

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONFEDERATION FOR FIRST NATIONS?

What changes have you seen in your community over the last few years? Have some things changed slowly, while others have changed quickly? Since Confederation in 1867, Canada had been rapidly expanding. There were increases in land, laws, and settlers. How do you think First Nations peoples were affected by Canada's expansion?

In August 2015, 10 First Nations from Canada and the United States signed the Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty in Banff, Alberta. This treaty aims to increase the buffalo population, engage youth in the treaty process, and recognize the relationship First Nations peoples have with the buffalo. What happened to the buffalo? For over 5000 years, Métis and First Nations peoples who lived on the prairie land had hunted buffalo as a primary food source. They practised sustainable hunting and made sure to use all parts of the buffalo. For example, meat was used for pemmican (food), horns were used for arrows, skulls for rituals, and tongues for combs.

Examine **Figure 3.35**. It shows a huge mound of buffalo skulls from the 1870s. The buffalo population was decreasing dramatically due to a variety of factors. One of these factors was the overhunting by non-Aboriginal people. As more settlers moved west, hunting increased. Non-Aboriginal people often wanted buffalo skin for coats and leather belts, which were used in the new factories in Canada. The population of buffalo, once numbered in the millions, was estimated to have shrunk to a few hundred. The buffalo had reached near extinction.



FIGURE 3.35 This photo from the 1870s shows a mound of buffalo skulls. **Analyze:** Based on the poses of both men, what attitudes are they portraying about the buffalo hunt?

THE NUMBERED TREATIES

In order for more settlers to move to the Northwest, the Canadian government needed to obtain more land. The **Numbered Treaties** were a series of 11 treaties negotiated from 1871 to 1921 between the Canadian government and First Nations. In return for giving their land to the government, First Nations received a variety of **reserve** (set-aside) lands, money, tools, and the right to hunt and fish on the land.

During the negotiations, the government and First Nations used interpreters to help them communicate. After the oral agreements were reached, the treaties were then written in English. Often what First Nations received did not reflect what the First Nations leaders understood to have been negotiated. Read **Figure 3.36**, an excerpt from Treaty 6. Whose perspective is the agreement written from?

What else can you learn about the Numbered Treaties from examining the map in **Figure 3.37**?

Numbered Treaties series of 11 treaties (1871–1921) between First Nations peoples and the Canadian government

reserve an area of land set aside for the use of a specific group of Aboriginal people

“The Plain and Wood Cree Tribes of Indians, and all the other Indians inhabiting the district ... do hereby cede [give up] ... all their rights, titles, and privileges, whatsoever, to the lands included within following limits ...”

— Treaty 6

FIGURE 3.36 An excerpt from Treaty 6, signed on August 23, 1876, at Fort Carlton, Saskatchewan, and at Fort Pitt, Saskatchewan, on September 9, 1876. **Analyze:** What key words in this excerpt tell you about the government's view of the land?

The Numbered Treaties in Canada, 1871–1930



FIGURE 3.37 This map shows the area and dates of the Numbered Treaties. **Analyze:** What patterns do you see about when the Numbered Treaties were signed?

CONTEXTUALIZING TEXT SOURCES

Often, historical sources do not tell us a lot of information on their own. To understand the meaning of a text from the past, you first must know where, when, and by whom it was written. Next, you need to determine how the text fits into its historical context—its historical time and circumstances. You need to look for information about the historical context in reliable secondary sources and make connections between this context and the text. You can ask questions such as those listed in **Figure 3.38** to help you make connections. Then you can decide what the text reveals about the historical context.

