

Teacher's Checklist

- ✓ Have you selected your topic?
- ✓ Have you given a copy of the debate script to all your students?
- ✓ Have you assigned roles to your students?
- ✓ Have students/teacher completed the Debate Outline Sheet?

If your preparation time is limited, trained Legislature staff will guide students through the role playing.

Debate Outline Sheet

Please fill out this sheet [student/teacher] and bring it with you to the debate. Every student should have a completed copy of this outline.

The topic we will discuss is:

The wording of the bill is:

The government supports this bill because:

The opposition is against this bill because:

Important facts about this issue are:

What are the media saying or what do we think they might say about the issue?

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Preparing for the Debate

A topic of current local interest might be your best choice. Students will get more involved if the topic relates directly to them.

Students must be selected to play these roles. You may wish to ask for volunteers or even stage a vote for some of the key positions.

One criterion for selection could be how a student feels about the topic. Government members need to be able to support the bill, and opposition members need to think of reasons not to support it.

1. Select a Topic

The purpose of a legislative debate is to consider a proposal for a new law. A topic must be selected before you come to the debate. The following topics are only suggestions. Students should pick a topic they are interested in. Be sure there are strong arguments both for and against the bill.

Sample Topics and bill titles

- make school uniforms compulsory: *School Uniforms Act*
- make bicycle helmets compulsory: *Bicycle Helmets Act*
- ban dangerous or rude material on the internet: *Internet Control Act*
- make year-round schooling compulsory: *Year-Round Schooling Act*
- ban smoking in all restaurants: *Restaurant Smoking Ban Act*
- require all bicycle riders to take a road test and get a licence: *Bicycle Riders Licensing Act*

2. Assigning the roles

The following roles must be assigned before coming to the Legislature. Students should know their roles and have an idea of what they do during the debate:

- Lieutenant Governor: gives Royal Assent to the bill. (Since this person only appears after the vote, someone can slip out at the vote, then return in this role.)
- Speaker: calls on members to speak and maintains order in the House.
- Premier
- Opposition leader
- Chairman (for Committee of the Whole): chairs the committee.
- Five cabinet ministers, one of whom introduces the bill that pertains to his or her department.
- Five opposition (shadow cabinet) members, one of whom leads off the response to the bill.
- Clerk: reads the titles of the bills.
- Clerk Assistant: assists the Clerk.
- Sergeant-at-Arms: leads the procession and carries the Mace; escorts the Lieutenant Governor into the Chamber.
- Pages (2): carry messages that members may send to others during session. Members raise a hand to signal a page to carry the message. The message is folded and the recipient's name is written on the front of the paper. It is then put on a tray, and the page delivers it.
- Other students are all private members and must be divided into government and opposition. You should have one or two more government than opposition members.
- Media (2- one TV reporter, one reporter for local newspaper): reporters take notes throughout the debate. After the vote, the TV reporter faces a camera and reports on the debate, possibly

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interviewing the cabinet minister and/or an opposition member.

The newspaper reporter can prepare a short written report to be read in class. Remember to put the most important information (the name of the bill and if it passed - or didn't pass!) in the first sentence or two.

3. Holding a caucus meeting

Once the debate topic has been decided, the students should gather into two groups. The government members group needs to decide what to call their bill and how to word it. For example, the Bicycle Helmets Act could state: "All persons riding a bicycle must wear a helmet approved by the Canadian Standards Association." The opposition members group needs to prepare what they will say against the bill.

4. Arranging the Room

If you can't come to the Legislature or if you would like to rehearse the debate ahead of time, this information will help you arrange the room:

In the classroom set two banks of desks facing each other. Put a table in the middle with a cushion for the mace and chairs for the Sergeant-at-Arms, Clerk, and Clerk Assistant. The Speaker's chair is opposite the door and faces the table. Put chairs beside the Speaker's for the pages.

If you come to the Legislature, the room arrangements, props, and uniforms are provided for you.

5. Props

To make the debate more authentic, the following props are provided when you visit the Legislature. However, making your own helps get students more involved in the program.

- A mace - see page 20 for instructions on making your own mace.
- Trays - for pages to carry messages.
- Bell - to call the Assembly to order.
- Notepads and pencils.
- Microphone - for the reporter. It can be made from a cardboard tube.
- Small pillow - for the table; the mace is placed on a cushion.
- Name markers for the desks; e.g., "Minister of ..." for cabinet members.
- Black Rod. It can be a stick painted black or covered in black paper.

6. Creating Costumes

Costumes will be provided for the Speaker, Clerk, Clerk Assistant, Sergeant-at-Arms, and Lieutenant Governor, if your debate is part of a Legislature tour. In the classroom, although costumes are optional, they can add to the authenticity and fun. Black capes might serve as robes for the above roles.

7. Research the topic

Look for information on the computer or check newspapers and magazines

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if the issue is current.

- If it is an issue the government is dealing with, contact the local MLA or the government department concerned for information.
- Speak to people whose work is related to the topic; for example, for bicycle helmets, health professionals who may have seen injuries from bicycle accidents, et cetera.
- Contact local organizations concerned with the issue; for example, for bicycle helmets, contact a local safety organization.
- In all cases, students must take some time to think about the topic for themselves.

