



Commissioner's Book Club: Discussion guide

Sofia Valdez and the Vanishing Vote

by Andrea Beatty, illustrations by David Roberts

Introduction

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner's Book Club offers monthly book selections that use stories to help readers connect with human rights issues and build connection with the characters they encounter. We hope to bring together a province-wide community of readers and deepen their understanding of human rights and those who are most affected by human rights issues. This guide has been prepared to assist parents, teachers, librarians and other trusted adults explore themes of democracy, community responsibility and fairness in *Sofia Valdez and the Vanishing Vote*.

In *Sofia Valdez and the Vanishing Vote*, Sofia Valdez and her classmates take part in a classroom election to choose a class pet and learn firsthand how democratic decision-making works in a community. Sofia is chosen as Election Commissioner and helps organize a fair election, complete with campaigns, posters, speeches, and voting. When the results end in a tie — and one vote mysteriously goes missing — the class faces an important challenge: how to resolve the problem while keeping the election fair and honest. The story shows how elections, community responsibility, and fairness are essential to democracy, and why every vote matters.

Discussion questions

1. What did you think of the story? Did you learn something new?
2. In the story, Sofia is named the Elections Commissioner for her class election. What were her responsibilities? What challenges did she face?
3. Fairness is very important to Sofia. What are some of the decisions she makes in the story that show how important fairness is to her?

4. How important is fairness important to you? Have you ever spoken up about something unfair affecting you or people you know?
5. At your school or in your classroom, do students get to vote on decisions?

If yes: What kinds of things do students vote on? (For example: class activities, rules, or projects.)

If no: Do you think students should be able to vote on some decisions? If so, what kinds of decisions should students be allowed to vote on? Why do you think voting could be helpful in a classroom or school?
6. What are the similarities and differences between a class vote on something like a game to play or a class rule, and how people vote in a province or a country? Some things to think about include:
 - Who gets to vote?
 - How is the final decision chosen?
 - What happens if not everyone agrees with the result?
7. In the story, why isn't the first vote about the class pet successful? What change does the class make so that they can decide together?
8. Explain what a "vanishing" vote means in this story. Does a ballot actually disappear?
9. What were the reasons Iggy decided not to cast a ballot in the vote? Do you think Iggy should have voted in the election?
10. Sofia's Abuelo explains that every vote matters, and if people do not vote, they give up their power to change things. Do you agree?
11. In the story, the students create a newspaper to explore their election issues, but at first the newspaper did not go as Ms. Greer had hoped. What was the problem with the newspaper? Why are accurate and clear news stories so important for the election?



12. Mr. Page, the librarian in the story, explains the three steps students can take to make sure the news is real. What are the three steps? What steps do you use to know if new stories are accurate and true?

13. In the story, Sofia tells the class that the most important part of their election is that they are making a decision together on something they care about. Elections and voting are about making important decisions together as a community, a province, or a country. How does voting help people feel part of their community or country?

14. In a democracy, why is it important for newspapers, reporters, and journalists to be free to share news and information with the public? How does press freedom affect the choices people make about their communities, especially during elections?

Activity prompts

Election activity

As a class, brainstorm ideas and choose one decision to vote on such as:

- choosing a class mascot
- which activity to do on a special day

Choose a voting method that students agree is fair and appropriate. Have a class discussion about the pros and cons of different voting methods, like hands up or paper ballots, and decide what the class will do if the vote results in a tie. Invite students to share their ideas and reasoning for or against the decision with the class. Hold the vote as decided by the class and count the results together.

After the vote, reflect on these questions individually and as a class:

- How did it feel to vote about this class decision?
- Did everyone have a chance to share their opinion? Was the vote fair?

Voting rights activity

Currently, children are not allowed to vote in government elections. Think about this issue from two different points of view:

1. Why might some people think that it is a bad idea for children to vote?

Write a list of reasons that people might give.



2. Why might some people think that it would be a good idea for kids to vote?

Write a list of reasons that people might give.

Remember: You do not have to agree with all the reasons. The goal is to practice thinking about fairness and different perspectives, just like in the story.

Children's campaign to vote

Imagine you are trying to convince adults like parents, teachers and principals to include children in decision-making at your school. Create a campaign poster that shares messages and ideas about why children should have a say in decisions that affect them at school.

Your drawing or poster should include:

- a clear title or slogan (for example: "Kids' Votes Matter!" or "Let Kids Decide!")
- one main message explaining why it's important for children to be allowed to make decisions for themselves
- pictures or symbols that show fairness, inclusion, decision-making or voting (for example: hands raised, check marks or groups of children)
- bright colours and clear words so your message is easy to understand

Be a reporter!

Interview an adult in your life about their experiences with elections and voting.

Some of the questions you can ask include:

- When was the first time you voted in an election?
- Were you or your parents ever banned from voting as an adult? Why? How did you feel about it?
- How did it feel to vote for the first time? Were you excited or nervous?
- Why do you think voting is important?
- How did you learn about voting when you were younger?
- Has voting changed since you were a child? If yes, how?
- What kind of information helps you decide how to vote in an election? How do you know if the information is accurate?
- What do you think kids should know about voting? What advice do you have for me about voting?

Human rights resources



UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

[UNICEF](http://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version), the United Nations agency for children, has a child-friendly version of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is available here: www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version

[The Society for Children and Youth of BC](http://www.scyofbc.org/resources) has many educational resources available about child rights, including a poster of a simplified United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. They are available here: www.scyofbc.org/resources

Mis/Disinformation: Can You Stop It? campaign

BCOHRC's public awareness campaign about mis/disinformation and human rights includes a short video with a discussion guide, an online quiz, and educational modules that show the connections between mis/disinformation and human rights. You can find this content here: www.bchumanrights.ca/stop

