

Lesson Plan

Title Confederation: The Unfinished Project

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This lesson plan is inspired by the article "Confederation Diary," in the Summer 2017 issue of *Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids*.

Grade Level 5/6, 7/8, 9/10

Theme(s)

- Canadian Identity
- Discover Your Community
- First Nations, Inuit & Metis
- National Politics
- Provincial/Territorial Politics
- Women

Subject Area Social Studies/History/ ELA/Civics

Lesson Overview (Summary)

This lesson examines the various viewpoints and perspectives of the participants in the Confederation debates, including the voices of women, Indigenous peoples and other groups left out of the process. Using primary source material, students will be asked to interpret various perspectives on Confederation as well as to imagine how discussions could look today, set within contemporary values.

Time Required 45 minutes x 5

Historical Thinking Concept(s)

- Establish historical significance
- Use primary source evidence
- Identify continuity and change
- Analyze cause and consequence
- Take historical perspectives
- Understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

Learning Outcomes

Student will:

- Outline the major participants in the Confederation debates of the 1860s, as well as identify the the principal groups who were excluded.
- Summarize the point of view of one of the provinces or parties involved in the debates, including pros and cons of joining the union.
- Describe some of the major ideas informing Confederation debates.
- Explain the concerns of groups not included in the debates, including linguistic minority groups, women, and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.
- Apply their new understanding of the Confederation debates to create their own political cartoon, illustrating a distinct point of view on the union.
- Analyze how the debates over nationhood, inclusion and identity have by identifying those who might be included in a discussion of Confederation if held today.
- Recommend a new model for contemporary Confederation that is more inclusive and reflective of Canada today.

Background Information

At the end of the summer of 1864, delegates from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island gathered in Charlottetown to discuss the possible union of the Maritime colonies. The Canadian delegation — led by John A. Macdonald, George-Étienne Cartier and George Brown — invited itself to their meeting. The Canadian delegates did their best to persuade their counterparts of the benefits of an extended union and debated the main points of their initiative with the Maritime delegates.

Having come to an agreement on the principle of a colonial union, the delegates decided to pursue the discussions in Quebec City. In October 1864, they met in the library of the Parliament of the Province of Canada to debate two major visions: one favouring a strong central government and the other upholding the autonomy of the provinces.

At the second conference, 72 resolutions were adopted. They were essentially a draft constitution. At the end of the Quebec Conference, the delegates were asked to have the resolutions ratified by the legislative assemblies of their respective colonies. The process of ratification was not without friction. As these publications suggest, Confederation was intensely debated in the assemblies and newspapers. In Nova Scotia, Joseph Howe opposed the union initiative in a series of open letters entitled “The Botheration Scheme.” Other politicians and journalists published vehement pamphlets. However, Thomas D’Arcy McGee, in Montreal, and Edward Whelan, in Charlottetown, eloquently defended the Confederation initiative.

A third conference began in London, England, on December 4, 1866. Ratified by the legislative assemblies of the Province of Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the 72 resolutions of the Quebec Conference now had to be revised and validated by the imperial government. A bill entitled the British North America Act, essentially a written constitution, was introduced in both houses of Britain’s Parliament and approved. Queen Victoria then received the delegates at court and, on March 29, 1867, gave royal assent to Confederation.

Confederation was a union of colonies who considered themselves to be as different as countries vast distances apart. Yet, not all nations in the land that was to be called Canada were included. First Nations had long signed treaties with the government to preserve friendship and goodwill. For First Nations people, the agreements they signed were contracts that should last forever, or as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow. First Nations, along with their lands, were mentioned in the 72 resolutions as subject to the jurisdiction of the central government. The Resolutions, as well as the British North America Act which created Confederation, did not name First Nations as nations unto themselves. Confederation was signed without their understanding or consent, leading the way to future abuses of rights.

