

# Lesson 1

## Government and Decision-Making Models



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What are different ways we can make decisions?
- 2 In what ways does government serve a community?
- 3 What does it mean to live in a democracy?

### PURPOSE

A government is made up of the people and practices put in place to manage the land, resources and people living within its borders.

In this lesson, students review different decision-making models and explore their strengths and limitations through dramatic presentations. Students discuss the purpose of government and review basic government types. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on why we need government or what it means to live in a democracy.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe different ways that governments or groups make decisions;
- analyze the strengths and limitations of different decision-making models;
- explain the type of government system in Canada and what it means for them;
- participate in teams by establishing positive and respectful relationships, and acting cooperatively.

## Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- Supplies/Needs: chart paper, Slide Deck 1, copies of 1.2, copies of 1.1 (if assigned individually).
- Any videos, slide decks, handouts and activity sheets in Word can be found at: [studentvote.ca/canada](http://studentvote.ca/canada).

## Starter

Read out one of the following scenarios or another of your choosing:

*A. Skateboards and longboards are being ridden on the sidewalk in the neighbourhood. Recently, there have been a few accidents with skateboarders running into small children. Some people want the boards to be banned from sidewalks.*

*B. More and more young kids are riding ATVs in the community without proper training or protective gear. Recently, one boy was riding with his friend on a single rider ATV without wearing a helmet. He fell off and was injured.*

In small groups, ask students to discuss one or more of the following questions:

- What are some solutions to the problem?
- Who should be involved in making the decision for the community?
- What information is needed to make an informed decision?
- Can you agree on one solution?

## Activities

1. Pose any of the following questions and lead a class discussion about decision-making processes.
  - How do people make decisions in a group?
  - What are different types of decision-making models?
  - How can making decisions be challenging, especially with many people? (e.g., ordering a pizza with toppings and ingredients that will meet both the preferences and dietary restrictions of all students).

Next, use a graphic organizer (e.g., Venn diagram, T-chart) to organize student responses to the following questions:

- What factors contribute to a positive decision-making process?
- What factors contribute to a negative decision-making process?

2. Review the three decision-making models on Activity 1.1 (autocratic, democratic, consensus). Divide students into groups and have each group prepare a skit for one of the scenarios on the worksheet. At the end of each skit, have the rest of the class choose the best decision-making model for the scenario and provide a reason.

Alternatively, students could fill out the activity sheet in pairs and discuss the answers as a class afterwards.

3. Discuss the concept of government and the need for rules and leadership in society (Slide Deck 1). Guiding questions:
  - What types of rules and decisions are needed for people living in a community (e.g., education/schools, roads and traffic laws, health care/hospitals)?
  - Who is responsible for making decisions in the community?
  - What would happen if there was no government responsible for creating laws and providing support to citizens?
4. Using the 'Government and Democracy' video and/or Slide Deck 1, review some basic government types and how they can be compared (e.g., democracy, dictatorship, monarchy). Connect the government types to three decision-making terms: autocratic, democratic, consensus.

## Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about different government types or decision-making models, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- Why do we need government?
- What are the strengths and limitations of different forms of government?
- What does it mean to live in a democracy? How does it affect your life?
- What would your life look like if Canada had a different type of government? (Students from other countries could share their experiences).

## Assessment For Student Learning

Ask students to fill out the reflection card (Activity 1.2). Use this to structure future discussions.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A **government** is made up of the people and institutions put in place to manage the land, resources and people living within its borders. Various types of government exist in the world.

Governments can be compared by their governance model, the number of people who have access to power, the rights and freedoms granted to citizens, and the existence of rule of law (laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently).

An **autocracy** is a type of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person who rules without restriction. There is no rule of law and citizens are not consulted on the decisions and affairs of the country. An autocracy can be a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy.

In a **dictatorship**, the dictator or ruling group exercises power through control of a mass movement, a political party or the military. Dictatorships often come to power through a military takeover (also known as a coup d'état). Power is then maintained without the consent of the people through a one-party state where political opposition is forbidden. Dictatorships generally restrict individual civil and political rights and there is no independent media.

The term **authoritarianism** is sometimes used to describe dictatorships. Authoritarian governments exercise forceful control over the population with no particular concern for their preferences or for public opinion.

A **monarchy** is a form of government where a monarch (king or queen) is the head of state. The role of the monarch is inherited and usually lasts until death or abdication. The power of ruling monarchs can vary; in an **absolute monarchy**, a monarch retains full political power over a state and its people whereas in a **constitutional monarchy**, the role of the monarch is more symbolic. In a constitutional monarchy, the authority of the monarch is limited by a constitution, which includes the principles and laws of a nation or state, defines the powers and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people living within it. A constitutional monarchy has a democratically elected government with a government leader, and a monarch who remains the head of state and performs ceremonial duties.

A **democracy** is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making. In a direct democracy, citizens themselves vote for or against specific proposals or laws. In an indirect or representative democracy, citizens elect political representatives to make decisions on their behalf. In democratic countries, citizens have protected civil and political rights such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association, and the right to participate in free and fair elections, and run for political office. There are many different types of representative democracies around the world.

A **republic** is a sovereign state, country or government without a monarch where all members of government are elected (including the head of state), and the democratically

elected government holds all political power. Similar to a constitutional monarchy, the government in a republic exercises power according to the rule of law and often has a constitution.

A **consensus democracy** uses a consensus decision-making model while developing legislation and aims to be more collaborative and inclusive by taking into account a broad range of opinions, as opposed to decisions made by majority rule. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut both have consensus governments where a group of individuals without any political party affiliation share political power.

Canada's system of government is a **parliamentary democracy** and a **constitutional monarchy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures, and the political party with the most elected representatives, usually forms government. The British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is our head of state, represented by the Governor General at the federal level. Every act of government is done in the name of the Queen, but the authority for every act comes from the Canadian people through the Constitution. The Constitution of Canada is the highest legal ruling in the country and includes laws, decisions by judges, agreements between federal and provincial governments, traditions and our civil and political rights (the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*).