



Gambling in Canada

Introduction

No one can say when humans first gambled. Gambling is older than history itself. Even some animals have been observed to embrace risk for the chance of a reward. Lotteries, casinos and bingo all came later. But even they have long histories. Lotteries existed in China as early as The Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BCE and are believed to have helped finance the building of the Great Wall. The game of bingo originated from lottery games which spread throughout Europe in the 16th century CE. These games were based purely on chance – based on the drawing of random numbers. They were altered over the centuries to become the game we know today. But this was a very gradual process. Mercantile gambling houses (early casinos) were common in Europe by the 18th century.

In 1606, King James I authorized a lottery to help fund the Virginia Colony, the first permanent English settlement in North America. Between 1744 and the American Revolution, lotteries played a vital role in the funding of roads, libraries, churches, colleges, bridges, and other public works. Lotteries also played a part in supporting the war efforts during the French and Indian Wars and the American Revolution. By the early 19th century gambling houses were becoming big business in the eastern United States.

Indigenous peoples have been gambling in what is now Canada for thousands of years. Explorers and settlers also brought their gambling games and traditions. However, in 1892, the Canadian government banned all forms of gambling. But, as times changed, so did perceptions on gambling. In 1900, bingo and raffles were permitted for charitable purposes. Ten years later, horse racing was added to the list of acceptable forms of gambling. And in 1925, fairs and exhibitions were granted the right to hold gambling events. In 1969, the Canadian government amended the Criminal Code to allow both the federal and provincial governments to run lotteries to fund special projects. Today, there are casinos in almost every province in Canada, but the lottery remains the most popular gambling activity in across the country.

This lesson uses 2009 data from Statistics Canada to explore the gambling landscape in Canada. Students are encouraged to think about the factors that might explain the relative popularity of different forms of gambling in different regions and among different populations in Canada. What might our gambling tell us about ourselves?

Instructional Strategies

1. Ask students to reflect on their own assumptions about gambling. You might have them discuss questions like the following in small groups or as a class.
 - a. Playing bingo for money, buying lottery tickets and playing slot machines or other casino games are all forms of gambling. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
 - b. Where do you think our ideas and beliefs about various gambling activities come from? To what extent, if at all, do our ideas and beliefs relate to our own personal history? To what extent, if at all, do they relate to the history of the various forms of gambling? What other factors may influence our ideas and beliefs about gambling and the various forms of gambling?



2. Provide students with a copy of the [statistical table](#) on Canadian gambling. You might ask a few factual questions to help students orient themselves to the table. For example you might ask:
 - a. In what province does the highest percentage of households engage in at least one gambling activity?
 - b. What province has the lowest percentage of households that engage in gambling?
 - c. On average, do men or women spend more money on gambling?
 - d. What is the most common form of gambling in British Columbia?

	At least one gambling activity		Government lotteries		Casinos, slot machines and video lottery terminals (VLTs)		Bingos	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
All households	495	67	265	58	710	17	530	6
Newfoundland and Labrador	425	68	290	55	310	6	575	13
Prince Edward Island	530	67	290	49	485	14	1,160	9
Nova Scotia	495	75	250	65	660	13	895	9
New Brunswick	440	70	260	60	535	9	780	9
Quebec	375	67	250	61	425	12	495	7
Ontario	490	66	280	59	595	19	370	5
Manitoba	540	75	255	61	610	25	735	8
Saskatchewan	735	76	250	62	1,315	23	720	5
Alberta	785	67	285	53	1,535	19	705	4
British Columbia	450	63	240	54	660	17	445	3
Gender and age								
Men	615	59	270	53	1,430	14	315	3
18 to 44	740	52	160	44	1,915	16	N/A	N/A
45 to 64	525	68	295	62	915	16	N/A	N/A
65 and over	570	57	375	55	1,165	7	N/A	N/A
Women	335	56	160	46	440	13	570	8
18 to 44	160	46	95	37	175	13	N/A	N/A
45 to 64	270	64	155	56	355	12	295	8
65 and over	475	57	200	45	670	13	715	12
Income after tax								
Less than \$20,000	390	46	170	39	845	8	625	7
\$20,000 to \$39,999	415	62	255	54	435	14	600	7
\$40,000 to \$59,999	495	70	295	60	655	17	515	6
\$60,000 to \$79,999	465	76	265	69	535	21	465	4
\$80,000 and over	620	75	280	65	1,025	21	340	4

Extracted from Statistics Canada data for 2009: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2011004/tables-tableaux/11551/tblo4-eng.htm>

After students are oriented to the table using the factual questions above, facilitate a class discussion or have students work in groups to explore questions like the following. Some of these questions could be used as topics for research projects.

- a. The majority of Canadian households participate in gambling. The vast majority will lose money, so what benefits do you think they think they get from gambling? Aside from the possibility to win money, what does it bring people?
 - b. Why do you think lotteries are the most popular gambling activity among Canadians? What do you think makes buying lottery tickets more appealing to Canadians than other types of gambling? Discuss your answer.
 - c. How is playing the lottery perceived by society? How are other forms of gambling perceived in Canadian society? How do you think this influences gambling behaviour? Explain.
 - d. Why do you think households in Alberta and Saskatchewan that engaged in gambling in 2009 spent considerably more on gambling than households in other provinces? In particular why do you think they spent so much on casinos, slot machines and VLTs?
 - e. Men who gamble spend more money than women who gamble. Why do you think that might be?
 - f. Men who gamble tend to spend less as they get older. Women who gamble tend to spend more as they get older. How would you explain this?
 - g. Are there any potential risks related to buying lottery tickets or other forms of gambling? If so, what risks? Would those risks be different for different forms of gambling? For different people? For people in different places? How could people who gamble mitigate any of these risks? Give examples.
 - h. Even though people with higher incomes spend more on gambling, people with lower incomes spend a larger percentage of their income on gambling. What factors might help explain this? What implications might this have for how we should regulate gambling in our society?
3. As an extension to the above, you might ask students to create graphs or info graphics to illustrate things they find interesting in the data (e.g., two side-by-side pie charts comparing average spending on gambling by women and men by age group).

Gambling literacy

Big ideas

- Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour
- Consider dominant social discourses and assess their impact on the distribution of risk and benefit associated with gambling
- Develop personal and social skills to reflect on and manage personal behaviour and choices related to gambling

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf



Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)

Social Studies 10 (Canada and the World)

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence)