

## ACTIVITY EIGHT: GOVERNMENT COMPARISONS

### Objectives:

- To compare the governmental structures of Canada and the U.S.
- To understand how power is distributed in the two federal government systems
- To identify strengths and weaknesses of the two systems

### Materials:

- Text, pp. XXX
- Butcher paper and felt pens
- Figure Fifteen: The Structure of Government in Canada and the United States

### Procedure:

1. Brainstorm all the terms associated with the Canadian government. Using Figure Fifteen: The Structure of Government in Canada and the United States, describe the two systems for the students.
2. Hand out text, pp. XXX. Discuss the differences between “separation of powers” and “fusion of powers” and how the differences influence:
  - a. an individual citizen
  - b. the leader—President or Prime Minister
  - c. the Senators
3. Divide class into small groups. Distribute butcher paper and marking pens. Ask students to make a chart illustrating the advantages and disadvantages of U.S. and Canadian governments. Allow time for group discussion. Display group diagrams and compare to each other.
4. From the student charts, list the three major advantages and disadvantages for each form of government. Have a class vote.

### Notes for Teaching:

The intent of this activity is to compare Canadian and U.S. government. The major point in the comparison is the distribution of power. The concept of “separation of power” represents a built-in government check on itself. The concept of “fusion of power” concentrates power by combining the legislative majority and the executive into one. When discussing the influences of political structures, some points to highlight are:

1. Citizen—in the United States, the President is elected by the whole electorate; in Canada, only people in the party leader's riding vote for the person who becomes Prime Minister.
2. Leaders—the President cannot count on automatic support from Congress because he is elected separately. The Prime Minister counts on party support because he is part of a party “team” that won the most legislative seats in the election.

3. Senators—they are appointed in Canada and have little power; United States Senators are elected and have considerable power.

The following chart of advantages and disadvantages can be used to help student groups compare the two systems.

## U.S. Government

### Advantages

1. Does not concentrate power in one branch.
2. Provides more opportunities for input by citizens and lobbyists.
3. Gives individual legislators more power in making public policy (e.g., committee system, lack of firm party discipline).

### Disadvantages

1. Executive and legislative branches may be of different parties.
2. Judicial review may place too much power in the judiciary.
3. Power in government is diffused and often results in committee chairmen, presidential cronies, etc., being too powerful.

## Canadian Government

### Advantages

1. Makes government more efficient since executive and legislative branches automatically work together.
2. Change of government occurs if Prime Minister loses support of the House of Commons.
3. Accountability is well defined since power and responsibility are clearly known.

### Disadvantages

1. Cabinet dictatorships may result from concentration of power vested in the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
2. Non-cabinet members in Parliament have little power; Parliament may act too much like a rubber stamp.
3. The Senate, an appointed honorific body, does not represent provinces in the central government. (States are represented in Washington D.C. in the U.S. Senate).