In this activity, you will contextualize **Figure 3.39**, a quote by Chief Poundmaker during the Treaty 6 negotiations. The quote was recorded by Peter Erasmus, the interpreter for the Treaty 6 negotiations. Erasmus was the son of a Danish father and Métis mother and was fluent in English and several Cree dialects. He gave this account of the negotiations to Henry Thompson, a Métis reporter, in the 1920s, at the age of 87. Use your knowledge of the time period and the evidence found in **Figure 3.40** and **Figure 3.41** to help you answer the inquiry question: Why did First Nations sign the Numbered Treaties?

| Questions to Ask When Contextualizing a Text | |
|--|---|
| About | Examples of Contextual Questions |
| Events and conditions at the time | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What else was going on at the time of the events recorded in the text, in the community, the region, the country, or the world? |
| Life at the time | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was it like to be alive in that place, at that time?• What things were different from today? What was the same? |
| Position of creator in society | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How was the creator involved in events of the time? What was his or her position or role in society? |
| Worldviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did people's beliefs and customs at the time differ from ours today? How is this reflected in the text?• How might different people have responded to these words at the time? |

FIGURE 3.38 Asking contextual questions can help you understand a historical text.

“The governor ... says 640 acres, one square mile for each family, he will give us. This is our land! It isn’t a piece of pemmican to be cut off and given in little pieces back to us. It is ours and we will take what we want.”

— Chief Poundmaker, Plains Cree First Nation

FIGURE 3.39 In this quote, Chief Poundmaker is responding to the Treaty 6 terms proposed by Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris in 1876.

FIGURE 3.40 In this quote from Erasmus’s account of the 1876 Treaty 6 negotiations, Chief Ahtahkakoop (also known as Starblanket) responds to Chief Poundmaker’s objections. “Queen Mother” refers to Queen Victoria, the British monarch at the time.

“Can we stop the power of the white man from spreading over the land like the grasshoppers that cloud the sky and then fall to consume every blade of grass and every leaf on the trees in their path? I think not.... For my part, I think that the Queen Mother has offered us a new way.... Surely we Indians can learn the ways of living that made the white man strong.... I will accept the Queen’s hand for my people.”

— Chief Ahtahkakoop, Plains Cree First Nation

“The main criticism of the written version has to do with the language used about the lands. The written version contains the wording ‘cede, surrender, and forever give up title to the lands.’ The Elders maintain that these words were not included in the original treaty. The Chiefs and Elders could not have sold their lands to the settlers as they could only share the lands according to the Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Dene laws. When the Elders were told of these written words, they had difficulty understanding them. These words do not exist in their languages.”

— Sharon H. Venne, historian

FIGURE 3.41 In a book published in 2002, historian Venne explains the First Nations peoples’ perspective on Treaty 6.

HOW TO CONTEXTUALIZE A TEXT

Start by closely reading **Figure 3.39**. What type of source is it? When and where was it created?

STEP 1

Examine what the source reveals about life at the time. As well as reserve lands, the government offered cattle, seeds, tools, training, and money to start farms. Why would this be attractive to the Cree?

STEP 2

Review the events and conditions occurring at the time. Read **Figure 3.40**. What challenges were the Plains Cree First Nations facing during this time period? Why might the Canadian government want the land?

STEP 3

STEP 4

Examine the creators’ position in society. Do you think Erasmus’s account is reliable? Why, or why not?

STEP 5

Compare different worldviews and perspectives. What do the quotes in **Figure 3.39** and **Figure 3.41** suggest about how First Nations’ understanding of land ownership differed from that of the Canadian government?

THE INDIAN ACT

After Confederation, the Canadian government created laws regarding First Nations. In 1876, these various laws were combined to create the *Indian Act*. The *Indian Act* was a set of regulations that controlled First Nations throughout the whole country. According to Macdonald's quote in **Figure 3.42**, what was the goal of the *Indian Act*?

Read the excerpts from the *Indian Act* in **Figure 3.43**. By defining the term *Indian*, the government dictated which groups of people were legally recognized as First Nations. The Métis and Inuit are not included in the terms of the act. Many of the terms are still in effect today.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

In 1883, the Canadian government established residential schools designed to assimilate and educate First Nations children. These institutions were run by religious groups, including Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and United churches. Children as young as 4 years old were taken from their homes and sent to live in schools away from their families. Students were forced to learn and speak only English or French and were forbidden from practising their own cultural and spiritual traditions. Most of the schools were in western Canada and northern Ontario. You will learn more about residential schools in Chapter 8. Examine **Figure 3.44**. How do these photos suggest that the creation of residential schools supported the *Indian Act* and the government's view of First Nations?

