

Stories of Sir John A.

Activity 1

Teaching Tools for the Online Timeline

The historical timeline at StoriesofSirJohnA.ca is built around three themes: Sir John A. Macdonald's **personal life**, his **public life** and **the road to our Dominion**. However, note that events may indeed be linked to more than one; this could be the basis for a class discussion.

Activities based on the online timeline are included in this guide. These will help introduce students to two concepts from the Historical Thinking Project (<http://historicalthinking.ca>): *historical significance* and *historical evidence*.

Here are some tips for approaching these concepts using the timeline:

- Emphasize the differences between important events and *historically significant* events. Start with examples from previous history lessons, current events and students' lives. The organizer entitled "How Historically Significant Was John A. Macdonald?" provides an investigational tool.
- Ask students to select the three most significant events in Macdonald's life and career, ranking the events and justifying their choices. Students can also debate in small groups whether 1864, 1867 or 1885 was most significant year in Macdonald's life and career.
- Students can exercise their creativity by composing a cinquain poem about Macdonald's life. For another option, they can select the most significant timeline entries for the history of their province, community or family, and then compose a poem or write a paragraph explaining their choices. See "Building History Concepts through Writing-to-Learn Strategies."
- Ask students individually or in groups to investigate the following question: "How is Macdonald remembered in our community and in the greater Canadian context?"
- Students can ask friends and/or family what they think Macdonald's most memorable contribution has been to Canada. Alternatively, students can conduct a search for Macdonald's namesakes (e.g., buildings, statues and celebrations) and report on their findings. Track whether students had positive or negative findings and have them share their reports with peers.

Activity 1

Student Activity: Historical Significance

Based on all the information we have about Sir John A. Macdonald, we know that he was a very important historical figure. Historians and students of history have a special way of determining the importance of people, events or developments. This test of *historical significance* is outlined in three questions:

1. Did this person or event produce *consequences* that were *meaningful, widespread* and *lasting*?
2. At the time of the event, how *prominent* was the person and did the event have lasting effects?
3. How *revealing* were the person's life and actions, in terms of what they reveal about the time when he or she lived and the events that took place? Is the person or event *remembered* (celebrated, mourned, criticized and/or regretted)?

How does Macdonald's importance measure in the history students' test for *historical significance*?

Visit the Stories of Sir John A. website (StoriesofSirJohnA.ca) and study the timeline of Macdonald's life. Try to identify some events in which he was a factor in Canadian history.

Because Macdonald was an educated and well-known figure, many of his personal, business and political letters have been preserved. We also have many court cases, contracts and laws that he worked on in the 19th century. These records are called *primary documents* and *evidence*.

Personal events that were important for Macdonald and his family did not necessarily have consequences for other families. However, some of what happened in Macdonald's personal life was very similar to what happened to other people and reveals much to the reader about life in the 1800s.

Some events either occurred when Macdonald was a young adult or when he was not in office. There are events that he had no control over and some in which he played a central role.

To determine how *historically significant* Macdonald was, let's examine the timeline and test the events to see how they relate to his life and career.

Activity 1

Student Activity: How Historically Significant Was John A. Macdonald?

How events link to Macdonald	Were the consequences <i>deep</i> , for <i>many</i> people and for a <i>long</i> time?	Have they been recognized as <i>prominent</i> , both <i>then</i> and <i>now</i> ?	Were they <i>revealing</i> , and are they still <i>remembered</i> ?

Your sources:

Your conclusions:

Activity 1

Sources of Evidence

In addition to the timeline on StoriesofSirJohnA.ca, you should use other sources of information such as your textbook and the websites of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and Library and Archives Canada. These resources may contain **primary** source documents from that time period such as letters, laws, newspaper articles, paintings, pictures and posters.

They will also contain **secondary** source summaries written by historians and history teachers. Remember that secondary accounts rely on books by other historians as well as a review of some of the primary documents.

It is always important to ask questions about primary and secondary source evidence. History students have different points of view and different biases. There may also be new primary sources discovered since your secondary source was written. Written history is never finished. The quality of written history is determined by the quality of the research and the logic of the arguments presented.

Resources and web links

Jacqueline A. Brown, *Sir John A. Macdonald: The Rascal who Built Canada* (2007).

Historica Canada's website (<https://www.historicacanada.ca>) provides an excellent portal to a number of resources and programs that help students investigate the life and time of Macdonald, including:

- *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/>)
- The Prime Ministers of Canada by 7th Floor Media (<http://www.pprime-ministers.ca/>)
- Macdonald & Laurier Days (<http://www.macdonald-laurier.ca/en/home>)

These government websites are also very helpful:

- Government of Canada (<http://www.canada.gc.ca/home.html>)
- Department of Justice (<http://www.justice.gc.ca/>)
- Library and Archives Canada (<http://ow.ly/MHf7Z> ; <http://ow.ly/MHfbn>)

Activity 2

Building History Concepts through Writing-to-Learn Strategies: Cinquain Poems

For students who are daunted by the prospect of writing a paragraph or a page on a topic, a five-line poem using only 11 words is a simpler exercise. Educators have discovered that students enjoy the challenge and are surprisingly creative. Most importantly, students resort to using many of the names, places and key terms that we want them to learn and to use.

Included below are two examples of cinquains. Have students write one poem and share their work with a partner. English as second language students may be provided with one or two samples and given creative licence to change the wording and sequence of the sample. After students have each created a cinquain, post the poems on the walls of your classroom and ask students to do a gallery walk and read each other's poems.

Activity 2

Student Activity: Cinquain Poems

A cinquain is a fun poem in five lines. Follow the rules and see what you can write! Compose a cinquain poem on Macdonald that focuses on one aspect of his life or career. Share your poem with your classmates.

Rules	Example	Macdonald Example
First line is a one-word topic	Olympics	Confederation
Second line is a two-word description	Many countries	Federal union
Third line has three "—ing" words showing action in the topic	Running, jumping, throwing	Meeting, talking, compromising
Fourth line is a four-word phrase describing and showing feeling on the topic	Competing individually and together	Creating a new country
Fifth line is a one-word synonym that restates the topic	Celebration	Canada

Activity 2

Student Activity: Cinquain Poems Worksheet

<p>Rules</p> <p>First line is a one-word topic</p> <p>Second line is a two-word description</p> <p>Third line has three “——ing” words showing action in the topic</p> <p>Fourth line is a four-word phrase describing and showing feeling on the topic</p> <p>Fifth line one-word synonym that restates the topic</p>	<hr/>	<hr/>
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Historica Canada is the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship. For more information, visit www.historicacanada.ca.