4 Political Parties

OBJECTIVE
Students will learn about political perspectives and political parties, and research the current political parties campaigning in Alberta.

KEY WORDS
political ideology, political party, platform, electoral division, party member, party leader, candidate, campaign, slogan, speech

QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON
- What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
- How do political parties form government?
- What is a party platform?
- Which political parties are campaigning in the Alberta provincial election?
- What is each party's platform or what promises are they making if they get elected?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS
- PowerPoint 4: Political Parties
- Handout 4.1: 2012 Election Results
- Worksheet 4.2: Getting to Know the Parties
- Worksheet 4.3: Where do you stand?
- Worksheet 4.4: Vote for My Party
- Worksheet 4.5: Watching the Leaders' Debate

TEACHING STRATEGIES
Hook: 20-30 min
1. Tell students to imagine that their school has been given a grant or sum of money to improve or expand the schoolyard. Lead a class brainstorming session on the different ways in which the money could be spent. Record ideas on a blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard.

2. Group similar ideas together so that there are four to six main ideas. Help students form groups ("parties") based on their interests. Ask each group to discuss their ideas in more detail and record reasons why their ideas are good ones. Ask each group to put together a one minute pitch.

3. Give each group one minute to share their pitch with the rest of the class.

Instruction: 10 min
1. When a community or large number of people need to get something done, people with similar interests often form groups and work together to achieve their goals. In politics, these groups are called political parties. A political party is made up of people, called party members, who share similar beliefs and goals for their province or country. Each party also selects a leader, usually through a vote or contest. In order for the political party to have the chance to work towards their goals, the party must win an election and lead the government.

2. Alberta's system of government is based on political parties. Each political party has a leader, and during elections they create a party platform, which is a list of ideas or strategies that aim to benefit the province. While all the parties may agree that education is a priority, for example, they may have different ideas about how to improve the system or what to focus on.

3. During elections, political parties also select individuals (candidates) to spread their message and platform, and compete for the job of MLA for their local area (electoral division). In the Alberta provincial election, there will be 87 local election races happening across the province.

4. After the election, the political party that wins the most local election races (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Review the results of the 2012 election (Handout 4.1).

Discussion: 10 min
What ideas and goals do you have for improving the province? If you were a member of party, what would you want your party's platform to focus on?

Activity: 60+ min (should be conducted over two classes with homework)
1. Review the list of political parties in Alberta and identify which have candidates running in your electoral division. A list of registered political parties can be found at the end of the lesson. Please refer to www.elections.ab.ca for a current list of parties and nominated candidates.

2. Organize students into groups and assign each group a political party or allow them to choose one based on their preference. Regardless of the method, the goal is to ensure each party running a candidate in your electoral division is covered by a group.

3. Using party websites, online resources and campaign literature, each group should conduct research into the following:
    - What does the political party stand for?
    - Who is the current leader of the party?
    - What are the party's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the party's key messages?
    - What are the party's main priorities or ideas (platform)? What is their vision for Alberta?

4. Using the information collected, each group will create a presentation about their party and their campaign platform. Students can also produce videos, posters or multi-media works to advertise their political party.

5. Have each group present their political party to the rest of the class. Students can make notes on each presentation using Worksheet 4.2. Afterwards have students vote on the political party they like best – excluding their own party.

Teacher Note: Organize a presentation schedule that would allow each group to visit other classes in the school on a rotational basis to help inform and prepare the student electorate for Student Vote Day. Alternatively, you could coordinate a school-wide assembly.

Debrief: 5 min
Have a brief closing discussion about political parties with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log.
- What did you learn about political parties?
- Why are political parties important?
- Would you ever join a political party? Why or why not?
- Which political party do you like the most? Why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES
A. A political ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs about how politics and government should work. Play a game of Agree/Disagree with your students. Post two signs in the classroom on either side of the room, one with "Agree" and one with "Disagree". Alternatively, create four zones with the following options: "Totally agree", "I agree but…", "I don't agree" and "Convince me." Have students move accordingly.

Read out one statement at a time and ask students to vote with their feet by walking to the sign that fits with their opinion. Ask students to explain their choice.
- Companies that pollute our air and water should suffer consequences.
- Canada should not welcome any more immigrants.
- Canada should spend more money on our armed forces.
- People who make more money should pay more in taxes.
- Government should focus on earning money, not helping people.
- Canada should give more money and aid to poorer countries.
- The government should provide free child care for all families.
- The size of government should be small with limited services, so that we do not have to pay a lot of taxes.
- Tradition is a more important than change, in our society.

Alternatively, you could assign Worksheet 4.3 and discuss the responses as a class.

B. Using Worksheet 4.4, ask students to create a comic strip persuading their classmates to vote for one particular political party on Student Vote Day. They should explain what their party stands for, what they are promising to do if they form the government and what makes them the best choice to lead Alberta.

C. Have students create their own Alberta political party. The political party should have a name, logo, slogan, key priorities and ideas for helping the people of Alberta. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

D. The leaders' debate is an opportunity for the major party leaders to share their platforms, point out weaknesses in their opponents' ideas and encourage voters to support them. Ask your students to watch the leaders' debate with their families and friends. Ask students to record quotes or arguments they liked or disliked. Afterwards, have students and their family and friends evaluate the performance of each leader using Worksheet 4.5.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political beliefs whose intention is to achieve power through an election, form government and create meaningful political change. Political parties compete against each other during election campaigns and appeal to the public for their support and ultimately their vote on polling day.

What is the political spectrum?
The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and policies. A linear spectrum is represented as a horizontal line, with parties on the left embracing change and parties on the right favouring tradition.

How does a political party form government in Alberta?
Alberta's system of government at the provincial level is based on political parties. Parties are required to register with Elections Alberta. During elections, an organized course of action is taken by a political party, its candidates and campaign team, with the intention of spreading their message in the hopes of securing constituent support and votes.

The political party that elects the most candidates (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Most candidates running for election belong to a party, unless they are running as an independent or are not associated with any party.

How do political parties work?
Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Anyone above the required age can be a member of a political party — for most parties the age is 14. Party members can discuss ideas and propose policy. Many parties also have youth wings.

Party members choose their party's leader and local candidates and help them get elected. Local candidates are party members selected through a nomination process by the local riding association. The party selects the person they feel has the greatest chance of success as their candidate.

Candidates campaign during the election, share their party's ideas and aspire to represent them in the legislature. To become an MLA, candidates must get more votes than any other candidate in their electoral division during an election.

What is a party platform?
A party platform is a series of declared principles, strategies and policies on jurisdictional issues that concern the government and the public. Parties share their platforms through announcements, advertising and events, and share their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and to secure votes.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES
- Elections Alberta — www.electionsalberta.ab.ca
- Campaign literature (pamphlets, advertisements, articles)

Alberta Political Parties
(For a current list visit www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)
- Alberta First Party
- Alberta Liberal Party — www.albertaliberal.com
- Alberta New Democratic Party — www.albertandp.ca
- Alberta Party — www.albertaparty.ca
- Alberta Social Credit Party — www.socialcredit.com
- Communist Party - Alberta — www.communistparty-alberta.ca
- Green Party of Alberta — www.greenpartyofalberta.ca
- Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta — www.pcalberta.org
- Wildrose Party — www.wildrose.ca