

# Citizenship Then and Now

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**T**he Alvarez family had just become Canadian citizens. Sara, Ben, and their parents had been invited to the citizenship ceremony. Now, they were on their way to a party at the Alvarez home.

The ceremony had been held with many people from countries all over the world, including Ghana, South Korea, Mexico, Sudan, and El Salvador. At one point, everyone stood up and said an oath:

“I swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen.”

After receiving their citizenship certificates from the judge, Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez were smiling from ear to ear. Mrs. Alvarez even had tears in her eyes, she was so happy. “Ten years ago, I would never have dreamed I would be living in such freedom. Canada has been very good to us. I am proud to be a citizen.”

The party was wonderful. Music played; people laughed; there was cake, ice cream, *pupusas*, and fruit to eat. When Ben and Sara got home later, though, Sara wondered why Mrs. Alvarez was so happy. What did she mean about living in freedom? After all, she and her husband had to go to work every

day and pay bills like everyone else. Sara asked her mother.

“In Canada, we can vote for whomever we want, and speak out when we see injustice. In the Alvarez’s country, you could be put in jail, and sometimes even killed, for speaking out against the government or supporting a certain political party. I think that is why living in a free country means so much to the Alvarez family. Yes, they have many responsibilities. They must work, pay taxes, and obey the law. But they also have many rights – things they can do freely – that they did not have before.”

## What Is Citizenship?

Throughout history, both the history of Canada and the history of humankind, people have lived together. We depend on each other for many things, and without the care of a loving community, a child cannot grow into a healthy mature adult.

As you have seen throughout this book, sometimes people work together to grow food and build communities. They look after one another and protect each other. Being a citizen means you are a member of a group. As a member of that group, you will get help and support. At the same time, you



**Figure 14.1** Greek and Roman citizens

are expected to do your part for the well-being of your community.

The idea of being a citizen has been around for a long time. Thousands of years ago, Greek and Roman city-states developed the concept of citizenship. Being a citizen meant that you had privileges like the right to

vote and to own land. It also meant that you had responsibilities like paying taxes and serving in the army.

In these city-states, serving as a political leader was seen as the highest good you could do for your community. In ancient Greece, not everyone was allowed to serve and equally participate as a citizen. Women were not considered citizens, nor were slaves or foreigners. A person had to be born in Rome to be a Roman citizen or else buy citizenship at a high price. Citizenship was valued by those who had it, and coveted by those who did not.

In North America, early Aboriginal groups did not necessarily talk about citizenship. However, there were rights and responsibilities that went with being a member of their communities. Everyone had a role to play within a family group and larger society. Rights were unique to different groups as well. For instance, in some groups, women were seen as equal partners in their society. In others, women were given many responsibilities, but few rights.

Being a citizen is still something that brings rights and responsibilities.

You can think of it as a balancing act. If everyone in a society had only rights and no responsibilities, the society would not thrive. People would enjoy the benefits their rights would bring, but may not contribute or care for their society.

A society in which people have responsibilities but no rights is equally unhealthy. For instance, people in these types of societies can be imprisoned for many years, even if they have not done anything wrong. There are still many societies around the world where people may have responsibilities but have no rights, because of their gender or race or religious beliefs. Imagine how your classroom or your family would function if it lacked a balance between rights and responsibilities.



**Figure 14.2** Lamia Kabir, left, takes an oath of citizenship with her mother, Nasima, and sister Ushmi, age two. The Kabirs, originally from Bangladesh, were among 52 people from 20 different countries who were sworn in as Canadian citizens at this ceremony in May 2004.

### As you read, think about

- what it means to be a citizen
- who was considered a citizen in 1867
- who can claim citizenship today
- some of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in Canada

## Responsibilities and rights

A responsibility is a duty, something that you should do. In Canada, you have a responsibility to treat other people fairly whether or not you agree with them.

A right is a privilege that you are given. In Canada, you have the right to be treated fairly by others, no matter your age or gender or opinions.

