



Lesson plan:

The Role of the Governor General Today

Objective of the lesson plan

This document is for teachers and educators across the country. The objective of this lesson is to teach students the important role that the governor general plays in Canada's system of government. Recognizing the scope of this role will help students understand Canada as a constitutional monarchy and how its parliamentary democracy works.

Suggested activities

The lesson centres on four activities, to be done alone or together, depending on the course needs:

1. "Defining Canada's System of Government": class discussion on the subject;
2. "Who Does What?": game about the differences between the role of the head of State and the role of the head of government;
3. "Today, the Governor General . . .": research and debate on the role of the governor general;
4. "Governors General Past and Present": research on the people who have made their mark on the history of the role in Canada.

Links with curricula across Canada

This lesson was designed to enrich the teaching of Canada's system of government and to support curricula in social sciences, civics, geography, history, Canadian studies and political science.

Grade level

Lesson activities are designed for high school students, but can be adapted for elementary school students in grades 5 or 6.

Learning outcomes

After completing the activities, students will

1. Understand the governor general's place in Canada's system of government;
2. Differentiate between the roles of the head of State and the head of government;
3. Recognize the governor general as the guarantor of responsible government;
4. Identify the governor general's responsibilities and the impact these have on their lives;
5. Know a few of the former governors general and that the role has evolved.

Teacher's preparation

Please visit the following three sites. They are available in both official languages and provide an array of information and helpful documents.

- www.gg.ca: Click on the “Role” tab to learn more about the governor general’s responsibilities. Each section includes a series of photos taken at official events; we encourage you to use these photos as visual aids in the classroom.
- <http://canadiancrown.gc.ca>: Click on the “Diamond Jubilee / Teachers’ Corner” section to read or download Kevin MacLeod’s *A Crown of Maples: Constitutional Monarchy in Canada* (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2012). This publication gives a clear overview of the Crown in Canada and includes a good glossary.
- www.parl.gc.ca: Use the search box to find the *Guide to the Canadian House of Commons*, which shows a diagram of our parliamentary system. This site also includes teaching resources and glossaries on Parliament.

Other helpful resources

Web sites:

Canadiana: www.canadiana.ca

Canadian Crown: <http://canadiancrown.gc.ca>

Canadian Encyclopedia: www.encyclopediecanadienne.ca

Canadian Heritage: www.pch.gc.ca

Elections Canada: www.elections.ca

Historica-Dominion Institute: www.historica-dominion.ca

Parliament of Canada: www.parl.gc.ca/explore

Supreme Court of Canada: www.scc-csc.gc.ca

Publications:

Monet, Jacques, S.J. *The Canadian Crown*. Clarke, Irwin and Company, Toronto/Vancouver, 1979.

Smith, Jennifer, and D. Michael Jackson (editors). *The Evolving Canadian Crown*. Queen’s University, Kingston, 2012.

Tidridge, Nathan. *Canada’s Constitutional Monarchy*. Dundurn Press, Toronto, 2011. See also his web site: www.canadiancrown.com.

Your feedback is important

Let us know what you think of this lesson plan. Please send us your comments, questions and suggestions at eduzone@gg.ca.

Note: The masculine gender is used throughout to simplify the text.



1. Defining Canada's System of Government

The goal of this first activity is to help students define Canada's system of government themselves and identify its main players. The suggested activity is a class discussion led by the teacher.

What you'll need

- Activity sheet 1: "Defining Canada's System of Government," which can be downloaded from gg.ca/eduzone
- Access to the Internet
- Blackboard with chalk or interactive whiteboard

Background information

Canada is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. All powers are vested in the Crown (personified by The Queen). The legislative power is entrusted to Parliament, the executive power to the government, and the judicial to the Supreme Court.

Canada's Parliament is made up of three parts: The Queen, represented by the governor general; the Senate; and the House of Commons. The prime minister and his Cabinet form the government. They are responsible to the House of Commons (therefore, to the people) and must keep its confidence, according to the principles of responsible government that regulate our parliamentary system. The Queen, through her representative, the governor general, ensures that these principles are always respected.