Important Rules

- While the Speaker is in the chair, all comments are addressed to the Speaker. Members say “Madam (or Mr.) Speaker...”
- During Committee of the Whole members address all comments to the Chairman.
- If there are noisy outbursts, the Speaker calls for order. The Speaker politely reminds members only one can speak at a time. Sometimes the Speaker stands while making these comments. No one is allowed to speak while the Speaker is standing.
- Members “applaud” by banging on their desks.
- Members are referred to by position and not by name; for example, “the honourable Minister of Education” or “the honourable opposition member.”
- The Speaker must try to ensure that everyone wishing to speak gets a chance to speak.

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SCRIPT

The Script of Procedure. Give a copy of this script to each student.

The following provides a detailed account of the formalities required for the debate. Students should each be given a copy of the script and asked to study what their role requires them to do and say. They should use their copies of the script for reference during the debate.

The MLAs and Media all stand at their places. Participants line up outside the door in this order: Sergeant-at-Arms, Speaker, Clerk, Clerk Assistant, and Pages. The Sergeant-at-Arms puts the mace over his/her right shoulder. The teacher or tour guide rings a bell to signify that the Assembly is about to begin.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: "Order. Order. Mr./Madam Speaker."

The procession enters. The Sergeant-at-Arms walks around the table and places the mace on the cushion with the crown of the mace pointed toward the government (right side of the Speaker's chair). The Speaker walks to the Speaker's chair, then faces the Assembly and remains standing for the opening prayer. The Sergeant-at-Arms stands in front of the mace, facing the Speaker. The Clerk and the Clerk Assistant stand at their places at the table. The Pages stand at their places on either side of the Speaker's chair.

The Procession

Everyone not in the procession must be in their places before it starts.

Opening Prayer

The Speaker can write a different prayer but only in consultation with the teacher.

SPEAKER: (Standing) "This morning we pray for wisdom and compassion as we work to help this province and its people. Amen."

Everyone sits down.

CLERK:(Stands) "Introduction of Bills."

SPEAKER: (Stands) "Honourable Minister (name of student)?"

The minister who is proposing the bill stands.

MINISTER: (Standing) "Mr. (or Madam) Speaker, I want to introduce Bill number 501, the (name of bill) Act. If this bill is passed....."

Introduction of Bills

The minister summarizes what the bill would accomplish if passed. For example, with the Bicycle Helmets Act the minister might say, "If this bill is

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First Reading:
Bill is introduced. .

passed, it will help save people from getting head injuries if they are hit by a car or if they lose control of their bike.”

Traditionally, everyone votes YES, so that the debate can continue.

SPEAKER: *(Stands)* “All in favour of Bill 501, please say yes.”

The members who agree with the bill say “YES”.

SPEAKER: “Those opposed, please say no.”

The members who do not agree with the bill say “NO”.

The Speaker sits down.

CLERK: *(Stands)* “Bill 501, the _____ Act, has now been read a first time.” (Clerk stays *standing* to announce “Second Reading.”)

CLERK: *(Standing)* “Second Reading, Bill 501, the _____ Act, the Honourable Minister _____.”

The minister who introduced the bill says a few words about the importance of the bill and why it would benefit Albertans. The debate process begins. We suggest 3 students read for the bill and 3 students oppose the bill, alternately.

MINISTER: *(Standing)* “Mr. (Madam) Speaker, this bill is important because

SPEAKER: *(Sitting)* “Honourable Opposition Member.”

OPPOSITION MEMBER: *(Stands)* “Mr. (Madam) Speaker, we oppose this bill because.....”

SPEAKER: *(Sitting)* “Honourable Government Member”.

GOVERNMENT MEMBER: *(Stands)* “Mr. (Madam) Speaker, we support this bill because.....”

SPEAKER: *(Sitting)* “Honourable Opposition Member.”

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OPPOSITION MEMBER : (*Stands*) “ Mr. (Madam) Speaker, we oppose this bill because.....”

Following the debate, the Speaker calls the vote as at first reading.

SPEAKER: (*Stands*) “ All in favour of Bill 501, please say yes.”

The members who agree with the bill say “YES”.

SPEAKER: “Those opposed, please say no.”

*The members who do not agree with the bill say “NO”.
The Speaker sits down.*

CLERK ASSISTANT: (*Stands*) “Bill 501, the _____ Act is now read a second time.” [Clerk remains *standing* for Committee of the Whole.]

Committee of the Whole:

At this stage the details of the bill are discussed in full and vigorously debated. Amendments to the bill may also be made at this time. The Speaker leaves the Chamber (for our purposes he/she may step to the side or sit on the benches, but cannot participate in the debate). The Sergeant-at-Arms moves the mace below the table and returns to his/her seat. The Clerk moves to the chair on his left to allow the Chairman of Committees, who normally sits on the government side, to preside. The Chairman sits at the table in the Clerk's chair. Members address comments to “Mr. (or Madam) Chairman.”

CLERK ASSISTANT: (*Stands*) “Committee of the Whole.”

