LESSON 4:
Political Parties

OBJECTIVE
Students will learn about political perspectives and political parties, and research the parties campaigning in the federal election.

KEY WORDS
political party, political ideology, perspective, political party, party leader, candidate, slogan, party platform, plank, riding

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON
- What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
- How do political parties form government?
- Which political parties can you name?
- What is a party platform?
- What is each party's platform or what promises are they making if they get elected?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS
- PowerPoint 4: Political Parties
- Handout 4.1: 2011 Election Results
- Worksheet 4.2: Getting to Know the Parties
- Worksheet 4.3: Where do you stand?
- Worksheet 4.4: Vote for My Party
- Worksheet 4.5: Watching the Leaders' Debate

TEACHING STRATEGIES
Hook: 20-30 min
1. Tell students to imagine that their school has been given a grant or sum of money to improve or expand the schoolyard. Lead a class brainstorming session on the different ways in which the money could be spent. Record ideas on a blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard.

2. Group similar ideas together so that there are four to six main ideas. Help students form groups ('parties') based on their interests. Ask each group to discuss their ideas in more detail and record reasons why their ideas are good ones. Ask each group to put together a one-minute pitch.

3. Give each group one minute to share their pitch with the rest of the class.

Instruction: 10 min
1. When a community or large number of people need to get something done, people with similar interests often form groups and work together to achieve their goals. In politics, these groups are called political parties. A political party is made up of people, called party members, who share similar goals for their province/territory or country. Each party also selects a leader, usually through a leadership contest. In order for the political party to have the chance to work towards its goals, the party must win an election and lead the government.

2. Canada's system of government is based on political parties. In the lead-up to or during an election, a political party will create a platform — a list of ideas or plans that explain the steps to achieve a party's goals. While all parties may agree that education is a priority, they may have different ideas about how to improve the system or which steps to take.

3. A riding (also known as a constituency or electoral district) is a geographical area represented by an elected official. During elections, political parties select individuals to represent them (called candidates) and compete for the job of MP in local races across Canada. Parties can only have one candidate per riding.

4. After the election, the political party that wins the most number of local election races (usually) forms government and the leader becomes the prime minister. Using Handout 4.1, review the results of the 2011 election.

Discussion: 10 min
What ideas and goals do you have for improving the country? If you were a member of a party, what would you want your party's platform to focus on?

Activity: 60+ min (should be conducted over two classes with homework)
1. Review the list of political parties in Canada and identify which have candidates running in your riding. A list of registered political parties can be found at the end of the lesson. A list of candidates can be found using the Voter Information Service on Elections Canada's website (**www.elections.ca**).

2. Organize students into groups and assign each group a political party that is running a candidate in your school's riding, or allow them to choose one based on their preference. The goal is to ensure that each party with a candidate running in your riding is covered by a group.

Using party websites, online resources and campaign literature, each group should conduct research into the following:
- What does the political party stand for?
- Who is the current leader of the party?
- What are the party's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the party's key messages?
- Who seems to be the target audience of the party? Who does the party seem to appeal to?
- What are the party's main priorities or ideas (platform)? What is their vision for Canada?

3. Using the information collected, each group will create a presentation about a party and its campaign platform. Students can also produce videos, posters or multi-media works to advertise the political party.

4. Have each group present their political party to the rest of the class. Students can take notes on each presentation using Worksheet 4.2. Afterwards, have students vote on the political party they like best – excluding their own party.

Teacher Note: Organize a presentation schedule that would allow each group to visit other classes in the school on a rotational basis to help inform and prepare the student electorate for Student Vote Day. A school-wide assembly could also be coordinated.

Debrief: 5 min
Have a brief closing discussion about political parties with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What did you learn about political parties?
- Why are political parties important?
- Would you ever join a political party? Why or why not?
- Which political party do you like the most? Why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES
A. A political ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs about how politics and government should work. Play a game of Agree/Disagree with your students. Post two signs in the classroom on either side of the room, one should read "Agree" and the other "Disagree." Alternatively, create four zones with the following options: "Totally agree", "I agree but…", "I don't agree" and "Convince me." Have students move accordingly.

