

# The Pillars of Democracy

The term "Democracy" comes from the Greek *demokratia*, which is derived from *demos* (people) and *kratia* (rule), meaning "the rule of the people." Today it is practiced in many different ways in many different countries.

Although democracy in some forms had been established since the time of Ancient Greece, democracy in its modern form did not begin to occur until much later. Democracy in its modern incarnation began in England with the Magna Carta in 1215, when English Barons forced King John to grant citizens of England certain rights and freedoms. Four centuries later, in 1642, the English Parliament would clash with King Charles I, and towards the end of the war, in 1649, they would declare the country a republic and behead their ruler.

In Canada, we practice representative democracy, which means that a small number of people are chosen to represent us and make decisions on our behalf. In Canadian democracy, we emphasize citizen participation, voting in elections, the protection of rights and freedoms, equality, elected representation, the freedom to disagree and majority rule.

## What do we have to do to be good citizens?

First off, we need to let the government know what it is that we want. If we don't tell them, then their decisions will not reflect our needs. Second, we need to obey the laws that are in place to protect us and the people around us. Third, we have the responsibility to provide the government with the necessary resources to govern us. That means paying taxes.

In a democracy, all citizens can participate in shaping their communities and society. In some of the earliest democracies, like Ancient Greece, something known as Direct Democracy was used. In Direct Democracy every single citizen votes on every single issue. In Canada, we

practice representative democracy. That is where we elect people to represent us in the government. These people then make decisions on our behalf.

Democracy is known as the rule of the people. In order for it to truly represent the people, a democracy must establish and uphold the rules by which we live. In a democracy citizens make the laws either directly, or through the representatives that they have elected. If a representative helps pass a law that the people feel is unfair, they can choose not to re-elect that person. In a democracy people are also informed about the laws that have passed. They are also treated equally, regardless of their race, religion, gender or age. Finally, in a democracy, people participate in the application of the law. People accused of a crime are brought forth to a group of their fellow citizens who are known as a jury. The jury judges whether they are innocent or guilty.

Not all societies are governed by a democracy. In fact, democracy was not one of the first types of government to be created. It was a very long process by which we came to have rule by the people.

There are four main pillars for our Grade 6 study of **democracy**. They are in place to ensure the rights and freedoms of all people in a society.

**Justice** - Attempts to ensure that all people are protected and treated fairly and equally according to the law.

**Equity** - This assumes the equality of opportunity, not the equality of result. Democracy hopes that every man, woman

and child are given the same opportunity to succeed and to be what they want to be and do what they want to do.

**Freedoms** - Freedoms include the rights to religion, speech, travel, and others.

**Representation** - All citizens have the opportunity to choose those that represent them in the government.