



[Parliamentary Democracy](#) 

[Educational Resources](#) 

[Classroom Connections](#) 

Speech from the Throne

Written by David Nicholls, Parliamentary Program Officer

Each new **session** of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is formally opened with the delivery of the Speech from the Throne by the Lieutenant Governor. This year's Throne Speech is being held on Monday, February 6 and will see the return of the ceremonial grandeur that normally accompanies the event after several years of being put on hold. An impressive military guard of honour and band will greet the Lieutenant Governor upon her arrival at the Parliament Buildings. This will be followed by a 15-gun salute as the Honourable Janet Austin, O.B.C., enters via the Ceremonial Entrance.

Although the speech is delivered by the Lieutenant Governor, it is written by the government of the day to explain why the Legislative Assembly is being assembled and to outline the government's broad goals for the coming legislative **session**. It is one of the many parliamentary practices and traditions that we have adopted from the United Kingdom, where the delivery of a speech by the Monarch in conjunction with the State Opening can be traced back to the 16th century. In Ottawa, it is common for there to be only one or two **sessions** of **Parliament** during the period between elections. In British Columbia, it is customary for a new **session** to begin each February, so we typically see four Throne Speeches over the course of the four-year period between elections that is fixed in law.


Key terms:

- **Sitting:** the fixed time of the day in morning, afternoon, and/or evening in which the Legislative Assembly meets during a session.
- **Session:** the period that begins with the Speech from the Throne and ends with prorogation or dissolution of the Legislative Assembly.
- **Parliament:** The period between general elections, typically composed of a few sessions. The session being opened on February 6 will be the Fourth Session of the 42nd Parliament.
- **Bicameral:** a legislature with two chambers.



In **bicameral** legislatures, like those found in London and Ottawa, the Monarch or the Governor General reads the speech in the upper chamber, the House of Lords for the United Kingdom, and the Senate for Canada. No Monarch has been permitted onto the floor of the House of Commons in London since 1642 without an invitation from the Speaker. At that time, King Charles I and his armed guards stormed into the chamber to arrest five Members accused of treason. In unicameral legislatures, like those of the provinces of Canada, the Monarch's representative, the Lieutenant Governor, is permitted into the Chamber to deliver the Speech from the Throne and to give Royal Assent, but only with the consent of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Interesting Throne Speech Events from BC and other Parliaments:

- In 1605, Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators in London attempted to blow up the Palace of Westminster during the State Opening of Parliament. Since then, the Yeoman of the Guards have performed a search of the cellar vaults prior to the arrival of the Monarch for the State Opening of Parliament.
 - After four years of construction, the new B.C. Parliament Buildings were opened on February 10, 1898. Before delivering the Speech from the Throne, the Lieutenant Governor climbed the steps of the Ceremonial Entrance and opened the front gates using a golden key. It is not known what happened to the key, but it is thought that it may have been lost in one of the subsequent fires at Government House.
 - On January 24, 1967 the Legislative Assembly met in New Westminster to mark the 100th anniversary of the first sitting of the Legislative Council of the United Colony of British Columbia, whose capital was in New Westminster at the time. The day started with the delivery of the Speech from the Throne to open the first session of the 28th Parliament.
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- In 1993, Clayoquot Sound protesters stormed the Ceremonial Entrance of the Parliament Buildings in Victoria prior to the arrival of Lieutenant Governor David Lam for the Speech from the Throne. The protesters smashed the stained-glass windows on the doors leading to the Legislative Chamber before leaving the building several hours later.
 - On February 12, 2008, the Honourable Steven L. Point, O.B.C., LL.B. delivered the Speech from the Throne to open the 4th session of the 38th Parliament. He was the first Indigenous Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, appointed as the 28th vice-regal representative in October 2007.
 - In 2011, the Commissioner of Nunavut (who fulfills a role similar to that of a Lieutenant Governor), the Honourable Edna Ekhivalak Elias, delivered the opening address of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut in her Inuinnaqtun dialect.

Significant Dates and Parliamentary Trivia!



- 1973 - W.A.C. Bennett asks the first oral question, laying the foundation for Oral Question Period.



- 1917 - Some women are granted the right to vote in BC provincial elections in addition to being able to stand for office.



Parliamentary Trivia!

Q. This gemstone found in BC was used for knives, axe heads and more recently in fine jewellery. What is BC's official gemstone?

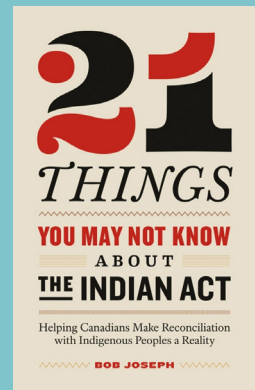
Check out [Discover Your Legislature](#) to find the answer. The first correct answer will win a prize from the Parliamentary Gift Shop! Email PEO@leg.bc.ca to submit. Good luck!

