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My 10-Year-Old Plans To 'Vote' For Justin Trudeau

BY JOSEPH WILSON

PHOTO BY JEFF VINNICK/GETTY IMAGES

Election signs are popping up like late summer foliage in our neighbourhood and my kids are full of questions.

I suspect many parents across the country are trying to explain this bizarre ritual in as simple of terms as possible. I know I've had to figure that out.

A Federal Election, Not A Sorting Hat

"Why are they all different colours?" asks Sonia (who is 10).

"The candidates are from different parties," I reply.

I am greeted with blank stares from all three of my kids.

"They're like different teams, like Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw," I try. "Then you vote for whatever team you want to represent you."

“Oh, I want Harry Potter to be our leader,” said Elizabeth (8). It might not have been an airtight metaphor.

Joseph Wilson is voting in a democratic election, but he would argue that parenting is a dictatorship.

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/parenting-democracy-dictatorship>)

Talking To Kids About The Election

For me, explaining what governments do, in principle, is straight-forward.

Our kids all go to public school, they have regular appointments with our family doctor and they see the garbage trucks come by every week.

They can understand that somebody needs to oversee all of those services.

"Oh, I want Harry Potter to be our leader."

But the details quickly get blurry.

“So, Justin Trudeau pays for the neighbourhood pool?” asks Sonia. “Well, no, that’s municipal,” my wife says, “there are... different governments for different things.”

At this stage in the conversation, they look skeptical.

A Good Education

In Sonia’s class at school they’ve been following the election and will be having a mock election in her class on Monday — it’s their first attempt at electoral politics.

Like any person effectively exercising their civic duty, she tries her best to understand the choices before her.

“The Conservatives want to conserve money so they don’t spend a lot,” says Sonia over dinner. My wife and I look at each other. “That’s actually a pretty good explanation,” I say.

"It must be so hard to teach electoral politics without coming across as a partisan spokesperson for your preferred party."

“The Liberals spend money when it’s necessary,” she then says. “Well, when they think it’s necessary,” clarifies my wife.

“The Bloc are only in Quebec, the NDP came up with the idea that hospitals should be free and the Greens like the environment,” she rattles off.

I admire her teacher’s pithy summaries. It must be so hard to teach electoral politics without coming across as a partisan spokesperson for your preferred party.

Talking The Vote

“I voted today,” says my wife who took advantage of the advanced polls.

“Who did you vote for?” asks Sonia.

“I don’t want to tell you because I don’t want to influence your decision,” she says.

“I’m going to vote for Justin Trudeau,” Sonia says confidently.

“OK, how did you decide that?”

“Because our school is named after his dad!” she says. “That’s so cool.” Apparently name recognition is a thing, even for 10-year-olds.

Joseph Wilson loves getting his kids involved. Not just in conversations about voting, but also: drywalling.

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/drywall-projects-with-daughters>)

A Conversation Too Nuanced, Confusing

“When you vote you don’t actually vote directly for the leader you want,” says my wife. As you can imagine, this brought on more skeptical looks from the kids.

“You vote for your local representative and then they choose the leader they want,” she says. Their looks say: it’s just like you adults to make a simple idea unnecessarily confusing.

To get herself ready, Sonia has been practicing her colours. “Nature is green and so the Green party is for the environment” she says, realizing that the other colours don’t make as much sense. “It’s confusing. There are two different blues,” she says, referring to the Bloc and the CPC.

“Well, three if you count...” mumbles my wife. “I don’t think they do,” I say. “Not in her class. Five is enough.”

It will be interesting to see if name recognition and colours are enough to win Trudeau another term in Sonia’s class.

“On Monday we might have a new Prime Minister,” I say.

The kids consider that for a moment and then ask, “What’s for dessert?”

A much simpler question to answer.

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