Trust in Democracy

Middle years students are at the stage of developing awareness and interest in the wider community. As they grow they will face navigating the claims and policies of politicians and leaders of government institutions. This lesson explores the links between trust and a functioning democracy.

Big Question: Is Trust Important in a Democracy?

Supporting Questions:

1. How can we tell if someone or something is trustworthy?

2. What happens to democracy when people/institutions are not trustworthy?

3. Can citizens be trusted to participate responsibly and fairly in democracy?

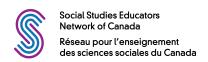## Outcomes (examples from across Canada)

NS Citizenship 9:
- *Analyze how issues become valued within and across all areas of government and society.*

SK Social Studies 8:
- *Assess the impact of citizens' willingness and ability to actively engage in the Canadian political processes.*

BC Social Studies 8:
- *Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.*
- *Compare the advantages and disadvantages of various graphic forms of communication (e.g., graphs, tables, charts, maps, photographs, sketches).*

Preparation

Time - Three (3) class periods (3 hours)

Materials/Sources:

- [Slidedeck](#)
- [CanTrust Index](#) - register at the website to download the full report
- Appendix - reproducible materials: cards for sorting activity; graphic organizer; exit slip
- Sticky notes
- Sentence strips
- Whiteboard and projector
- Colour copies of infographics from slidedeck
- Large paper or graphing software (e.g., Canva)

Prior knowledge/vocabulary - Students should already have a basic understanding of democracy and associated terms.

Minds on

Two Truths and a Lie – Have students play "two truths and a lie" Each student says three things about themselves- two are true and one is not. The other students have to guess which is the lie and which is true.

Debrief - Class discussion – How did you decide what statements were truthful or not? What criteria did you use? How did you decide whether the statements you heard could be trusted?

Co-constructing a definition of "trust"- On a sticky note, have each student write what they think "trust" means, then at their tables or other small groups combine their answers into a single definition. Have one person from each group write their definition on the board or sentence strips (long strips of paper to write on). Using the groups' group definitions, highlight common threads to create criteria, then create a class definition of "trust".

Show the CanTrust Index [definition of trust](#). Compare the class definition with the CanTrust definition. What is the same or different? Use the concept of trust and criteria for trustworthiness, and co-construct a class definition.

Learning Activity

This lesson has three (3) parts:

Part One

Materials: Reproducible Cards (see Appendix)

The first task is students doing a "card sort" and group discussion. Cards are based on several value categories in the CanTrust Index. It is recommended that the teacher does NOT frontload much information about the cards. Rather, divide students into groups or at their tables, and have them "sort" the cards *any way they think makes sense* in a "good thinking way" (i.e., don't just sort them alphabetically). Try not to lead them too much, since we want them to practice inductive reasoning, that is, to begin with observations and move to patterns and theories. One example could be to sort the cards in order of perceived importance (other ideas may include "things we can/can't live without", "we can control/cannot control", "kids things/adult things", etc.)

Have each group select one person to be the host of their group. The host stays with the table and cards and explains the group's reasoning while other students rotate through each table hearing and seeing how other groups sorted their cards.

Have an "I notice, I wonder" conversation with the whole class about what they saw in each other's groups. Are there other values they think should be included in this list? How are these values connected to trust?

Part Two

Materials/Sources:

- [Slidedeck](#)
- PMI Graphic organizer (see Appendix)

This task requires students to examine infographics which represent data from the CanTrust Index in several categories of interest to middle level learners. They work in groups to use the critical thinking strategy "Plus, Minus, Interesting" (PMI).

Model this strategy using the "who do we trust" infographic in the [slidedeck](#). For example: Plus - this graphic is easy to understand; Minus - it shows that people don't trust _____. An Interesting question is "Has this changed since before the pandemic?".

Assign each group an infographic and theme for discussion. Either print these from the Google slides or make a digital copy of the relevant slides for student use. As a group, list some PMIs: Plus, Minus, Interesting Question about each graphic and the content.