In addition, Confederation was not a union of diverse people. At the time of Confederation in 1867 women were not allowed to be politicians. They were not even allowed to vote in federal elections. It was not until 1918 that women could vote in federal elections, and not until 1919 that women gained the right to be elected to the House of Commons. Most men believed women were incapable of participating in democratic affairs. At the Charlottetown, Quebec and London conferences, however, women accompanied their husbands and fathers. The women played a major role in the social aspects of the conferences. Mercy Ann Coles, who accompanied her father from Charlottetown to Quebec City, carefully recorded her impressions of the events in her diary. Sarah Caroline Steeves, daughter of a delegate from Nova Scotia, is said to have made a cushion with silk from a gown she wore to the conference balls in 1864. Still, and despite these voices, it is clear that the perspectives of women did not feature prominently in the shape the country was to take.

Confederation was instituted as a union of the provinces with the aim to promote economic opportunity and security and well-being for the provinces, as well as to ensure the development of a national railway system. It was not a compact for or of the people, but an agreement that the provinces arrived at through negotiation and compromise, by considering what was best for them.

The Lesson Activity

Activating

Working in pairs or in small groups (3-4), students will share any information they know about how Canada was founded. If no one in the group has prior information, students will create a bullet-point chart showing what they think happened. Groups should then share their version of events with the rest of the class.

Students will watch the Heritage Minute. Breaking into pairs or groups, they will be asked to revise the information or the stories they created according to the information provided in the Heritage Minute.

Acquiring

In small research teams, students research basic information on Confederation – who, what, when, where, why? (Student Handout 1 and Confederation for Kids website)

Teacher presents political cartoon, “La Confederation!” (Annex 1). The class can predict who they think drew it and what it might mean, before it is explained by the teacher.

(The cartoon, published in Quebec in 1864, paints Confederation as the harbinger of destruction. The sacrificial lamb in the image represents Québec as a sacrifice to the hydra monster of Confederation, which is ridden by George Brown, one of the Fathers of Confederation. The cartoonist predicts the demise of French Canadian culture, and shows Québec politicians blessing the monster instead of defending the lamb. The accompanying text for this cartoon argues that Québec will be destroyed by joining Confederation. It represents the total destruction of Québec’s cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage.)

Students read “Confederation Diary” considering the perspectives of women left out of the Confederation debates.

Teacher presents treaty medal (Annex 2). The class can predict what the imagery seems to represent and what it might mean, before it is explained by the teacher.

(Between 1871 and 1921, the Crown concluded 11 numbered treaties with groups located in the territorial boundaries set by Canada. First Nations leaders believed that the Treaty they were signing was establishing a nation-to-nation relationship, negotiated as equals, that would ensure the group’s survival and success into the future.)

As a small group or as a class, students brainstorm what other groups might have been left out of the Confederation debates.

Applying

Using the summary perspectives attached, students will produce their own political cartoon outlining their province or territory’s objection to, or agreement with, Confederation (according to the perspective based on the handouts).

Students will watch the original Heritage Minute again, noting what they might change to better reflect the diversity of Confederation debates and the difficulties of achieving consensus.

Students will engage in a small or large-group discussion about which groups might be invited today to discuss Confederation, if the debate was to take place in contemporary times.

Suggested Materials/Resources

Student Handout 1 (attached)

Annex 1: Confederation Cartoon (attached)

Annex 2: Treaty Medal (attached)

Summary Perspectives (attached)

Confederation for Kids

Student Handout Confederation Research

When did the Dominion of Canada come into being?

Which colonies joined the federation? How were they reorganized in 1867?

When and how have new provinces or territories been created?

Why was this new country Canada formed?

Where and when did the three important meetings (Conferences) leading to the creation of Canada take place?

What document was produced by the delegates at the three Conferences?
What does it do?

Annex 1 Anti - Confederation Cartoon

Source <https://dessertating.wordpress.com/2015/04/16/hydra>



Annex 2 Treaty Medal

Source <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-8>



Summary Perspective

The Province of Canada: Canada West

John A. Macdonald and his allies mobilized massive support for Confederation. George Brown and his supporters also saw more advantages than drawbacks, although they had some reservations.

