

# LESSON 4:

# Political Parties

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about political perspectives and political parties, and research the political parties campaigning in Saskatchewan.

## KEY WORDS

political party, political ideology, perspective, party leader, candidate, slogan, party platform, constituency

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
- How do political parties form government?
- What is a party platform?
- Which political parties are campaigning in the Saskatchewan provincial election?
- What is each party's platform or what promises are they making if they get elected?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 4: Political Parties
- Handout 4.1: 2011 Saskatchewan Provincial Election Results
- Worksheet 4.2: Getting to Know the Parties
- Worksheet 4.3: Where Do You Stand?
- Worksheet 4.4: Vote for My Party
- Worksheet 4.5: Watching the Leaders' Debate

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 20-30 min

1. Tell students to imagine that their school has been given a sum of money to improve or expand the schoolyard. Lead a class brainstorming session on the different ways in which the money could be spent. Record ideas on the blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard.
2. Group similar ideas together so that there are four to six main ideas. Help students form groups ('parties') based on their interests. Ask each group to discuss their ideas in more detail and record reasons why their ideas are good ones. Ask each group to put together a one minute pitch.
3. Give each group one minute to share their pitch with the rest of the class.

### Instruction: 10 min

1. When a community or large number of people need to get something done, people with similar interests often form groups and work together to achieve their goals. In politics, these groups are called political parties. A political party is made up of people, called party members, who share similar opinions and goals for their province/territory or country. Each party also selects a leader, usually through a leadership contest. In order for the political party to have the chance to work towards its goals, the party must win an election and lead the government.
2. Saskatchewan's system of government is based on political parties. Each political party has a leader, and during elections they create a party platform — a list of ideas or plans that aim to achieve the party's goals and benefit the province. While all parties may agree that an issue like education is a priority, they may have different ideas about how to improve the system or which steps to take.
3. During elections, political parties also select individuals (candidates) to spread their message and platform, and compete for the job of MLA for their local area (constituency). In the current Saskatchewan provincial election, there will be 61 local election races happening across the province.

4. After the election, the political party that wins the most number of local election races usually forms government and the leader becomes the premier. Using Handout 4.1, review the results of the 2011 provincial election.

#### Discussion: 10 min

What ideas and goals do you have for improving the province? If you were a member of a party, what would you want your party's platform to focus on?

#### Activity: 60+ min (should be conducted over two classes with homework)

1. Review the list of political parties in Saskatchewan and identify which have candidates running in your constituency. A list of registered political parties can be found at the end of the lesson. Please refer to the Elections Saskatchewan website ([www.elections.sk.ca](http://www.elections.sk.ca)) for a current list of parties and nominated candidates.

2. Organize students into groups and assign each group a political party that is running a candidate in your school's constituency, or allow them to choose one based on their preference. The goal is to ensure that each party with a candidate running in your constituency is covered by a group.

Using party websites, online resources and campaign literature, each group should conduct research into the following:

- What does the political party stand for?
- Who is the current leader of the party?
- Who is the local candidate?
- What are the party's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the party's key messages?
- What are the party's main priorities or ideas (platform)? What is their vision for Saskatchewan?

3. Using the information collected, each group will create a presentation about their party and its campaign platform. Students can also produce videos, posters or multi-media works to share information about their political party.

4. Have each group present their political party to the rest of the class. Students can take notes on each presentation using Worksheet 4.2. Afterwards, have students vote on the political party they like best — excluding their own party.

*Teacher Note: Organize a presentation schedule that would allow each group to visit other classes in the school on a rotational basis to help inform and prepare the student electorate for Student Vote Day. A school-wide assembly could also be coordinated.*

#### Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about political parties with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What did you learn about political parties?
- Would you ever join a political party? Why or why not?
- Which political party do you like the most? Why?
- Do the political parties have clearly different ideas? Compare the platform of two or more parties on one or more issues.

