



LESSON PLAN

A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

Appropriate for all grades

Duration: Approximately 120 minutes

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- [Parliamentary Roles](#)
- [How a bill becomes a law](#)
- [Levels of Government](#)

LEARNING GOALS

Students will understand how lawmaking debates take place in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario by holding a classroom debate on a provincial issue that affects their lives. Students develop research, presentation, and teamwork skills while learning about the legislative process in Ontario. By simulating and reflecting on the debate process, students will gain a deeper understanding of the parliamentary system and how it affects the lives of Canadians.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

(15 minutes)

What is a debate?

A formal discussion on a particular topic in a public meeting or legislative assembly, in which opposing arguments are put forward on a given topic. Debating is an essential part of an MPP's job.

Why is debate an integral part of the parliamentary system?

Debates allow MPPs to defend their ideas and to listen to the ideas of the opposing parties. They are an important step in how a bill becomes a law.

Optional: Show clip of question period to show how a back and forth between the government and opposition can look. Note that question period is not the debate portion of the legislative process (i.e. second and third reading of the bill)

www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/video/question-period-archive

ACTIVITY: THE DEBATE

(30-60 minutes)

Planning the debate

- Choose an issue or topic
 - Choose an issue or topic that students feel strongly about. Students can create their own bill, using the [Create a Provincial Bill lesson plan](#), or they can choose to use a [bill](#) currently or previously debated in Ontario's Parliament, or the class can come up with a topic of their own to debate such as a bill banning school uniforms.
- Review the rules and decorum
 - What is decorum? Correct or proper behavior that shows respect and good manners.
 - Why would this be important in a Parliament, particularly during debate?
 - Why are rules important in a debate? Reinforce the idea that respect is of the utmost importance especially during debates. "Audi Alterum Partem" (Hear the other side) is the motto of the Legislative Assembly to highlight the importance of mutual understanding during disagreement. This is an essential part of the democratic process.

Examples of rules and decorum in the House:

- When an MPP wishes to speak or address the House, they must stand and wait silently to be recognized by the Speaker.
- Only the Member that the Speaker has recognized may speak, all other MPPs must sit down and be silent.
- MPPs direct all their comments to the Speaker, saying: "Mr. Speaker,..." or "Madame Speaker,..."
- MPPs must not use un-parliamentary language (e.g. foul, profane or offensive language or words disrespecting the House, any of its MPPs, the Monarch or any government official)
*This includes calling or insinuating another MPP is a liar/lying.

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- Assign Roles
 - Assign students the following parliamentary roles: Speaker, Clerk, Sergeant-at-Arms, Premier and Leader of the Opposition. Assign remaining students into two groups - Government MPPs and Opposition MPPs.
 - Prepare your classroom: the two groups will meet separately to discuss the arguments they will present during the debate. Each group should either oppose or support the topic or bill selected for the debate. They should record who would say which arguments.
 - The Speaker, Clerk and any other non-partisan roles will meet separately to discuss what they will do during the debate and how they will remain neutral and non-partisan.
 - Use the Legislative Assembly seating plan as a guide to arrange the classroom for the debate. Government members to the right of the Speaker, opposition members to the left of the Speaker.
 - Use the debate script below to arrange the classroom for the debate and organize students into government and opposition to present their arguments. Alter the script as required (15-20 minutes)

GROUP DISCUSSION: AFTER THE DEBATE (10 minutes)

Allow students time to discuss their experience in passing or rejecting a bill. Sample discussion questions following the debate could be:

- If you were in a neutral role, how did you feel during the debate? Did you want to support a side?
- If you were with the Government party, did you always agree with your fellow Government MPPs?
- If you were in the Opposition party, did you always agree with your fellow Opposition MPPs?
- What did you think about the arguments made by the other side?
- Were all possible opinions represented?



