

Historica Canada Education Portal

J.S. Woodsworth

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Heritage Minute: "J.S. Woodsworth."](#) J.S. Woodsworth helped create Canada's social security system. His combination of leadership, determination, and an unrelenting desire for social reform changed the lives of all working Canadians.

Aims

Students will briefly describe the history and importance of J. S. Woodsworth and will identify his achievements and how they affected Canada's political system.

Students will create mind maps and engage in a debate to identify the reforms made by Woodsworth, compare the differences in society before and after these reforms, and evaluate the role of the government in providing social assistance.

Activities

1. After viewing the "J.S. Woodsworth" Minute, ask students about it. The questions can be about the time period, the activities occurring, the

conflict being presented, and the location.

2. Using information from the Minute and findings from additional research, have students answer the following questions:

- When was Woodsworth born? Where did he come from?
- What rights did he believe in? Why did he resign?
- How long was his career?
- What were some of his achievements?
- Would you say that he was an important or significant Canadian?

After these questions have been answered, lead the students in a class discussion about social programs in Canada. Explain the basic principles of certain programs and ask students why people would need these programs.

3. Divide the class into groups of four or five. Each group will take on the role of the government or ruling party of Canada. Explain that the country has finished the year with a budget surplus and that the government has to decide what to do. They have the choice of allocating funds to: increase social programs, reduce taxes, or reduce the country's debt.

The groups will discuss which choice is the best way to spend the funds and explain to the class how this choice will benefit the elderly, unemployed, immigrants, and farmers. The class will decide which choice is the best, based on presentations of arguments from their peers.

After the students have presented their choices, have the class as a whole draw three clear conclusions about which plan is the best or most viable.

4. Have students examine other politicians of Woodsworth's time to identify the differences and similarities between them.

5. Have students research the formation and role of the NDP in Canada. Have them outline how this group differs from other political parties. (Students will need to research the other political parties as well for a thorough comparison.) Students could present their findings and opinions in a presentation, report, or essay.

6. Discuss the idea of pensions and assistance from the government, and identify the social programs available to those in need. For information, refer to the The Human Resources Development Canada Web site.

Have students use markers and large poster paper to identify different types of social programs in a mind map, identifying the pros and cons of social programs.

Have students present their mind maps to the class, discussing and defending their choices. This should lead to a good discussion, and will help students work on presentation skills.

7. Have students conduct a formal debate about the validity of government assistance. Does the government have the responsibility to help those in need?

Divide the class in two; have one side argue that intervention from the government is necessary, have the other argue that it is not.

Students should be given time to research the reforms of men such as Woodsworth and Tommy Douglas to help shape their arguments.

Students should also be introduced to the concept of Social Darwinism.

Ensure all members of the class are properly prepared for the debate and that they have a good understanding of the proper rules of debating.

8. Possible Extensions/Additional Activities

- Have students examine some of the issues of the New Democratic Party and discuss whether they would like to see the NDP as leaders of Canada. Why or why not? Information about the Party can be found on their website.
- Students can write a letter to an MP for the NDP about their concerns as students. They can also discuss what they have learned about J. S. Woodsworth and why they feel he was an important figure.
- Have students collect basic literature from all political parties in Canada. Post the information around the classroom for students to read and process. Set up voting stations for a “class election.” Have students explain why they elected their respective parties.

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: J. S. Woodsworth](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: James Shaver Woodsworth](#)
- [The Canadian Citizenship Challenge](#)
- [The Expanded Woodsworth Minute](#)