If you are a Canadian citizen, here are some of your rights and responsibilities:

RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
Freedom of thought, speech, and religion.	Let other people express their thoughts and religion.
Anyone accused of a crime must have a fair trial. Everyone deserves to be treated in the same way by police and the law courts.	Follow Canadian laws.
Everyone must be treated fairly without discrimination.	Treat others fairly.
Canadians can live wherever they want to within Canada. They can also leave and come back to Canada.	Look after our country and its environment so that it will be a good, healthy place for others to live.
All Canadian citizens who are at least 18 can vote in elections. Their vote is allowed to remain secret.	Vote in elections at age 18 and older.
Any Canadian citizen of voting age can run for public office.	Vote for politicians who are honest and accountable.

## Citizenship in 1867 and Today

Being a citizen of Canada in 1867 was different from being a citizen of Canada today. For many years, being a Canadian citizen meant that you were a British subject. A person's first allegiance was to the British monarch, not to the Dominion of Canada. For a rousing display of patriotism, people sang "God Save the Queen," not "O Canada." Canada did not have its own official flag. Instead, Britain's flag flew over the land.

Citizenship and legal status were often limited because of race, gender, religion, or birthplace. Citizenship meant different

things to different people at the time of Confederation, and it can still mean different things to people today.

WHO HAS CITIZENSHIP?	1867	TODAY
Anglophone property owners	Yes	Yes
Anglophones who do not own property	No	Yes
Francophone property owners	Yes	Yes
Francophones who do not own property	No	Yes
Aboriginal peoples	No	Yes
Asian people	No	Yes
African-Canadian people	No	Yes
Women	No	Yes
Children	No	Yes

## Citizenship and Aboriginal Peoples

Aboriginal peoples were not treated as citizens at the time of Confederation. Although their treaties stated that they had a right to their lands, it was not the land they had always lived on. Their traditional lands were taken by the government. The Aboriginal peoples were confined to smaller parcels of land called reserves. They did not have a right to use their own languages, and many of their traditions were discouraged or even made illegal. Aboriginal peoples

may have been allies and partners with the European settlers in the past, but by the time of Confederation they had been pushed to the **edges of society**.

The federal government viewed the Aboriginal peoples as subjects who were not able to take care of themselves. The government decided to make laws that would

control them and assimilate them. Most Aboriginal peoples were not allowed to vote.

Today, Aboriginal peoples are legally entitled to rights and privileges as citizens of Canada, including voting and running for public office. They also have exclusive rights, including hunting and fishing rights. However, the real experience of citizenship for Aboriginal peoples is not always the same for others in Canada. Aboriginal peoples still struggle with injustices, such as poverty, racism, and discrimination.

Aboriginal peoples continue to work toward self-government. Some of them have a declaration (see below), which is similar to an oath of citizenship.



**Figure 14.3** This couple (c. 1878), from the North-West Territories, would have been caught between two worlds. Their old way of life was ending, and they had to move to reserves. Yet they were not considered Canadian citizens, so could not vote for the laws and policies that decided their future.

**We the Original Peoples of this Land know the Creator put us here.**

**The Creator has given us Laws that govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind.**

**The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities.**

**The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our cultures, and a place on Mother Earth that provided us with all our needs.**

**We have maintained our freedom, our languages, and our traditions from time immemorial.**

**We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed.**

**The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination.**

**The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.**



**Figure 14.4** *Upper Town Market, Quebec.* Although people of many backgrounds and classes would meet in this busy market, only some of them were considered citizens.

## Citizenship and the French

Until the 1800s, the population in Canada of French people was greater than the population of the English. After the Seven Years' War, when Britain defeated France in North America, there were few French settlers. More settlers began to come from Britain, especially during the Loyalist period and the Great Migration following the Irish potato famine.

As the British began to outnumber the French, the French recognized that they would need to do something to protect their language and culture. By the time of Confederation, the French language had “protected” status. French and English have always been the official languages spoken

in the government, and Article 133 of the BNA Act of 1867 states that all official documents must be written in both languages.

Within provinces with large French populations – Quebec, New Brunswick, and Manitoba – the French were assured of schools that would teach French children in their own language and were administered by their Roman Catholic Church.

Today, French people in Canada are assured of their rights to language and to their unique cultural practices. However, some still fear assimilation, so they want to separate from Canada. The Canadian government continues to seek a balance between Quebec’s unique society and the rest of Canada.

## Citizenship and the British

At the time of Confederation, men of British descent had the most power and the most freedom as citizens in society. Men who were wealthy and owned land, or who had important family connections, had more rights and privileges than men who were poor. Men who were wealthy, owned land, had important family connections, and belonged to the Church of England (Anglican) were the most privileged of all.

