

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT VIDEO: EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

This guide has four components:

1. General discussion questions
2. Specific discussion questions
3. Activities
4. A glossary of key terms

GOAL: The video, discussion questions, and activities are intended to increase participants' understanding and appreciation for the responsibilities and real-life challenges of being a Member of Parliament (MP).

OBJECTIVES:

1. Introduce viewers to the three roles that MPs play as legislators, representatives, and service providers
2. Raise questions about how MPs address the competing issues and interests they sometimes encounter when fulfilling these roles
3. Remind viewers that MPs are people with lives and concerns outside of politics, including families and friends

AUDIENCE: The video is appropriate for grade 5 or higher, and English language learners. English and French subtitles are available.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

General Discussion Questions

These questions can be raised before and/or after viewing the video, depending on participants' existing knowledge of MPs:

1. Would you want to be a Member of Parliament? Why or why not?
2. What is the hardest part of being an MP? What is the best part?
3. Which role is the most important for an MP – Legislator, Representative or Service Provider?
4. When are national concerns more important than local concerns? When are local concerns more important than national concerns?
5. If you were an MP, what issue would you want to work on most?

Specific Discussion Questions

These questions relate to particular elements of the video, and should be raised after viewing the video:

1. Cabinet Ministers are Members of Parliament that also serve as head of a government department. This added responsibility provides both benefits and challenges. For the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, what might be some of the benefits or challenges associated with that role? What about the role of other ministers? (Find a complete list of ministers here: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/parliamentarians/en/ministries>.)
2. Priya has lunch with an MP from the Opposition party. Why would MPs from different political parties socialize? Do you have friends with different political views?
3. While MPs almost always support their party when voting on legislation, MPs can discuss their concerns about legislation with party leaders during private caucus meetings or raise concerns when committees consider legislation. Why do MPs almost always support their party when voting on legislation? Do you think caucus meetings should be closed or open to the public?
4. One of the jobs of MPs is to represent the interests and concerns of constituents. However, often constituents do not all agree on an issue. What side should an MP support if constituents disagree on an issue? How should MPs determine how their constituents feel about an issue?
5. All MPs meet constituents who disagree with them on an issue. If you were MP, how would you respond to a constituent who disagreed with you?

ACTIVITIES:

Activity 1 - Perception of Members of Parliaments

Description: Many Canadians have a low assessment of politicians, including MPs. This activity addresses these perceptions and provides an opportunity for participants to change their perception in light of the information in the video.

Materials: Pens or pencils, notecards or scrap paper, whiteboard or flip chart.

Time: 5-15 minutes

Instructions:

1. Before watching the video, ask participants to write “Before” on the top of a notecard or scrap paper. Then, ask participants to write down 5 words they would use to describe Members of Parliament. Collect the responses. Do not read them aloud.
2. After watching the video, ask participants to write “After” on the top of a notecard or scrap paper. Then, ask participants to write down 5 words they would use to describe MPs.
3. Write a list of “Before” and “After” terms on a whiteboard or flipchart and discuss the differences.

Activity 2 - Local vs. National

Description: MPs often must balance local and national interests. This activity asks participants to consider how they might make difficult choices when facing competing issues and interests.

Materials: “Support” and “Oppose” signs to post on walls.

Time: 5-20 minutes

Set-Up: Post “Support” and “Oppose” signs on opposing walls.

Instructions:

Present the following scenarios and ask participants to stand along a spectrum from “support” to “oppose” in response. Ask for volunteers to explain their answer and discuss both the

substance of the issue and the basis for making their decision. Ask if their decision would be different if they were an MP.

Scenario 1:

A new world class sports arena has been proposed for international games to be held in your city. The sports arena is two blocks from your house and will take over a park you currently enjoy for walking your dog and playing games with your friends.

Do you support the sports arena or oppose it?

Scenario 2:

The government has proposed new environmental regulations to reduce air pollution that has been linked to childhood asthma. The regulations could force the closure of a local factory and the loss of thousands of jobs.

Do you support or oppose the new environmental regulations?

Activity 3 - Contact Your Member of Parliament

Description: Have participants write to their MP or invite them to a meeting. Many MPs are glad to meet with classes or community organizations but they generally require significant lead time to plan.

Materials: Pens or pencils, pieces of paper or postcards.

Time: 15-30 minutes

Instructions:

Before asking participants to write or meet with their MP, ask them to:

1. Find their local MP using this [search tool](#) from Open North.
2. Give participants examples of federal issues that MPs have authority over.
3. Read this [blog post](#) for helpful tips on contacting MPs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Samara's report on [Democracy Talks](#) explains the program's impact and history.

