

LESSON 1:

Governance and Democracy

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about different types of government around the world to better understand the principles of democracy.

KEY WORDS

government, anarchy, dictatorship, oligarchy, democracy, constitutional monarchy, representative democracy, democratic principle

QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What is the role of government?
- What types of governments exist around the world?
- How do other forms of government compare to democracy?
- What are some key principles of democracy?
- Why is democracy important?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 1: Governance and Democracy
- Video 1: Government and Democracy
- Handout 1.1: Principles of Democracy
- Worksheet 1.2: What are the Principles of Democracy?
- Worksheet 1.3: Who Should Decide?

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 10 min

Rules are statements that guide behaviours and actions, and tell people what they can and cannot do in various situations. Have an opening discussion with your students about rules at home or at school.

Guiding questions:

- What rules or laws affect you?
- Does your family have rules? What rules do we have at school?
- Are these rules written down?
- Who enforces these rules?
- Are these rules easy to change?
- What would happen if rules were easy to change?
- What would life be like without rules?
- Why do we need rules (and laws)?

Instruction: 5-15 min

Various types of government exist in the world and they make rules and decisions for their people in different ways. Government types can be distinguished by the number of people who have access to power and by the types of rights and freedoms granted to citizens.

Teacher Note: Show Video 1 or PowerPoint 1 to provide examples of the different government types to students.

a) A dictatorship is a type of government where one person or a ruling group has complete political power. Dictatorships often come to power through a military takeover. Power is then maintained without the consent of the people through a one-party state where political opposition is forbidden. Dictatorships generally restrict individual rights. There is usually a heavy military presence with no independent media.

b) An oligarchy is a type of government in which political power is kept in the hands of a small group of people, usually the rich. Oligarchs exercise power primarily to serve their own interests. An oligarchy can also be a dictatorship.

c) A democracy is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making. The most common form of democracy is representative democracy, where citizens elect politicians to represent them in assemblies and make decisions on their behalf. Citizens are also free to run for political office. In democratic countries, citizens have protected rights such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association, and the right to participate in free and fair elections.

Discussion: 5-10 min

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of government? Consider the following:

- The process for making decisions and laws (time, cost and efficiency)
- The fairness of the decision-making process
- The ability of citizens to live their lives freely in these societies
- The mood and feelings developed among citizens toward their government

Activity: 35-45 min

1. Introduce Handout 1.1 and explain that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.

2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and assign them one or two of the principles of democracy. Give students 10 to 20 minutes to familiarize themselves with their principle(s) and design a brief presentation to inform the rest of the class about their principle(s). Students can design a poster, symbol or graphic, create a skit, or provide actual examples that demonstrate the principle working or not working. Make chart paper available for any visual or written material.

3. Give each group a couple minutes to present. During the presentations have students take notes on Worksheet 1.2.

Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about governance and democracy. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection in their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What does democracy mean to you?
- Is democracy the best form of government?
- Are there some countries that operate under the guise of a democracy? Whose responsibility is it to ensure governments act responsibly?
- Why does a healthy democracy rely so heavily on citizen participation?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Divide the class into groups and provide an actual or hypothetical decision to be made or ask them to select one on their own (e.g., desk arrangements, theme for a school dance, charity fundraiser, field

trip, movie choice). Assign each group a specific decision-making model to guide the process (e.g., autocratic, oligarchic, democratic). Have a post-activity discussion: How were decisions made and how efficient was the process? Who influenced the decision? Was everyone satisfied with the decision? What kinds of behaviour helped or hindered the group? What kind of feeling developed in the group? What are the pros and cons to each decision-making model?

B. To further explore the advantages and disadvantages of decision-making models in a range of scenarios, assign students Worksheet 1.3. Discuss the answers as a class and debate the choices where applicable.

C. Use media and news stories to discuss global struggles to participate democratically (e.g., overcoming violence to vote, long lines at polling places). In pairs or groups, have students choose a clip and explain and present it to the class. Suggested follow up discussion questions include: What do these struggles signify? How does it compare to voting in Canada?

D. Divide the class into groups and provide each with a different country, choosing examples from different continents and regions. Ask students to research the system of government used in each and present their findings to the class.

E. As a class or in groups, have students debate the principles of democracy and evaluate the health of our democracy today. Defend your answers by providing examples of where a principle is or is not working (e.g., citizen participation in elections, multi-party systems, abuse of power). Assign Canada a letter grade (A, B, C, D, E or F) for its application of the principles of democracy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What is government?

A government is made up of the people and institutions put in place to run or govern a country, state, province or community. The role of government is to make decisions and enforce laws for the people it is responsible for. The purpose of government is to protect its citizens and provide services.

What types of government exist?

Various types of government exist in the world and they make rules and decisions for their people in different ways. Governments can be distinguished from one another by the number of people who have access to power and the types of rights and freedoms granted to citizens.

A dictatorship is a type of government where one person or a ruling group has complete political

power. In this system of government, the dictator or ruling group exercises power through control of a mass movement, 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. There is usually a heavy military presence with 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. Similarly, an autocracy is a type of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person who rules without restriction. An autocracy can be a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy.

An oligarchy is a type of government in which political power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of people, usually the rich. Oligarchs exercise power primarily to serve their own interests. An oligarchy can also be a dictatorship.

A democracy is a type of government where a majority of the population is included in political decision-making. The word 'democracy' is derived from two ancient Greek words: demos ('the people') and kratos ('strength' or 'power'). Many different political systems describe themselves as democratic. The most common form of democracy is representative democracy, where citizens elect politicians to represent them in assemblies and make decisions on their behalf. Citizens are also free to run for political office. 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.

What type of government do we have in Canada?
Canada is a parliamentary democracy, which is a type of representative democracy. It is also a constitutional monarchy; the Queen, our head of state, holds symbolic power.

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. Most of the powers and responsibilities of the Queen are now exercised by her representative, the Governor General, except when the Queen is in Canada.

The monarch's powers in Canada are limited by the Constitution and the ability to make and pass legislation belongs to an elected parliament. As a system of government, a constitutional monarchy

separates the head of state's ceremonial and official duties from partisan politics.

What is a principle? What are the principles of democracy?

A principle is a fundamental belief or rule of action. There are several principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. Most democratic countries exhibit some or all of these principles, including equality and human rights, economic freedom, a bill of rights, the rule of law, control of the abuse of power, free and fair elections, multi-party systems, citizen participation, accountability and transparency, an independent judiciary, political tolerance and accepting the results of elections.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Our Country, Our Parliament," *The Library of Parliament* — www.parl.gc.ca
- "Government Type," *CIA World Factbook* — www.cia.gov
- "Libya begins election amid violence," *Al Jazeera* (June 25, 2014) — www.aljazeera.com
- "Ukraine votes in presidential poll amid fears of violence," *France24* (May 25, 2014) — www.france24.com
- "Iraqis vote amid looming threat of violence," *Al Jazeera* (April 30, 2014) — www.aljazeera.com
- "Zimbabwe voters stand in long lines for crucial election," *The Associated Press* (July 31, 2013) — www.ap.org
- "Florida's Long Lines On Election Day Discouraged 49,000 People From Voting: Report," *Huffington Post* (December 29, 2012) — www.huffingtonpost.com