It should be noted that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II holds the title of "Queen of Canada" in addition to "Queen of the United Kingdom." The Canadian Crown is distinct from the British Crown, as Canada and Great Britain have been two separate, yet equal sovereign states since the passage of the *Statute of Westminster, 1931*. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II also reigns over 14 other of the 54 Commonwealth member states, which are all independent of one another.

Steps to follow

- 1.1** Ask the students to name different types of systems of government, and the characteristics that distinguish them from one another (ex. republican, monarchist, oligarchic, communist, theocratic, anarchic, type of head of State, right to vote, hereditary powers, etc.). Write all the keywords on the board. If necessary, help the students complete the list to ensure it includes the following terms: monarchy, constitution, parliament, democracy, federation, right to vote and responsible government. These terms should be mixed in with the others to make the next step a little more challenging.
- 1.2** Ask the students to pick the terms that they think best describe Canada's system. Ask someone to come up and circle the terms chosen. The inclusion or exclusion of certain terms could result in a class discussion; students must justify their choices. Do not correct the students' choices right away.
- 1.3** Next, hand out copies of activity sheet 1. Talking together, ask the students to explain our system of government in their own words. Ask them to define each of the underlined terms in



the first question. They can use the glossary in MacLeod's *A Crown of Maples* and the diagram of the parliamentary system from the *Guide to the Canadian House of Commons*. They should write the explanation they come up with on the activity sheet.

- 1.4 Ask the students to list the various parts that make up the Parliament of Canada, as well as the names and official titles of the people who hold the following positions: Queen, governor general and prime minister. Students can write their answers on the activity sheet.
- 1.5 Finally, go back to the terms they circled on the board in step 1.2. Ask them to correct their own answers.
- 1.6 Conclusion. Tell them that systems of government are run by men and women who share functions of representation, decision making, legislation and control. Although the attribution process of these functions may vary (hereditary, merit, election, lottery, etc.), the work carried out by these men and women is essential to the governance of a country.

Answer key for activity sheet 1

- Q1** Example of answer: Canada's head of State is a "monarch" (The Queen); its "constitution" (series of legislation and conventions) outlines the division of power; legislative powers are exercised by elected representatives ("democracy"); they come together in "Parliament"; the majority forms the government; it exercises executive powers and must keep the confidence of the House ("responsible government").
- Q2** (a) Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; (b) His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston; (c) The Right Honourable Stephen Harper.

2. Who Does What?

The goal of this second activity is to help students better understand, compare and critically analyze the role and responsibilities of our head of State (The Queen), her representative (the governor general) and her head of government (the prime minister). The activity is a game.

What you'll need

- Activity sheet 2: "Who Does What?", which can be downloaded from gg.ca/eduzone
- 3 name tags: "The Queen of Canada," "Governor General of Canada," and "Prime Minister of Canada"
- A hat
- The attached list of roles and responsibilities (page 9): cut them out and place the individual pieces in the hat
- Access to the Internet

Background information

In Canada, the duties of head of State and head of government are distinct. *The Constitution Act* (1867) places executive power in The Queen. In practice, this power is exercised by the prime



minister and his ministers. However, The Queen is Canada's head of State. Because she does not live in Canada, she delegates her responsibilities to her representative.

That is why the *Letters Patent Constituting the Office of the Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada* (1947) authorize the governor general to exercise these responsibilities. Since then, the governor general has exercised the duties of the head of State, not only in Canada, but also abroad. He exercises his responsibilities in a non-partisan, apolitical manner. The governor general acts on the advice of the prime minister and his Cabinet, and has the right to advise, to encourage and to warn. Furthermore, the Crown has discretionary powers that the governor general may exercise in exceptional cases in order to safeguard our democracy.

