

## LESSON 3:

# Three Levels of Government

### OBJECTIVE

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

### KEY WORDS

federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, local, Member of Parliament (MP), legislative assembly, parliament, House of Commons, prime minister, premier

### QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

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

### SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 3: Three Levels of Government
- Video 3: The Levels of Government
- Worksheet 3.1: Government All Around
- Worksheet 3.2: Investigating Government
- Handout 3.3: Government Responsibilities
- Worksheet 3.4: In the News

### TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### Hook: 5-10 min

1. Ask students to consider the roles of the following individuals in education: teacher, principal and superintendent/director of education. What is the area or border of their responsibilities (e.g., classroom, school, school board)? Whose responsibilities are the broadest?

2. Similar to the education system, there is a division of responsibility among governments in Canada. Write the words below on the board. Ask students to match the two columns.

Federal Government	___	A ___ Classroom Teacher
Provincial Government	___	B ___ School Principal
Municipal Government	___	C ___ School Division Superintendent

3. Ask students to describe the separation of responsibilities (who does what) at several community places or organizations (e.g., police force, business, hospital, fire department, grocery store).

For example:

Police – Chief of Police, Sergeants, Constables

Fire Department – Fire Chief, Captain, Firefighters

Business – President/Executive Director, Regional Directors, Local Manager, Local Staff

#### Discussion: 2-3 min

Who is the current prime minister, premier and mayor/reeve/chairperson of your community?

#### Instruction: 15-20 min

1. Canada is a federal state with three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal/local.

- Each level has its own set of responsibilities. Sometimes, more than one level works together on a particular issue but there is still a division of roles.
- The federal government takes responsibility for matters of national and international concern, provincial/territorial governments are responsible for their own province and territory, and municipal/local governments manage their community.

2. In Canada, we vote for people to represent us at each level of government.
- The representative at the federal level is called a Member of Parliament (MP). Canada will elect 338 MPs in the current election, each representing a specific area or riding (also known as an electoral district or constituency).
  - At the provincial/territorial level, representatives are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP), Members of the National Assembly (MNA) or Members of the House of Assembly (MHA), depending on the province or territory.
  - The representative at the municipal/local level is often called a councillor or alderman.
3. The representatives gather together to propose, debate and approve laws, discuss concerns facing the country, province or community, and represent people living in their riding.
- MPs meet at the House of Commons within the Parliament buildings in Ottawa.
  - Provincial/territorial representatives meet at the legislature in the capital of their province or territory.
  - Councillors/aldermen meet at the local city or town hall in their community.
4. Each level of government has a leader. At the federal and provincial levels, this person is usually the leader of the political party that has the most members in the legislature or parliament. At the municipal/local level, the leader is usually selected by the people through a vote.
- The leader at the federal level is called a prime minister.
  - The leader at the provincial/territorial level is called a premier.
  - The leader at the municipal/local level is called a mayor, reeve or chairperson.

*Teacher Note: Consensus government is used in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. There are no parties, and the territorial legislature selects the speaker, premier and cabinet members from amongst its members.*

**Activity: 15-20 min and homework**

1. Distribute copies of Worksheet 3.1 and ask students, individually or in pairs, to label or identify all the government services in the picture.
2. Take up the worksheet as a class and have a discussion about all the ways government impacts our lives.
3. Assign Worksheet 3.2 for homework. Provide the following links to support research.
  - The Governor General of Canada — [www.gg.ca](http://www.gg.ca)
  - Parliament of Canada — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
  - Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)

**Debrief: 5-10 min**

Have a brief closing discussion about government in Canada. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What have you learned about the levels of government in Canada?
- How does government affect your life?
- Is government important? Why or why not?
- If you became the prime minister, what would your top three goals be over the next few years?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

A. Review Handout 3.3 and ask students to identify an area of responsibility they care about at the federal level. In pairs, groups, or individually, ask students to prepare a creative presentation about why it is important. Students can use any form of presentation they choose — it could be a speech, poster, skit, song or rap.

B. Have students find a story related to government in the local newspaper. Ask them to identify whether the story concerns the municipal/local, provincial/territorial or federal government by highlighting the key words that reveal this information. Using Worksheet 3.4, have students answer the following questions and share their findings with the class: What is this news story/article about? What is the issue being discussed? Which level of government does it involve? What are the arguments or supporting points being made? Who is this story important to?

C. Have students draw a community picture or map and label five government services (e.g., school, park, hospital, roads, cars, police officer). The label should include the level of government and the responsibility.

D. Invite an elected representative, past politician or public servant (at any level) to visit the school or class to discuss their role and the responsibilities of their level of government.

**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 matters of national importance, and separate provincial/territorial governments for local purposes.

In Canada’s parliamentary democracy, the people elect representatives (members) to the federal parliament and to the provincial and territorial legislatures. 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 party with the most elected representatives in the 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 the premier.

Consensus government is used in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. There are no parties, and the legislature selects the speaker, premier and cabinet members from amongst its members.

With the exception of a few cities in Canada, there are no political parties at the municipal or local level. The elected local representative is usually called a councillor or alderman. The leader of the municipal government is most often called a mayor, reeve or chairperson. The leader is elected by the people.

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 the 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.

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.

*How are responsibilities divided among the levels of government?*

Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal/local. 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, healthcare delivery, natural resources and transportation/highways.

- Municipal and local 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 and local governments acquire their responsibilities from their province or territory.

Some powers may overlap between jurisdictions. This is called concurrency. For example, federal, provincial and municipal/local 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/local governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

*How is the federal government structured? What roles exist?*

The Canadian government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial.

The legislative branch creates laws, rules and regulations under federal jurisdiction. The legislative branch is made up of elected representatives called Members of Parliament at the federal level. After the next election, there will be 338 Members of Parliament and each will represent a different geographic area (called a riding or electoral district).

The executive branch implements and enforces laws, rules and regulations. In the executive branch, the Queen is the head of state and is represented by the governor general. The leader of the federal government is called the prime minister. The prime minister appoints several MPs to head the ministries of the executive council (cabinet). Each minister is in charge of one of the federal departments and acts as an advisor to the prime minister and the legislature in their area of expertise.

The judicial branch interprets the law, rules and regulations and punishes those who violate them. The judicial branch of government is headed by the Supreme Court and nine appointed judges. The Canadian court system is responsible for deciding who has broken the law and for dispensing the appropriate punishment for the crime committed.

*What do members of the legislative branch do?*

When the legislature is sitting, MPs are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents. When the legislature is not sitting, MPs meet with their constituents (people living in the ridings they represent) to discuss the constituents' 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)
- Parliament of Canada — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Government of Canada website — [www.gc.ca](http://www.gc.ca)
- Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)