

Lesson 3

Levels of Government



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How is government structured in Canada?
- 2 How do the different levels of government affect me?

SUMMARY

Canada has different levels of government; each with its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility.

In this lesson, students compare the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, including leadership roles, elected officials and areas of responsibility. Afterwards, students create a digital presentation where they identify government services or areas of responsibility and explain how they relate to or directly affect their lives using photos and captions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe our government system in Canada;
- distinguish between the levels of government;
- analyze the different ways in which government affects their life.

Starter

1. Review the role of government in society. Government is responsible for making decisions and establishing laws for the people living within its borders, and for providing a variety of services.
2. Review the levels of government in Canada and explain the idea that each level is responsible for different issues. In column format, write the following on the board, or in an equivalent forum: federal / provincial / municipal / First Nations, Métis and Inuit.
3. Ask students to consider which level of government they would contact in the following scenarios:
 - You and your friends would like a skate ramp added to the local park
 - You want to apply for government loans and grants to support your post-secondary education
 - You want more bike lanes in your neighbourhood
 - You are traveling to a foreign country and need to find out if there are any travel advisories
 - You want more mental health services for youth
 - You want to know if your local First Nations community has access to clean drinking water
4. Discuss as a class:
 - Why is it important to know which level of government is responsible for which issues?
 - If you needed to, how would you go about contacting each level of government?
 - What would life be like if we didn't have government?

Activities

1. Divide students into pairs and distribute Activity 3.1. Have them work together to fill in what they already know about the levels of government in Canada.
2. Review the structure of government in Canada using the "Levels of Government" video, Slide Deck 3 and/or Handout 3.2.

Guiding questions:

- What kind of government do we have in Canada?
- What is the role of our elected representatives?
- What is the title given to the elected representative at each level?
- What is the title given to the leader at each level? How are they chosen?
- What are the areas of responsibility of each level of government?

Afterwards, have students continue to work in pairs to complete Activity 3.1. Alternatively, students could create a slide deck with the same information and add images or graphics.

3. Have students create a digital presentation (slides) where they identify three government services or areas of responsibility for each level of government that relate to their lives (Activity 3.3). Ask students to take photos or search online to find relevant pictures to represent the area of responsibility. Students could also find a current article or social media post that shows how the issue is affecting their life.

Consolidation

After the lesson and activities are complete, ask students to fill out the exit slip (Activity 3.4).

- The most important thing I learned today...
- The thing that surprised me today...
- I would like to learn more about...

Assessment Suggestion

Students can be assessed on their completed work from Activity 3.3. An *Assessment Checkbric* has been included.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

English 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.• Provide examples or photos for each area of responsibility.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the demographic data of one or more elected bodies and discuss the need for more diversity in politics.• Review the governance structure of a neighbouring Indigenous community.
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion.• Activity 3.3 can be created and shared in an entirely digital format, using PowerPoint or Google Slides.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

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 separate regional governments (provincial/territorial) for regional/local purposes.

The division of powers is based on the principle of **subsidiarity**, in which the government closest to the issue governs it. The distribution of responsibilities is found in Sections 91-95 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The **federal government** takes responsibility for the whole country and matters of national concern, such as the armed forces, international relations and trade, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety. **Provincial and territorial governments** are responsible for their own province or territory and issues such as education, health care, social welfare, transportation and highways.

Municipalities receive their powers from their provincial or territorial governments. These governments are responsible for the planning, growth and safety of their communities. They also handle local matters such as water and sewage treatment, public transit, roads and bridges, local parks and recreational facilities.

For some issues, the different levels of government have to work together and share the responsibility. This is called **concurrency**. For example, federal, provincial and municipal 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 governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

Indigenous Peoples can also have different governance structures. A variety of treaties, agreements, and legislation outline who is responsible for providing services and decision-making in Indigenous communities.

Each level of government has locally elected officials to represent the people (constituents) living in their designated areas. Elected representatives are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents.

Federal representatives are called **Members of Parliament (MPs)** and provincial representatives in Newfoundland and Labrador are called **Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs)**. MPs and MHAs are often affiliated with political parties.

In Newfoundland and Labrador municipalities, elected representatives are called **council members** or **councillors**. Municipal representatives in Newfoundland and Labrador do not have a party affiliation.

The leader of the federal government is called the **prime minister**, whereas **premier** is the title given to the leader of the provincial government. In both of these cases, the leader of the party with the greatest number of elected representatives in the legislative body usually assumes the role of the leader of that government.

At the municipal level in Newfoundland and Labrador, the head of council is called a **mayor**. A mayor is directly elected by citizens in their municipality. Municipalities can either have officials elected at large or from wards, which divide the municipality into smaller geographic sections.

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 a **lieutenant governor**, who is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. Usually, the governor general and lieutenant governors serve a five-year term. There is no sovereign representative at the municipal level.