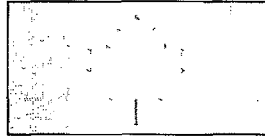


Activity Sheet 1-5: How Canada Became a Constitutional Monarchy

Lesson 1

Name: _____ Block: _____ Date: _____

Canada is known as a democratic **constitutional monarchy**. This means that the **head of state** is a King or Queen whose powers are limited by a written **constitution**.



A constitution is a legal document that sets out the roles, responsibilities and powers of a government.

Canada received its constitutional monarchy status in 1867, when the fathers of confederation decided to join the British North American colonies of Upper and Lower Canada into a country. This was called Confederation. They signed the *British North American (BNA) Act* with the approval of the British Government.

As a result of the BNA Act, Canada was created and became a federal system of government responsible to the people. Our head of state is the Queen and she is represented by the **Governor General**. The **Prime Minister** is the head of the government. The Governor General has very different powers and duties to that of the Prime Minister, but he or she is responsible for ensuring that our current government is behaving properly and in the best interests of the people of this country. The Governor General also signs bills into law by giving **Royal Assent**.

Canada is a bilingual country, meaning that we have two official languages set out by the *Constitution* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*: English and French. The *Charter* is a legal document that sets out the rights of all Canadians under the law and was added to our constitution in 1982. Courts decide all matters related to the constitution.

Executive Branch

Our government is set up as a parliamentary-cabinet. The Prime Minister of Canada belongs to the elected political party and is a member of either the House of Commons or the Senate before becoming Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister's job has no fixed term in office and can be held by the same person as long as he or she is chosen by his party to run as its leader and that party continues to win the majority of votes in an election.

All judges, Lieutenant Governors and Senators are appointed with *executive nation powers*, which are held by the Prime Minister alone. The Prime Minister appoints a Cabinet of people who belong to his party and are responsible for a portfolio such as Minister of Finance or Minister of Defense. Each minister on cabinet is a member of the House of Commons and was elected by the people of his or her riding in one of the provinces or territories. The Prime Minister and the ministers introduce bills and laws to the House and they too must defend them in daily debates, discussion and attacks.

Legislative Branch

Canada has four major political parties: Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party of Canada, Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party. A party can form the government if they have 50% or more of the votes (known as a majority government) or if they have less than 50% of the vote but the other parties together make up more than 50% (this is known as a minority government).

This means that Canadians do not actually vote for the Prime Minister directly but for representatives to the House of Commons known as Members of Parliament. As long as the government has the support or majority of the House of Commons on its side it can pass any bills or laws it wants; but if it loses support of the House of Commons a new election can be called because the government cannot pass any bills. This is called a vote of no confidence. Unless they change their position on a bill, Canadian governments cannot fend off the House of Commons for more than a few weeks before an election is called.

Activity Sheet 1-6: American Government-A Democratic Republic

Lesson 1

Name: _____ Block: _____ Date: _____

The United States was once made up of British Colonies. Between 1775-1783, colonists tired of not being represented properly by the British monarchy and the British Parliament so they staged a revolution to gain their independence. It was a long drawn out bloody war for Independence.



On July 4, 1783, the United States was formed under a written constitution. The American forefathers created a democratic federal state based on responsible government known as a republic. The written constitution sets out the role and power of the government, president and the law. The constitution also states that America's official language is English.

Like the Canadian structure of government, the American system is divided into three branches: the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary.

The head of state and the head of government is the President of the United States. He or she is directly elected by the people of the United States in an election that is held every four years no matter what party makes up the House of Representatives or the Senate.

The American federal system believes in the *separation of power*. This means that the President cannot be a member of the House of Representatives or the Senate. His or her cabinet ministers also cannot be part of either house. The President of the United States cannot introduce bills in the Congress, defeat or attack bills. But he or she does have ultimate veto power over any bill that does pass through both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The President's role, qualifications, method of election,

method of removal and all essential powers are written into the constitution and cannot be changed unless both Houses agree to a constitutional change. The constitution can only be changed or dealt with

in court.

The President must sit his or her full term in office no matter what political affiliation, either Republican or Democrat, is seated in the House of Representatives or the Senate. If a president is doing a poor job in office, it is possible to get rid of him or her in an impeachment; but this requires that both Houses vote for the removal of the president and then a trial is held. It is very difficult to get both Houses to agree.

There are two political parties in American politics: Republican and Democrat. The House of Representatives and the Senate are made up of people from these two parties. These two bodies form Congress. Each member is elected by his or her constituents in each different state at different times; not all positions are elected at the same time. The members of the House of Representatives are elected for two-year terms and the members of the Senate are elected for six-year terms. This means that elections take place at different times and those Houses represent the two different parties at different times. It may mean that a democratic President may have to face a republican congress. This can be a problem as neither may agree with the other one's bills and they could spend years feuding with each other to pass a bill.