

LESSON 3:

Governments in Canada

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, subsidiarity, concurrency

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

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

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 3: Government in Canada
- Video 3: The Levels of Government
- Worksheet 3.1: Government in Canada
- Handout 3.2: Government Responsibilities
- Worksheet 3.3: Investigating Government
- Worksheet 3.4: Government All Around
- Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* (available online)

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 15-20 min

1. Have an opening conversation: How does government impact you or your life? Create a list for all students to see on the board, overhead or SmartBoard.

2. Invite students to share all of the activities they do on a daily or weekly basis. Try to refine the list so that activities can be easily connected to government policy or services (e.g., make breakfast, listen to music, ride the bus, go to school, drive a car, go clothes shopping, go to the park/skate park, buy groceries, take out the garbage).

3. Ask students to consider how government affects the following activities through funding or legislation.

Examples include:

- Food — farming/agriculture, use of electricity
- Music — the content of television and radio broadcasts, copyright laws/downloading music
- Buses and local transportation — public transit, roads
- School — curriculum outcomes, teachers, school boards
- Driving a car — driver's license, traffic laws, speed limits
- Shopping — sales taxes
- Parks and playgrounds — development and maintenance
- Festivals — tourism, celebrations

4. Considering the list of government services mentioned, ask students how they would go about organizing one of the items if there was no government involvement. How would this change their relationship with government?

Instruction: 15-20 min

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

- The division of responsibilities is based on the principle of subsidiarity (whoever is closest to the matter governs it).

2. Canada is a parliamentary democracy.
 - We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and provincial/territorial legislatures. Members are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills.
 - The dominant political party in the parliament or legislature usually determines the leader of the government.
 - The prime minister or premier selects a cabinet (made up of ministers) and is responsible for the operations and policy at their level of government.

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.

3. Canada is a constitutional monarchy.
 - Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king).
 - The sovereign is represented by the governor general (GG) at the federal level and the lieutenant governor (LG) at the provincial level.
 - The GG and LG have similar roles and are responsible for ensuring there is a leader and a functioning government. They summon, dissolve and prorogue parliament, call elections, give assent to acts of parliament and read the Speech from the Throne.

Teacher Note: Use PowerPoint 3 to assist with the delivery of key concepts and terms. Ask students to fill out Worksheet 3.1 as you review the terms and concepts or for homework. Copies of Handout 3.2 could also be distributed.

Activity: 20-25 min

1. Watch Video 3 with your class to quickly review the roles and responsibilities at each level of government.
2. As a class or in groups play a game of political trivia (e.g., What is the title given to the leader of our country? Who holds this position? Which party do they represent?). You can use or modify the Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* game available online or create your own list of questions and answers. Worksheets 3.1 and 3.3 could also be used for reference.

Debrief: 5-10 min

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

- What have you learned about government in Canada?
- Why is it important to know your elected representative?
- How involved should governments be in the lives of their citizens?

- Would you rather pay taxes to have public services provided, or be responsible for them yourself?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using online resources, ask students to fill out Worksheet 3.3. This could be completed in a computer lab or assigned for homework. Use the following links as a starting point:

- The Governor General of Canada — www.gg.ca
- The Library of Parliament (Canada) — www.parl.gc.ca
- Elections Canada — www.elections.ca

B. Distribute copies of Worksheet 3.4 and ask students, individually or in pairs, to label the various government services in the picture and identify the level of government if possible. Take up the worksheet as a class and have a discussion about all the ways government impacts our lives.

C. Have students research and choose a political hero from the past – a local, provincial/territorial, or federal political figure who made a significant mark in the community, province/territory or nation. Have them write a short summary of their hero's impact and what it means to them, and have them present it to the class.

D. Create questions as a class or individually and ask students to contact one of their local elected representatives. Sample questions: What is an example of a recently passed law or by-law? Why was it passed? What are three pressing issues on the table right now? What issue are you most passionate about? How do your political decisions and efforts affect me?

Alternatively, you could invite a former politician into the class for a Q&A about their experiences. Sample questions: Why did you want to get involved in politics? Which accomplishments are you most proud of while you were in office? What was the most challenging aspect of your job?

E. Visit the 'Learn' page on the Student Budget Consultation website (www.civix.ca/sbc) and watch Videos 2, 3 and 4 to learn more about Canada's revenues and expenditures. Discussion questions: Are you surprised by the breakdown of revenues and/or expenditures? Where do you think the federal government should spend more or less? Should the federal government increase or decrease any of its revenue sources?

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, international trade, 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. 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
- “Discover Canada” — www.cic.gc.ca
- Library of Parliament (Canada) — www.parl.gc.ca
- Government of Canada website — www.gc.ca
- Elections Canada — www.elections.ca