

Lesson 4

Governments in Canada



GUIDING QUESTIONS

❶ How does government affect me?

❷ How is government organized in Canada?

PURPOSE

Governments make decisions and pass legislation that influence the lives of citizens. Canada has several levels of government, each with its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility. The federal government is the only one that affects everyone in Canada.

In this lesson, students first explore roles and responsibilities in their school community and then within the levels of government in Canada. Students reflect on all the ways the different levels of government affect their lives and then analyze which level is most important to them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze the division of responsibilities at school;
- identify the roles and responsibilities associated with the different levels of government;
- evaluate how government affects them directly.

Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- When discussing big concepts like elected representatives and levels of government, create classroom visuals with photos or images to give students a quick reference point throughout the unit or Student Vote process.
- Supplies/Needs: 'Levels of Government' video, Slide Deck 4A and 4B, copies of 4.1.
- Any videos, slide decks, handouts and activity sheets in Word can be found at: studentvote.ca/canada.

Starter

1. Explain the idea that within schools, and in any community, there are areas of responsibility (who does what) and that different issues are handled by different people.
2. Ask students who they would go to in the following scenarios.
 - If you had a question about your writing assignment;
 - If a bucket of water spilled in the hallway;
 - If you were feeling sick and wanted to go home;
 - If you wanted to help with the school dance or musical concert;
 - If you wanted to try out for the basketball team;
 - If you forgot your lunch;
 - If your tennis ball was thrown over the fence at school and into the neighbour's backyard;
 - If your library book fell in a mud puddle.
3. Have a whole class discussion: Why is it important to know who is responsible for what in your school or community?

Activities

1. Using the images in Slide Deck 4A (Who am I? What am I?), gauge student knowledge about government and politics in Canada. Images include current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Governor General Julie Payette, the parliament buildings, as well as other non-political figures and places. This can be completed through class discussion, or have students jot down their answers on paper.

Afterwards, invite students to share what they know about how government is organized in Canada.

2. Using the 'Levels of Government' video and Slide Deck 4B, review how government is structured in

Canada. Suggested questions to cover during instruction and discussion:

- What is a representative democracy?
 - What are the levels of government in Canada (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal/local and First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments)?
 - What is the title of the elected representative at each level?
 - What is the title of the leader at each level? How are they chosen?
3. Review the concept that each level of government has its own set of responsibilities. The level closest to the issue usually manages it (i.e., the federal government handles national defence). Provide several examples of responsibilities and ask students to guess which level of government is responsible for it. Examples from Activity 4.1 could be used.
 4. Using 'Think-Pair-Share,' have students complete Activity 4.1. They should highlight or circle all of the government areas that affect their life and then respond to the questions. Afterwards, have students share with a partner and then take it up as a class.

Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about government in Canada, or ask students to write a reflection on one or both of the following questions.

- What have you learned about government in Canada?
- Is government important? Why or why not?

Extended Learning

OPTION A: Ask students to keep a 'diary' or create a comic strip of their actions throughout the day. For each activity, ask students to identify the level of government and area of responsibility connected to the activity.

OPTION B: Take the class out for a walk to discover what you can see in your neighbourhood related to government services. Prepare for the walk by looking at the list of responsibilities and have students write down things they see on the walk that relate to these areas.

Assessment For Student Learning

Ask students to identify an issue that concerns them the most in the community. Ask them to find out which level or levels of government are responsible for this matter and contact to the appropriate elected representative (it could be more than one) expressing their concerns. This could be completed by email.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

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

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 a **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. There is no sovereign representative at the municipal/local or territorial level.

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

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.

The division of powers is based on the idea that the level of government closest to the issue governs it. The distribution of responsibilities is found in Sections 91-95 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The **federal government** takes responsibility for the whole country

and matters of national concern, such as the armed forces, international relations and trade, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety.

Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for their own province or territory and issues such as education, health care, social welfare, transportation and highways.

Municipal and local governments receive their powers from their respective provincial or territorial government. These governments handle local matters, such as garbage and recycling, libraries, public transit, local parks and recreation.

Some First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities have their own systems of governance. These councils or governments share certain responsibilities with the provincial/territorial or federal government.

For some issues, the different levels of government have to work together and share the responsibility. 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.

Each level of government has elected officials to represent the people (constituents) living in their designated areas (e.g., electoral districts/divisions, wards, municipalities at-large). **Elected representatives** are responsible for

proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents.

Representatives at the federal level are called **Members of Parliament** (MPs). Representatives at the provincial or territorial level are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) or Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs), depending on the province or territory. The elected representative at the municipal level is usually called a councillor or alderman.

Most federal and provincial elected representatives belong to a political party. A **political party** is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change. At the territorial level in Northwest Territories and Nunavut and in most municipalities, there are no political parties.

The leader of the federal government is called the **prime minister**, whereas **premier** is the title given to the leader of each provincial government. At both levels of government, the leader of the political party with the greatest number of elected representatives in the legislative body usually assumes the role of the leader of that government. Therefore, we do not vote for the premier or prime minister directly.

The leader of the municipal government is most often called a mayor, reeve or chairperson. The leader is elected directly by the people.