Representation

The province would finally get more representatives to match its growing population. It would therefore carry more political weight within the new Confederation than in the Province of Canada.

Prosperity

Confederation would create new markets, make the railway companies more profitable and help people enter the territory to settle land in the West.

Security

Confederation would allow better military protection against the Americans and others.

Since the advantages were obvious, 54 of the 62 members of the Legislative Assembly from Canada West voted in favour of ratifying the Confederation initiative.

Summary Perspective

Province of Canada: Canada East

George-Étienne Cartier's party, the Parti bleu, enthusiastically supported the Confederation initiative. Antoine-Aimé Dorion's Parti rouge was, however, opposed.

Autonomy and Survival

The province would maintain control of its language, religion, education system and civil law. The rights of French Canadians would therefore be safe from the English. However, some people were worried about the scope of the federal government's power. They thought that the French would be outnumbered by the English, and that the religion most Francophones practiced might be threatened by the Protestant religion favoured by most English.

Security

Confederation would allow better military protection against the Americans and others. Some were scared, however, that the union might make people from other countries angry by provoking them into a fight. If all of the colonies were getting together, other countries might see a threat, and want to deal with it.

The Will of the People?

Dorion, who was anti-Confederation, criticized those who promoted Confederation for not allowing the people to express their opinion on it, either in a referendum or an election.

The supporters of Confederation won by a narrow margin: only 37 of the 62 members of the Legislative Assembly from Canada East voted in favour of ratifying the Confederation initiative.

Summary Perspective

Nova Scotia

Although the delegates led by Charles Tupper were enthusiastic supporters of Confederation, the general population did not share their opinion. Joseph Howe fiercely opposed the initiative.

Little in Common

Nova Scotia had always been focused on the sea and on its relations with Great Britain, and had established few ties with the Province of Canada. Howe and many others feared that their colony would become weak in a much bigger country.

Under-representation

Like the other Maritime colonies, Nova Scotia was worried about being under-represented in an elected assembly.

Insufficient Transfers

The sums of money that the new federal government would transfer to the provinces seemed insufficient.

There was strong opposition to Confederation. Still, the Legislative Assembly ratified the initiative, against the general will of the people.

Summary Perspective

New Brunswick

The delegates, led by Samuel Leonard Tilley, were enthusiastic supporters of Confederation, but the population itself was divided.

Under-representation

Like the other Maritime colonies, New Brunswick was worried about being under-represented in a legislative assembly. Its delegates insisted, in vain, on representation equal to that of the Province of Canada in the new Senate.

A Railway

The construction of an inter-colonial railway serving Saint John would open up new markets. Construction costs would be shared by all the colonies.

Trade

New Brunswick had always maintained closer commercial ties with the United States than with the Province of Canada. Uniting with the other colonies would not necessarily be good for business.

Security

Confederation would allow better military protection against the Americans and others, including an Irish group called the Fenians who conducted raids into Canada.

The Rights of Minorities

The Acadians and the Irish Catholics feared that their educational rights would be threatened by Confederation, since the Protestants would be in charge in the new country due to their greater numbers.

In the general election held at the beginning of 1865, the opponents of Confederation won a clear victory. Voters, however, changed their minds when a second election was held the following year, and the Legislative Assembly accepted the union.

Summary Perspective

Prince Edward Island

Enthusiasm for Confederation was lower here than in any of the other colonies, even among the delegates. Confederation seemed to offer very few advantages.

Under-representation

As the colony with the smallest population, Prince Edward Island would be very weak within the new government. It wanted more seats in the House of Commons and the Senate.

Access to Land

The fact that most of the island belonged to wealthy British landowners was very unpopular. Residents wanted the new government to buy the lands and to give them to the Islanders living there.

The Economy

There were fears of higher taxes. In addition, the population did not want to be forced to pay for projects that would not benefit them directly, like an inter-colonial railway.

