

# Sir John A. Macdonald & Confederation

## Senior Learning Tool

### Introduction and Note to Educators:

Sir John A. Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation are among the most famous – and controversial – Canadians in history. Using an approach developed by the Historical Thinking Project, this learning tool challenges students to think critically about Confederation and draw meaningful conclusions by examining evidence.

This tool was developed for social studies, history and civics classes in grades 9–12 and secondary III to secondary V within Québec.



Sir John A. Macdonald, Library and Archives Canada.

**Note to Educators: Accommodations for Special Education, ELL and ESL students are included under the appropriate sections and identified as “modification”.**

Students will also apply their creativity and knowledge to produce their own *Heritage Minute*-style video. Enter it in the ***Make Your Own Heritage Minute: Stories of Sir John A. and the Fathers of Confederation Student Contest*** for a chance to win great prizes. Submissions are due **15 August 2015**. For more information, visit [StoriesofSirJohnA.ca](http://StoriesofSirJohnA.ca).

**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](http://www.historicacanada.ca). This learning tool is made possible with the generous support of the **Government of Canada**.

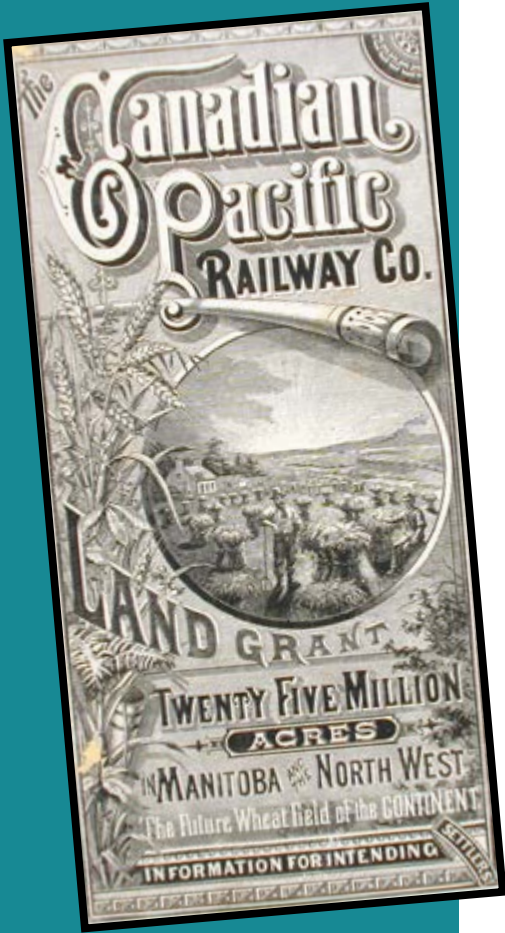
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Educators may want to review the outline of historical significance found on the Historical Thinking Project website (<http://historicalthinking.ca/historical-significance>).



Canadian Pacific Railway Co., Land Grant in Manitoba and North West Territory, McCord Museum.



Charlottetown Conference, 1864, Library and Archives Canada.

*History is a dialogue among people about the interpretation of meaningful evidence left over from the past.*

— HISTORIAN RUTH SANDWELL

## Step One: What is History?

1. While students are regularly asked to study history, we rarely discuss what history actually is. How would you define it? What do you think an historian does?
2. Share your answer with your class.

Modification: For step one, write the questions on the board and ask each separately, giving think time to students before group discussion. Allow students to use translators and to share with a partner before discussing the questions as a class.

## Step Two: The Original Macdonald-Cartier *Heritage Minutes*

1. Watch the *Heritage Minutes* about Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier by visiting [www.historicacanada.ca/content/videos](http://www.historicacanada.ca/content/videos)
2. Choose one, and, with a partner, discuss why you think it was created. What is it trying to say about Confederation? Does it evoke any emotions or reactions? Share your ideas with the class.

Modification: Prior to discussion, recap what occurred in the video. Refer to a map of Canada.

3. How was Sir John A. Macdonald or Sir George-Étienne Cartier portrayed in the video? With your partner, decide upon a **single word** that best describes this individual. Complete the chart (below). Explain your reasoning with the class.

Modification: Explain the word “portrayed” for ESL and ELL students. Next, brainstorm words with the class that best describe Sir John A. Macdonald or Sir George-Étienne Cartier. Give students the option to choose a word from the list or a word of their own.

Word: \_\_\_\_\_

Heritage Minute Scene	How it Supports your Word
1.	
2.	
3.	

## Step Three: Agency, Cause, and Consequence: Why did Confederation Happen?

It is a common mistake to assume that events in the past had to unfold as they did. Examining the complex events leading up to Confederation helps us remember that things could have turned out quite differently.

1. In pairs, look up *The Canadian Encyclopedia*'s entry on Confederation using the Encyclopedia's search bar.

Modification: For students with reading difficulties, consider placing them in mixed groupings or reading the text as a class first. Also, allow students to use read-write software and translators. Prior to beginning, write each question on the board and explain it to the students.

2. This article shows that Confederation was possible because many different governments recognized its advantages. Read the article, and identify why, in spite of the obvious dislike of the Confederation proposal, the scheme was eventually endorsed by all of the colonial and British governments. *Consider rephrasing the question as follows for ESL/ELL students: "Even though the colonial and British governments disagreed about Confederation, explain why it occurred."*
3. Were the provinces' interests necessary or sufficient conditions for Confederation? Why did each province join Confederation? Would it have been easy for a province to reject Confederation?
4. Who were the Founding Fathers of Confederation? What role did Sir John A. Macdonald and the other Founding Fathers play in Confederation?

