



Canada at War
1914-1919 | 1939-1945

First World War

///Education Guide///



Table of Contents

Message to Teachers	2
Introduction	2
First World War Timeline	3-4
On the Western Front	5-7
Home Front	7-9
Opposition to the War	9
Canada's Conscription Controversy	10-11
The Ethical Dimension: The Case of "Enemy Aliens"	11
Legacy & Consequences	12

///Message to Teachers///

To mark the centenary of the First World War, [Historica Canada](#), the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship, has created this educational guide to assist teachers and students in learning about Canada's involvement in this global conflict.

Developed in line with the historical thinking concepts created by the [Historical Thinking Project](#), this guide complements Canadian middle-school and high-school curricula. It invites students to deepen their understanding of the First World War through primary- and secondary-source research and examination, engaging discussion questions and group activities.

This guide was produced with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Further educational activities and resources are available on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#). We hope the guide will assist you in teaching this important period of Canadian history in your social studies or history classroom.

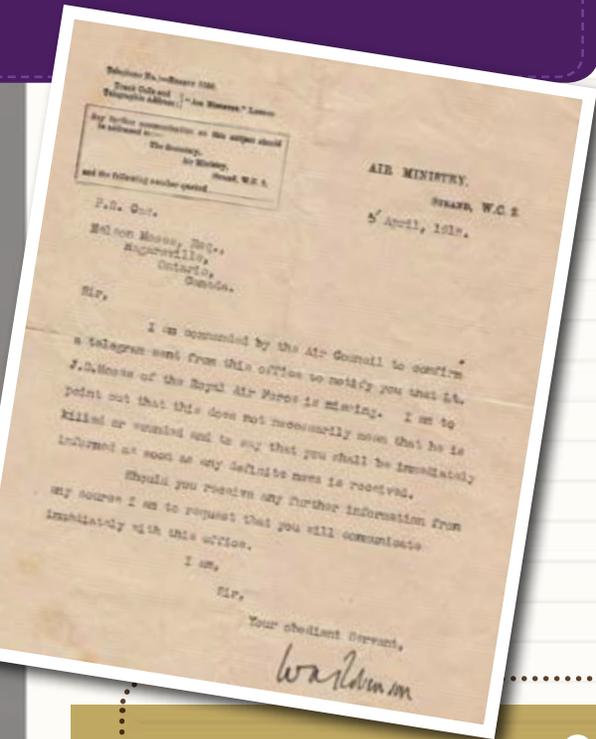
///Introduction///

The First World War, often called "the Great War," was a global conflict that divided many of the world's nations into two opposing camps, called the Allies (originally the Triple Entente) and the Central Powers. From 1914 through the end of hostilities in 1918, more countries joined the conflict out of necessity or opportunism, including Japan, the United States and the Ottoman Empire.

The war had disastrous consequences for many Canadian individuals, families and communities: approximately 60,000 Canadian lives were lost overseas and 170,000 were wounded. These staggering losses, in addition to a substantial industrial and agricultural contribution to the war effort, led Canada's leaders to strive for greater decision-making powers in the postwar period. Accordingly, the First World War led the country towards greater independence from Britain.

At home, wartime experiences varied greatly. Millions of Canadians supported the soldiers overseas, raising money for their families, supporting the war effort through purchasing war bonds, working in munitions factories and farming the fields to provide food for the armies. Some employers and their employees prospered due to increased manufacturing and nearly full employment during the war. At the same time, relatives of soldiers lived in fear of receiving news that a loved one had been killed. The study of Canada's experiences during the First World War involves multiple histories and perspectives that can be remembered, explored and understood in their diversity.

◀ Missing-in-action telegraph (courtesy John Moses).



Online Resources

The following resources contain additional information about Canada's involvement in the First World War and are referenced throughout this guide.

Canada at War (1914-1919 | 1939-1945)
Canada1914-1945.ca

The Historical Thinking Project
historicalthinking.ca

The Canadian Encyclopedia – First World War Collection
TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca/en/collection/first-world-war

The Canadian War Museum — Canada and the First World War
warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar

The Memory Project – An archive of first-hand accounts and photographs of veterans of the First World War
thememoryproject.com/stories/WWI

Library and Archives Canada — Oral Histories of the First World War
collectionscanada.gc.ca/first-world-war/interviews/index-e.html

FIRST WORLD WAR TIMELINE

28 June 1914

Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie are assassinated by a Serbian nationalist, setting in motion a chain of decisions by European governments that leads to war.

Margaret MacDonald at her office in London (courtesy St. Francis Xavier University Archives/Macdonald Family fonds, MG 78).



