

3 Three Levels of Government

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the roles and responsibilities associated with the three levels of government and understand how government influences their lives.

KEY WORDS

provincial, territorial, federal, municipal, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Member of Parliament (MP), legislative assembly, legislature, parliament, House of Commons, prime minister, premier, mayor, ministry, minister

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- How is your life affected by government?
- How is government structured in Canada?
- What roles and responsibilities are associated with each of the three levels of government?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 3: Three Levels of Government
- Video: Canada's Democracy
- Video: The Levels of Government
- Worksheet 3.1: Government All Around
- Worksheet 3.2: Investigating Government
- Handout 3.3: Government Responsibilities
- Worksheet 3.4: In the News

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 5-10 min

Ask students to consider the roles of the following individuals in education: teacher, principal and superintendent. What is the area or border of their responsibilities (e.g., classroom, school, school division)? Whose responsibilities are the broadest?

Similar to the education system, there is a division of responsibility among governments in Canada. Write the words below on the board. Ask students to match the two columns.

Federal Government	___	A	___	Classroom Teacher
Provincial Government	___	B	___	School Principal
Municipal Government	___	C	___	School Division Superintendent

Ask students to describe the separation of responsibilities (who does what) at several community places or organizations (e.g., police force, business, hospital, fire department, library, community swimming pool, grocery store).

For example:

Police — Chief of Police, Sergeants, Constables
 Fire Department — Fire Chief, Captain, Firefighters
 Business — President/Executive Director, Regional Directors, Local Manager, Local Staff

Discussion: 2-3 min

Who is the current prime minister, premier and mayor or reeve of your community?

Instruction: 15-20 min

1. Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal.
 - Each level has its own set of responsibilities. Sometimes more than one level works together on a particular issue but there is always a division of roles.
 - The federal government takes responsibility for matters of national and international concern, provincial/territorial governments are responsible for their own province and territory, and municipal governments are responsible for their community.
2. In Canada, we vote for people to represent us at each level of government.
 - The representative at the federal level is called a Member of Parliament (MP). There are currently 308 MPs across the country, each representing a specific area or district.
 - In Alberta, the representative at the provincial level is called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). There are 87 MLAs across Alberta.
 - The representative at the municipal level is called a councillor or alderman.
3. The representatives gather together to suggest, debate and approve laws, and to discuss concerns facing the country, province or community and people living in the geographic areas they represent (also known as a constituency).
 - MPs meet at the House of Commons within the Parliament buildings in Ottawa.
 - MLAs meet at the Alberta Legislature in Edmonton.
 - Councillors/aldermen meet at the local city or town hall in their community.

4. Each level of government has a leader. At the federal and provincial levels, this person is usually the leader of the political party that has the most members in the legislature or parliament. At the municipal level, the leader is usually selected by people through a vote.
- The leader at the federal level is called a prime minister.
 - The leader at the provincial/territorial level is called a premier.
 - The leader at the municipal level is called a mayor or reeve.

Teacher Note: PowerPoint 3 and Videos 2 and 3 can be used to assist with content delivery.

Activity: 15-20 min and homework

1. Distribute copies of Worksheet 3.1 and ask students, individually or in pairs, to label or identify all the government services in the picture.
2. Take up the worksheet as a class and have a discussion about all the ways government impacts our lives.
3. Assign Worksheet 3.2 for homework. Provide the following links to support research.
 - The Governor General of Canada — www.gg.ca
 - The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta — www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca
 - Parliament of Canada — www.parl.gc.ca
 - Legislative Assembly of Alberta — www.assembly.ab.ca

Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about government. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- What have you learned about the levels of government in Canada?
- Is government important? Why or why not?
- If you became premier of Alberta, what would be your three top priorities or goals over the next four years?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Review Handout 3.3 and ask students to identify an area of responsibility they care about at the provincial level. In pairs, groups, or individually, ask students to prepare a creative presentation about why it is important. Students can use any form of presentation they choose — it could be a speech, poster, skit, song or rap.

B. Have students find a story related to government in the local newspaper. Ask them to identify whether the story concerns the municipal, provincial or federal government by highlighting the key words that reveal this information. Using Worksheet 3.4, have students answer the following questions and share their findings with the class: What is this news story/article

about? What is the issue being discussed? Which level of government does it involve? What are the arguments or supporting points being made? Who is this story most important to?