Read out a statement and ask students to vote with their feet by walking to the sign that fits with their opinion. Ask students to explain their choice for each question. After each student defends their response, give the other students the chance to change where they stand, demonstrating that this is what parties try to do with voters during election campaigns.

The statements could include:
- Companies that pollute our air and water should suffer consequences.
- Canada should spend more money on our armed forces.
- People who make more money should pay more in taxes.
- Government should focus on earning money, not helping people.
- Canada should give more money and aid to poorer countries.
- The government should provide free childcare.
- The government should be small and provide limited services, so that we do not have to pay a lot of taxes.
- Tradition is a more important than change in our society.

Alternatively, you could assign Worksheet 4.3 and discuss the responses as a class.

B. Using Worksheet 4.4, ask students to create a comic strip persuading their classmates to vote for one particular political party on Student Vote Day. They should explain what the party stands for, what it is promising to do if it forms the government, and what makes it the best choice to lead Canada.

C. Have students create their own federal political party. The political party should have a name, logo, slogan, key priorities and ideas for helping the people of Canada. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

D. Leaders' debates are opportunities for the leaders of the major political parties to share their platforms, criticize their opponents' ideas and perform in front of the electorate. Plan a viewing of one of the federal

leaders' debates for your class or ask students to watch it with their family and friends. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Worksheet 4.5.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS
What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political ideals whose intention is to achieve power through an election and create meaningful political change. Political parties compete against each other during election campaigns and appeal to the public for their support and, ultimately, their vote on election day.

What is the political spectrum? How do political parties and the political spectrum relate?
The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and policies. A linear spectrum is represented by a horizontal line, with parties on the left embracing social equality, social services and government intervention in the economy, and parties on the right favouring individual liberty, free markets and lower taxes.

How do political parties form government in Canada?
Canada's federal system of government is based on political parties. Parties are required to register with Elections Canada. During elections, an organized course of action is taken by a political party, its candidates and campaign team, with the intention of spreading their message to secure constituent support and votes.

The political party that elects the most candidates (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the prime minister. Most candidates belong to a party, unless they are running as an independent or are not associated with any party.

How do political parties work?
Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Joining a political party can be an effective way for you to influence the party and the politicians who represent you and your riding. Anyone above the required age can be a member of a political party (for most parties the age is 14). Party members can discuss ideas and propose policy. Many parties also have youth wings.

Party members choose the party leader and local candidates and work together to help them get elected. Local candidates are party members selected through a nomination process by the local riding association. The party selects the person they feel has the greatest chance of success as their candidate.

Candidates campaign during the election, share their party's ideas and aspire to represent its vision in the parliament or legislature. To become an MP, candidates must get the most votes in their riding during an election.

What is a party platform?
A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues that concern the government and the public. Parties share their platforms through announcements, advertising and events. They share their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and secure votes.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Elections Canada — **www.elections.ca**
- Vote Compass — **www.votecompass.ca**
- Campaign literature (pamphlets, advertisements, articles)

Registered Political Parties (For the most up to date list, visit **www.elections.ca**)
- Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada — **www.environmentvoters.org**
- Bloc Québécois — **www.blocquebecois.org**
- Canadian Action Party — **www.canadianactionparty.org**
- Christian Heritage Party of Canada — **www.chp.ca**
- Communist Party of Canada — **www.communist-party.ca**
- Conservative Party of Canada — **www.conservative.ca**
- Forces et Démocratie — **www.forcesetdemocratie.org**
- Green Party of Canada — **www.greenparty.ca**
- Liberal Party of Canada — **www.liberal.ca**
- Libertarian Party of Canada — **www.libertarian.ca**
- Marijuana Party — **www.marijuanaparty.ca**
- Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada — **www.mlpc.ca**
- New Democratic Party — **www.ndp.ca**
- Party for Accountability, Competency and Transparency — **www.onlineparty.ca**
- Pirate Party of Canada — **www.pirateparty.ca**
- Progressive Canadian Party — **www.pcparty.org**
- Rhinoceros Party — **www.neorhino.ca**
- The Bridge Party of Canada — **www.thebridgeparty.ca**
- United Party of Canada — **www.unitedpartyofcanada.com**