

Teacher's Guide

First Peoples in Canada: An Overview of Significant Events & Dates

Ca. 1610: Stadaconans at present-day Quebec City; Hochelagans at present-day Montreal; Hurons/Wendat near Georgian Bay; Petuns near present Tobermory Peninsula; Neutrals in present Niagara region; In present-day United States were from east to west south of Lakes Ontario and Erie, Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, Eries.

1701: Negotiations of peace among Huron/Algonkian alliance, Iroquois league, [representing over 30 eastern North American First Peoples] and the French ended in La grande paix de Montréal.

1760: English abolish the annual 'gift' distributions to First Peoples that had been established by the French. Reserves that had been established to missionize First Peoples during the French regime were confirmed by the English.

1763: English Proclamation partially acknowledged territorial rights of First Peoples, and in 1764 land-cession treaties began to be signed at Upper Canada (now Ontario).

1867: Constitution Act assigned to Parliament legislative jurisdiction over 'Indians and Lands reserved for the Indians.' Parliament was to continue to make treaties where needed.

1869: Canada purchases the prairies from the Hudson Bay Company where the First Peoples were in control.

1876: First Indian Act passed. Its fundamental purpose was to assimilate First Peoples who were defined as 'Status' – 'treaty Indians who were members of groups who at some time took part in an agreement with the Crown to surrender their land rights for specified benefits', plus 'registered Indians outside treaty areas' and 'non-Status Indians' who through inter-marriage had lost their legal status as 'Indians.'

1880: The Canadian prairies were now dominated by the settlers.

1884: The feast of the North-west Coast First Peoples, known as 'potlatch' was banned along with dances associated with religious rituals.

1895: 'Sun dances' (thirst dances) of the Plains First Peoples were banned because the government authorities did not consider their ceremonial endurance features acceptable.

1912: Canada produced its first Calgary Stampede, a rodeo and Wild West show in which First Peoples participated because they could handle horses well and had adapted themselves to the ranching economy. It was an Indigenous person, Tom Three Persons (Kainai), and the only Canadian that got the top awards in 1912! However, the government and tourist authorities wanted to present a history in which the West had been empty before the arrival of settlers such as the cowboys, fur traders, and the North-west Mounted Police.

1914: Amendments to the Indian Act made any First Person participation in dances, rodeos, and public exhibitions off reserves in the Western provinces and territories subject to the approval of local Indian agents of the Canadian government.

1920: Government declared 'compulsory enfranchisement' when a First Person relinquished his Indian status and attended school to age 15. More than ever, children were taken from their communities and families at age six or earlier and placed hundreds of kilometres away in residential schools. There they were not allowed to speak 'Indian' and of course had no opportunity to hear and learn their traditional rituals including music and dance.

1939–45: More First Peoples enlisted for service during the Second World War proportionately than any other segment of Canadian population even though they were not considered citizens.

1951: Indian Act allowed a measure of self-control in managing reserve lands and band funds. Anti-potlatch and anti-dance measures were quietly shelved.

1960: First Peoples were granted suffrage by the Canadian government without compromising their special status.

1960s Scoop: As the Canadian government began to close compulsory residential schools in the 1950s and 1960s, Indigenous children were taken and placed in foster homes or adopted, almost exclusively by non-Indigenous families. This “scooping up” persisted into the 1980s. The term, “Sixties Scoop,” was coined by Patrick Johnson in his 1983 report, “Native Children and the Child Welfare System.”

1969: National Indian Council sets up committee to study Indian Act.

1970: Blue Quills School, Alberta, becomes first school controlled by an Amerindian band.

1970s: The term, First Nations, gradually becomes more common as Indigenous leaders counteract the Government's rhetoric of only two founding peoples, French and British.

1996: Last federal residential school, Gordon Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan, closed.

2008: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, organized by the parties of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, had its official establishment on 2 June 2008. It completed hearings from persons who had attended residential schools in December 2015.

Recommended Sources:

- Olive Patricia Dickason's *Canada's First Nations*. 1992. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

Thomas J. Courchene's *Indigenous Nationals, Canadian Citizens: From First Contact to Canada 150 and Beyond*. 2018. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.