Lesson 2 - The Structure of Government in Canada

Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. Each level of government has its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility.

Introduction
In choosing a federal form of government, the Fathers of Confederation assigned particular responsibilities to the different levels of government. However, public servants at all levels of government have been charged with the responsibility to reflect the desires of Canadian citizens. The division of powers is found in Section 91-95 of the Constitution Act (http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/index.html).

It is important to understand that all municipal governments are created by their provincial government. The Government of Ontario is responsible for assigning Ontario municipalities with their powers and responsibilities.

Similarly, since the Constitution assigns responsibility for education to the provinces, the Government of Ontario has the power to create school boards in the province and assign their powers and responsibilities. These are found in the Education Act.

In order to participate in the Canadian democratic process as voters, students need to have some knowledge of the structure and responsibilities of the three levels of government. In preparation for the upcoming elections, students should become well acquainted with the services provided by the municipal government.

Essential Questions

• What are the three levels of government in Canada?
• How is the Canadian citizen represented by each level of government?
• What differences exist between the three levels of government?

Hook 5-10 min.
Independently make a list of the ways you think that government and school boards affect your life. Share your list with a classmate and together use a scale of 1 to 10 to rate the impact of government on your life (1 signifying little to no impact; 10 signifying enormous impact). Share your rating with the rest of the class.

Essential Learning 40-50 min.

1. Review the following terms: representative democracy, elected representative, geographic area.

2. Three levels of government have been established to order Canadian society: federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal. Using Worksheet 2.1, identify the leaders of each level of government for your community as well as the location where each government is located. Consider conducting a webquest or using an encyclopedia to find the required information.

3. Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada’s first Prime Minister, stated that federalism provided “a general government and legislature for general purposes with local governments and legislatures for local purposes.” Using Handout 2.2, review the division of responsibilities among the three levels of government. Reflect on which level of government you feel impacts your day-to-day life the most.

4. Illustrate how government impacts nearly every aspect of Canadians’ lives by tracking your activities over the course of a day or week and relating these activities to a federal, provincial, or municipal government or school board responsibility.
   e.g. 7:00 am Eat breakfast at home Food standards and inspections (Federal/Provincial)
        7:30 am Shower & brush teeth Water & Sewer (Municipal)
        8:00 am Travel to school Roads/Transit (Municipal)
        8:30 am Attend class Education (Provincial/School Board)

   Afterwards reflect back on the Hook Activity and determine if your opinion has changed regarding the relevance of government in your lives. Share your findings with your class.

5. Review what you have discussed and learned about the reasons for and functions of different levels of government and school boards.
Extended Learning 10-20 min.

Option A:
Find a news story related to government in a local newspaper. Identify whether this story concerns municipal, provincial, or federal government. Highlight the words that tell you what level of government the story relates to. Summarize your news story for your class without identifying the level of government involved. See if anyone can identify the level of government from the people, places or issues in the story.

Option B:
Choose an activity from Local Government Week Resource Guide (elementary and secondary versions) http://www.amcto.com/db/newsinfo.asp?it=727&itemid=12094&DataIT=&ListName=

Option C:
Select an area of responsibility that interests you from the municipal level of government. Use information from the corresponding municipal website to discover each municipal department’s mandate as well as the principal activities of each municipal department. Share your findings with the rest of the class.

Option D:
Imagine that you are considering running for public office. Consider and compare the advantages that each level of government offers (power to shape society or community, ability to make people happy, personal interest in responsibilities, celebrity status, etc) in order to justify the level of government to which you would prefer to be elected.

Key Terms
alderman; cabinet; council; councillor; elected representative, federalism; geographic area; government; House of Commons; Leader of the Opposition; Legislative Assembly; mayor; Member of Legislative Assembly; Member of Parliament; Member of Provincial Parliament; ministry/department; municipality; Premier; Prime Minister; Provincial Parliament; reeve; representative democracy

Teacher Preparation
• Select teaching strategies for essential learning activities
• Make class copies of required handouts
• Book computer lab, if desired
• Preview websites to be used for class activities, if desired (LGW Resource Guide and Additional Resources posted on studentvote.ca)
• Select extended learning activity and teaching strategies, if desired
• Have selection of newspapers available to students, if desired

Home Connections
Ask students to have a discussion about the three levels of government in Canada. Potential questions for discussion:
• What level of government do you think is the most important? And why?
• What level of government impacts our family the most on a daily basis?” And how?

Assessment
Students should provide evidence that they have the ability to differentiate between the different levels of government in Canada and that that they are able to apply their knowledge of the division of government powers.