22 August 1914

The Canadian Parliament passes the *War Measures Act*, which compromises democratic rights in Canada by allowing the government to censor speech and lock up or deport those it deems to be obstructing the war effort.

19 September 1914

Nova Scotian nurse Margaret MacDonald volunteers for overseas service and begins enlisting others to serve in Europe. She becomes the first woman in the British Empire to achieve the rank of major.

November 1915

The Canadian government launches what will later be called the “Victory Loan” program. It allows citizens and companies to purchase government bonds to help finance the war.

The interior of an Australian advanced dressing station on the Menin Road during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), 20 September 1917 (courtesy Imperial War Museum/ E(AUS) 715).



June 1916

Canadian soldier Percy Graves suffers from “shell shock” caused by the horrors at the front. Due to a lack of understanding of the condition, some victims are subjected to treatments such as electrocution. Today, this mental disorder is known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

1914

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1915

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1916

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG

4 August 1914

After Britain’s ultimatum to Germany to withdraw its army from Belgium expires at midnight on the third, the British government declares war on Germany the next day. As dominions of the British Empire, Canada and Newfoundland are also at war.

18 August 1914

The first internment camp for “enemy aliens,” meaning people residing in Canada who were born in enemy countries, opens at Fort Henry, Ontario.

19–23 August 1914

Canadians, a large proportion of them British-born, show enthusiasm for the war and thousands of men from across the country enlist. Public celebrations are held in many towns and cities.



14 October 1914

The first contingent of 31,000 Canadian soldiers arrives in Plymouth, England, after a 10-day voyage across the Atlantic. The troops spend the winter months undergoing military training.

Crowd in Toronto waiting to join the army, 1 September 1915 (courtesy Corbis/ HU031336).



Canadian soldier with mustard gas burns, France, c 1916–18 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-080027).

22 April 1915

German soldiers release poisonous chlorine gas against the Canadian lines during the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium in spite of some opposition to its use. Soldiers who breathe in the gas have their lungs painfully burned and many choke to death due to a buildup of fluid.

1 July 1916

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Newfoundland Regiment is ordered to attack at Beaumont-Hamel, France. Due to tactical errors, most of the men are mowed down by machine-gun fire. At roll call the following day, 68 men had survived.

The following table summarizes the original nations and governments that instigated the conflict in 1914:

ALLIES (TRIPLE ENTENTE)	CENTRAL POWERS
France United Kingdom (including Canada & Newfoundland) Russian Empire	German Empire Austria-Hungary

TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

15 September 1916

As part of the Somme offensive, Canadian soldiers capture the French town of Courselette, taking many German prisoners. Some soldiers are commanded to take no prisoners and kill captured German soldiers.

1916

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC



5 July 1916

Due to activism from men like J.R.B. Whitney, the military forms the No. 2 Construction Battalion for Black soldiers. This segregated unit provides support service to other Canadian soldiers in Europe throughout the war.

◀ Soldiers from the No. 2 Construction Battalion waiting to load Canadian Corps tramways with ammunition, July 1918 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19930012-397).

9–12 April 1917

Canadian soldiers, attacking as part of the Canadian Corps, capture the German-held fortress of Vimy Ridge, France. The victory becomes a symbol of the sacrifice and daring of Canadian soldiers.

1917

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

November 1916

Canadian soldiers near Vimy hear SOS calls from German soldiers trapped underneath the Canadian trenches while digging a tunnel to place an explosive mine. Canadian soldiers work for two days to dig out the trapped Germans, yet never reach them.

29 August 1917

The government passes the Military Service Act, which makes male citizens of Canada between the ages of 20 and 45 subject to conscription or mandatory military service.

◀ Francis Pegahmagabow (courtesy Mathers Museum of World Cultures, Indiana University).

26 October 1917

The Canadian Corps attacks at Passchendaele ridge near Ypres, which they capture by mid-November, incurring 15,600 casualties.

6–7 November 1917

Cpl. Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa person from Wasauksing (Parry Island), wins his first Military Medal for bravery at Passchendaele. Pegahmagabow will become Canada's most decorated Aboriginal war veteran.

1918

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

September 1917

Activist Helen Jury Armstrong opposes the government's decision to imprison "enemy aliens" and argues for better treatment of the wives and children of interned men.

20 September 1917

The Conservative government of Sir Robert Borden passes the Wartime Elections Act, which permits some women to vote in federal elections and removes this same right from many citizens labelled "enemy aliens."

8 August 1918

The Canadian Army begins an assault on Amiens, France, marking the start of "Canada's Hundred Days," a series of military offensives against the German army in the final months of the war that lead to the armistice on 11 November 1918.

