

Lesson: How can you make your voice heard?

Big idea

It is important to know which level of government is responsible for the different programs and services students will interact with in their lives. In addition to knowing each government's responsibilities, it is also important to know which government to contact to get their voices heard and the ways in which the government acts to get public input. A key part of democracy is the idea of the common good. Government should listen to diverse voices because diverse groups have different perspectives on issues and decisions should be made that are the best for the whole society. Democracy involves deliberations over how to balance different interests.

Curriculum connections

B3. Understanding Context: demonstrate an understanding of the roles and key responsibilities of citizens and of the different levels of government in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments (Focus on: Significance).

B3.1 describe the major rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada (e.g. rights: equal protection under the law, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to vote; responsibilities: to respect the rights of others, to participate in the electoral process and political decision making, to improve their communities).

B3.6 describe different processes that governments can use to solicit input from the public and explain why it is important for all levels of government to provide opportunities for public consultation.

B3.8 explain why different groups may have different perspectives on specific social and environmental issues.

B3.9 describe some different ways which citizens can take action to address social and environmental issues.

Learning goals

I am learning to:

- understand the many ways the government uses to get feedback from the public and when it's appropriate to use the specific methods
- understand the many ways Canadians can get their voices heard
- understand that different groups have different perspectives on social issues

Success criteria

I can:

- identify an appropriate way for the government to consult the public on social and environmental issues
- explain the many ways Canadians can get their voices heard
- take on a group's perspective about a social issue and participate in a town hall meeting

Inquiry question

How can you make your voice heard?

Required materials

1. Appendix A Student handout:
[Who do you contact? - Cards](#)
2. Appendix B Student handout:
[Ways to make your voice heard](#)
3. Appendix C Student handout:
[Scenario cards](#)
4. Appendix D Student handout:
[How can you make your voice heard?](#)
5. Appendix E Student handout:
[Town hall role cards](#)
6. Appendix F Group handout:
[Town hall meeting preparations and reflection](#)
7. Appendix G Group handout:
[Town hall meeting preparations - Government officials](#)
8. Appendix H Student handout:
[Three 3s in a row](#)
9. Appendix I Teacher resource:
[Town hall meeting format](#)
10. Slide deck:
[Who Do You Contact?*](#)

*Available online at: elections.on.ca/learning

Minds on

Teacher note: Students need some familiarity with the government responsibilities for this lesson (see [What role does government play in my life?](#) lesson).

1. Play a quick little game called “Who do you contact?”. Students can play in groups, pairs or individually. Each student or group must get [one set of cards](#) (Appendix A) to play.
2. Use the [Who Do You Contact? slide deck*](#), to provide students with a scenario involving a government responsibility. Students raise their chosen card (municipal, provincial, federal, band council) to respond.

Teacher note: Consider adding a point value to make the game competitive, adding popsicle sticks so that the placards become paddles the students raise and encouraging students to cheer each other on if competing in groups. Alternately this can be done in more of a review format rather than competitive play.

3. Conclude the game and remind students it is important to know which level of government is responsible for the different programs and services they will interact with in their lives. In addition to knowing each government’s responsibilities, it is also important to know which government to contact to get their voices heard.

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Activity

1. Distribute the student handout [Ways to make your voice heard](#) (Appendix B). These are brief summaries of all the ways the government solicits input from the public.
2. Give time for students to review them individually or in partners. Have students circle any words they do not know from the summaries and provide time for a class discussion around these words. The unfamiliar words can be written in a visible spot in the class and their definitions and explanations beside them.

Teacher note: The student handout is structured in such a way that the summaries can be cut out into strips. This may help students with the activity as they can place a summary on the scenarios during their group or partner deliberations.

3. Distribute the [scenario cards](#) (Appendix C) to students. In their small groups or pairs, students will read each scenario and then select a process that the government could use to solicit public input on the issues involved.

Teacher note: The scenario cards can be given to all students as a set or a different scenario can be given to each student group, depending on what works best for your class.

4. Students should keep note of their selections and their rationale explaining their thinking on the handout, [How can you make your voice heard?](#) (Appendix D).
5. Partner groups together to review their work and make any further deliberations as they finalize their choices.
6. As a whole class, come to a consensus as to appropriate processes that the government could use in each scenario.
7. Remind students that a key part of democracy is the common good - government should listen to diverse voices because different groups have different perspectives on issues and decisions should be made that are the best for the whole society. Democracy involves deliberations over how to balance different interests.
8. Explain that students will now do a simulation where they will practice perspective-taking and government deliberation, as well as experience a process government uses to get input from the public. The process will be a town hall meeting.
9. Each student will get a [role card](#) (Appendix E) and then find the other students in the class who got the same role card. They will form a group.
10. The question being deliberated in the town hall meeting is: "Should our town's school board change the school year?". Establish what a school year involves for your students (e.g. school starts after Labour Day in September, there is a winter break, March or spring break, summer break, etc.), the days and hours students typically attend school (e.g. Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 3 pm).
11. In their groups, students will deliberate changing the school year based on their assigned role card's perspective.
12. Encourage students to conduct research into the school year in other jurisdictions (e.g. Florida, British Columbia, France, Kenya. They can enter the search term "school year calendars around the world").
13. After an agreed upon amount of time to prepare their positions and questions using the student handout, [Town hall meeting preparations and reflection](#) (Appendix F), the town hall meeting will begin. Each group will have a chance to explain their position and to ask questions.
14. The students who are in the government group should sit in a designated spot as they will be listening to and considering all the points of view and reaching a decision. The government group has a different [handout](#) (Appendix G) from the rest of the groups to get ready for the town hall meeting.

Teacher note: A town hall meeting is suggested here for this activity; however, students can also vote on which process would be best for the government to get many different perspectives and input on the issue. Then the class could engage in that process. For example, you may wish to use this question as the basis for the election simulation (see [Election simulation](#) lesson).

15. A simple [town hall meeting format](#) (Appendix I) is included as a teacher resource for this lesson. You may wish to follow that format for the town hall meeting.
16. The town hall meeting concludes with the government deliberating and reaching a decision. Deliberations should occur in private (i.e. in the hallway). Once a decision has been reached, the government should deliver it to the class. A template is provided for the government group to plan their brief speech on their [handout](#) (Appendix G).
17. Ask students to complete their group handouts and then discuss as a class.
 - a. Are there any clear winners or losers?
 - b. Did the government deliver a decision that balances interests and helps to achieve the common good?

Consolidation

[Three 3's in a row](#) (Appendix H)

Students move around to their classmates, and they listen to each other and get information from their peer “experts”. Students must summarize what the peer expert stated into the corresponding box. The owner of the template is the one who must write the answer in the box. This is crucial because it helps them engage with what their peers said, and it helps the student develop processing skills through listening to each other. The students can only use a peer one time for a question so they will be talking to nine different students. After students have finished, share as a class what they learned.

Assessment

The teacher can do a quick assessment of learning by walking around the room and looking for any trends of empty boxes, indicating students are not too confident responding to the question(s). Review the questions with the class where those trends are apparent.