

# 3 Governments in Canada

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the roles and responsibilities associated with the three levels of government and understand how government policy and services influence their lives directly.

## KEY WORDS

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

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

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

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 3: Governments in Canada
- Video 2: Canada's Democracy
- Video 3: The Levels of Government
- Worksheet 3.1: Government in Canada
- Handout 3.2: Government Responsibilities
- Worksheet 3.3: Investigating Government
- Worksheet 3.4: Government All Around
- Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* (available online)

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 15-20 min

1. Have an opening conversation: How does government impact you or your life? Create a list for all students to see on the board, overhead or SmartBoard.
2. Invite students to share all of the activities they do on a daily or weekly basis. Try to refine the list so that activities can be easily connected to government policy or services (e.g., make breakfast, listen to music, ride the bus, go to school, drive a car, go clothes shopping, go to the park/skate park, buy groceries, take out the garbage).
3. Next, ask students if they know how government affects these activities, either through funding or legislation.

Examples include:

- Food — farming/agriculture, use of electricity
  - Music — Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, copyright laws/downloading music
  - Buses and local transportation — public transit, roads
  - School — curriculum outcomes, teachers, school boards
  - Driving a car — driver's licenses, traffic laws, speed limits
  - Shopping — sales tax
  - Parks and playgrounds — development and maintenance
  - Festivals — tourism, celebrations
4. Considering the list of government services mentioned, ask students how they would go about organizing one of the items if there was no government involvement (e.g., residential street snow removal, parks). How would this change their relationship with government?

### Instruction: 15-20 min

1. Canada is a federal state with three levels of government (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal).
  - The division of responsibilities is based on the principle of subsidiarity (whoever is closest to the matter governs it). There are also cases where responsibilities are shared between levels of government (concurrency).
2. Canada is a parliamentary democracy.
  - We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and provincial/territorial legislatures. Members are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills.
  - The political party with the most seats in the parliament or legislature usually determines the leader of the government.
  - The leader selects a cabinet (made up of ministers) and is responsible for the operations and policy of their level of government.
3. Canada is a constitutional monarchy.
  - Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king).
  - The sovereign is represented by the governor general (GG) at the federal level and the lieutenant governor (LG) at the provincial level.

- Both the GG and LG have similar roles and are responsible for ensuring that there is a leader and a functioning government. They summon, dissolve and prorogue parliament, call elections, give assent to acts of parliament and read the Speech from the Throne.

*Teacher Note: Use PowerPoint 3 to aid in the knowledge transfer. Ask students to fill out Worksheet 3.1 as they review the terms or assign it for homework. Copies of Handout 3.2 could also be distributed.*

#### Activity: 20-25 min

1. Watch Video 3 with your class to quickly review the roles and responsibilities at each level of government.
2. As a class or in groups play a game of political trivia (e.g., What is the title given to the leader of our country? Who holds this position? Which party do they represent?). You can use or modify the Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* game available online or create your own list of questions and answers. Worksheet 3.3 could also be used for reference.

#### Debrief: 5-10 min

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

- What have you learned about government in Canada?
- If you became premier of Alberta, what would your three top priorities or goals be over the next four years? What would your vision for Alberta be?
- How involved should governments be in the lives of their citizens?
- Would you rather pay taxes to have public services provided, or be responsible for them yourself?

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using online resources, ask students to fill out Worksheet 3.3. This could be completed in a computer lab or assigned for homework. Use the following links as a starting point:

- The Governor General of Canada – [www.gg.ca](http://www.gg.ca)
- The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta – [www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca](http://www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca)
- Parliament of Canada – [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Legislative Assembly of Alberta – [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)
- Elections Canada – [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- Elections Alberta – [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)

B. Distribute copies of Worksheet 3.4 and ask students, individually or in pairs, to label or identify all the government services in the picture. Take up the worksheet as a class and have a discussion about all the ways government impacts our lives.

C. Have students research and choose a political hero from the past – a municipal, provincial or federal politician who made a significant mark in the community, province or nation. Have them write a short summary of their hero's impact and present it to the class.

D. Create questions as a class or individually and ask students to contact one of their local elected representatives. Sample questions: What is an example of a recent law or by-law passed? Why was it passed? What are three pressing issues on the table right now? What issue are you most passionate about? How will your decisions and efforts affect me?

Alternatively, you could invite a former politician into the class for a Q&A about their experiences. Sample questions: Why did you want to get involved in politics? Which accomplishments are you most proud of while you were in office? What was the most challenging aspect of your job?

#### 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 a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) at the provincial level in Alberta.

The dominant party in legislature or parliament (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.

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 by and chooses the governor general 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 have 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/territorial 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 federal and provincial 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 the 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 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 (people living in the electoral division they represent). When the legislature is not sitting, MLAs meet with their constituents to discuss their concerns and to provide guidance and advice relating to government services.

#### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- How Canadians Govern Themselves — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Discover Canada — [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)
- Legislative Assembly of Alberta — [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)
- Government of Alberta website — [www.alberta.ca](http://www.alberta.ca)
- Parliament of Canada — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Government of Canada website — [www.gc.ca](http://www.gc.ca)