1 April 1918

Anti-conscription rioting in Québec City ends on 1 April when Canadian troops operating under the War Measures Act open fire on protestors, killing four.

January 1919

The federal government passes the Soldier Settlement Act, which provides returning veterans with free land to farm in the Canadian West and \$2,500 in interest-free loans. Some of the land is questionably acquired from First Nations reserves, and First Nations veterans are not entitled to veterans' benefits.

11 November 1918

An armistice is signed between France, Britain and Germany, which puts an end to fighting on the Western Front. Spontaneous celebrations take place throughout Canada to mark the war's end.

▶ Armistice Day at Bay and King Streets, Toronto, 1918 (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/Fonds 1244, Item 891D).

January 1919

Canada attends the Paris Peace Conference as part of the British Empire delegation. The resulting Treaty of Versailles launches the League of Nations, which Canada will join as a charter member in 1920.

1919

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

May–June 1919

Many demobilized servicemen join striking workers in a general strike in Winnipeg demanding union rights, higher wages and better working conditions.



TIMELINE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was the outbreak of the First World War inevitable?
2. Many important people and events related to the First World War are not included in the timeline. Identify two and provide an argument for their inclusion.
3. If your family lived in Canada during the war, consider how their experiences of the events on this timeline have shaped who you are today. Partner with a classmate whose family was not in Canada during the First World War and share your families' different First World War experiences.

/// On the Western Front ///

“When the war broke out – you could not believe it unless you were there. The country went mad! People were singing on the streets and roads.”

—REMEMBRANCE OF BERT REMINGTON, CANADIAN SOLDIER

CANADIAN ENLISTMENT: EIGHT QUICK QUESTIONS

How did Canada react to the outbreak of war and why did Canadian men and women enlist and volunteer to serve overseas?

These are just a few of the questions that will be answered by reading an online article on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* on **soldier enlistment** and an online article from the Canadian War Museum on **volunteer nurses**.

Answer the questions below to get a basic understanding of the situation soldiers and nurses faced before heading to the battlefield.

1. Why did men enlist? Why did women enlist?
2. How much were soldiers paid? Were nurses paid for their services?
3. For what reasons might a potential male recruit be denied serving in the army?
4. What was the average age of a soldier or nurse?
5. Give two specific details about the enlistment of First Nations peoples.
6. How ethnically diverse was enlistment in the First World War?
7. What percentage of soldiers were from each of the following areas of Canada: the West, Ontario, Québec and the East?
8. Why did fewer soldiers from Québec enlist?

Inspector William M. Graham with Cree soldiers and their friends and families, posed before bidding farewell and parting for the First World War, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1914 (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-5462-23).



DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why do you think many Canadians showed so much public enthusiasm to join the war effort in 1914?

CANADA IN BATTLE

“This life is sure hell. I don’t know the minute I may get shot. Sometimes the bullets are so thick that it is just like a big rainstorm, and while I am writing this the shrapnel is exploding over heads every minute, and pieces of steel and iron are falling all around us.”

—PRIVATE HERBERT DURAND IN A 1915 LETTER FROM THE FRONT

Canadian soldiers engaged in battle along the Western Front in France and Belgium against soldiers from Germany and Austria-Hungary. Canadian soldiers also fought in the Middle East and southeast Europe against soldiers from the Ottoman Empire. On the Western Front, support units worked in the rear to supply the front-line troops, and doctors and nurses cared for and saved the lives of the injured. What happened in these battles and what made them significant?

◀ Valcartier camp: Grenadier Guards march off to target practice, 1914 (courtesy Library of Congress/LC-DIG-ggbain-17228).



CANADA IN BATTLE (CONTINUED)

Fate of German machine gunner, Canal du Nord, east of Arras, France, October 1918 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/PA-003202). ▼

Tank advancing with infantry at Vimy, April 1917 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19940001-193). ▶



The Canadian Encyclopedia has a series of informative articles about Canadian participation in these costly battles in its First World War collection. Refer to the *Encyclopedia* to read about what happened and make a chart like the one below to complete for your notes.

BATTLE	KEY DETAILS (WHERE, WHEN, WHAT HAPPENED)	WHY IS THE BATTLE HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT?	PRIMARY SOURCE/ IMAGE
Ypres			Note: For this section, use a website noted below to help you find a photograph or quotation about the battle.
Somme			
Vimy Ridge			
Passchendaele			
Canada's Hundred Days			



◀ Trench foot, France, 1917 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/PA-149311).

ONLINE SOURCES TO CHECK OUT

[The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[The Canadian War Museum — Canada and the First World War](#)

[The Memory Project](#)

[Library and Archives Canada — Oral Histories of the First World War](#)

For additional information on historical significance, visit the [Historical Thinking Project](#).

