

Up and Down, Back and Forth: Canadian and American Relations and our Ever-changing Relationship

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Grade Level: 5/6

Magazine Issue: "[Canada and the United States](#)" (April 2026), *Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids*

Time Required: 3-4 lessons

Select Curriculum Connections:

ONTARIO | Language 6: Literacy connections and applications | Social Studies 6: Canada's global interactions

NEWFOUNDLAND | Social Studies 6: Use concepts and skills common to the social sciences

QUEBEC | Social Studies 2: Interpret change in a society and its territory

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Explore the "Up and Down, Back and Forth" timeline, identifying key events and patterns in the relationship between Canada and the United States.
- Recognize and rank the historical significance of events in the relationship between Canada and the United States, building an argument to justify their choices.

Teacher Background:

Teachers should be familiar with the six concepts of historical thinking, developed by the Centre for Historical Consciousness. **Historical significance** is the lens you will use to guide your lesson. Historical Significance is used to determine if certain past events or people are important based on their long-lasting impact and connections to other people. The following criteria is often used to determine historical significance:

- *Deep consequences (profundity):* the impact of an event, development or person on people's lives
- *Quantity:* the amount of people affected

- *Durability*: long-lasting effects of a person or event
- *Revealing*: what is the connection between a person or event to larger themes in history or contemporary issues?

For more resources about historical significance, visit HistoricalThinking.ca and view [their template](#) for determining historical significance.

Activity:

PART I – Introduction

Have a group discussion with your students about historical significance, asking: what is the most important thing that’s happened during your day or the current school year? Based on their answers, explore what makes the developments, events or people in their day or current school year important. Use the following historical significance criteria to guide your discussion:

- *Resulted in change*: events, people or developments have long-lasting consequences for lots of people over a long period of time
- *Revealing*: provides perspective on old or new issues in history or contemporary life
- *Constructed*: are an essential part of an overarching narrative
- *Varies*: are different from person to person and can change over time

Have students paraphrase the criteria in their own words. They may also have come up with their own criteria to determine historical significance. Their rewritten criteria will be used throughout the lesson.

PART II – Ranking Historical Significance

Have students read the article “Up and Down and Back and Forth,” exploring the timeline of events about the relationship between Canada and the United States.

Have a group discussion about the timeline, exploring students’ initial thoughts or observations, and clarifying gaps in their understanding about events. Consider discussing the historical events you will focus on as a class – whether you’ll use the entire timeline for the activity or focus on specific decades.

Put the students into small groups (3-4 people). Have students rank the top 5 events from the timeline based on their historical significance. Students should use the criteria you rephrased as a class to guide their rankings. Remind students that their

rankings are subjective, so each group might have similar or different answers.

PART III – Building an Argument

Explain to your students that they will be building an argument to justify how they ranked the 5 events, based on the historical significance criteria. Remind your students that anytime they defend something, like their favourite singer or video game, they are building an argument.

Students can continue working in the same small groups as PART II. Students should prepare a brief (3-5 sentences) argument to defend the 5 events they ranked. They can write notes using a few bullet points or record video or voice recordings (3 mins maximum).

Each group will select the one event from their ranking they think is most historically significant. Students will present their event to the class, summarizing the argument they built.

If you believe that the class is mature enough, students can vote to determine which groups presented the most historically significant event.

PART IV – Wrap-up and Reflection

Review current events in Canada and the United States relations. Students can research news stories related to sports, trade, immigration, and the environment.

Using either a physical exit ticket or a digital bulletin board (e.g., Padlet), students can answer the following question: How might this event be considered historically significant to the future of Canada and United States relations? Be sure to use the historical significance criteria to support your answer.

Extension:

You can adapt this lesson for older students by extending the timeline until the 2010s or researching more in-depth news stories that can be paired with the events highlighted in the *Kayak* timeline.

Additionally, you can also ask students to develop an argumentative essay, presentation, or infographic to defend their positions about the historically significant events they ranked.