

Parliament in Motion

Evolving Parliamentary Democracy

Because Canada has a **constitution**, Canadians have reliable rules to follow.

But sometimes, old **laws** do not fit society any more. For example, in 1923 **Parliament** passed the *Chinese Immigration Act*, which closed Canada's doors to people of Chinese origin. This law was changed in 1947. The democratic system is flexible and allows Parliament to change old laws and create new ones.

National and even international events and issues influence Canadians' values on many levels. As Canadians consider these issues through open discussion and **debate**, their ideas may change over time. In turn, Canadians influence Parliament to change laws or introduce new ones.

THINK ABOUT IT

When Canada became a country in 1867, the laws were different than they are today. According to the laws of the time, many groups of people were not allowed to **vote** — people such as Aboriginal Canadians, women, Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians. Why do you think this was? The voting age used to be 21, but in 1970 it was lowered to 18. Some Canadians talk about lowering the voting age again. How would lowering the voting age affect Canada and its youth? What if voting became mandatory?

WHAT ABOUT ME?

Think about the issues listed below. How do they affect you or your classmates? What might **parliamentarians** do about these issues?

- environmental concerns
- child poverty
- international terrorism
- illnesses such as AIDS
- street crime
- Internet crime
- promoting Canadian arts (music, television, films, literature, visual and theatre arts)
- promoting multiculturalism and preventing racial and ethnic intolerance

WORD BUILDER — FLEXIBLE / INFLEXIBLE

The word *flex* means *to bend*. If you are flexible, it can mean that you can bend in certain ways (touch your hands to the floor, for example), or it can mean that you are able to adapt to changes as they occur.

Consider these sentences:

- My yoga teacher is very flexible — she can put her foot behind her head!
- My yoga teacher is very flexible — she does not mind if I come on Mondays or Wednesdays.

Adding an *im-* or an *in-* to the beginning of a word sometimes turns the word into its opposite: flexible into inflexible, for example. Consider these words:

- polite impolite
- complete incomplete
- capable incapable
- sincere insincere

Careful! *in* can also mean *incoming* or *into*. Here are some more words starting with *in* or *im*:

- interior, income, input, injury, involve, incline, include, investigate, important.

Look them up in your dictionary. Are they opposites?





Getting Involved in Democracy

The voting age in Canada for a federal **election** is 18. But voting is not the only way for you to get involved. If you feel strongly about an issue, there are many ways to express your views. Become knowledgeable about the issue by reading, researching and interviewing experts. Write to your local newspaper. Form a council. Send letters to your **Senator** and your MP to let them know how you feel. They may want to talk to you more about it.

Helping out in an election campaign is another good way to get involved, no matter what your age. You can meet the candidate, help him or her prepare for public events, and help organize supporters. Does a political party interest you? Almost all parties have a youth wing that organizes events and distributes information.

Your local community might need your help — you can volunteer for a community association, or for the board of your local

school, library or community centre. This is a great way to meet your neighbours and find out what is important to them. Community organizations have been successful across Canada in getting their concerns heard by politicians at all levels.

It is important to talk to your family about getting involved, too. Find out their opinions and discuss what issues are important to them. Canada's **government** works because of its **citizens**, and you are never too young to become part of it.

TALK ABOUT IT!

What organizations are you part of? Would you like to be more involved? How? Does your school have a student council? How are students elected? What role do they play in the school? How could student voices be better heard (both in the school and in your community)? Talk with your classmates about these questions.

Just because you are too young to vote yet does not mean that you cannot get involved.

There are several ways to make your voice heard and to enact change.

W **WORD BUILDER** – WING – from Old Norse *wenge* (meaning *wing of a bird*). In English, the word *wing* means the wing of a bird, but also something that extends from a central base. Consider these sentences:

- The Canadian art collection is in the east wing of the museum.
- He belongs to the youth wing of the party.

Because the places to either side of a theatre's stage are called *the wings*, English also uses some phrases like:

- I have no idea what is on the test; I will just have to wing it. (Note: This slang comes from an actor learning his or her lines *in the wings* – it means to do something without being prepared.)

