

Grade 8 History

The Development of Western Canada

Aboriginal Teaching Strategy

Treaties and Legislation – Transforming Lifestyles

Students examine the seven treaties signed by First Nations in western Canada and the federal government between 1871 and 1877 (Treaties 1 to 7) and the Indian Act of 1876 and compare the lives of First Nation peoples in western Canada before and after the treaties were signed and the legislation came into effect.

Related Curriculum Policy

- *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, 2004*

Specific Expectations

Knowledge and Understanding

- analyse how treaties and the Indian Act of 1876 transformed the lifestyles of First Nation peoples in the Canadian west

Aboriginal Context

Between 1871 and 1877, the federal government and First Nation peoples in western Canada signed seven treaties (Treaties 1 to 7). These treaties, which established reserves and promised First Nation peoples traditional hunting and fishing rights, were essentially viewed by the federal government as documents that set out the terms by which it purchased First Nation lands.

The First Nation peoples concerned were motivated to negotiate these treaties because they believed the agreements would enable them to protect their culture and sustain themselves in the ways they knew best. Since most understood that change would come with or without treaties, First Nation leaders worked for concessions that would allow their people and culture to survive.

The Indian Act of 1876 amended and consolidated older laws affecting Aboriginal peoples. Most significantly, this act turned First Nation peoples into legal wards of the state. In addition, it took away much of their land and property and gave agents of the federal government control over many aspects of their daily lives.

Teaching Strategies

- Divide the class into eight groups. Provide each of seven groups with a copy of one of the seven numbered treaties negotiated between 1871 and 1877 and give the eighth group a copy of the 1876 version of the Indian Act.
- Have the groups read the treaty or the act and prepare a summary of its contents.
- Have each group present its summary to the class.
- Engage students in a class discussion about why the federal government would have wanted to sign the treaties and enact the legislation and why First Nation peoples would have wanted to sign the treaties.

Teacher prompts: Why would the federal government have wanted the treaties? What was the intent of the Indian Act? Why would the federal government have wanted this legislation? Why would First Nation peoples want to sign the treaties?

- Continue the class discussion by asking students what changes they think the treaties and legislation brought about in the lives of the First Nation peoples, listing their responses on a class chart, and asking them how First Nation peoples would have reacted to the changes.
Teacher prompts: How would the treaties and legislation have made First Nation peoples' lives different? How would such changes have made them feel?

- Have students investigate the impact of the Indian Act and Treaties 1 to 7 on First Nation peoples in western Canada.
- Ask students about their findings and use the information to make additions and deletions to the chart.
- Engage students in a class discussion about the impact the changes had and about whether the federal government achieved its aims with the treaties and the legislation.
Teacher prompts: What changes did you identify? What effects did these changes have on First Nation peoples' lives? What were the most significant changes? Which changes were temporary? Which were permanent? How effective were the act and the treaties in accomplishing what the federal government wanted? How effective were they in accomplishing what First Nation peoples wanted? What are the effects of the act and the treaties on the lives of First Nation peoples today?

Resources

The following recommended resources and web links were accurate at the time of publication. Teachers are encouraged to check that these reference listings remain current.

Canada's First Nations: Treaty Evolution. http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/firstnations/
Provides a summary of the reasons for and the terms of the seven treaties that First Nation peoples in western Canada and the federal government signed between 1871 and 1877, and reactions to the treaties.

Henderson's Annotated Indian Act. <http://www.bloorstreet.com/200block/sindact.htm>
Contains the Indian Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. I-5, and annotations to the act by Bill Henderson, an Ontario lawyer who provides general litigation services and advice on issues of Aboriginal, treaty, and other rights and on other matters of concern to First Nation peoples.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Acts, Agreements, and Land Claims. <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index-eng.asp>
Gives information about the Indian Act and the treaties, along with extensive background materials and links to resources pertaining to Aboriginal people.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Treaty Guides. <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/al/hts/tgu/index-eng.asp>
Provides summaries of treaties made between Aboriginal people and the federal government.

Ward, Donald. *The People: A Historical Guide to the First Nations of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Books, 1997 (distributed by Fitzhenry and Whiteside, Markham, Ontario). Provides an overview of the history and culture of First Nations of the Prairie provinces, including an exploration of the effects of European contact on each group.

Making Community Connections

- Contact local First Nation politicians or individuals affiliated with First Nation political forums and advocacy organizations (e.g., the Union of Ontario Indians, the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, and the Chiefs of Ontario) for information about their work.

ABOUT THE TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

This teaching strategy is one component of *Aboriginal Perspectives: The Teacher's Toolkit*, a collection of resources designed to help Ontario educators bring Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom. Based on the revised Ontario curriculum, the collection includes resources for educators at both the elementary and secondary levels. Other resources in this series can be found on the ministry website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