Reconciliation Resources

Professional development book reviews by Kirk Longpré, retired educator, BCTI alumnus, facilitator, former Education Steering Committee member. Included here are some resources to assist educators and students on their learning journey towards understanding why reconciliation is paramount.

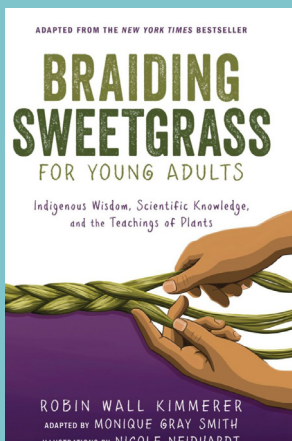
Joseph, Bob. (2018). 21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality. Indigenous Relations Press.

This book is an essential guide to understanding the *Indian Act* and its repercussion on generations of Indigenous Peoples. The author dissects the complex issues around the *Indian Act*, and demonstrates why learning about its legacy is vital for Canada to move to true reconciliation. This publication includes terminology, classroom activities, a discussion guide and additional reading.



Joseph, Bob with Cynthia F. Joseph. (2019). Indigenous Relations: Insights, Tips & Suggestions to Make Reconciliation a Reality. Indigenous Relations Press.

This straightforward, insightful book is full of practical and doable information for building bridges between peoples of different backgrounds. The terminology and advice are of value to all Canadians. This book includes pledges of reconciliation, terminology: guidelines for usage, a glossary and additional resources.



Kimmerer, Robin Wall adapted by Monique Gray Smith, Illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt (2022). Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and Teachings of Plants. Minneapolis, MN: Zest Books.

Every secondary school English, Social Studies, Biology and History teacher should read this book adapted from the New York Times bestseller, Braiding Sweetgrass. The original book by professor Kimmerer demonstrates how all living things provide us with gifts and lessons every day. This new version, adapted by Monique Gray Smith for grade 8 reading level, engages young adults with Indigenous wisdom, teachings and activities focused on social justice, social awareness, responsible decision making and social-emotional learning.

Newman, Carey with Kirstie Hudson. (2022). The Witness Blanket: Truth, Art and Reconciliation. Victoria, BC: Orca.

Written for middle school ages 9-12, *The Witness Blanket* is a 96 page, vibrant collection of objects and stories from Residential Schools. This new book shares stories of Indigenous history, resistance and hope. It has been nominated for the Forest of Reading - Yellow Cedar Award, 2023. A new interactive website to accompany the book is available at witnessblanket.ca bringing each object and story to anyone with an internet connection.



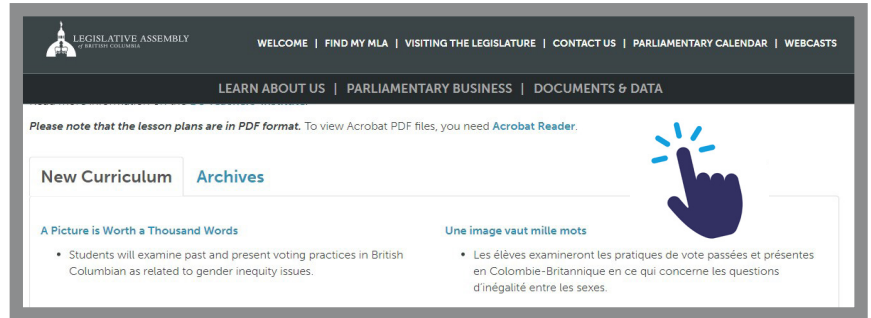
Wente, Jesse. (2021). Unreconciled: Family, Truth, and Indigenous Resistance. Penguin Canada.

Unreconciled shook my privileged settler sensibility when I read it. This engaging, powerful, honest, memoir is both personally and politically rooted. Reading it prompted me to reflect on how I can work towards a better relationship between myself and Indigenous peoples. This publication has the potential to enlighten and educate all Canadians. Highly recommended for all educators and secondary students.

New Lesson Plans in English and French

One of the exciting outcomes of the BC Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy (BCTI) are the new lesson plans developed by educators during the institute. At the end of our most recent in person BCTI in October 2022, teachers were inspired to develop lesson plans around parliamentary symbols and procedures. In the lesson plan **Changing Government Processes** students are asked to research and consider alternative versions of democratic governments. Using learning resources such as the **Democracy and Parliament** brochure from the BC Legislative Assembly and others, students are given learning activities to apply their newly acquired ideas to create a classroom policy or resolve a controversial issue.

For the many French speaking teachers and students in British Columbia, most of the lesson plans and **learning resources** are available in French on our website. Fact sheets on Black History in BC, the Justice System and the Speech from the Throne are just a few of the many student friendly resources available online in both French and English.



