

ACTIVITY NINE: CANADIAN PARTY SYSTEM

Objectives:

- To understand the role of Canadian political parties
- To know how the party system works in Canadian federal and provincial governments
- To compare a central feature of Canadian and U.S. politics

Materials:

- Text, pp. XXX
- Figure Fourteen: House of Commons

Procedures:

1. List on the blackboard the various Canadian political parties. Discuss their role in Canadian government.
2. Describe a “majority” and “minority” government and what they mean to Canadians. Discuss whether these types of government can occur in U.S. government.
3. On the blackboard draw the House of Commons and the party seat plan. Compare the plan with the Houses of Congress. Why is there a different arrangement of elected members? What is the role of “Opposition” in the House of Commons?
4. Group students according to Canadian political parties and hold a mock election. How will the election be different from a U.S. election?
5. Have the class create their own political party system that shows the physical and human diversity in Canada.

Notes for Teaching:

Studying Canadian political parties enables students to understand how a party system works in a parliamentary system. Majority and minority governments are key terms. Be sure the class understands that “majority” means the governing party does not have to rely on other parties for support and thus has an easier time getting its policies through the parliament.

In describing the House of Commons, indicate how the physical structure reveals much about what happens there. Point out how the parties are physically separated in terms of their seating arrangement—thereby highlighting “Government” and “Opposition.” Point out also how the Prime Minister and Cabinet sit in the front row, and the Leader of the Opposition sits directly opposite. Sketch the semicircular arrangement of the United States House and Senate, showing how members face the speaker instead of each other.

In Canada, elections place more emphasis on the party system than individual candidates. Another difference is that Canadian voters do not vote for a Prime Minister, as Americans vote

for a President. And, there is no Vice-President. Be sure to point out that the Prime Minister is an elected member of the House of Commons.

The final exercise allows students to create their own possible Canadian party system. Many parties are possible based on geographical location, language, political philosophy, economic interest and cultural background. Examples are an east and west party, a French and an English party, a socialist party, a farmer party, a labor party, a capitalist party, a British party, an aboriginal party, and a provincial party.