CLERK: (*Stands*) “Bill 501, the _____ Act.”

During committee debate members may make changes to any part of the bill. Members alternate speaking, first the government side, then the opposition, until this debate is finished or the time has run out.

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE: (*Sitting*) “Honourable Government Member.”

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GOVERNMENT MEMBER: “Mr. (Madam) Chairman, I favour this bill because.....”

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE: (*Sitting*) “Honourable Opposition Member.”

OPPOSITION MEMBER: “Mr. (Madam) Chairman, I still oppose this bill because.....”

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE: (*Sitting*) “Honourable Government Member.”

GOVERNMENT MEMBER: “Mr. (Madam) Chairman, this is a good bill because.....”

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE: (*Sitting*) “Honourable Opposition Member.”

OPPOSITION MEMBER: “This bill is not good for Albertans because.....”

After debating, the Chairman calls the vote.

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE: (*Sitting*) “All in favor of Bill 501 please say yes.”

The members who agree with the bill say “YES”.

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE: (*Sitting*) “All against Bill 501 please say no.”

The members who do not agree with the bill say “NO”.

After the vote, the Speaker returns, the Chairman returns to his/her seat and the Sergeant-at-Arms moves the mace back onto the cushion on the table.

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES: (*Stands*) “Mr. (Madam)Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 501, the_____ Act, and reports it to the Assembly.”

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Third Reading:

CLERK: (*Stands*) “Third Reading, Bill 501, the _____ Act. The Honourable Minister of _____”

The minister now stands and sums up the benefits of the bill.

GOVERNMENT MINISTER: “Mr. (Madam) Speaker, I encourage our opposition members to support us on this bill because.....”

SPEAKER: ”Honourable Opposition Member.”

The opposition member [shadow critic] now stands and sums up the closing arguments against the bill.

OPPOSITION MEMBER: “Mr. (Madam) Speaker, we continue to oppose this bill because.....”

The Speaker calls for a final vote.

SPEAKER: (*Stands*) “All in favour of Bill 501, please say yes.”

The members who agree with the bill say “YES”.

SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

The members who do not agree with the bill say “NO”.

The Speaker sits down.

CLERK ASSISTANT: (*Stands*) “Bill 501, the _____ Act is now read a third time.”

PREMIER: (*Stands*) “Mr. (Madam) Speaker, His/Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend on the Assembly.”

Royal Assent

Black Rod: *The black rod is used by the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort the Lieutenant Governor to the Chamber for Royal Assent. Because the mace represents the monarch as does the Lieutenant Governor, the mace is draped during Royal Assent.*

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The Sergeant-at-Arms, followed by the Premier, leaves to get the Lieutenant Governor, who is waiting outside the room. One of the pages covers the mace, the other gets the Black Rod and gives it to the Sergeant-at-Arms. When they return, the Sergeant-at-Arms knocks three times on the door of the Chamber (or on the floor) with the Black Rod. The pages let them in.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: *(At the door with a strong voice yells out.)* “Mr. Speaker, His/Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor awaits.”

SPEAKER: *(Stands)* “Sergeant-at-Arms, admit his Honour the Lieutenant Governor.”

*When they enter the Chamber, everyone stands. The Speaker leaves his seat and stands to the right of his/her chair. The Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Premier walks to the Speaker's seat. The Premier returns to his former place. The Lieutenant Governor sits in the Speaker's chair. The Sergeant-at-Arms and the Clerk stand to the left of the Lieutenant Governor. **Everyone now sits.***

SPEAKER: *(Addressing the L.G.)* “Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills. In the name of the Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.”

CLERK: “Your Honour, following is the title of the bill to which Your Honour's assent is requested. The _____ Act.”

The Lieutenant Governor approves the bill with a tip of the hat or a nod of the head.

CLERK: “In Her Majesty's name His/Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor assents to this bill.”

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: *(sitting)* “I would like to thank all the members of the Legislative Assembly for their hard work, commitment and dedication to their elected positions.”

When the Lieutenant Governor is finished the Sergeant-at-Arms calls out:

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: “All rise, please.”

Everyone stands as the Lieutenant Governor, followed by the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Premier leave the chamber in procession. Everyone sits once

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the Lieutenant Governor is gone.

The Pages uncover the mace. The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms return to the Chamber and take their former places. Now that the bill is passed, the Premier will ask for adjournment of the assembly.

PREMIER: *(Stands)* “Mr./Madam Speaker, I move that we now adjourn this assembly.”

The Speaker calls for the vote.

SPEAKER: *(Stands)* “All in favour of adjourning this meeting, please say yes.”

The members who agree say “YES”.

SPEAKER: *(Stands)* “Those opposed to adjourning, please say no.”

The members who do not agree say “NO”.

SPEAKER: *(Standing)* “This Assembly is hereby adjourned.”

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: *(Picks up the Mace and shouts out)* “Order.”

The Sergeant-at-Arms leads the Speaker's procession out of the Chamber. Following the Sergeant-at-Arms in order are the Speaker, Clerk, Clerk Assistant, and Pages.

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Legislature Role Play

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