

# Observing Debates

When the House is in Session, school groups can request seats in the Public Gallery at the conclusion of the guided tour. Time in the Public Gallery provides students with the opportunity to observe the MLAs as they debate important issues of the day and vote on legislation. Here are some tips and resources to help you prepare for your time in the Public Gallery.

## Observing debates from the Public Gallery:

Your tour confirmation letter states if seats have been reserved for your group. Please contact the Tour Office if you have any questions.

Only 40 seats in the Public Gallery are available for the Tour Office to distribute to school groups. All other seats are reserved for the guests of MLAs, members of the press, and the general public.

Due to high demand, school groups are allotted 20 minutes in the Public Gallery. Gallery Security Staff will inform your group when it is time to leave.

- Please be aware that most seats in the Public Gallery have partially-obstructed views. Students (especially younger children) will have difficulty seeing the MLAs from their seats in the Public Gallery.

All visitors must pass through a security scanning station (similar to those at an airport) before entering the Public Gallery.

## Rules of the Public Gallery:

Backpacks, notebooks, pens and pencils, cameras, cell phones and all other electronic devices are not permitted in the Public Gallery and must be left at the security station. Secure storage is provided for these items while guests are in the Public Gallery.

Visitors must refrain from leaning over the railings, standing, applauding, talking, reading, or taking notes.

Visitors must rise during the Speaker's Procession and the reading of prayers.

- Please be aware that the Rules of the Public Gallery are strictly enforced by the Gallery Security Staff. They will speak directly to students who are not abiding by the Rules of the Public Gallery.

Photography is not permitted in the Public Gallery.



## Observing Debates

On days that the Legislative Assembly is sitting, proceedings in the Chamber typically last between 5.5 to 7 hours. Many teachers specifically request time in the Gallery to observe Question Period. As it accounts for only 30 minutes of the day's agenda, only 1 class per day is able to observe Question Period.

### **What to expect if your group is attending Question Period:**

Each day MLAs participate in a 30-minute period of questions and answers called Oral Question Period. The purpose of Question Period is to provide MLAs with the opportunity to question the Premier and Cabinet Ministers on the current political issues of the day. Members ask Ministers questions about their area of responsibility, without giving advance notice.

Question Period can be lively, with MLAs becoming passionate and heated about particular issues. While the rules may be different from those in your classroom, there are certain rules and procedures that must be followed. For example, MLAs have a right to be heard without overwhelming background noise and unparliamentary language is not permitted. It is up to the Speaker to make sure that Question Period runs smoothly and to enforce the rules found in the [Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly](#).

### **What to expect if your group is attending at a time other than Question Period:**

Outside of the daily Routine Business of the House (such as Question Period), the major part of the day's sitting is spent debating bills. All bills must pass through 3 Readings and a Committee Stage before they can be presented to the Lieutenant Governor for Royal Assent. Other business that may be discussed could include Throne Speech Debate, Budget Debate, and [Committee of Supply](#) debate.

Students often ask why some Members are not present during debates. All of the MLAs are expected to be present on days that the Legislative Assembly is meeting, but are not required to be in the House for the entire 5.5 to 7.5 hours of the daily sitting. MLAs have many other commitments that prevent them from being in the House at all times, such as meetings with constituents, reviewing legislation, and attending Parliamentary Committee meetings.

