

LESSON 3:

Governments in Canada

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the roles and responsibilities associated with the three levels of government in Canada and understand how government policy and services influence their lives directly.

KEY WORDS

federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, councillor, Member of Parliament (MP), Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), legislative assembly, parliament, prime minister, premier, mayor, reeve, subsidiarity, concurrency, self-government

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

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

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 3: Governments in Canada
- Video: 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
- Handout 3.5: History of Aboriginal Self-Government
- Worksheet 3.6: First Nation Profile
- Provincial Ministry Descriptions (available online)
- Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* (available online)

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 15-20 min

1. Invite students to share all of the activities they do on a daily or weekly basis. Create a list of their answers for all students to see on the board, overhead or SmartBoard. 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 hunting or fishing, go to the park/skate park, buy groceries, take out the garbage).

2. Ask students to identify how the activities they have mentioned are related to certain areas of government policy, 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 divisions
- Driving a car — driver's license, traffic laws, speed limits
- Shopping — sales taxes, imports
- Hunting/fishing — natural resources, licensing, Aboriginal rights
- Parks and playgrounds — development and maintenance
- Festivals — tourism, celebrations

3. Ask students to reflect on the compiled list of activities and/or services related to government and have a discussion about all the ways government impacts our lives. For example, ask students how they would go about organizing one of the items if there was no government involvement. Would the service change if no government was involved? If so, how?

Instruction: 15-20 min

Teacher Note: Watch the “Levels of Government” video with your class to quickly review the roles and responsibilities at each level of government.

1. Canada is a federal state with three levels of government (federal, provincial/territorial and municipal).
 - The division of responsibilities is based on the principle of subsidiarity (whoever is closest to the matter governs it), but certain responsibilities are sometimes shared amongst more than one level of government.
 - Municipal governments receive their powers from the province.
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 (usually made up of elected members from their party) and the cabinet is responsible for the operations and policy at its level of government. Cabinet members are called ministers.
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 officially responsible for ensuring there is a leader and a functioning government. At the advice of the prime minister or premier, they summon, dissolve and prorogue the parliament or legislature, call elections, give assent to acts of parliament and read the Speech from the Throne.
4. In addition, there are other types of government in certain Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal governments replace, overlap, or share certain responsibilities with the government of their province/territory or the federal government. An Aboriginal community that has control over its own affairs is known as having self-government.

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 assign it for homework.

Activity: 20-25 min

1. Review the list of responsibilities for each level of government (Handout 3.2). Look for areas where the

different governments may want or need to work together.

2. Divide students into small groups, assign each group a different provincial government ministry and give each group the task of researching their assigned ministry. This activity can be completed by using online resources and government websites, or you can distribute information from the list of Provincial Ministry Descriptions (available online).

3. Ask each group to create a short presentation or skit about the role and responsibilities of their ministry (e.g., What type of programs or services do they offer? How do they aim to help people? Are responsibilities of this ministry shared with other types of government in the region?). Give each group an opportunity to present.

Debrief: 5-10 min

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

- What have you learned about governments in Canada?
- Why is it important to know your elected representatives?
- 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 Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan – www.ltgov.sk.ca
- The Library of Parliament – www.parl.gc.ca
- Elections Canada – www.elections.ca
- Elections Saskatchewan – www.elections.sk.ca
- Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan – www.legassembly.sk.ca

B. Distribute copies of Worksheet 3.4 and ask students to label the various government services in the picture and identify the level of government.

C. Learn more about Aboriginal self-government in Canada by reviewing Handout 3.5 with your class. Use the First Nations Map of Saskatchewan (www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca) to determine the First Nation(s) whose traditional territory your school is located on (if applicable), or select another Saskatchewan First Nation of your choosing. As a class or in small groups, have students research the First Nation selected by completing Worksheet 3.6.

D. Have students research and choose a provincial political figure from the past – someone who made a significant mark in Saskatchewan or the local community. Have them write a short summary of the person’s impact and what it means to them, and have them present it to the class.

E. 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.

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, 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 level in Saskatchewan are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs).

The party with the most elected representatives in the parliament or legislature usually determines the leader of the government. At the federal level, the leader of the government is called the prime minister. At the provincial level, the leader of the government is called the premier.

With the exception of a few cities in Canada, there are no political parties at the municipal level. The elected representative is usually called a councillor. The leader of the municipal government is most often called a mayor or reeve. The municipal 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 the governor general, on the recommendation of the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and represent the federal government in the territories.

How are responsibilities divided among the levels of government?

Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal. 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, health-care delivery, natural resources and transportation/highways.
- Municipal governments take responsibility for their city or town and local matters such as water and sewage treatment, libraries, roads and bridges and local parks and recreation. Municipal 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 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.

What are other forms of government in Saskatchewan?

There are different types of government in Saskatchewan other than the three levels of government. The majority of these are Aboriginal governments and they replace, overlap or share the responsibilities of other levels of government. Comprehensive land claims agreements (modern treaties) between Canadian governments and Aboriginal nations often result in Aboriginal peoples having the autonomy to choose their own method(s)

of representation and decision-making. The term that describes an Aboriginal community possessing greater control over its own affairs is self-government.

How is the provincial government structured? What roles exist?

The Saskatchewan provincial government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial.

The legislative branch, termed the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, is made up of elected representatives called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The legislative branch creates laws, rules and regulations for areas under provincial jurisdiction. Following the current election, the legislative assembly will consist of 61 MLAs and each will represent a different geographic area, called a constituency.

In the executive branch, the Queen is the head of state and is represented by the lieutenant governor. The leader of the government is called the premier. The executive branch implements and enforces laws, rules and regulations. The premier appoints several MLAs to head ministries of the executive council (cabinet).

Each minister is in charge of one (or more) of the provincial responsibilities and acts as an advisor to the premier and the legislature in their area(s) of expertise.

The judicial branch of government is headed by the Chief Judge of Saskatchewan. The judicial branch interprets the law and punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations. In Saskatchewan, the Chief Judge and 48 additional judges are appointed by the provincial government to serve the population of the province. The Saskatchewan court system is responsible for deciding who has broken the law and for dispensing the appropriate punishment for the crime committed.

Where does the legislative assembly meet? What do they do?

The legislative assembly meets at the Saskatchewan Legislature in Regina.

When the legislature is sitting, MLAs 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, MLAs meet with their constituents (people living in the constituencies 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
- Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan — www.legassembly.sk.ca
- Government of Saskatchewan — www.gov.sk.ca
- Parliament of Canada — www.parl.gc.ca
- Government of Canada — www.gc.ca
- First Nations Map of Saskatchewan — www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca