

PARENT / TEACHER LESSON PLANS



POLITICAL PARTIES



Summary

In this lesson, students are introduced to different types of political parties. After reviewing several party's policies on child care, students compare party policy on different issues. After this, students consider a scenario and are called to discover the underlying issues that could help inform a Christian how to cast their vote.

Essential Question

What issues can be considered to help Christians decide how to vote?

This essential question is intended to get to a deeper issue than "Should all Christians vote for the Christian Heritage Party?" or "Can a Christian vote Liberal?" It is intended to highlight where each party draws their authority from, how brokerage parties sometimes resemble each other and how some issues are more urgent than others. At its most basic, this question is intended to get students at least considering how they would vote if they had the right.

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Engage the Students

- Engage students by drawing out the names of several federal political parties both in the mainstream (Liberal, Conservative, NDP) and more of the relatively unknown or fringe parties (Green, CHP, Marxist-Leninist).
- Encourage students to volunteer ideas on what they think each of these parties stand for. Depending on the level of prior knowledge, students may realize that the mainstream parties have changed policy positions before and that sometimes they share quite a bit in common.
- Display the news article in *Handout 1 - Conservative child care change* and highlight several portions to illustrate how mainstream political parties can change their policies. The main point here is how one political party has adopted both sides of an issue at one point.
- More general changes can be viewed and briefly shown to students in *Handout 2 - Conservative policy change proposals*. Particularly the "Criminal Justice and Social Policy" section shows some easier to understand policy shift proposals. This illustrates that brokerage parties have a constantly evolving platform depending on what they think the electorate needs / desires.
- Students might find it easier to highlight what the fringe parties stand for as these ideological parties hold to an ideology that rarely shifts or changes.

Explore the differences between brokerage and ideological parties

- Distribute *Handout 3 - Brokerage and Ideology*
- Discuss the similarities and differences between these two types of parties.
- Distribute *Handout 4 - comparing child care policies*
- Review the different details surrounding child care policies of the different political parties. Lead a class discussion that around the following suggested points:
 - What is similar between the Conservative and Liberal positions? Liberal and NDP? Conservative and CHP?
 - What is different between each of the parties?
 - Are there any characteristics that distinguish the brokerage parties from the ideological party?
- Students likely will notice that each of the parties are in favour of providing payments to families. It should be noted that this money originally comes from the families in the form of taxes. Students will also notice that parts of the plans of the three brokerage parties are interchangeable except for the amounts (i.e. the NDP was in favour of keeping the UCCB, the Liberal's plan was tax-free but the Conservatives was taxable). The CHP's position has a principled element to it where they are rewarding a family for having a parent at home. The Conservative income-splitting plank also acknowledges the influential role of a stay-at-home parent.

Task – Comparing party positions

- Students should select another issue and review the different party platforms on that issue. Sometimes between elections, party platforms are in a state of flux so the teacher can decide to modify this assignment to have students interview a local candidate from each party to determine their position on each of the issues that the class determines they will be discussing.
- An equally important part of this task should include an email or telephone interview with the local candidates from the previous election on each groups chosen issue.
- These issues can range from single issues to more broadly defined issues.
- Some examples include
 - Same-sex marriage
 - Age of consent
 - Euthanasia or Medical Aid in Dying
 - Abortion
 - Whether families should be taxed (income splitting) or whether individuals should be taxed
 - Government accountability
 - How to approach opioid crisis
 - Crime
 - Environmental stewardship
 - Tax policy
 - Public funding of political parties

- Students should submit a report that outlines if they found evidences of similarities and differences between the brokerage and ideological parties. This report should answer key questions like:
 - What are five key similarities and/or differences between the parties on your issue?
 - Provide a justification why you have identified each of these as important?
 - What does this reveal about the nature of the brokerage and ideological party on this issue?
 - Based solely on this issue, for which candidate would you recommend casting your vote?
 - Is this issue urgent enough that it would become a deciding factor for you in casting your vote? (i.e. The candidate's position on this issue might be so important that all other issues are secondary.)
- A student version of this task is in *Handout 5 – Comparing Party Positions*.

Task – What Should I Do?

- Distribute *Handout 6 – What Should I Do?*
- The purpose of this assignment is to try and discover the underlying issues and not necessarily come to a definitive answer on the question. Understand that this situation is complicated and can involve more than one correct answer.
- To complete this assignment students should:
 - Read through the account and highlight the different facts (verifiable truths).
 - For each fact, outline who the different affected groups and parties are. Further describe what interests they have in this problem as it relates to that particular fact.
 - Once you have searched all the facts and outlined the different parties and interests, discuss the important issues that are underlying these competing interests?
 - You will know if you have correctly outlined the underlying issue if:
 - The issue is relevant for more people than just John.
 - The issue should gather opinions from others about an appropriate course of action.
 - The issue should allow for disagreement on the solution.
 - Now write a recommendation for John.

Encourage

- Consider inviting in a local or recently retired politician to speak about their work and life as a politician. Invite them to speak on what their experiences are as a Christian in their party. Excellent candidates can be found in several parties.

Teacher Overview – Political Parties

Canadian politics requires the organization of political parties.

Political parties are voluntary associations of individuals who agree to work together based on common ideas about public affairs. Political parties are membership based. Canadian citizens are able to buy a membership in a party and receive the privileges that are associated with their membership (such as choosing a candidate to run for office, choosing a leader, and voting on party policy). When a party has the majority of MP's in the House of Commons, it forms the government. The leader of the governing party becomes the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister selects some of the MP's in his or her party to serve as cabinet ministers – special positions responsible for various aspects of governing such as health or defence. The party with the second most number of MP's forms the official opposition.

There are many parties in Canada. The Liberals, Conservative, New Democrats, and Bloc Quebecois are the most well-known because they have a presence in Canada's House of Commons. But many other parties exist, such as the Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada, the Marijuana Party, and the Western Bloc Party. The sixth largest party in Canada is the Christian Heritage Party. They describe themselves by saying "The CHP is Canada's only pro-Life federal political party, and the only federal party that endorses the Judeo-Christian principles enshrined in the Canadian Constitution..." Individuals from Reformed churches were very involved in the creation of the CHP in the 1980's.

The two largest parties in Canada – the Liberals and Conservatives – are classified as "brokerage parties." This means that they try to reach out

to as wide a variety of people as possible. In contrast to ideological parties, which run on specific principles such as environmental responsibility, brokerage parties are willing to make their policies adapt to the general consensus of Canadians.

Christians work within many different parties. Some choose to work for secular brokerage parties with the hope of using their power to influence Canada for the better. Others believe that the only option is a Christian party because the other parties require a compromise of faith. Choosing which party to support is an important decision that all Canadian citizens have a responsibility to consider.