

AN INTRODUCTION TO CANADIAN GOVERNMENT



A government is made up of the people and institutions put in place to lead or manage the affairs of a specific jurisdiction, such as a country, nation, province or community. The role of government is to create and enforce laws, provide services and make decisions for the people living within its borders.

There are different types of government around the world. Canada is a democracy. We elect members to represent us in our parliament and legislatures. Each member represents a small area, called a constituency or district.

To serve citizens most effectively, there are multiple levels of government: federal, provincial or territorial, and municipal, as well as Indigenous governments. Each level of government has its own structure and a unique set of responsibilities.

Elections are the way in which we choose who will become our elected members. Federal representatives are called Members of Parliament (MPs), provincial representatives are called Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPPs) in Ontario (and often, Members of the Legislative Assembly in other provinces/ territories), and at the municipal level, representatives are called councillors or aldermen.

Federal and provincial representatives are often affiliated with political parties – which are groups of like-minded individuals with a

shared political views whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change. At the federal and provincial level, the leader of the political party with the largest number of representatives elected to parliament or the legislative assembly assumes the role of the leader of that government. At the municipal level in Ontario, the head of council is called a mayor or reeve.

Elected representatives are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents. Each level of government has its own jurisdictional issues and responsibilities.

For example:

- The federal government takes responsibility for the whole country in matters of national and international concern (e.g., armed forces, relations with other countries, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety).
- Provincial and territorial governments handle regional matters (e.g., education, healthcare, agriculture and transportation).
- Municipal governments are responsible for local matters (e.g., water supply and sewer services, public transit, transit, roads and sidewalks, garbage and recreational facilities).

BIG IDEA

Governments make decisions and pass legislation that impact the lives of citizens. Canada has several levels of government, each with its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Grade 5, Social Studies: Unit B (B2.1, B2.2, B3.1, B3.2, B3.3)

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate critical-thinking and decision-making skills;
- Understand the purpose of government, their relationship to it and the need for leadership and rules;
- Identify the roles and responsibilities associated with the levels of government;
- Understand how government impacts their lives; and,
- Explain what democracy is and why it is important.

MINDS ON

Survivor Island

1. 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 by considering the following questions.

- Will everyone find their own food and shelter, or will the class work together as a team or in small groups? Explain the reasons behind your choice.
- If you decide to work as a team or in groups, how will the tasks be divided?
- Will you need a leader? If so, how will they be selected? What powers will they receive?
- Are rules necessary? If so, which rules are needed? How will they be established?
- Will there be consequences for those who break the rules or do not contribute their fair share? How will this be determined and by who?
- Why is it important have a say in decisions that impact you?

Alternatively, the process can be self-directed with each group brainstorming what decisions would need to be made and how they would be made, in order to create a community.

2. Bring the class back together and discuss the decisions made by each group. How were the decisions made (unanimous support, compromise, majority rule, one person)? Did everyone agree with the decisions? Were decisions made quickly? Why or why not? What were the challenges with the process and how were they overcome?

DISCUSSION

Who is responsible for making decisions and rules for our community? What would happen if there was no government responsible for creating laws and overseeing the community?



FACILITATED LEARNING

Guiding Questions

- What do you know about government?
- What is a democracy?
- How is government structured in Canada?
- What is the role of our elected members?

Tools: Student Vote Educational Tools

- (<https://www.youtube.com/studentvote>)
- Video 1: “Government and Democracy” (2:27 min)
- Video 2: “Levels of Government” (2:26 min)

WORKING ON IT

Think-Pair-Share

1. In pairs or individually, have students use the graphic organizer to sort information about the levels of government in Canada. An information bank has been provided to assist with the related content.
2. Have students compare their organizers to their peers’ and then review as a class. Ask students to explain their choices.

CONSOLIDATION

Have a brief closing discussion or ask students to write a journal entry about government in Canada.

- Is government important? Why or why not?
- What are some ways that government impacts you on a daily basis?
- Which level of government affects your life the most? Defend your answer.
- What does living in a democracy mean to you?
- Will you vote in government elections when you turn 18? Why or why not?

Alternatively, you could focus on the upcoming provincial election. Ask students to reflect on what they see as the top challenges facing Ontario today. Why is it important that citizens talk about issues that matter to them?

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER: GOVERNMENTS IN CANADA

Organize information about the levels of government in Canada.

	FEDERAL	PROVINCIAL	MUNICIPAL
Title given to the elected representatives			
Title given to the leader of the government			
Meeting space of the elected representatives			
Responsibilities			
Date of the next election			

INFORMATION BANK

Premier	June 7, 2018	Prime Minister	Legislative Assembly
Councillor	Councillor/Aldermen	Mayor/Reeve	International Trade
Chambers	Member of Parliament	Health-care	Fisheries and Oceans
Garbage and Recycling	Education	Transportation	Member of Provincial Parliament
Citizenship and Immigration	Parks and Playgrounds	October 21, 2019	Water and Sewage
	October 22, 2018	House of Commons	The Environment