

Rural Classrooms with Global Vision

Provincial Governance

In 1784, the province of New Brunswick was founded as a colony of Great Britain. The British *Westminster Parliamentary System* was subsequently adopted and has governed the land ever since. The British were not, however, the only people influencing the structure of New Brunswick. For thousands of years before this date, aboriginal peoples of the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq Nations had been inhabiting and enriching the land. In addition, France developed settlements prior to the arrival of the English in what was then known as Acadia.



New Brunswick Coat of Arms

<http://www.gnb.ca/cmb/logos/logos/Coat-e.asp>

What does it mean to democratically govern a province? Why is democracy important?

In a democratic society, everyone has equal and fair representation through an elected government. The people of New Brunswick vote for candidates in their local areas to represent their views and values in the governing body known as the provincial *Legislative Assembly*. Every New Brunswick citizen has the responsibility to ensure that the government is representing them

in the best way possible!

By 1867, the government of New Brunswick was looking to improve an already strong economy and to prevent a northward expansion by the powerful United States of America. Consequently, the colony of New Brunswick entered into Confederation with Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec to form the Dominion of Canada. Since this time, a national parliament has democratically governed Canadian society. New Brunswick shares in the governing body, having modeled its own parliamentary system after the Westminster system to suit the needs of New Brunswick citizens.

Accurate parliamentary representation in a province such as New Brunswick is a difficult task to achieve considering the rich and diverse history and culture that makes New Brunswick what it is today.

How does one ensure a true representation?

The province is divided into 55 electoral districts, each district having its own MLA (*Member of the Legislative Assembly*) who acts on behalf of the region in the *Legislative Assembly* of New Brunswick. Distribution of these electoral districts must consider the linguistic composition, minority representation, geography, community history, community interest, population, and growth patterns of the province. These factors change as New Brunswick grows, so it is important to reassess them periodically.



Photo: Leland Daugherty

Casting a Vote:
The Launch of Carleton County's
Children's Parliament

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate understanding of regional and national governance system and the rights and responsibility of citizenry in democracy.
2. Make appropriate decisions and take responsibility for those decisions.
3. Demonstrate understanding of their own and others' cultural heritage.

Curriculum Entry Points

Grade 9 Social Studies; Grade 9 Human Rights; Grade 11 Global Studies; Grade 11 Western History; Grade 12 World Issues; Grade 12 Political Science; Grade 12 Law.

Who determines the following: The type of education you get? The facilities at your school? The condition of the roads used every day? The services within your community? The health care available to your family? The upkeep of parks around you? The use of the land and all of its natural resources? Decisions made in the Legislative Assembly impact the lives of everyone in New Brunswick!

The province spends approximately \$5.25 billion each year. The current government commits 70% of this spending to health care, education and reducing the debt. This leaves 30% to cover all other existing activities including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, day care, environment, and transportation. **Is this how you would like to see your money being spent?** Maybe it is or maybe it is not - **you have the responsibility to let your local MLA know!**

MLAs are legislators (meaning that they help to create new laws under the Legislative Branch of the government), but they are also ombudsmen representing the constituents of their municipalities. Your local MLA is elected at least once every 5 years in a provincial election, or before this time if the *Premier* of the province chooses to call an election. The *Premier* of New Brunswick is the head of the political party which has the greatest number of MLAs elected into parliament. As an elected MLA, the Premier must follow his/her electoral promises, but as Premier, is also obligated to represent *all* of New Brunswick.

The 55th Legislative Assembly was formed after the provincial election of June 9, 2003. It is made up of 28 *Progressive Conservative* MLAs, 26 *Liberal* MLAs, and 1 *New Democratic Party* MLA.

Fifteen of these MLAs make up the current *Cabinet*. It is the Premier who chooses the Cabinet Members. These members are known as the *Executive Council* or the **Government** (with a capitol G) because they are the MLAs assigned to be the Ministers responsible for specific government departments. Although there are several advisors within each department, it is ultimately the *Minister* who gives the final authority on any decisions made within their department and who is held accountable.



Photo: Adam Dickinson

!Democracy!

People have the right to be heard! In a democratic society everyone makes choices. These choices affect the individual as well as society as a whole. The Canadian province of New Brunswick is said to function democratically. We use a system known as 'representational democracy'. Does it truly represent everyone?

Take a closer look!

Who is currently participating in this governing system? Who is voting? Who is not voting? Why are they not voting? Are there any modifications to be made to the current 'democratic' system to make it more inclusive of all people living in New Brunswick? The proper functioning of a democracy is dependent on the active participation of all citizens. It's roots are embedded in respect, fairness and responsibility. If someone or some people feel they are not given their deserved rights and respect, their opinions should be considered.

Governments serve a purpose. They should not grow static nor dormant to the needs of the people of today and of the future. Without cooperation from all peoples to include everyone's voices, and without the ability to re-evaluate current governing structures, democracy can not work.

Photo: Tegan Wong



What about the decisions made within the Legislative Assembly?

How do these become laws?

