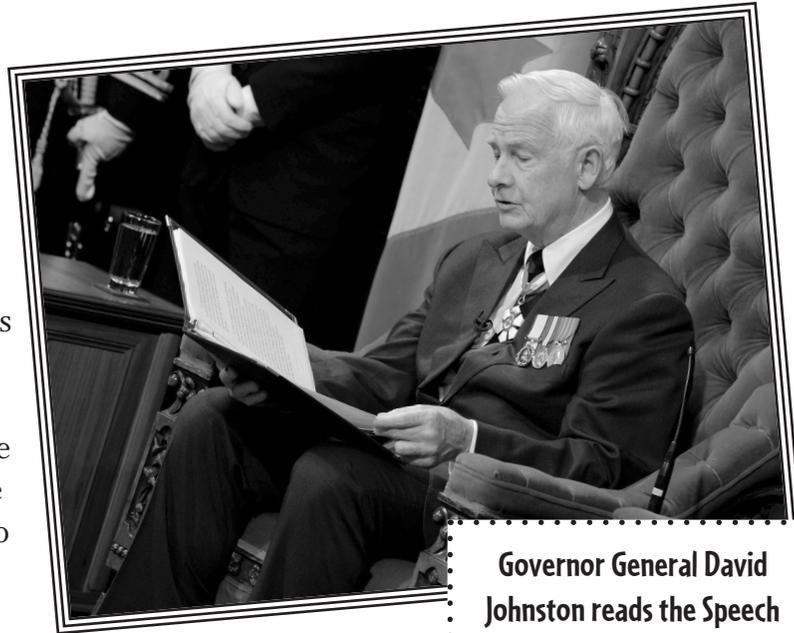




Speech from the Throne

After the new Speaker is elected, it's time for the Speech from the Throne. With a swirl of pageantry, the governor general enters the Senate Chamber and sits on the throne. You and Nathan don't see this part, because you're in the House of Commons with the other MPs. Once again you hear *bang-bang-bang* on the door. Once again it's the Usher of the Black Rod. Walk down the hallway to the Senate Chamber.



Governor General David Johnston reads the Speech from the Throne in 2011.

Black Rod

The Black Rod, the ceremonial weapon used to bang on the door of the House of Commons when MPs are invited to the Senate, is inscribed with the words *Honi soit qui mal y pense* (Evil to the one who thinks evil). It's carried by an official messenger called the *Usher of the Black Rod*. Like many of our traditions, this one started in Britain before the time of Shakespeare. It's been going on ever since.

Ask your favourite grandparent about the Usher of the Black Rod. If he or she looks confused, just shake your head and walk away.

The Chamber is packed with senators, visitors and all nine of the Supreme Court judges in their red robes with white fur collars. It's a very fancy occasion.

Your new Speaker exchanges some promises with the Speaker of the Senate. Then the governor general reads the Throne Speech, partly in French and partly in English. The ideas in the speech have been put together by the government and cabinet ministers, and it

has been written by the staff in the Prime Minister's Office. It tells what the government thinks about how Canada is doing, and what types of problems seem most important at the moment. It gives a general idea of the kinds of laws the government plans to introduce during the new session of Parliament.

I hope you wore comfortable shoes! The speech usually lasts about an hour.

The Address Debate

After the Throne Speech has been read, you and the other MPs can roll up your sleeves and get to work. It's time to start debating, and the topic is the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. The first day of this debate is called Leaders' Day, and the first speaker is the Leader of the Opposition. The prime minister speaks next. The debate goes back and forth for six days and covers most of the important ideas from the Throne Speech. You'll hammer out a general idea about where this session of Parliament is going, and what it hopes to do.

Soon Nathan will get tired of playing with his headphones and asking for fresh pencils, and everyone can settle down to work.

DON'T CLAP

Visitors to the House of Commons sit in balconies called galleries around the edges of the room. No noise or applause is allowed there — even if the MPs themselves are shouting or clapping.

A visitor who breaks the rules can be shushed or even asked to leave.