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. A political ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs about how politics and government should work. Play a game of Agree/Disagree with your students. Post two signs in the classroom on either side of the room; one should read "Agree" and the other "Disagree." Alternatively, create four zones with the following options: "Totally agree", "I agree but...", "I don't agree" and "Convince me."

Read out a statement and ask students to vote with their feet by walking to the sign that fits with their opinion. Ask students to explain their choice for each question. After each student defends their response, give the other students the chance to change where they stand, demonstrating that this is what parties try to do with voters during election campaigns.

The statements could include:

- Companies that pollute our air and water should suffer consequences.
- Canada should not welcome any more refugees.
- The government should spend more money on education.
- People who make more money should pay more in taxes.
- The government should focus on earning money, not helping people.
- The government should provide free childcare.
- The government should be small and provide limited services, so that we do not have to pay a lot of taxes.
- Tradition is more important than change in our society.

Alternatively, you could assign Worksheet 4.3 and discuss responses as a class.

B. Using Worksheet 4.4, ask students to create a comic strip persuading their classmates to vote for one particular political party on Student Vote Day. They should explain what the party stands for, what it is promising to do if it forms the government and what makes it the best choice to lead Saskatchewan.

C. Have students create their own Saskatchewan political party. The political party should have a name, logo, slogan, key priorities and ideas for helping the people of Saskatchewan. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

D. The leaders' debate is an opportunity for the leaders of the major political parties to share their platforms, criticize their opponents' ideas and perform in front of the electorate. Plan a viewing of the provincial leaders' debate for your class or ask students to watch it with their family and friends. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Worksheet 4.5.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

*What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?*

A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political ideals whose intention is to achieve power through an election and create meaningful political change. Political parties compete against each other during election campaigns and appeal to the public for their support and, ultimately, their vote on election day.

*What is the political spectrum? How do political parties and the political spectrum relate?*

The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities and provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and policies. A linear spectrum is represented by a horizontal line, with parties on the left embracing social equality, social services and government intervention in the economy and parties on the right favouring individual liberty, free markets and lower taxes.

*How do political parties form government in Saskatchewan?*

Saskatchewan's system of government is based on political parties. Parties are required to register with Elections Saskatchewan for transparency and accountability. During elections, an organized course of action is taken by a political party, its candidates and campaign team, with the intention of spreading their message to secure constituent support and votes.

The political party that elects the most candidates usually forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Most candidates belong to a party, unless they are running as an independent or are not affiliated with any party.

*How do political parties work?*

Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Joining a political party can be an effective way for you to influence the party and the politicians who represent you and your constituency. Anyone above the required age can be a member of a political party (for most parties the age is 14). Party members can discuss ideas and propose policy. Many parties also have youth wings.

Party members choose the party leader and local candidates and work together to help them get elected. Local candidates are party members selected through a nomination process by the local constituency

association. The party selects the person they feel has the greatest chance of success as their candidate.

Candidates campaign during the election, share their party's ideas and aspire to work towards achieving their party's vision in the legislature. To become an MLA, candidates must get the most votes in their constituency during an election.

*What is a party platform?*

A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues that concern the government and the public. Parties share their platforms through announcements, advertising and events. They share their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and secure votes.

**EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

- Elections Saskatchewan — [www.elections.sk.ca](http://www.elections.sk.ca)
- Campaign literature (pamphlets, advertisements, articles)

Saskatchewan Political Parties (For a current list, visit [www.elections.sk.ca](http://www.elections.sk.ca))

- Green Party of Saskatchewan — [www.saskgreen.ca](http://www.saskgreen.ca)
- New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan — [www.saskndp.ca](http://www.saskndp.ca)
- Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan — [www.pcsask.ca](http://www.pcsask.ca)
- Saskatchewan Liberal Association — [www.saskliberals.ca](http://www.saskliberals.ca)
- Saskatchewan Party — [www.saskparty.com](http://www.saskparty.com)
- Western Independence Party — [www.wipsk.com](http://www.wipsk.com)