C. Have students draw a community picture or map and label five government services (e.g., school, park, hospital, roads, cars, police officer). The label should include the level of government and the responsibility.

D. Invite an elected representative, past politician or public servant (at any level) to visit the school or class to discuss their role and the responsibilities of their level of government.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

How is government structured in Canada?

Canada is a federal state, parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.

A federal state brings together a number of different political communities with a central government (federal) for general purposes and separate local governments (provincial/territorial) for local purposes.

In Canada's parliamentary democracy, the people elect representatives (members) to the federal parliament and to the provincial and territorial legislatures. The local representative is called a Member of Parliament (MP) at the federal level and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) at the provincial level in Alberta.

The dominant party in legislature or parliament, or the party with the most seats or representatives, usually determines the leader of the government. At the federal level, the leader of the government is called the prime minister. At the provincial or territorial level, the leader of the government is called a premier.

Consensus government is used in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. There are no parties, and the legislature selects the speaker, premier, and cabinet members from amongst themselves.

As a constitutional monarchy, Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king), who reigns in accordance with the constitution. The sovereign is represented in Canada by the governor general, who is appointed by the sovereign on the advice of the prime minister. In each of the ten provinces the sovereign is represented by the lieutenant governor, who is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. Usually, the governor general and lieutenant governors serve five-year terms.

Territorial commissioners serve in a role similar to a lieutenant governor in Canada's three territories. Commissioners do not represent the sovereign, however. They are appointed by and represent the federal government.

How are responsibilities divided among the levels of government?

Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal. Each level of government has its own structure of elected and appointed representatives as well as a unique set of responsibilities.

The constitutional division of powers is based on the principle of subsidiarity, in which the government closest to the issue governs it. The division of powers is found in Sections 91–95 of the *Constitution Act*.

- The federal government takes responsibility for the whole country and matters of national and international concern, such as our armed forces, relations with other countries, money and currency, fisheries and oceans, and criminal law and public safety.
- Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for their own province or territory and regional matters including education, health care delivery, natural resources and transportation/highways.
- Municipal governments take responsibility for their city or town and local matters such as garbage and recycling, libraries, public transit, and local parks and recreation. Municipal governments acquire their responsibilities from their province.

Some powers may overlap between jurisdictions. This is called concurrency. For example, federal, provincial and municipal governments are concurrently responsible for the environment. The federal government enforces the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* and regulates waterways used for fishing and shipping. Provincial governments regulate land use, mining, manufacturing and harmful emissions. Municipal governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

How is the Alberta government structured? What roles exist?

The Alberta government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial.

The legislative branch, termed the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, is made up of elected representatives called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The legislative branch creates laws, rules and regulations for areas under provincial jurisdiction. The legislative assembly consists of 87 MLAs and each represents a different geographic area, called an electoral division.

In the executive branch, the Queen is the head of state and is represented by the lieutenant governor. The leader of the government is called a premier. The executive branch implements and enforces laws, rules and regulations. The premier appoints several MLAs

to head ministries of the executive council (cabinet). Each minister is in charge of one of the provincial responsibilities and acts as an advisor to the premier and the legislature in their area of expertise.

The judicial branch of government is headed by the Chief Provincial Judge of Alberta. The judicial branch interprets the law and punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations. In Alberta, there are nine assistant chief justices, judges and supernumerary judges to serve the population of the province. The judicial branch punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations. The Alberta court system is responsible for deciding who has broken the law and for dispensing the appropriate punishment for the crime committed.

Where does the legislative assembly meet? What do they do?

The Legislative Assembly of Alberta meets at the Alberta Legislature in Edmonton.

When the legislature is sitting, MLAs are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents. When the legislature is not sitting, MLAs meet with their constituents (people living in the electoral division they represent) to discuss their concerns and to provide guidance and advice relating to government services.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- How Canadians Govern Themselves — www.parl.gc.ca
- Discover Canada — www.cic.gc.ca
- Legislative Assembly of Alberta — www.assembly.ab.ca
- Government of Alberta website — www.alberta.ca
- Parliament of Canada — www.parl.gc.ca
- Government of Canada website — www.gc.ca