

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

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE 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: 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

1. Split the class into three groups and have them sit together. Assign an actual or hypothetical scenario that requires a decision (e.g., selecting desk arrangements, theme for a school dance, menu additions for the cafeteria) and ask each group to brainstorm ideas. Provide enough time to allow all students to share their opinion.

2. Assign each group one of the following decision-making models and ask them to make a final decision based on the rules below. (These decision-making models are based on real types of government found throughout the world, and will be further defined in the *Instruction* section of the lesson).

Group A – Only one person (i.e., the first person on the class list) will make the decision (dictatorial)

Group B – Only a select few (i.e., the two or three tallest or shortest students) will make the decision (oligarchic)

Group C – All group members will have an opportunity to have a say by deciding through a vote (democratic)

3. Bring the class back together to discuss each group's experience. Questions could include:

- How quickly was a decision reached?
- Did anyone try to influence the decision-makers?
- Did everyone agree with the decision made? How happy were you with the outcome? Why?
- How did students feel about their position in the group's decision-making process?
- Was everyone equally engaged in the activity? Did it matter how much power one had over making the decision?
- Was the decision-making process fair?

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 their decision-making model, the number of people who have access to power and the types of rights and freedoms granted to citizens.

Teacher Note: Show the "Government and Democracy" video or PowerPoint 1 to review some of the basic government types with 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 where political power and decision-making is kept in the hands of a small group of people, usually the rich. Oligarchs make political decisions that usually serve their own interests. An oligarchy can also be a dictatorship.

c) A democracy is a type of government in which 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 of making decisions and laws (time, cost and efficiency)
- The fairness of the decision-making process
- The ability of citizens to live their lives freely
- The 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 principle(s) of democracy. Give students 10 to 20 minutes to familiarize themselves with their principle(s) and to 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 few minutes to present. During the presentations have students take notes on Worksheet 1.2.

Teacher Note: Afterwards, post the visual displays around the classroom for future reference.

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?
- Does a healthy democracy rely on citizen participation?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. 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.

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

C. 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 country and present their findings to the class.

D. 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 Saskatchewan 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, nation, 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 their decision-making model, the number of people who have access to power and the 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 the 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 usually 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 often 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 its 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, when a monarch has full political power over a state and its people.

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 make political decisions that usually 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* (rule or power).

The most common form of democracy is a representative democracy, where citizens elect political representatives to 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's system of government 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 exercised by her representative in Canada, the governor general, except when the Queen is visiting 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

or legislature. 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.

Genuine democracies will adhere to some or all of the following: 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. Many different political systems, whether they follow these principles or not, describe themselves as democratic.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Our Country, Our Parliament," *The Library of Parliament* — www.parl.gc.ca
- "Government Type," *CIA World Factbook* — www.cia.gov
- "Queen and Canada," *The Official Website of the British Monarchy* — www.royal.gov.uk
- "Ballots run out in 6 First Nation polling stations" *APTN National News* (October 19, 2015) — www.aptn.ca
- "Bill would target videotaping, intimidation at Maine polling places," *Daily Journal* (December 18, 2015) — www.dailyjournal.net
- "Voting restrictions in the US since the 2010 election: state by state," *The Guardian* (July 13, 2015) — www.theguardian.com
- "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
- "Indian Election: Kashmir violence leaves three dead," *The Guardian* (April 22, 2014) — www.theguardian.com
- "Zimbabwe voters stand in long lines for crucial election," *The Associated Press* (July 31, 2013) — www.ap.org