

Lesson 1: Preparing for the Visit

OBJECTIVES

Students will review the concepts of government and elections, learn about the different levels of government, and familiarize themselves with the role of their elected representatives in preparation for meeting their MP.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe some key characteristics of Canada's government and describe its responsibilities;
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament;
- Prepare adequately for the Member of Parliament's visit.

KEY WORDS

representative democracy, Prime Minister, Member of Parliament (MP), riding, electoral system, Single-Member Plurality, First-Past-The-Post, candidate, division of powers, federal, provincial/territorial, municipal/local, political party, committee, caucus

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does the Canadian electoral system work?
- How is government organized in Canada? What are the responsibilities of each level of government?
- What is the role of an MP?
- Which issues at the federal level am I concerned about?
- What do I want to ask my MP?

LESSON PLAN: Part A: Elections and Representatives (20-25 min.)

Using slide deck A, test students' knowledge of Canadian political parties and their leaders. Review the key terms: leader, political party, prime minister, opposition, Member of Parliament (MP), House of Commons.

Teacher's note: The slide deck is structured as a quiz with a scoring system. The information can be edited on slides, according to your needs.

1. What do you know about Canada's government and the way elections are held in Canada? Who is your Member of Parliament (MP)? How can you find who your MP is? Review some key concepts.
 - Canada is a **representative democracy**. This means we elect representatives to make decisions on our behalf.
 - **Elections** are the process of choosing our representatives. Generally, elections are held every third Monday of October, four years after the previous general election. The next fixed election date is October 21, 2019.
 - Our political system at the national level is based on political parties. A **political party** is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision whose intention is to achieve power

and create meaningful political change. Parties select candidates to compete for the job of representative. Some candidates do not have an affiliation to any parties – they are called independent.

- The political party with the most elected representatives forms the government and its leader becomes the leader of the government (prime minister at the federal level).

2. How exactly does our electoral system work? Review some key concepts about our electoral process in Canada.

- A **riding** is a geographical area represented by an elected representative (also known as an electoral district or constituency). There are currently 338 federal ridings and each is represented by one Member of Parliament.
- Canada uses a system called **Single-Member Plurality**, or First-Past-The-Post. Voters are allowed to choose one candidate/party on their ballot and the candidate who has the greatest number of votes becomes the elected representative.

Teacher’s Note: Show the “[Our Electoral System](#)” video (2:31) to your class for an overview of our electoral system.

3. What riding is your school located in? Using the Elections Canada website, [find your riding](#). Select “Elections results since 2015” under “Past Elections” to view the 2015 federal election results (or subsequent by-election results, if applicable). You can also view the [Student Vote results](#) for your riding and ask students the following guiding questions:

- Was the same candidate elected during the official election and the Student Vote?
- Was it a tight race?
- Do you remember any memorable moments from the federal election?

4. Brainstorm a few questions you would like to ask your MP about their campaign experience. (e.g., What was the most challenging aspect? What was the most rewarding aspect? What was your greatest strength or asset? What would you do differently?)

Part B: Government Roles and Responsibilities

1. Show the “[The Levels of Government](#)” video to your class for an overview of roles and the responsibilities at each level. Key concepts:
 - Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal/local. Each level of government has its own representatives as well as a unique set of responsibilities.
 - The constitutional division of powers is based on the principle of subsidiarity (the government closest to the issue governs it). The division of powers is found in Sections 91–95 of the Constitution Act.
2. Review the list of responsibilities for each level of government using Handout 1.1 (Government Responsibilities).
3. To further an understanding of the division of powers, have students complete Activity Sheet 1.2 (Whose Responsibility Is It?).

Part C: Role of Federal MPs and Preparing for the Visit

1. Review the role of elected representatives and Members of Parliament using Slide Deck B.

- Members of Parliament are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on legislation (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents (people living in the ridings they represent).
- Members of Parliament gather in the House of Commons in Ottawa, attend Parliamentary Committee meetings regarding specific issues, and meet with their Caucus (their party).
- When they are not sitting (in Ottawa for a session in parliament), elected representatives are usually back in their riding to discuss local issues with their constituents (people living in their riding) and provide guidance and advice relating to government services.

2. Review your MP's bio on the [Library of Parliament website](#). Do they have a specific role in government or their party? Are they part of any parliamentary committees?

3. Discuss the upcoming visit and protocol. Prepare a format for the visit and assign roles and responsibilities to your students. Refer to Handout 1.3 (A Framework for Planning Your MP Visit).

4. Ask students to consider questions they would like to ask their MP related to their role or issues that matter to the riding. Use Activity sheet 1.4 (Questions for my MP) to gather and structure the selected questions. Encourage students to conduct additional research by reading a few articles included in the [News Bank](#) prior to the visit to come up with informed questions.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- What has the government achieved so far? What would you like to see them accomplish? How have the media and opposition parties critiqued the government's actions? Ask students to use multiple media sources to evaluate policy decisions to date and assess what needs to be addressed going forward.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Map of federal ridings](#)

[Members of Parliament – House of Commons of Canada](#)