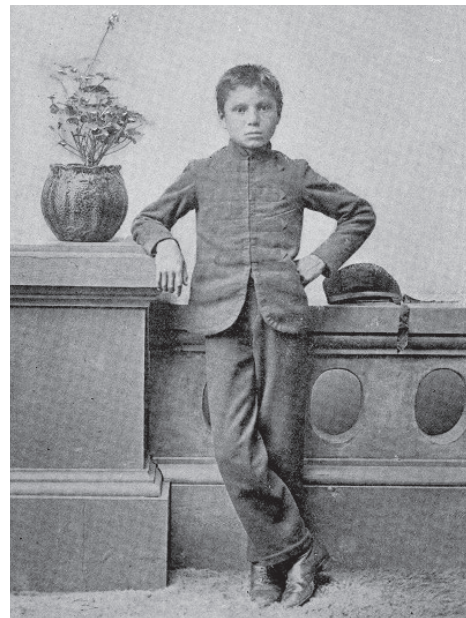


FIGURE 3.44 These 1897 photos show Thomas Moore, a First Nations child, before and after his admittance into a residential school. **Analyze:** How do these photos support evidence of assimilation in the late 1800s?

“The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change.”

— Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald

FIGURE 3.42 In this 1887 quote from Parliament, Macdonald discusses the government's policies toward First Nations. **Analyze:** How would having one set of laws affect the identity and culture of different Aboriginal peoples?

“2. The Minister of the Interior shall be ... in the control and management of the reserves, lands, moneys and property of Indians in Canada ...

3. The term “Indian” means First. Any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band; Secondly. Any child of such person; Thirdly. Any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person:

12. The term “person” means an individual other than an Indian.”

— *Indian Act*

FIGURE 3.43 This is an excerpt from the original *Indian Act*, which passed on April 12, 1876. The minister of the interior is a member of the government appointed by the prime minister. **Analyze:** How do you think some First Nations may have felt while reading the *Indian Act*?

How did the creation of the North-West Mounted Police contribute to the expansion of Canada?

FIGURE 3.45 This painting, *The Start from Fort Dufferin, Manitoba 1874*, based on a sketch by Henri Julien, depicts North-West Mounted Police officers heading west from Manitoba in 1874.

Analyze: How does this painting depict the interactions between the North-West Mounted Police and First Nations people?



THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE

In 1872, the *Dominion Lands Act* gave away land in the Northwest to farmers who cleared between 15 and 50 acres of land, planted crops, and built homes within three years of settlement. In May 1873, the government created the North-West Mounted Police, shown in **Figure 3.45**, to maintain law and order in the area. The North-West Mounted Police were responsible for ensuring that First Nations complied with the regulations outlined in the *Indian Act*.

Whisky was an illegal alcohol in Canada. However, Americans would cross the border to trade their whisky and rifles for goods from the Assiniboine First Nation. In June 1873, an American trader's horse went missing. He immediately blamed the Assiniboine and enlisted the help of some wolf hunters to enter the First Nation camp in Cypress Hills (located in present-day Saskatchewan) to forcibly take a horse. A bloody battle took place between the well-armed Americans and the poorly armed Assiniboine. The battle left 22 Assiniboine people murdered and one American wolf hunter dead. How might the Cypress Hills Massacre have confirmed the government's need for a police force in the Northwest?

Jerry Potts (also known as Ky-yo-kosi) was a Métis who worked with First Nations peoples and the North-West Mounted Police. He helped to develop a relationship of trust between them by teaching each group about the culture of the other. Why was it important to establish cooperation between First Nations peoples and the North-West Mounted Police?

CHECK-IN

- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** How did the policies introduced by the government regarding First Nations conflict with the First Nations way of life?
- CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** What was the most important turning point for First Nations at this time?