The poster features the logo of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia at the top. The main title is "Family Day at the Legislature". Below the title, it says "Please join us for free family friendly activities at the B.C. Parliament Buildings". The date and time are "Monday, February 20, 2023" and "9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.". The background is a colorful illustration of the B.C. Parliament Buildings with a fountain in front, and many people of various ages and ethnicities are shown enjoying the grounds. The website "www.leg.bc.ca" and email "tours@leg.bc.ca" are at the bottom.

Virtual Classrooms

Meet our bilingual tour guides at the Legislative Assembly

One way the Legislative Assembly opens its doors to students around the province is via our Virtual Classroom. Each month, two of our facilitators, Nicholas and Danny, welcome hundreds of students virtually into the building, providing a unique presentation prepared for each group. Questions and answers make up a large part of the presentation. Danny and Nicholas shared their thoughts on how to make the most of a **Virtual Classroom** visit in either English or French.

Q. How should teachers prepare for a Virtual Classroom with their students?

A. Teachers can review with their class some of the learning materials we provide to them with direct email links to our Learning Resources on the Legislative Assembly website. The specific content they might touch upon depends on the focus they selected for their Virtual Classroom (Levels of Government, BC History, How Government Works, etc.). We are also prepared to work with a class that is coming in completely new to the concepts that we're teaching (which happens regularly).

Q. Can students meet their MLA when they visit virtually?

A. Yes, sometimes a short 10-minute meeting with the school's MLA can be arranged to fit within the MLA's schedule. Meeting their MLA is beneficial because it gives the students a chance to interact with someone that represents them.

Q. How do you keep students engaged?

A. Our classrooms are uniquely prepared for each group. The presentations often include references to important people and locations to your school. For example, we might mention the school's MLA, the constituency office where they can be found, the school's federal MP and their office, the Mayor and City Councillors, and City Hall. In addition, our facilitators understand that every group is different, and can adapt to many different learning styles and paces. Another way we keep students engaged is through participation. We offer many chances for students to ask questions, make connections, and answer questions of our own. There is a particular emphasis on participation in our How Government Works focus, in which students engage in an informal mock parliament and create a bill to pass! Finally, we keep students engaged simply by being engaged ourselves. All of our facilitators are passionate about history, the legislature, and government and are eager to share our knowledge. For many of us, it's our favourite part of the day!

Q. Do students surprise you with their questions?

A. One time a tour guide mentioned the MLA who would be speaking with the students "wore a lot of hats" in their role as an MLA and Minister. The students took this quite literally, and wanted to know what sort of hats they wore, where the hats were kept, were the hats attractive? Before meeting with their MLA, a good preparator activity is for students to write down one question for their Member.

Q. How can teacher follow up with the information shared in the Virtual Classroom?

A. We recommend looking at the Learning Resources page on our website after the session. Additionally, any follow-up questions from the students can be sent to the facilitator. We'd be happy to respond! A good follow up activity would be to look at the **Virtual Tour** on our website to see if they can find some of the places discussed in the program.

Q. And finally, does the teacher need to be a tech wizard to bring their students virtually to the Legislative Assembly?

A. Teachers do not need to be tech wizards at all! When we call into a classroom via Zoom or Teams, it is preferable to have our presentation projected onto a surface, and for the class to be able to hear the facilitator (and vice versa), but of course, technical challenges occur on many occasions. Since glitches are inevitable and hard to predict, our facilitators are adaptable and savvy at troubleshooting in the moment. Teachers could test out their audio and video before the time of the Virtual Classroom to deal with issues before they arise.



Thanks for Asking!

Grade 8 students from Holy Cross Middle School asked us:

How much did it cost to build the legislature buildings originally and how much would it cost now?

- Evan P.

Construction costs for the BC Parliament Buildings were \$923,000 and today that would be about 50 million.

Why is the legislature in Victoria?

- Kerstin V.

Victoria is the capital of BC and was the largest city when BC joined Canada in 1871.

How long did it take to build the legislature buildings?

- Kaylee M.

The B.C. Parliament Buildings took 4 years to construct between 1893 and 1897.

BCTI 2023 Application Dates

Sponsored by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the annual British Columbia Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy is an intensive four-day professional development opportunity for teachers of social studies and related subjects in elementary, middle and secondary school. Participating teachers return to their schools with an enhanced understanding of parliamentary democracy and political process in B.C.



*Upcoming Session: October
17-21, 2023*

Applications for this session will open on
April 3rd and close on June 30th.

<https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Pages/BCTI.aspx>

We wrote this newsletter in the Parliament Buildings, which are located on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking (Le-KWUNG-en) peoples. Now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, these Coast Salish peoples have a rich culture and history dating back thousands of years.

We are thankful to live and work here.

