

LESSON 1:

Government and Democracy

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the role of government and different types of government around the world.

KEY WORDS

government, dictatorship, oligarchy, democracy, constitutional monarchy, representative democracy

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What are different ways a decision can be made?
- Why are rules important?
- What is the role of government?
- What types of government exist around the world?
- How do other forms of government compare with democracy?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 1: Government and Democracy
- Video: Government and Democracy
- Worksheet 1.1: Let's Eat!
- Worksheet 1.2: Survivor Island
- Worksheet 1.3: Who Should Decide?

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 20-25 min

1. Divide students into groups and tell them to imagine they are on a field trip and will be eating lunch at a fast-food chain or restaurant (provide a specific name). To save on costs, they are asked to come up with one order that everyone can agree on. They need to ensure they have one main course, one side, one drink and one dessert. Ask each group to fill out Worksheet 1.1.

2. Have a follow-up class discussion:

- How was a final decision made for the lunch order?
- Did everyone agree with the decision?
- Was the decision made quickly? Why or why not?

Teacher Note: Alternatively, you could use Extension A as the Hook activity.

Discussion: 10-15 min

What would your classroom be like if your teacher had no rules regarding behaviour, habits or homework. What would happen if there were no rules or authority in your community or country?

Imagine what would happen if your classroom or school made rules that were unfair or unnecessarily harsh. What would happen if people in your community or country were under very strict rules (e.g., 6 p.m. nightly curfew for anyone under 18 years of age, no sports or games in the streets)?

Instruction: 10-15 min

Governments are responsible for making rules and decisions for people living within their borders (e.g., education/schools, transportation/roads, health-care/hospitals). There are different types of governments around the world and they make decisions and rules in different ways. You can compare governments by the number of people who have access to power and by the rights and freedoms granted to citizens.

Teacher Note: Show the "Government and Democracy" video or PowerPoint 1 to provide examples of the different government types with students.

a) A dictatorship is a type of government where one person or 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 system 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 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 where a majority of the people are included in political decision making. The most common form of democracy is a representative democracy, where citizens choose politicians to represent them 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.

Activity: 10-15 min

Play a game of running dictation using some or all of the key terms in the lesson (e.g., democracy, dictatorship, oligarchy). Using the glossary or your own definitions, prepare large print definitions of each term (one per page, multiple copies if necessary).

Instructions:

1. Attach a single term to a wall in the classroom or in the hallway (create numerous locations if helpful). Divide students into pairs with one student acting as the “writer” and one student acting as the “runner.”
2. The runner must run to the wall or board where the key term is displayed, read the text, run back to their partner and repeat what they read.
3. The writer’s job is to listen to the runner and write down what is said. It will likely take a few trips to and from the posting for the runner to dictate the entire definition to the writer.
4. When most groups are done, the writer can check their work against what is displayed. Roles are then reversed and the next term is used.

Debrief: 10-15 min

Have a brief closing discussion about government and democracy. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection in their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What is the role of government?
- What are the pros and cons of different types of government?
- Which kind of government system would you prefer to live in? Why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Ask students to imagine they are stranded as a group on a remote island. Divide students into groups and explain that each group will explore the need for leadership, organization and rules within a community. Using Worksheet 1.2, each group will answer the questions to figure out how they will work together to survive. Bring the class back together and discuss each group’s answers. How were decisions made for each question? Did everyone agree with the decisions? Were decisions made quickly? Why or why not?

B. Using Worksheet 1.3, explore the benefits and challenges of decision-making models in various scenarios. Have students form groups and act out one of the scenarios. After each dramatic presentation, discuss which type of decision-making model would make the most sense as a class. Alternatively, the groups could act out both decision-making models for a scenario. Debrief as a class afterwards. Which decision-making process was the best model for each situation? Why?

C. Ask students to imagine what would happen if they lived under a dictatorship for a day or a week. Students can create a comic strip or short story.

D. Ask students to write a short story about a fictional country without a government. What would happen if there were no leaders to decide on laws or services to support citizens? There would be no traffic laws or police to enforce any rules. Imagine what would happen to schools, hospitals or community centres. What would life be like?

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.

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