

MLA Day Lesson: Preparing for the Dialogue

OBJECTIVES

- Review the roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government
- Name and identify the school's electoral district and MLA
- Examine issues facing the province through research and dialogue with family and friends

KEY WORDS

municipal, provincial, federal, premier, prime minister, House of Commons, Legislative Assembly, Member of Parliament, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), electoral district

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- How does government affect your life?
- How is government structured in Canada?
- Who is my local MLA?
- Which issues matter to you and your family?

RESOURCES

- MLA Day – Background Information (PowerPoint)
- The Structure of Government in Canada (Handout/Overhead)
- Federal, Provincial and Municipal Responsibilities (Handout/Overhead)
- Investigating Government in Canada (Worksheet)
- Map of the school's electoral division (can be downloaded from [Elections Alberta](#))
- Election Results from the [Student Vote website](#) (Select the electoral division from the drop down list. Both the student results and adult results are available).
- MLA Biographies ([Legislative Assembly of Alberta's website](#))

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 5-10 min

Ask students to name all of the activities they do on a daily or weekly basis (e.g., Make breakfast, listen to music, ride the bus, go to school, drive a car, shopping, go to the park/skate park, buy groceries, take out garbage).

Create a list of activities on the board, overhead or SmartBoard. Try to refine the list so that activities can be easily connected to government policy or services.

Ask students if they know how government impacts these activities either through funding or legislation. For example:

- Drive a car – drivers' licensing, traffic laws, speed limits
- Make food – farming/agriculture, food inspection, use of electricity
- Parks – development and maintenance
- Bus – city transit
- School – curriculum outcomes, teachers, school boards
- Music – Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, copyright laws/downloading music
- Festivals – culture and celebration

Instruction: 10-15 min

1. Canada is a federal state with three levels of government (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal).
 - A federal state brings together a number of different political communities with a general government for general purposes, and it has separate provincial/local governments for the purposes of each region. The division of responsibilities is based on the principle of subsidiarity (whoever is closest to the matter governs it). There are also cases where responsibilities are shared between levels of government (concurrency).
 - The federal government takes responsibility for matters of national and international concern, such as defence, foreign affairs, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety.
 - Provinces are responsible for municipal government, education, health, natural resources and other local concerns such as transportation/highways.
 - Municipal governments receive their responsibilities from their province and include such matters as waste removal, libraries, city transit, local parks and recreation.
2. Canada is a parliamentary democracy.
 - We elect members to represent us in the federal parliament and provincial legislatures (Members of Parliament - MP, Members of the Legislative Assembly - MLA).
 - The party with the most number of elected representatives or members (MPs/MLAs) in the legislature or parliament determines the head of government (Premier, Prime Minister). They are usually the leader of the party.
 - The prime minister or premier selects a Cabinet (made up of ministers) and is responsible for the operations and policy of their level of government.

Teacher Note: The Structure of Government in Canada Handout or Federal, Provincial and Municipal Responsibilities Handout may be useful for this instruction period.

Activity: 5 min

In a short quiz or jeopardy game, ask students the following questions:

- Who is the current prime minister? Which party is he/she the leader of?
- Who is the current premier? Which party is he/she the leader of?
- Who is the local MP? Which party does he/she belong to?
- Who is the local MLA? Which party does he/she belong to?

Alternatively, you could assign the Investigating Government in Canada Worksheet.

Instruction: 10-15 min

1. An electoral division is a geographical area represented by an elected representative. Also known as an electoral district, riding or constituency. Show students a picture of the school's electoral division. Identify the boundaries of the division and major landmarks within it.
2. An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats. Or the way candidates are selected to become elected representatives. There are many different systems used throughout the world.
3. Alberta uses a system called Single-Member Plurality or First-Past-The-Post (also used across Canada for federal and provincial elections).
 - Citizens elect one representative per electoral division (single-member districts).
 - Voters are allowed to choose one candidate/party in each race.
 - The candidate that has the most number of votes becomes the elected representative.

Discussion/Activity: 5 min

Ask students if they remember the April 2012 provincial election. What do they recall? Was it a close race? What were the major issues? Did they participate in Student Vote?

Using the Student Vote website, review the results from the election. Compare the official election results with the student results for the province and the school's electoral division.

Instruction: 5 min

1. Review the role of your MLA.
 - When the Legislature is sitting, MLAs are responsible for proposing, studying, debating, and voting on bills (potential laws) and raising issues that concern their constituents.
 - When the Legislature is not sitting, MLAs spend their time meeting with those constituents to discuss their concerns and to provide guidance and advice relating to government services.
2. Read the bio of your MLA. Please refer to the [Legislative Assembly of Alberta's website](#).

Discussion: 10 min

Mention to your students some of the major issues facing Alberta and/or your electoral division. Use the following prompt questions to have a discussion about the issues and questions your students want to raise during the MLA visit.

- Are you familiar with any of these issues?
- Are there other issues you feel need to be addressed by the provincial government, which are not currently being discussed?
- Where would you go to learn more about these issues?
- Based on these issues, what question(s) would you like to ask your MLA?

Homework: 20-40 min

To prepare for the MLA visit, ask students to complete the following tasks for homework.

- Research province-wide and local issues related to provincial government. Students should read two articles that mention their MLA or one of the provincial government's ministries.
- Have a discussion with your parents about issues they are concerned about relating to provincial responsibilities.
- Write up two questions you would like to ask your MLA.