## Step Four: Evidence and Perspective — Macdonald's Other Deeds

*The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.*

— L.P. HARTLEY

Historians must be very careful when drawing inferences from evidence. They must consider the reliability of sources, critically examine the evidence supporting an interpretation, and clearly explain any contradictory evidence. It is also important for historians to avoid "presentism".

With a partner, answer the following questions:

1. Read *The Canadian Encyclopedia's* entry on Sir John A. Macdonald (Type "Sir John A. Macdonald" in the search bar, and click on the first link). Create a T-chart with the headings "Political Accomplishments" and "Shortcomings". Complete this chart using information from the article.

Modification: Prior to reading, explain the terms "political accomplishments" and "shortcomings". Write an example from the T-chart on the board and review with students. For some classes, it may be best to place the students in groups and assign each group a section of the reading. Each group can then add its response to the board for everyone to copy.

2. Read Richard Gwyn's article "The Man Who Made Us" and Chris Pennington's article "Facing Sir John A. Macdonald's Legacy" in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.
3. These two authors have very different opinions of Macdonald. Summarize their views by creating a reading note for each author (see sidebar).

Modification: As an alternative to having students read both articles, you may consider giving a different article to each half of the class. Students would then pair up with someone who has read the other article to discuss the differences and complete the reading note for each author.

4. Why do these two historians disagree? Do they interpret evidence differently or rely on different sources? Do either of them ignore any evidence? Discuss.
5. Is there presentism in their work? What additional information would you need to support this claim?

### Necessary vs. Sufficient Conditions:

A **necessary condition** is something that must occur in order for another event to become possible. For example, you must hand in your essay if you want to get an A.

A **sufficient condition** guarantees that something will happen. Getting an A on every assignment is a sufficient condition for getting an A in your history class.



The Last Spike, McCord Museum.

### Presentism:

Judging historical actors, or trying to explain their actions, using our own present day standards.

### Creating a Reading Note:

Author's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Opinion (1 Sentence): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Evidence:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

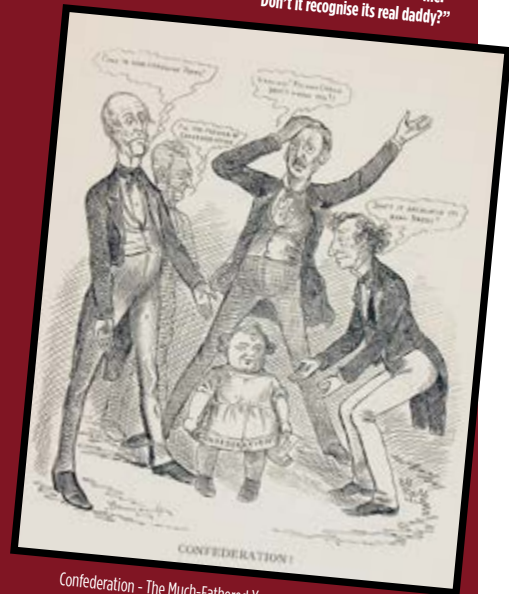
### Note for Educators:

Time permitting, encourage students to conduct additional research on the Confederation era and further analyze how scholars use evidence.



Quebec Conference, 1864, Library and Archives Canada.

“Come to your genuine poppy!”  
“I’m the Father of Confederation.”  
“Gracious! Me own cheild don’t know me!”  
“Don’t it recognise its real daddy?”



Confederation - The Much-Fathered Youngster  
John Wilson Bengough 1886, 19th century, McCord Museum.

### Note to Educators:

While costumes, props, and sets are great add-ons, communicating the story accurately and effectively should be your focus.

Activity questions in this learning tool are based on the Historical Thinking Concepts created by professor Peter Seixas. For more information visit: [www.historicalthinking.ca](http://www.historicalthinking.ca).

6. Do you find either narrative convincing? Why?
7. How do you think Sir John A. Macdonald should be remembered? Sum up your view in one sentence.
8. Share your views with the class.

## Step Five: Assessing the Macdonald and Cartier *Heritage Minutes*

1. Working in groups of four, develop criteria for evaluating a *Heritage Minute* in the following three categories: message, use of evidence, and audiovisual effectiveness.
2. As a class, make a final list of criteria for each category.
3. Use this checklist to evaluate the video you’ve chosen. Work in groups.

## Step Six: Make Your Own Video

Pick a subject for your *Heritage Minute*. You can choose a person (e.g., a Father of Confederation), key moment or event. What impact did this person or event have on Canadian history?

1. In small groups, decide what message you wish to convey. What do you want your audience to learn about your subject?
2. What moments in your subject’s life would best illustrate your message? What’s the best way to tell that story on video?
3. Plan out your *Minute* using the chart below. Know the limitations of your equipment, and plan your scenes accordingly.

Modification: Review more advanced terminology such as “convey” and “illustrate”. Consider giving students who need assistance with organization a template for a storyboard to complete first.

Key Events	Corresponding Scene	Materials Needed

### Perspective:

A specific point of view or attitude towards something.

E.g. Patrick and Carol got into a disagreement because they could not understand each other’s perspective.

### Inference:

A conclusion reached based on the evidence given.

E.g. Carrie made inferences based on the primary and secondary sources she found about Sir John A. Macdonald.

Visit our resource section at [www.StoriesofSirJohnA.ca](http://www.StoriesofSirJohnA.ca) for more tips on how to engage students with Sir John A. Macdonald and Confederation.