



SOCIAL STUDIES GRADE: 6 LESSON NOTES

THE BAHAMAS: AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY.

PLEASE READ BEFORE ATTEMPTING PAGE 4

VOCABULARY

constitution – document that sets out how a country should be governed

Royal Prerogative of Mercy – official pardon of a condemned criminal by the Governor-General on the advice of the Minister for Public Safety and Immigration

Facts about the Constitution

The constitution is a document that lays out how a country is to be governed. It shows the **rights** of all its citizens.

When The Bahamas became independent, the old system of colonial government was replaced and its new constitution came into effect. Both the **British** and **The Bahamian** governments agreed to this new constitution, which is the basis of all law in The Bahamas.

It lays out the duties of the Prime Minister and his cabinet, and states how Parliament – the House of Assembly should function.

* The **constitution** is a **legal document** that **protects rights** and **freedoms** of all **citizens**.

Duties of the Governor-General - who represents the Head of State (Queen Elizabeth II)

The **Governor-General** holds the **highest** position in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas as the Queen's representative. Many of his/her duties are ceremonial, but he/she is informed about everything that goes on in The Bahamas. Government House is the official residence of the Governor General. It was built on a hill known as **Mount Fitzwilliam (Mt. Fitzwilliam)**, Nassau and completed in 1806. Here the Governor – General entertains important **foreign visitors** and **diplomats** there. Government House is protected by **The Royal Bahamas Defense Force**. There have been **10 Governor – Generals** since we became an independent country.

Other duties of the Governor-General include:

- hosting important state functions and formally opening sessions of Parliament each year,
- signing all Bills from the House of Assembly and the Senate to make them law,
- approving the appointment of civil servants, on the advice of various cabinet ministers,
- appointing and dismissing ministers, on the advice of the Prime Minister;
- dissolving parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister,
- pardoning a criminal, on the advice of a special committee – this is known as the **Royal Prerogative of Mercy**, and appointing Senators, on the advice of the leaders of the parliamentary parties.

The House of Assembly

- The House of Assembly is located in **parliament Square, Bay Street** in Nassau.
- Members of Parliament (MPs) meet here to discuss the nation's business and to pass laws. It is sometimes called the **Lower House of Parliament**.
- Together the **House of Assembly**, the **Senate** and the **Governor-General** comprise the **law-making body** of our country.
- The House of Assembly is the most important part of this body because its members are **elected** by the people.
- Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected by the voters during a general election.
- The **Mace** is the supreme authority in the House of Assembly.
- The House is chaired by the **Speaker**. The Speaker is the Hon. _____. There are presently 39 Members of Parliament.

The Senate

- The Senate also meets at Parliament Square, Bay Street in Nassau.
- The Senate is also called **Upper House**.
- All laws are sent to the Senate after they have been agreed to by the House of Assembly.
- The main purpose of the Senate is to make sure that every law that is passed in The Bahamas is looked at in details by two sets of people.
- This ensures that each law is as flawless as it can be, and that it says what it was intended to say.
- The chairman of the Senate is elected by the Senators, and is known as the **President** of the Senate. The President of the Senate is _____.
- There are **16** members of the Senate.
- Senators are appointed by the Prime Minister, and not elected.
- The President's duties are similar to those of the Speaker in the House of Assembly.

The Cabinet

- The first day of a new Prime Minister is to form a new **Cabinet**.
- Its members are usually selected from among members of the Prime Minister's party in Parliament.
- Cabinet ministers have to be members of either the House of Assembly or of the Senate.
- The Cabinet assists the Prime Minister in carrying out his government's policies and programs.
- Each minister is given a set of duties for which he is responsible. These responsibilities are the **portfolios**.
- To help them in performing their duties, Cabinet ministers are assisted by parliamentary Secretaries.
- Every minister is responsible for new laws and important new schemes.
- These are discussed by the Cabinet before they go to Parliament. Ministers are held responsible for whatever happens in the departments under their portfolios.

* The Prime Minister must, however, accept full responsibility for all that his government does or neglects to do.

The Senate or Upper House

