



## Lesson Plan

# The Role of the Governor General Today

## INTRODUCTION

### Lesson objective

This lesson plan is for teachers and educators across the country. Its objective 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

For students in grades 7 to 11 (Secondary 1 to 5); can be adapted for 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 today;
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](http://www.gg.ca): For information on the Governor General's role and on the official events she takes part in. We encourage you to use in the classroom our photos of official events as visual aids to illustrate the governor general's responsibilities.
- [www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/royal-symbols-titles/crnMpls-eng.pdf](http://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/royal-symbols-titles/crnMpls-eng.pdf): To read or download Kevin MacLeod's *A Crown of Maples: Constitutional Monarchy in Canada* (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2015). This publication gives a clear overview of the Crown in Canada and includes a good glossary.
- [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca): Go to "Learn about Parliament" for information on our parliamentary system, teaching resources, interactive activities and glossaries.

## Other helpful resources

Web sites:

Canadiana.org: [www.canadiana.ca](http://www.canadiana.ca)

Canadian Crown: [www.canada.ca/en/services/culture/canadian-identity-society/monarchy-crown.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/services/culture/canadian-identity-society/monarchy-crown.html)

Canadian Heritage: [www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage.html)

Elections Canada: [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)

Historica Canada: [www.historicacanada.ca](http://www.historicacanada.ca)

Supreme Court of Canada: [www.scc-csc.gc.ca](http://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.

## Your feedback is important

Please send us your comments, questions and suggestions at [guide@gg.ca](mailto:guide@gg.ca). Indicate "Educational Resources" in the subject line.

**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.

### **You will need**

- *Activity Sheet 1*: “Defining Canada’s System of Government,” to be downloaded from [www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/role](http://www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/role).
- 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 King). 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 King, 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 King, through her representative, the governor general, ensures that these principles are always respected.

It should be noted that His Majesty King Charles III holds the title of “King of Canada” in addition to “King 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*. His Majesty King Charles III 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 (e.g.: republican, monarchist, oligarchic, communist, theocratic, anarchic, king, president, 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, universal suffrage 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 Kevin MacLeod's *A Crown of Maples* and the resources available on the Parliament of Canada website. They should write the explanation they come up with on their copy of *Activity Sheet 1*.

- 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: King, governor general and prime minister. Students can write their answers on their copy of *Activity Sheet 1*.
- 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 people 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 people 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 King); 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** On July 26, 2021, the answers were: (a) His Majesty King Charles III; (b) Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon; (c) The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau.

## **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 King), her representative (the governor general) and her head of government (the prime minister). The activity is a game.

### **You will need**

- *Activity Sheet 2*: "Who Does What?", to be downloaded from [www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/role](http://www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/role)
- 3 name tags, each respectively marked as: "King/Queen of Canada," "Governor General of Canada," and "Prime Minister of Canada"
- A hat
- The attached list of roles and responsibilities (page 9 of this document): cut them up 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 King. In practice, this power is exercised by the prime minister and his ministers. However, The King is Canada's head of State. Because he does not live in Canada, he delegates his responsibilities to his 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. Therefore, today, the governor general exercises the duties of the head of State, not only in Canada, but also abroad. She exercises her responsibilities in a non-partisan, apolitical manner. She acts on the advice of the prime minister and his Cabinet, and has the right to advise, to encourage and to warn the government. 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 “King/Queen of Canada” name tag and the other, the “Governor General of Canada” name tag. Give the “King/Queen” the hat with the cut-up responsibilities. Give the “Governor General” the third name tag, which he/she will hold on to for the time being. The rest of the students in the circle represent the parliamentarians.
- 2.4** The “King” must pull responsibilities out of the hat, read them out loud and identify which are his responsibilities. If he makes a mistake, the other students may correct him; this will test what they remember from the beginning of the activity. Once the “King” has correctly identified all of his responsibilities, he 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 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 selected student 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 activities related to the parliamentary process, please see the learning section at [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca).)

- 2.8** Before finishing activity 2, remind students that executive power belongs to The King, 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 King, 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**

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

### **You will need**

- *Activity Sheet 3: “Today, the Governor General...”*, to be downloaded from [www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/rolegg.ca/.../educational-resources](http://www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/rolegg.ca/.../educational-resources)
- Access to the Internet

### **Background information**

The current governor general is Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary May Simon. Her mandate began on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021. She is the 30<sup>th</sup> governor general of Canada since Confederation. Before becoming governor general, she gained international recognition for her work on Arctic and Indigenous issues.

Today, her responsibilities as governor general can be placed into five fields of activity: to ensure responsible government (“constitutional role”); to serve as commander-in-chief of Canada; to represent Canada, at home and abroad; to bring Canadians together; and to 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 copies of *Activity Sheet 3*, ask the students to read (in class or as homework) the section on the governor general’s responsibilities at <https://www.gg.ca/en/governor-general/role/responsibilities>.
- 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 *Activity Sheet 3*. 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,” to be downloaded from [www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/role](http://www.gg.ca/en/educational-resources/role)
- 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 *Treaty of Paris, 1763* 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 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. Prince Arthur, 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 non-partisan support to socio-cultural causes.	I write the Speech from the Throne (which the governor general will read).