Steps to follow

- 2.1 As an introduction, share the information above with the students.
- 2.2 Next, hand out copies of activity sheet 2. Ask the students to complete the sheet, either by allowing them to do Internet research, or by discussing possible answers with them. Ensure that all students have the correct answers at the end of this step (see answer key below).
- 2.3 Ask students to leave their sheets on their desks, and to stand up and form a circle. Select two students to stand in the middle of the circle. Give one student the “The Queen of Canada” name tag and the other, the “Governor General of Canada” name tag. Give “The Queen” the hat with the cut-up responsibilities. Give the “Governor General” the third name tag, which he will hold on to for the time being. The rest of the students in the circle represent the parliamentarians.
- 2.4 “The Queen” must pull responsibilities out of the hat, read them out loud and identify which are her responsibilities. If she makes a mistake, the other students may correct her; this will test what they remember from the beginning of the activity. Once “The Queen” has correctly identified all of her responsibilities, she hangs on to them and hands the hat to the “Governor General.”
- 2.5 The “Governor General” then pulls his responsibilities out of the hat and reads them out loud. If he makes a mistake, the others may correct him. He then asks his classmates (the “parliamentarians”) to identify the leader of the majority party in the House of Commons. If they do not quickly come to a consensus, ask them to take a vote, or ask the “Governor General” to settle the argument and select the future prime minister. The “Governor General” then asks the student selected to form the government and gives him the “Prime Minister of Canada” name tag and the hat.
- 2.6 Finally, the “Prime Minister” reads his responsibilities.
- 2.7 Optional extension. Ask the “parliamentarians” to propose a bill (of their choosing) and to vote on it. Once the voting is over, the “Prime Minister” turns to the “Governor General” and asks him to give the bill Royal Assent. The “Governor General” nods as a sign of consent. This last step in the game illustrates the ceremony surrounding the approval of a bill by the governor general, when the bill becomes law. (For more ideas on role-playing activities related to the parliamentary process, please see the education section at www.parl.gc.ca.)
- 2.8 Before finishing activity 2, remind students that executive power belongs to The Queen, but in practice, it is exercised by the prime minister and his Cabinet. Note also that the game



highlighted only a few of the responsibilities of The Queen, the governor general and the prime minister.

- 2.9** Conclusion. Start a debate with the students on the legitimacy of, the reasons behind, and the limits of this distribution of the Crown's powers.

Answer key for activity sheet 2

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. The Queen | 10. Governor general |
| 2. Prime Minister | 11. Prime Minister (and his ministers and other parliamentarians) |
| 3. Governor General | 12. The Queen |
| 4. Prime Minister | 13. Governor General |
| 5. The Queen | 14. Prime minister (and his ministers) |
| 6. Governor General | 15. Governor General |
| 7. Governor General | 16. Prime Minister (and his ministers) |
| 8. Prime Minister (and his ministers) | 17. Prime Minister (and his ministers) |
| 9. Governor General | 18. Governor General |

3. "Today, the Governor General..."

The goal of this third activity is to help students understand the role of the governor general today and appreciate the impact that the governor general can have on their lives. The activity is a series of research projects, with class discussions and presentations.

What you'll need

- Activity sheet 3: "Today, the Governor General...", which can be downloaded from gg.ca/eduzone
- Access to the Internet

Background information

The current governor general is His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston. His mandate began on October 1, 2010. He is the 28th governor general of Canada since Confederation. His personal mandate is to bring Canadians together to build a smarter, more caring nation.

Today, his responsibilities as governor general can be placed into five fields of activity: ensure responsible government ("constitutional role"); serve as commander-in-chief of Canada; represent Canada, at home and abroad; bring Canadians together; and encourage excellence (by conferring honours and acting as the head of the Canadian Heraldic Authority, among other duties).

Steps to follow

- 3.1** In preparation of the research project, before even handing out the activity sheet, ask the students to read (in class or as homework) the section on the governor general's responsibilities on the gg.ca site (under the "Role" tab).