Today, people from all ethnic backgrounds, religions, races, and walks of life have the same rights and responsibilities. Canada's population has grown, not just from people of British or European descent, but from people from all over the world.

## Citizenship and Women

Women and men were treated very differently by the law at the time of Confederation. Women were not allowed to vote, and they had few rights. Unmarried women were under the control of their fathers, and married women were under the control of their husbands. Most married women were not allowed to own property, and only the father, not the mother, had a legal right to their children. Many people did not believe that women needed much education, so it was very difficult for most women to go



**Figure 14.5** In 1869, when this family portrait was taken, a woman's success was measured by her role as a wife and mother. Women were not expected to be concerned about matters outside the home, so the right to vote was thought unnecessary. Although the woman in this picture could not vote or own land, she would have been considered successful and a valuable asset to her husband's status in society.

to school beyond the first few grades. Society felt it was more important for a woman to learn how to work around the home and care for children and the family.

Today, women are equal to men under the law, and they are able to participate fully in government, as well as own land and possessions.



**Figure 14.6** These children enjoy celebrating Canada Day on a camping trip. As Canadian citizens, they are entitled to security, health, and education. Children in 1867 (Figure 14.7, at right) were not protected from such things as abuse or neglect, nor did the government have to provide them with an education.

## Citizenship and Children

At the time of Confederation, children who were under 21 had no rights as citizens. They were under the legal care of their father, or if they were orphans, the government. It was not against the law to abuse children, and children did not have the right to an education.

Today, Canada has agreed to the United Nations statement about the rights of children. Some of those rights include

- the right to adequate standards of living, such as shelter, nutrition, medical treatment
- the right to reach their fullest potential, through such things as education, play and leisure, cultural activities, access to information, and freedom of thought, conscience, and religion
- the right to participate in their communities, express opinions, and have a say in matters affecting their own lives

- the right to be safe from abuse, neglect, and exploitation

## Conclusion

Children living in Canada are in a position that is unique in the world. There are other countries where children are valued and allowed to participate in society, but there are also many countries where children are not given the rights and responsibilities to be involved in their community.

Many Canadian children have worked to make a positive difference within and outside Canada. Equality, respect for cultural differences, peace making, and freedom of expression are some of the values that many Canadian children can promote within their homes, schools, and communities.

Although you may not be able to vote until you are 18 years of age, you may write your Member of Parliament in Ottawa, or your Member of the Legislative Assembly in your province. You have a right to have

## Kids who make a difference

Some children collect food at their birthday parties rather than gifts from their friends. Over the years they have donated hundreds of kilograms of food to a local food bank.

One child collects money for hungry children living in famine-stricken countries rather than getting gifts from his friends. He has collected over \$500 for children who would otherwise go hungry, and has never missed the gifts — he still gets plenty from his family!

Hannah Taylor was upset when she saw a man eating out of a garbage can. She talked to her parents and her teacher and began to collect money for homeless people. Over the years, her organization has raised thousands of dollars to help homeless people in Manitoba and across Canada.

Craig Kielburger (above right) was only 12 years old when he started “Free the Children,” which speaks out against child labour around the world. Over the years his organization has

- built 400 Free the Children schools around the world, providing education to more than 35 000 children every day



Figure 14.8 Craig speaks with Mother Teresa, who spent most of her life helping the poor.

- delivered 200 000 school and health kits to students around the world
- shipped \$9 million in medical supplies to 40 countries
- provided health care centres and community funding to help 500 000 people
- provided access to clean water and improved sanitation to over 125 000 people

your concerns heard and to receive an answer from your representatives.

As a citizen of Canada and the world, you have the right to raise awareness about issues that may bother you. Whatever your concern – homelessness, the environment, or world hunger – you can make a difference. Where would we be today if the people mentioned in this book had not taken a stand?

You can do something, too. As a Canadian child, you have the right to make a difference. The history of our country is based on shared values of cooperation and

working together, despite our differences. As we work together, we can accomplish a lot for the good of our country and the good of our world.

Canada was populated and created by people who were willing to take risks and improve their society. Throughout our history, people have stood up to protect our country and the people who live in it. They have spoken out for those who are less fortunate, and they have made their lives better. Are you willing to follow in their footsteps?