

Learning Experience: The Role of Veterans in Promoting Equity

Teachers' Note: When students think about Canadian veterans, they will likely think about active service and examples of courage, sacrifice, and duty. Increasingly, society is recognizing that as members of the armed forces put themselves at great physical risk in armed conflicts, their experiences can also have lasting psychological impacts. While students should understand the roles Canadians have played in armed conflicts, it is also important that they recognize the important work veterans and veterans associations have led in advocating for disability rights in Canada. Their ongoing work has improved health outcomes for veterans and also impacted the ways Canadians understand disability and disability rights. *This learning experience is an example and can be adapted to meet the needs of your students.*

Outcome:

- Learners will reflect on the efforts of individuals and groups in Canada to address inequities in Canadian society.

Student Resource: *Fighting for Equity*

Historical Thinking Concept:

- Continuity and Change

Duration: 1 lesson, 75 minutes

Lesson 1: The Role of Veterans and Veterans' Associations in Promoting Equity

Objective:

- To analyze how Canadian veterans have advocated for disability rights, including their efforts to secure healthcare, rehabilitation, and mental health support for both veterans and the public.

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard and projector
- Student handout: "Canadian Veterans as Disability Advocates"
- Teacher Backgrounder: "Historical Context of Canadian Veterans' Disability Advocacy"
- Access to the Internet (for research)

Key Vocabulary:

- Veterans Charter of 1944
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Disability Rights
- Royal Canadian Legion
- Disability Benefits

Background for Teachers:

Starting after World War I and continuing to the present, Canadian veterans have advocated for disability rights. Following both World Wars, veterans faced physical injuries and mental health conditions like “shell shock” or “combat fatigue”(now known as PTSD). Many also faced stigmas related to their injuries and mental health conditions upon returning home after war ended. In the face of these challenges, their collective advocacy led to the development of Canada’s first rehabilitation programs and disability pensions. The Veterans Charter of 1944 further expanded access to healthcare and rehabilitation, influencing national policies for all Canadians. In more recent years, veterans’ groups like the Royal Canadian Legion have been instrumental in pushing for mental health services and broader disability rights, contributing to the development of accessibility laws and destigmatizing mental illness. These efforts have had a lasting impact on how Canadian society views and addresses disability, both for veterans and the broader Canadian population.

Lesson Plan Overview:

Part 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

- Ask students: “What comes to mind when you think of disabilities and Canadian veterans?”
- Record their responses on the board (e.g., physical injuries, mental health, PTSD, rehabilitation).
- Explain that veterans have been strong advocates for disability rights, shaping policies and programs that benefit not only them but also all Canadians.

Part 2: Mini Lesson (15 minutes)

- Provide a brief lesson on key periods of disability advocacy by Canadian veterans, providing brief explanations and historical context (see Teacher Backgrounder: “Historical Context of Canadian Veterans’ Disability Advocacy”).
- Provide copies of the student handout, “Canadian Veterans as Disability Advocates” for students’ reference.

Part 3: How have Canadian veterans advocated for disability rights in Canada? (30 minutes)

- Divide students into small groups and assign each group one of the key historical periods of veterans’ disability advocacy (e.g., Post-WWI, Post-WWII, post-Korean War, modern advocacy, etc.).
- Ask students to research their area of focus and respond to the following:
 - Identify the main advocacy actions taken by veterans and how they contributed to disability rights.
 - Identify any broader impacts on Canadian society (e.g., healthcare, mental health awareness).
 - Prepare a brief summary and share their findings with the class.

Part 4: Sharing and Reflection (20 minutes)

- Ask each group to share their summaries.
- After hearing from each group, ask students to write a reflection based on one of the following questions:
 - Why was it important for WWI veterans to advocate for better support and care for their disabilities? How did this advocacy impact healthcare in Canada?
 - How did the advocacy for physical rehabilitation after WWII set the stage for future healthcare policies in Canada?
 - Why is the recognition of mental health conditions, like PTSD, as disabilities important? How have veterans' advocacy efforts around mental health shaped broader societal changes?
 - How has modern advocacy by veterans changed how Canadians understand and address disabilities in society today?

Assessment for Learning:

Before moving on to the next lesson, you can use the presentations and reflection to assess students' understanding of the role veterans have played in advocating for disability rights. You can combine evidence of learning from observations, conversations, and products using a rubric like the one below to record your assessment:

Student Name: _____

Criteria	Competent	Developing	Limited
Understanding of Key Concepts	Demonstrates a strong understanding of key moments in veterans' disability advocacy	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of key moments in veterans' disability advocacy	Demonstrates limited understanding of key moments in veterans' disability advocacy
Explanation of Veterans' Impact	Provides a clear, detailed explanation of how veterans influenced disability rights	Provides a general explanation of how veterans influenced disability rights	Provides a vague or incomplete explanation of how veterans influenced disability rights
Reflection on Societal Changes	Insightfully reflects on the broader impact of veterans' advocacy on Canadian society	Provides a basic reflection on the impact of veterans' advocacy on Canadian society	Provides little to no reflection on the impact of veterans' advocacy on Canadian society

Additional Resources

[CAF Story | PTSD – Invisible Wounds \(youtube.com\)](#), Canadian Armed Forces. LCol Rhonda Crew discusses the PTSD she developed as a nursing officer in the Canadian Armed Forces and the ways she has worked to take care of herself and encourage others to access help.

[Concerns CAF veterans suffering from traumatic brain injuries](#), CTV News (video). This news story reports on some new research to diagnose Canadian veterans with traumatic brain injuries (CTE) as a result of being exposed to explosions in active combat.

[Canadian Veterans with Disabilities](#), Statistics Canada, 2017. This infographic shares findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability

[Settlement finalized in \\$283M disable veterans class action, but benefits policy changed](#), CBC 2023. This article discusses a class-action settlement between injured Canadian military veterans and the federal government.

[“The Cost of Canada’s War”](#), Canadian War Museum. This page includes information about medical treatments and diagnosis and treatment of “shellshock” during and after WWI.

[Legion National Foundation: Teachers’ Guide](#), The Royal Canadian Legion. This teaching guide includes information about the experiences of Canadian service people in a variety of conflicts, as well as Legion’s role in supporting and advocating for veterans.

Possible Extension:

Have students consider different ways to raise awareness about the work veterans have led in disability advocacy, and to address the challenges veterans continue to face in accessing needed support. Students could consider:

- Raising awareness within their school community as part of Veterans’ Week
- Writing to their local MP to express their thoughts about how Canada should be supporting veterans
- Contacting a veterans’ organization to learn more about the issues veterans face and how the organization is taking action and sharing their findings with the class

Launching the Inquiry: *How effective have actions taken by Canadians been in creating equity for the disability community?*

Teachers can refer to the Teacher Resource (pp. 37-39) for ideas about how to introduce the case study, “Disability Rights in Canada”.