

Lesson 2: Preparing for the Visit

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the role of our elected representatives, how they are chosen and prepare for the visit with their Member of the Legislative Assembly.

KEY WORDS

parliamentary democracy, minority government, majority government, electoral district, electoral system, single-member plurality, first-past-the-post, candidate, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- How does Nova Scotia's electoral system work?
- What is the role of an MLA?
- Which issues at the provincial level am I concerned about?
- What do I want to ask my MLA?

PREPARATION

- Prepare Handout: 2013 Provincial Election Results.
- Prepare access or obtain information displaying the results (provincial, local) from the last provincial election, see list of resources at the end of the lesson.
- Prepare access or obtain information to the 2013 provincial election Student Vote results ([Student Vote Website](#)).
- Obtain a map of the school's provincial electoral district ([Elections Nova Scotia website](#)).
- Obtain biographical and background information about your MLA ([Nova Scotia Legislature website](#), party website, personal website).

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 5 min

1. Share the national summary results for the 2013 provincial general election and examine the results of each party.
2. Share the 2013 provincial election Student Vote results with students so they can compare how their peers voted with the official election results.

Discussion questions: Who formed government in each election? Who is the official opposition? Is it a minority or majority government?

Instruction: 10 min

1. An electoral district is a geographical area represented by an elected representative. Also known as a riding or constituency.

Teacher note: Show students a map of the school's provincial electoral district. Identify the boundaries of the district and major landmarks, towns, bordering roads and the school location 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 ways of transferring 'votes to seats' throughout the world.
3. Nova Scotia uses a system called Single-Member Plurality or First-Past-The-Post for federal, provincial and territorial elections.
 - Citizens elect one representative per electoral district (single-member districts).
 - Voters are allowed to choose one candidate/party in each race (exclusive ballot).
 - The candidate that has the most number of votes becomes the elected representative (plurality).
4. Review your school's electoral district results for the 2013 provincial election (general election and Student Vote, if applicable).

Activity 1: The Role of an MLA (15-20 min)

Review basic background information about the role of MLAs (PowerPoint C: Members of the Legislative Assembly).

Discussion Questions:

- What do you believe are the most important aspects of an MLA's job?
- What qualifications or experience do you believe is important for someone running for the job of MLA?
- Do you think that MLAs have a clear job description?

Activity 2: Issues at the Provincial Level (15-20 min)

Facilitate a conversation about some of the major issues facing Nova Scotia or your electoral district. Encourage students to share information about current news stories or issues they have researched or have seen in the news.

Discussion Questions:

- Which current political issues are important to you?
- Which issues are you interested in learning more about?
- Are there other issues you feel need to be addressed by the provincial government, which are not currently being discussed?

Activity 3: Preparing for the Visit (15-20 min)

1. Read over your MLA's background on the Nova Scotia Legislature website/party website - including where they were born, past careers, when they were elected, how long they have served, current role in government, important issues, etc.

Teacher Note: Encourage students to share what aspects of the MLA's biography they relate to.

2. Working on their own, in pairs or as a class, develop a range of questions to ask your MLA. These can be personal or political questions.
 - What would you ask your MLA about their job and experience?
 - What 'fun' question might you ask your MLA?
 - What would you ask your MLA about any provincial or local issues?
 - What message would you like your MLA to bring back to Province House on your behalf?

Discuss the upcoming visit and protocol. Prepare a format for the visit/meeting and assign roles and responsibilities. Share the agenda with the MLA in advance of the visit. If the MLA is more prepared, the better the visit (Refer to Handout: A Framework for Planning Your MLA Visit).

RESOURCES

- PowerPoint C: Our Electoral System
- PowerPoint D: Members of the Legislative Assembly
- Handout: 2013 Provincial Election Results (Provincial Summary – General Election vs. Student Vote)
- Handout: A Framework for Planning Your MLA Visit
- Handout: A List of Provincial Responsibilities
- Map of the school's provincial electoral district can be downloaded from – <http://electionsnovascotia.ca/content/maps-0>
- 2013 provincial election Student Vote results – <http://studentvote.ca/ns/results/> (select the electoral district from the drop down list)
- 2013 general election results – <http://electionsnovascotia.ca/election-data/past-results> or other media websites
- MLA Profiles – <http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/people/members/>