- 3.2** Divide the class into a number of groups and hand out copies of activity sheet 3. Assign each team one of the research themes listed on the sheet. (As theme 5 will be difficult, it is suggested to use it as a subject of discussion for younger students at the end of the activity.)
- 3.3** Each group conducts their research according to the instructions on the sheet. They must present their findings to the class in a creative way, for example, as a skit, an audio-visual presentation, a formal speech or a work of art (illustration, poem, etc.). Regardless of the form the presentations take, they must all begin with the words “Today, the governor general. . .”. In their conclusion, students must include their impressions or opinions on what they have learned.
- 3.4** Conclusion. Summarize the various responsibilities of the governor general that have just been presented. Ask the students how they think these responsibilities can have an impact on their lives. You can also use theme 5 to start a class debate on the relevance of the governor general’s role today.

4. Governors General Past and Present

The goal of this fourth activity is to help students learn about past governors general and see how the role has evolved over time. This will help them take a more critical view of the current reality of the role. The activity is a series of questions and answers.

What you'll need

- Activity sheet 4: “Governors General Past and Present,” which can be downloaded from gg.ca/eduzone
- Access to the Internet

Background information

The role of the governor general is considered the oldest public office in Canada. Its origins date back to the early 17th century, when governors in New France represented the King of France. Four hundred years ago, Samuel de Champlain—governor in all but name—fulfilled several duties and responsibilities that would later be carried out by the governors of New France.

Over time, the role adapted to the new political and social realities in the country, from the 1763 *Treaty of Paris* to the *Statute of Westminster, 1931*; from the advent of responsible government in 1848 (during Lord Elgin’s mandate) to the *Letters Patent Constituting the Office of the Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada* (1947); all the way to the 1999 appointment of a former refugee as governor general (the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson).

Steps to follow

- 4.1** Hand out copies of activity sheet 4. In class or as homework, working alone or in groups, the students must answer the “Who am I?” questions.



- 4.2** Correct the answers in class, asking the students if they discovered any other interesting or surprising information about these governors general. The answers are given below.
- 4.3** Optional extension. Suggest two research projects to the students: one on the governors of New France, and the other on the governors and governors general of British North America. Assign the projects or let the students choose their subject. Ask them to find out what responsibilities and powers these former governors and governors general had. Students can present their findings to the class. Next, ask them to discuss the differences they discovered in the role, according to each era.
- 4.4** Conclusion. Ask students to name a past governor or governor general who made a specific mark on their community (culture, family, municipality, province, etc.) because of a visit, a special or historical event, common origins or concerns, etc. Or ask them if they know of a school, street or park named after a former governor or governor general and why that name was given to that place.

Answer key for activity sheet 4

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. The Earl of Dufferin | 11. The Right Honourable Edward Schreyer |
| 2. The Right Honourable Jeanne Sauvé | 12. Lord Stanley |
| 3. Lord Tweedsmuir | 13. The Earl of Athlone |
| 4. HRH the Duke of Connaught | 14. The Right Honourable Roméo LeBlanc |
| 5. The Right Honourable Vincent Massey | 15. The Viscount Monck |
| 6. The Right Honourable Roland Michener | 16. The Earl of Aberdeen |
| 7. The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson | 17. General the Right Honourable Georges P. Vanier |
| 8. The Viscount Willingdon | 18. The Right Honourable Ramon John Hnatyshyn |
| 9. Lord Byng | 19. The Duke of Argyll (Marquess of Lorne) |
| 10. The Viscount Alexander | 20. The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean |

List to cut up for activity 2



I am the head of State.	I am the head of the Canadian Heraldic Authority.
I am the head of government (I govern).	I am the commander-in-chief of the Canadian Forces.
I represent Canada abroad (at the request of the prime minister).	I draft bills.
I negotiate trade agreements with other countries.	I appoint the governor general.
I approve the creation of new honours.	I give Royal Assent to bills.
I dissolve or prorogue Parliament.	I manage the country's finances.
I preside over the swearing-in of ministers and judges.	I grant Canadian honours.
I defend the government's policies in the House.	I recommend the appointment of the governor general.
I lend my apolitical support to socio-cultural causes.	I write the Speech from the Throne (which the governor general will read).