In order for any law to be created, a legislative proposal must be drafted, introduced and accepted in the Legislative Assembly. These drafts are known as *Bills*. A *Bill* can be introduced to the Legislative Assembly by either MLAs (in the case of a *Public Bill*) or by persons outside of the Legislative Assembly (in the case of a

Private Bill). If this *Bill* is debated, voted on, and passed after its 3rd reading, it must then be given the *Royal Assent* before it becomes law. This assent can only be carried out by the *Lieutenant-Governor* of the province.

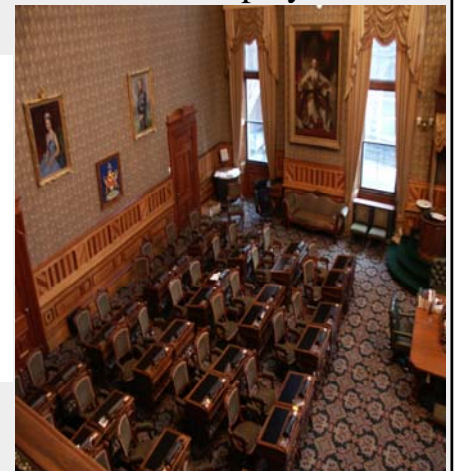
The Hon. Marilyn Trenholme Counsell is the 28th Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. It is her duty to represent the *Crown* – the Queen of Britain, whose Commonwealth Empire Canada remains a part of. Her approval is the final requirement needed before a *Bill* can become *Law*. These *Laws* are the rules that govern all of New Brunswick. Therefore, the decisions made in the Legislative Assembly have a definite impact on the lives of everyone in the province!

Let your local MLA know how you feel, use your voting right, and responsibly play a role in the future governance of your province!

Suggested Class Activities / Discussion Questions

1. Compare New Brunswick's structure of government with that of other Canadian provinces, and also with that of other democratic societies around the world. How does democracy work in each case? Is there room to make the process even more democratic?
2. Create a New Brunswick *Wall of Fame* in your classroom. Students must research a famous New Brunswicker and create a draft proposal (*Bill*) to their class which details why this particular person deserves to be on the *Wall of Fame*. The class will have to role-play the process of passing a *Bill* with 1st and 2nd readings, debates, final drafts (3rd reading) and a classroom vote.
3. Research the powers and duties of, and role-play the various positions in, the New Brunswick Legislature e.g.: MLA, Speaker, Clerk, Premier, Lieutenant-Governor.
4. Reflective exercise: What does it mean to you to live in New Brunswick? Create a symbol & describe how it represents New Brunswick to you? What does it mean to be a Canadian citizen? What is your role as a citizen of a democratic society? What role does the government play in New Brunswick? How can you ensure that your voice is heard?
5. What is symbolism and how does it apply to New Brunswick and to its government? Explore the areas of government where many symbols are found and used. Discuss the meaning and history behind each symbol. Create a work of art using several symbols of your choice to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of New Brunswick's rich history. Display these symbols around your classroom and school.

Photo: Adam Dickinson



Some ideas for what you can do:

- Visit your Provincial Legislature Buildings in Fredericton. Tour Old Government House and the Legislature Complex, attend a Daily Sitting of the Legislative Assembly, and meet your local MLA.
- Brainstorm concerns you as a youth have about the community you live in. Create postcards with these concerns written onto the cards. Send your cards to your local MLA, or invite your local MLA to attend or speak at a school event.
- Organize a Youth Forum within your high school where youth can come together, voice and discuss issues that concern them, and create action plans to have their voices heard.
- What is democracy? Write your own oath of what democracy means to you. Is the province of New Brunswick truly democratic? Why or why not? How could it be changed in any way to make it a more democratic and just society for all? Write a letter to the editor of your local paper with your feelings of what democracy is, why it is important, and how New Brunswick can work towards a more democratic society.
- Organize a 'Celebration of New Brunswick: the voices of our people' evening. Be sure to invite people from your community of many different backgrounds i.e. Wabanaki, Acadian, English-speaking, recent immigrants, government officials, your neighbours, etc. Have these people tell, act, or present their background, their perspectives on belonging in New Brunswick, and how decisions in the Legislative Assembly affect them.
- Play a role in Carleton County's Children's Parliament; where children can voice their concerns and participate in decision-making that affects them. Youth are welcome to help in the facilitation of activities run throughout the school-year. This is a great opportunity to link elementary and high school students!



Photo: Tegan Wong

Carleton County's Children's Parliament 2002-2003

Where to find More Information

For information on booking tours of the **Legislative Assembly** Complex contact:

Tour Coordinator
Legislative Assembly Complex
P.O. Box 6000
Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5H1
Tel: (506)453-2527
Fax: (506)453-7154

Look up your local MLA on this website: <http://app.infoaa.7700.gnb.ca/gnb/pub/ListMLA1.asp>- Provides a contact list for all the Members of the 54th Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick.

Check out the official website of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick at <http://www.gnb.ca/legis/>

To learn more about **Carleton County's Children's Parliament** or organizing a **Youth Forum** contact Tegan at the Falls Brook Centre; #(506) 375-4310.



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<http://www.fallsbrookcentre.ca>

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