Each group will record their group PMIs in the graphic organizer (see Appendix B). Alternatively, groups could use sticky notes (virtual or physical) to record their observations.

Ask each group to summarize a few of their observations. Show the related graph for the whole class to see. Other students can suggest more PMIs.

Lead the class in a discussion surrounding the "minuses". Here are some suggested questions:
- ***Why do you think some individuals do not trust certain people, organizations, or ideas?***
- ***What might cause peoples' trust to change, or for them to be less trusting than they were before?***
- ***Is it easier to keep someone's trust all along than to lose someone's trust and have to rebuild it?***
- ***Can you think of personal examples of keeping or losing trust in someone or something?***

Part Three

Materials:
- large paper
- whiteboard, or digital platform such as Canva

The third activity is a student survey. Inspired by their group's theme in the previous activity, and using the CanTrust Index survey questions as a guide, have each group make their own "middle school three-question" version of a similarly themed survey. For example, the group who had the theme of "trust in government leaders" could make a three-question survey about Trust in School Leaders such as: "When you think about these people or groups of people, how much do you trust them to do what is right for students? Your Teachers, Your Principal/Vice Principal, the School District?" The group that looked at the question regarding climate change, could take the theme and go with a whole new question, for example "Can citizens be trusted to do their part to help climate change?" or something similar. The slide deck has other examples.

Conference with each group to help them design their survey.

Allow time to conduct the survey with classmates and others in the school as appropriate. To get enough results to make a graphic representation, encourage students to do the survey with several people depending on your school configuration and whether they need to ask people the questions outside of school (parents, etc.).

Present the results graphically. Using large paper, or the whiteboard, or digital platform such as Canva, each group makes a graph similar to the visual from their CanTrust Index example. Groups share their results, using a jigsaw or with another group to exchange feedback . Include the following questions in the presentation or sharing session.
"Do you think your results were accurate? Did people participate well? Truthfully?"

Voices of the Kids Media

At this stage, students have had a chance to consider what it means to trust or not trust, to be trustworthy, and they have had an opportunity to perform their own survey about trust-related themes and consider whether responses (and results) can be trusted.

To answer the big question "Is trust important in democracy?", assign a "Voice of the Kids" media assignment to the class. They can do this in groups or individually. The groups do not have to be the same as the previous learning activities.

Have students choose a consolidation topic from the list below which relate to the big question: *Is trust important in democracy?*

Topics:
- If democracy means "the people rule", here's what the people need to know…
- If you want me to vote when I'm old enough….
- If you want me to care…
- A "how-to" guide for future leaders
- Letter to a future leader
- I hear what you say but I see what you do" – the importance of actions vs words.

- "Keeping" trust vs "rebuilding" trust
- Other topics suggested by the teacher

The aim of the activity is to consider the significance of trust and share their understanding in a creative way.

Possible formats:
- Podcast-style audio
- Influencer video
- Infographic
- Public Service Announcement (PSA)
- Doodly, Powtoon, or other whiteboard-style video

Informed Action - Voices Showcase

Include a "showcase" of the Voices projects, for example a gallery walk or a screening event in class. Have students reflect on what they learned from someone else's project using the exit ticket in Appendix C.

Extension: Invite local civic leaders (government or non-government) to the showcase, or make a video or slideshow of the showcase for sharing on the school website or social media.

Appendix A - Reproducible Cards for Card Sort (Activity 1)

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Freedom	Diversity
Safety	Democracy
Education	Inclusion
Health	Fairness
Privacy	Equity
Sustainability	Economic Security

Appendix B - PMI Graphic Organizer (Activity 2)

PMI Organizer

Name:
Source:

P	PLUS- positive observations	**M**	MINUS- negative observations	**I**	INTERESTING- questions or observations

Appendix C- Exit Ticket for Showcase Extension Activity

Name: _____

Is trust important in democracy?

O **Something I learned from**

_____'s project is

_____.

It has to do with trust because

_____.

EXIT TICKET