write down their thoughts in the L column on Activity 3.1 (What did I LEARN about political debates?).