Defence

The Islanders did not want to be forced to get involved in conflicts or disputes that the Canadians might find themselves in with other countries on the border, especially the United States. Since Prince Edward Island was separate from the mainland, it felt it could avoid disagreements over borders and trade.

The debates tore apart the government of Prince Edward Island. The opposition was so strong that the Confederation initiative was rejected until 1873.

Summary Perspective

Newfoundland

Newfoundland was not represented at the Charlottetown Conference, although two observers were sent to the Quebec Conference. They returned home enthusiastic but were unable to persuade most Newfoundlanders to care about the idea of Confederation.

The Economy

Some people hoped that Confederation would offer a solution to the island's economic problems, but most saw no advantages. There were fears of higher taxes.

Little in Common

Newfoundland had never been oriented to the land, but rather, to the sea. It had enjoyed a close relationship with Great Britain, and did not have ties with the other colonies.

The Rights of Minorities?

Many Newfoundlanders were of Irish origin, and they were scared of the union because they felt that Ireland's troubles came from its union with England. They were also scared of the anti-Catholic attitudes in Canada West.

Because indifference and opposition were so strong, Newfoundland did not join Confederation until 1949.

Summary Perspective

Indigenous Nations

Indigenous nations were not represented at the Charlottetown Conference. Most delegates did not see them as important partners and believed that Indigenous peoples were going to become extinct.

A Changing Natural World

Colonists' and governments' theft of land forced Indigenous peoples to find new ways to survive but a new country, where they would not be able to keep their traditional lands or ways of making a living, was not of benefit to them.

Little in Common

First Nations had always believed they had a direct relationship with the British King or with the Queen, rather than with the colonies. They had not made treaties or agreements with individual colonies. While they may have been worried about the colonies joining, they felt as though they would be able to continue to deal directly with the Queen and her representatives to make treaty or for any other concerns they might have.

New Laws and New Limits

During the 1850s, the government passed laws that directly interfered with the rights of Indigenous peoples. Some laws promoted assimilation by sending Indigenous children to school to learn about settler ways, or by sending Indigenous people away from their homelands. As a result, First Nations and Metis people did not believe that the colonies would negotiate like good partners should.

Despite their relationship with the Crown and their rights to land, First Nations and Metis people were not invited to debate Confederation.

Summary Perspective

Great Britain

The British government was involved in the negotiations in Charlottetown and Quebec City, but it took part in the London Conference.

Security

Confederation would allow Great Britain to reduce its costs in Canada, especially for the military, which was very expensive. If the colonies joined together, they would have to pay for their own military.

Investments

London financiers felt that the union of the colonies would help them get a return on their investments in North America, especially if the railway was built. This would make Canada a much richer country.

The British government did everything possible to promote Confederation. As instructed by London, the governors of the colonies used their influence to encourage colonies to join.

Summary Perspective

Women

Not all women in Canada had the same experience, depending on where they came from, how old they were, and if they were rich or poor. Still, what was true of women at this time is that they were not considered persons under the law. For this reason, women were excluded from any of the discussions on Confederation.

A Rigid Legal Structure

Under the law, women did not have rights of their own. They belonged to their fathers, as property, until they got married. At that time, they became the property of their husbands. There were no laws protecting women's rights, or their right to be heard in any public way, especially in government.

Little in Common

From an early age, girls were taught that they did not have a place in government, or in any public realm. Opportunities for women to engage with politics were very limited. While some participated in local clubs and associations through their communities or churches, most women did not participate in, and were not aware of, many of the larger political issues at play.

Banquets and Ball gowns

If they were included in any of the events around Confederation, it was as companions to their husbands and fathers. Some women wrote about the Confederation Conferences in their diaries or in letters. Some others created crafts and other items to commemorate their participation in banquets and in balls.

Despite the important segment of the population they represented, the legal status of women as non-persons contributed to their non-participation in any of the discussions or the voting surrounding Confederation.