RESOURCE

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE SCRIPT

ROLES

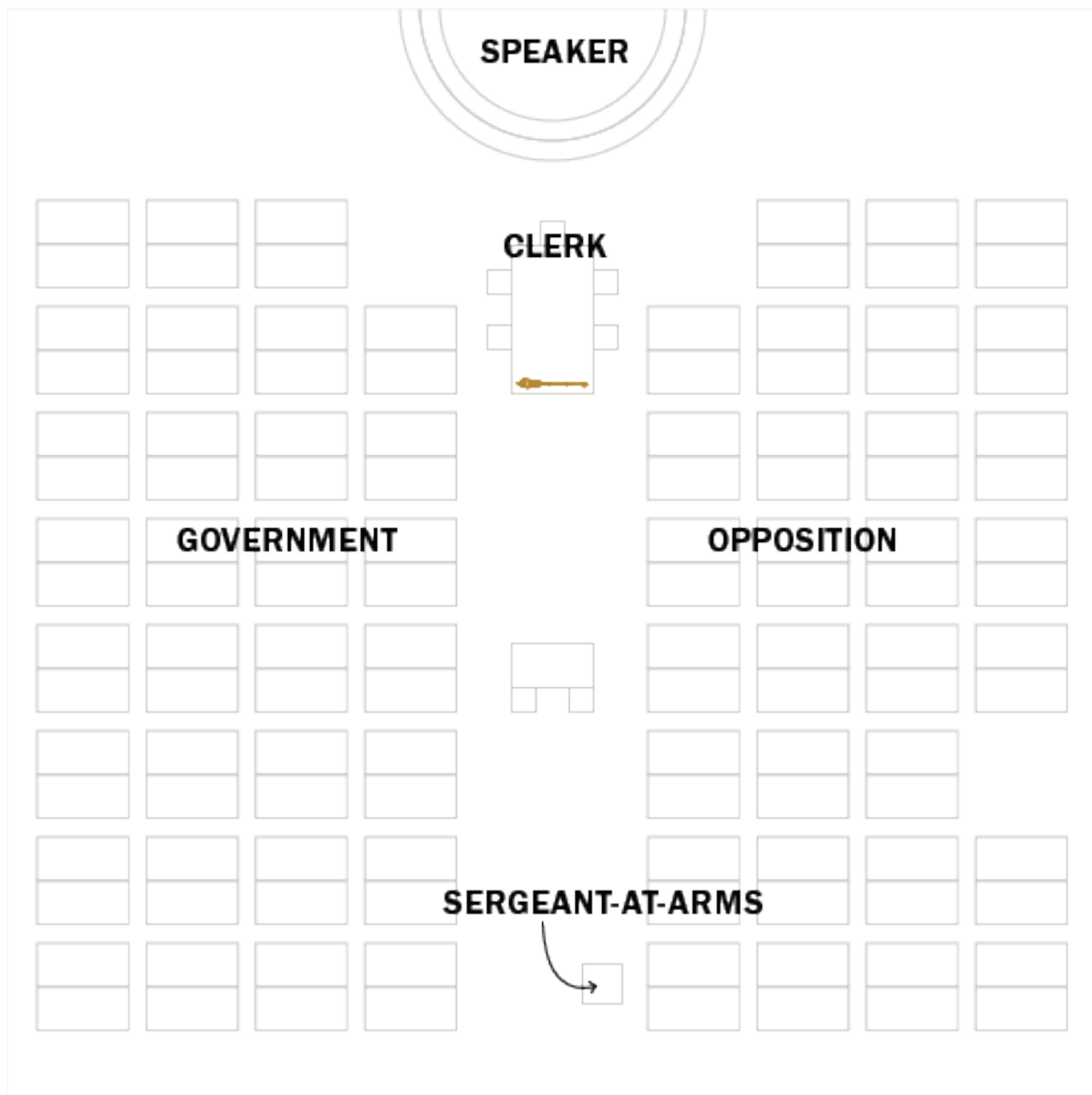
Speaker - the primary responsibility of the Speaker is to maintain order in the Chamber, and making sure Members are following the rules and decorum. The Speaker also gives permission by recognizing each Member who wishes to speak. If a Member breaks the rules, they are asked to withdraw what they said and apologize to the House, if not, the Speaker may name them and ask them to leave. In the class, un-parliamentary students would no longer be able to participate in the debate.

Clerk - the primary responsibility of the Clerk in the Chamber is to keep time, count the votes and advise the Speaker and Members on procedure and on the practices and rules of the Legislative Assembly.

Sergeant-at-Arms (SAA) - the Sergeant-at-arms keeps the House safe, as well as brings the ceremonial mace (a metre stick will suffice for the class) into the Chamber. If the Speaker names a Member for using un-parliamentary language, the SAA will be asked to escort the Member out of the Chamber (or to the back of the classroom).

Members of Provincial Parliament - following the rules and decorum, Members will rise to speak in the debate, awaiting the Speaker to recognize them before speaking. The Premier followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition should introduce their party's or group's stance and provide the first points of debate. All other students should participate in no specific order as long as they are recognized first.

CHAMBER (CLASSROOM) LAYOUT



Teachers may replace the highlighted sections with the bill topic decided by the class.

Teacher: “ORDER!”

All Members of Provincial Parliament must stand once “order” is called and wait for the Speaker to sit.

The Sergeant-at-Arms, carrying the mace over their right shoulder leads the Speaker, the Clerk into the Chamber. The Speaker and the Clerk proceed to their seats and remain standing at their positions while the Sergeant-at-Arms walks around the Clerk’s table and places the mace at the end of the table furthest from the Speaker. Members may take their seats on either side of the Chamber. The Sergeant-at-Arms bows to the Speaker and takes their seat at the back of the room.

EXAMPLE

Speaker: “We will now move to debate Bill 15, The School Uniform Act. Government Members, what do you have to say about this bill?”

At this point, the Premier briefly explains the goal of the bill.

Premier: “If this bill is passed, all primary students in Ontario will be required to wear uniforms to school.”

After the goal of the bill is explained, the Leader of the Official Opposition will provide an opposing point followed by all other Members in no particular order. Government Members will make points supporting the bill and Opposition Members will make points rejecting the bill. The Speaker will help to keep order as the debate takes place and will tell Members when they can talk. Students will debate one at a time, alternating between government and opposition members. Time allotted for each student to make their point is at teacher’s discretion.

With 5 minutes remaining in the debate:

An MPP: “I move that we vote on this Bill”

Speaker: “Is it the pleasure of the house that the motion carry?”

MPPs call out: “Aye!” or “Nay!”

Speaker: “The ayes have it. All those in favour of the bill, please rise.”

All those in favour of the bill passing stand until the Clerk has counted them. (The Teacher can assume this role, if preferred)

Speaker: “All those opposed, please rise.”

All those voting against the bill stand until the Clerk has counted them.

Clerk: “The ayes are — (number in favour). The nays are — (number against).”

Speaker: “The ayes being — (number in favour) — and the nays being — (number against):

I declare the motion carried OR I declare the motion lost.”

Teacher: “I move that we adjourn the House until tomorrow.”

Speaker: “Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?”

All MPPs: “Aye!”

Speaker: “This House stands adjourned until 8:30 of the clock tomorrow.”

Teacher: “ORDER!”

All Members must rise as the Sergeant-at-Arms collects the mace and leads the Speaker, and the Clerk out of the Chamber (room).

You may wish to discuss what happens to the bill. If less than 50% of Members voted in favour of the bill, then the bill has failed to pass. If more than 50% of Members voted in favour of the bill, it goes to the Lieutenant Governor for Royal Assent after which it becomes law in Ontario.

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