

Lesson 4

Levels of Government



GUIDING QUESTIONS

1 How is government structured in Canada?

2 How do the different levels of government affect me?

PURPOSE

Canada has different 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 compare the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal/local levels of government, including leadership roles, elected officials and areas of responsibility. Afterwards, students analyze how the levels of government affect them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe our government system in Canada;
- distinguish between the levels of government;
- identify issues or areas of responsibility and explain how they relate to or directly affect their lives.

Starter

1. Using Handout 4.1, review the levels of government in Canada. In column format, write the following on the board, or in an equivalent forum: federal / provincial or territorial / municipal or local / First Nations, Métis and Inuit.
2. Ask students to consider which level of government they would contact in the following scenarios:
 - You and your friends would like a skate ramp added to the local park
 - You think there should be more financial aid available to help youth pursue post-secondary education or skills and training programs
 - The streetlight near your home is broken and needs to be replaced
 - You are traveling to a foreign country and require documentation
 - The hospital or health clinic in your town is in need of a new X-ray machine
 - You would like your community to welcome more refugees
3. Debrief with the whole class using the following questions:
 - Why is it important to know which level of government is responsible for which issues?
 - If you needed to, how would you go about contacting each level of government?

Activities

1. Divide students into pairs and distribute Activity 4.2. Have them work together to fill in what they already know about the levels of government in Canada.
2. Then explain the structure of government in Canada. Use the 'Levels of Government' video, Slide Deck 4 and/or Handout 4.1.

Guiding questions:

- What kind of government do we have in Canada?
- What is the role of our elected representatives?
- What is the title given to the elected representative at each level?
- What is the title given to the leader at each level? How are they chosen?
- What are the areas of responsibility of each level of government?

Afterwards, have students continue to work in pairs to complete Activity 4.2.

3. For each level of government, ask students to identify three issues or areas of responsibility and explain how they relate to or directly affect their lives (Activity 4.3). Ask students to search online to find and select relevant pictures to represent the issue or area of responsibility. Students could also use pictures that they take themselves in their community or find a current article or social media story that shows how the issue is affecting their life.

Consolidation

After the lesson and activities are complete, ask students to fill out the exit slip (Activity 4.4).

- The most important thing I learned today...
- The thing that surprised me today...
- I would like to learn more about...

Extended Learning

Ask students to pick an issue that matters to them and analyze how the government could take action to improve the conditions. Students should advocate for government action through a method of their own choosing. This could include writing a letter to the minister(s) in charge of their related issue, producing a rant, pitch slide deck or multi-media artwork.

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 and territorial 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.