

Lesson 1: Democracy



GUIDING QUESTIONS

1 What does it mean to live in a democracy?

2 How can we support and maintain our democracy?

OVERVIEW

Democracy by definition is "rule by the people" where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making. A healthy democracy requires responsible citizens who uphold democratic principles and actively participate in society.

In this lesson, students experience different types of governance through a tower building activity. Afterwards, students explore what democracy means and what the implications are for them as members of a democracy.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- analyze different ways that groups make decisions and interpret the consequences;
- explain the meaning of democracy;
- identify the principles of democracy and how political institutions shape our lives;
- analyze the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

Starter

Tallest Tower Activity

1. Create four or more table stations and assign four to six students to each station.
2. Explain the task of building the tallest, most stable structure as possible that holds the jumbo marshmallow on top, using only the materials given.
 - 20 sticks of spaghetti/linguine
 - 1 metre of tape
 - 1 metre yarn/rope
 - Jumbo marshmallow
 - Scissors

Alternatively, you can use 20 small marshmallows and 20 sticks of spaghetti.

3. Provide each station with one card from Activity 1.1, which details the process for each group. They must build the tallest tower they can based on the group involvement described on their card. There are four suggestions:
 - *Team of 1 (dictatorship)* – Only one person is in charge and they make all the decisions without ideas from other group members. They can complete the task by themselves or direct who they want to help or not help. They can also ask the other group members to leave the table if they want. The person in charge is the oldest person in the group.
 - *Team of 2 (oligarchy)* – Only two people will work together on the task. No one else is involved. The team of two consist of the shortest person in the group and this person's choice of another person from the group.
 - *Team of all, with roles (democracy)* – All group members are involved in the task. They must choose a leader and determine different roles for the rest of the group members based on consensus or majority rule.
 - *Team of all, no roles (anarchy)* – All group members are involved in the task, but there are no roles or planning in advance of the task.
4. Provide groups with three minutes to plan for the task and ten minutes for building.
5. Give students time to reflect on the experience within their groups. What are the pros and cons of the style of leadership and group involvement? How did each group member feel during the process?
6. Organize a gallery walk to have students move around to each station to evaluate each tower and understand the style of group involvement. Afterwards, have each group summarize their experience.

- What made the building process successful or unsuccessful?
- What feelings developed among group members and why?

Activities

1. Give students time to work in pairs or small groups to activate any background knowledge they have about the term 'democracy' using a Frayer Model (Activity 1.2). Students can also use images to communicate their thinking.

TEACHER NOTE

Consider providing some key terms to support their thinking, such as political power, leadership, government, citizen participation, viewpoints, rights and freedoms.

2. Watch the "Government and Democracy" video and have students add to their notes on Activity 1.2.
3. Afterwards, debrief as a class and create a class definition for the term 'democracy'. Students should add the class definition to their activity sheet.
4. Using the "Democratic Principles" video and/or Handout 1.3, explain to students that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.
5. Using Slide Deck 1 as a starting point, analyze examples of democratic principles in practice and the different ways they shape our lives. Ask students to share their own real-world examples.
6. Using a Think-Pair-Share protocol, have a closing discussion with the following prompts.
 - Is it important for citizens to support and uphold these principles? What would happen if no one cared?
 - Do our rights come with responsibilities? Explain using concrete examples. For example, the right to protest comes with the responsibility to do so peacefully and without violence.

Consolidation

Option 1: Which concepts from this lesson about democracy are most important to remember? Use the exit card (Activity 1.4) to create four hashtags to describe what you learned from the lesson, and write down any lingering questions.

Option 2: Which democratic principle is most important to you? Create a poster or digital artwork that reflects this principle and what it means to you.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance.• Share the lesson videos before class discussions and activities.• Ensure that subtitles are on during videos.• Support students' understanding of democratic principles with additional real-world examples.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare democracy to other forms of governance representing different countries and cultures that have meaning for your students.• Students will come from different backgrounds and may have different opinions on democracy. Ensuring a safe place for respectful discussion is encouraged.• Review democratic principles in various social settings, inclusive of Indigenous peoples and diverse cultural groups.• Discuss the systemic barriers to equality faced by Indigenous peoples and other diverse cultural groups.
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A **government** is made up of the people and institutions put in place to manage the land, resources and people living within its borders. Various types of government exist in the world.

Governments can be compared by their governance model, the number of people who have access to power, the rights and freedoms granted to citizens, and the existence of rule of law (laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently).

An **autocracy** is a type of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person who rules without restriction. There is no rule of law and citizens are not consulted on the decisions and affairs of the country. An autocracy can be a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy.

In a **dictatorship**, the dictator or ruling group exercises power through control of a mass movement, a 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 and there is 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.

An **oligarchy** is a type of government where power rests within a small number of people, generally individuals who are rich and powerful, often due to family lines, wealth or prominent political or military connections (e.g., China, Venezuela). People living under oligarchic rule usually have

some rights and freedoms. Similarly, an aristocracy is a form of governance where administration or power is in the hands of a special class of people. Aristocrats are connected to royal families through blood or ennoblement, whereas an oligarchy is not.

A **monarchy** is a form of government where a monarch (king or queen) is the head of state. The role of the monarch is inherited and usually lasts until death or abdication. The power of ruling monarchs can vary; in an **absolute monarchy**, a monarch retains full political power over a state and its people whereas in a **constitutional monarchy**, the role of the monarch is more symbolic. In a constitutional monarchy, the authority of the monarch is limited by a constitution, which includes the principles and laws of a nation or state, defines the powers and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people living within it. A constitutional monarchy has a democratically elected government with a government leader, and a monarch who remains the head of state and performs ceremonial duties.

A **democracy** is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making. In a direct democracy, citizens themselves vote for or against specific proposals or laws. In an indirect or representative democracy, citizens elect political representatives to make decisions on their behalf. In democratic countries, citizens have protected civil and political rights such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association, the right to participate in free and fair elections, and the right to run for political office. There are many different types of representative democracies around the world.

A **republic** is a sovereign state, country or government without a monarch where all members of government are elected (including the head of state), and the

democratically elected government holds all political power. Similar to a constitutional monarchy, the government in a republic exercises power according to the rule of law and often has a constitution.

A **consensus democracy** uses a consensus decision-making model while developing legislation and aims to be more collaborative and inclusive by taking into account a broad range of opinions, as opposed to decisions made by majority rule. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut both have consensus governments where a group of individuals without any political party affiliation share political power.

Canada's system of government is a **parliamentary democracy** and a **constitutional monarchy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures, and the political party with the most elected representatives, usually forms government. The British monarch, King Charles III, is our head of state, represented by the Governor General at the federal level. Every act of government is done in the name of the King, but the authority for every act comes from the Canadian people through the Constitution. The Constitution of Canada is the highest legal ruling in the country and includes laws, decisions by judges, agreements between federal and provincial governments, traditions and our civil and political rights (the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*).