

Lesson 1: Understanding Government

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the different types of government around the world and how government works in Canada and Nova Scotia.

KEY WORDS

government, autocracy, democracy, representative democracy, parliamentary democracy, constitutional monarchy, federal state, prime minister, premier, Member of Parliament, Member of the Legislative Assembly

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is the role of government?
- How are different types of government compared?
- How is government organized in Canada?
- How is government organized in Nova Scotia?
- What are the roles and responsibilities at each level of government?

PREPARATION

- Make copies of Worksheet: Investigating Government

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 15 min

1. Split the class into three groups and have them sit together. Assign an actual or hypothetical decision (e.g., theme for a school dance, charity fundraiser, \$10,000 grant for school improvements, travel destination for a graduation trip) and ask each group to brainstorm ideas for a few minutes. Provide enough time to allow all students to share their opinion.
2. Now assign each group one of the following decision-making models and ask them to make a final decision based on the rules given. These decision-making models are based on real types of government found throughout the world.

Group A – Only one person (i.e., the tallest person) will make the decision (autocratic)

Group B – Only a select few (i.e., only boys or only girls) may be involved in the decision-making process (oligarchic)

Group C – All group members will have an opportunity to have a say in the decision-making process (democratic)

3. While groups are making their decision, observe how each group is functioning and make notes (e.g., level of engagement among those with power versus those without, interactions among members, length of time to make the decision). Alternatively, you can ask one student to be the observer in each group and take notes.

Teacher Note: Group A may become unruly as most members of the group will lack a voice — but this will make for a productive discussion afterwards.

4. Bring the class back to the big group and discuss each group's experience. Ask the following discussion questions to each group.

- How quickly was a decision made?
- Did everyone agree with the decision?
- How happy were you with the decision made? Why?
- What kind of feeling developed within the group?
- How engaged were all members in the activity?

Instruction: 20-25 min

1. Different types of governments exist in the world and they make decisions for their people in different ways. The type of government is distinguished by the allocation of power and the types of rights and freedoms afforded to its citizens. Compare autocracy, oligarchy and democracy.
2. Most democracies are representative democracies. Since it is not practical for all citizens to have a say on every matter, we vote for representatives to make decisions and pass laws on our behalf. Elections are the process by which our elected representatives are chosen.
3. In Canada our government system is a federal state, a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.
 - A federal state means that there is a central government for national purposes and local governments for local purposes. Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal. Sections 91-95 of our Constitution outline the responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments. Municipal governments receive their powers from the province or territory.
 - A parliamentary democracy is a system where elected representatives are selected by the people to represent them in the parliament or legislature. The elected representatives usually belong to a political party or they may be independents. The political party with the most elected representatives gains control of the legislature or parliament and acts as the governing party. The leader of that party becomes the prime minister or premier.
 - A constitutional monarchy means the King or Queen is our head of state and he or she is guided by our Constitution. Although Queen Elizabeth II lives in England, she is also the Queen of Canada. The King or Queen is represented by the Governor General at the federal level and the Lieutenant Governor at the provincial level.
4. The Nova Scotia government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial.
 - The legislative branch, termed the Nova Scotia Legislature, is made up of elected representatives called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and the lieutenant governor and is responsible for creating laws, rules and regulations. The legislative assembly consists of 51 MLAs and each represents a different geographic area called an electoral district.
 - 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 a 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 of the provincial responsibilities and acts as an advisor to the premier and the legislature in their area of expertise.

- The judicial branch of government is headed by the Chief Justice of Nova Scotia. The judicial branch interprets the law and punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations. The Nova Scotia court system is responsible for deciding who has broken the law and determining the appropriate punishment for the crime committed.

Activity: 15-20 min

1. In a short quiz or game of trivia, ask students a series of political affairs questions. Please refer to PowerPoint B: Political Trivia. Some answers will need to be inserted, depending on your community.

Alternatively you could have a class discussion using some of the following questions:

- What is the title given to the leader of the federal government? Who is the current prime minister? Which party is he/she the leader of?
 - What is the title given to the leader of the provincial government? Who is the current premier? Which party is he/she the leader of?
 - What is the title given the elected representative at the federal level? Who is the local MP? Which party does he/she belong to, if applicable?
 - What is the title given to the elected representative at your provincial/territorial level? Who is the local MLA? Which party does he/she belong to, if applicable?
 - What is the title given to the head of your local government? Who is the current head of council?
 - What is the title given to the elected representative at your municipal level? Who is the local representative?
 - Which level of government is responsible for immigration, foreign affairs, public safety and the environment?
 - Which level of government is responsible for education, health care, transportation, energy and the environment?
 - Which level of government is responsible for waste removal, libraries, roads and local parks?
2. Afterwards, ask students to fill out Worksheet: Investigating Government, or assign it for homework.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a closing discussion with your class about democracy and democratic engagement.

- What does living in a democracy mean to you?
- Why is it important to participate in your democracy?

Homework: 20-30 min

Ask students to research current political issues in Nova Scotia in preparation for the Rep Day visit by reading recent news articles.

RESOURCES

PowerPoint A: Government

PowerPoint B: Political Trivia

Worksheet: Investigating Government