Democracy Talks

GLOSSARY

1. **Amend:** To change or improve something: for example, a piece of legislation.
2. **Caucus:** A group composed of all Senators and Members of Parliament from the same political party. Private caucus meetings are held regularly.
3. **Committee:** are composed of both Government and opposition members. There are three basic types of committees:
 - a. Legislative committees, which examine bills after second reading in the House,
 - b. Standing committees, which study certain issues, documents, departments or estimates throughout the duration of the Parliament, and
 - c. Special committees, which are appointed to inquire into specific matters.
4. **Constituency:** The specific geographic area in Canada that a Member of Parliament represents in the House of Commons, also known as a riding or electoral district. During debate the Member is identified by the name of the constituency rather than by his or her own name.
5. **Constituents:** A person living in an area in Canada represented by an elected Member of Parliament.
6. **Election:** The process of choosing a representative by vote. In a federal general election, the voters in each riding elect one representative to the House of Commons. The person who gets the most votes represents the riding. Generally, the party that has the most members elected forms the Government.
7. **Governing party:** The political party that forms the government because it had more of its members elected to the Chamber by the people than any other political party.
8. **House of Commons:** The elected Lower House of Parliament is composed of 338 Members representing all the ridings across Canada. Most of the laws passed by Parliament originate in the House of Commons. Members' duties include representing constituents' concerns, serving on committees, proposing legislation, participating in Commons debates and discussing and amending bills.

9. **Interest groups:** Groups of businesses, associations and people with a common interest who lobby the Government to promote that interest.
10. **Legislation:** The Acts passed by Parliament, which make up the law.
11. **Legislator:** An elected official who is responsible for drafting, amending and passing laws. In Canada, one of the responsibilities of Members of Parliament is to act as a legislator (see also: Representative and Service Provider)
12. **Lobbyist:** Lobbyists are individuals and groups who actively communicate with federal public office holders in an attempt to influence Government decisions. They are required under the Lobbyists Registration Act to register their activities, provide information on their clients and the subject matter of their lobbying activity, and adhere to standards of conduct for communicating with federal public office holders.
13. **Member of Parliament (MP):** This term can be used in two ways. It can refer to Members of both the Senate and of the House of Commons, reflecting the fact that the Parliament of Canada is a bicameral legislature. In common usage the term refers to a person elected to a seat in the House of Commons (an MP), who serves as a representative of one of the 308 ridings into which Canada is divided. In debate, Members are identified not by their own names but by the names of their ridings.
14. **Minister:** A Member of Parliament who is usually head of a government department. The Leader of the Government in the Senate is usually a member of Cabinet.
15. **Opposition member:** A Member of Parliament who belongs to an opposition party.
16. **Opposition party:** The party or parties and independent members who do not belong to the governing party. The role of the opposition is to provide knowledgeable criticism of the Government and propose ways to improve its policies and legislation.
17. **Political party:** An organization of people with similar values and beliefs who seek to influence or control the government by winning elections.
18. **Prime Minister:** The leader of the party in power and the head of the federal Government.
19. **Representative:** An elected official who is responsible for ensuring that the interests and concerns of their constituents are considered. In Canada, one of the responsibilities of Members of Parliament is to act as a Representative (see also: Legislator and Service Provider)
20. **Riding:** Another word for constituency or electoral district.

- 21. Service Provider:** An elected official who provides assistance to their constituents. In Canada, one of the responsibilities of Members of Parliament is to act as a Service Provider (see also: Legislator and Representative)
- 22. Speaker of the House:** The Speaker presides over the House of Commons, ensuring that its rules and traditions are respected. The Speaker represents the Commons in dealings with the Senate and the Crown and is also responsible for the administration of the House and its staff. The Speaker has a diplomatic and social role in hosting visits by heads of state and heads of government who come to Parliament. The Speaker is elected to the position by other Members at the beginning of a new Parliament or when a vacancy occurs.

Source: Parliament of Canada Educator Page (Accessed July 12, 2016 at <http://lop.parl.gc.ca/about/parliament/Education/glossary-intermediate-students-e.html>)

Democracy Talks

About Democracy Talks Activities

Democracy Talks activities are designed to strengthen participants' political voice by motivating involvement, increasing knowledge and enhancing the skills required to be involved in our democracy.

Five Principles of Democracy Talks:

Designed to be used in both academic and non-academic settings, DT activities are based on five principles:

1. Based on the interests of participants.
2. Involves conversation amongst participants and provides opportunities for all voices to be heard.
3. Accessible and engaging for people from a wide range of backgrounds.
4. Fun and meaningful for participants.
5. Simple to deliver for facilitators.

Facilitator's role:

The facilitator's role is to:

1. prepare all the materials,
2. set-up the space,
3. establish a safe and welcoming environment,
4. explain and conduct activities,
5. encourage active engagement by all participants,
6. maintain a pace that ensures activities are completed within the allotted time,
7. collect and report participant feedback.

Facilitators are not required to be experts on Canadian politics or democratic institutions.