In groups of four or five, complete the chart and discuss the following questions:

1. Which battle was most significant for Canada? What criteria make a battle “significant”?
2. How did the experiences of a front-line nurse compare to those of a soldier?
3. If you had to write a headline to capture the essence of each battle, what would your headline be?

For each question, be sure to have reasons drawn from your research to help defend your point of view.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Find a photo on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* that shows the particular horrors experienced by service people during the First World War and explain your choice.

NOTE TO STUDENTS

There are many sources available on the Internet, but as a good researcher you will want to make sure you are consulting authoritative websites. See “How to Find a Reliable Online Source” on *The Canadian Encyclopedia’s* Learning Centre.

Canadian soldier writing a letter, August 1916
(courtesy Canadian War Museum /19920044-504). ▼



ACTIVITY: WRITING A LETTER HOME

Conduct some research about what life might have been like on the front lines of the battles noted in the chart. Consider the various individuals who experienced these battles, including nursing sisters, soldiers with family members at home, Aboriginal soldiers, French Canadian soldiers, underage soldiers, wounded soldiers and so on. Using the information you find, write a letter home from the perspective of one person on this list, describing his or her experiences.

In your letter, include at least five specific pieces of information related to the First World War, a battle and the individual’s experiences and emotions.

A detailed look at Canadian soldiers’ experiences in the Great War, including life in the trenches, is available online on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and the *Canadian War Museum* websites.

NURSING SISTERS

“This is the most interesting and by far the most worthwhile work I have yet done.”

—NURSING SISTER S.M. HOERNER IN A 1915 LETTER

Please view the *Heritage Minute* about Canada’s nursing sisters and answer the questions below. Questions can be answered orally or in writing.

Canadian, age 17, in a Canadian casualty clearing station, wounded 15 minutes before the armistice, November 1918 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19930065-404).



QUESTIONS

1. What role did primary sources play in the *Minute*?
2. What challenges were faced by nurses serving in the First World War?
3. This *Minute* takes place in 1918. But if you did not know this, what are some clues in the clip indicating that it takes place during the First World War?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Watch and listen to the *Heritage Minute* and describe what happens. When you hear the following words or terms, put a check mark beside them: mangled, blinded, suffering, air raid, nurses, bravery, Military Medal, killed in action. Look them up later and record a definition.

/// Home Front ///

“It seems so strange to be in a country that is not at war! I did not realize until I came here [to the United States] how deeply Canada is at war, how normal a condition war has come to be with us. It seems strange to go out — on the street or to some public place — and see no khaki uniforms, no posters of appeal for recruits, no bulletin boards or war dispatches.”

—LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY IN A DIARY ENTRY WHILE VISITING THE UNITED STATES IN 1915

The First World War had a major impact on all Canadians at home. Some women went to work in factories, children adjusted to their fathers’ absence and the war became a part of everyday life. When we talk about the “home front,” we are referring to the experiences of people in Canada during the war years and how the war impacted their lives, directly or indirectly.

▲
Airplane assembly, 1916 (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/ Fonds 1244, Item 4554).



WOMEN ON THE HOME FRONT

While more than 2,500 women served overseas as nurses, on the home front many women desired and were encouraged to serve the war effort in a variety of important ways, including taking on jobs previously done by men. During the war years, approximately one in eight war workers in Canada was a woman. In addition, many politically active women saw new opportunities to express their beliefs and fight for greater recognition and rights.

INVESTIGATION

Conduct some research to find out about women's experiences and contributions to the war on the home front and their political activism concerning issues such as voting rights and the prohibition of alcohol. Begin your research on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* by reading an article about the home front.

Here is a list of possible topics for your research:

- Labour activists
- Farmerettes (female farm workers)
- Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE)
- Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD)
- Suffragists and voting rights
- Prohibition (include a look at the Woman's Christian Temperance Union)
- Workers in munitions factories and other manufacturing industries

Choose one or two of these topics, write a brief explanation of what women did and indicate what it tells us about Canada during the period of the war.



Emmeline Pankhurst and members of the Men's and Women's Canadian Clubs in front of Palliser Hotel, Calgary, Alberta (courtesy Glenbow Museum/NA-1447-20).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Record a definition for each of the terms noted above.

FURTHER ACTIVITY

Examine the painting *Women Operators* by George Reid. What does it reveal about women and the war? Refer to three specific things in the painting to support your answer.

George Reid, *Women Operators*, 1919 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19710261-0551).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think women's work and service was perceived and recognized by many Canadians during the First World War?
2. How did life change for Canadian women during the war years? How did it stay the same?
Refer to the [Historical Thinking Project](#) to read more about the concept of continuity and change.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

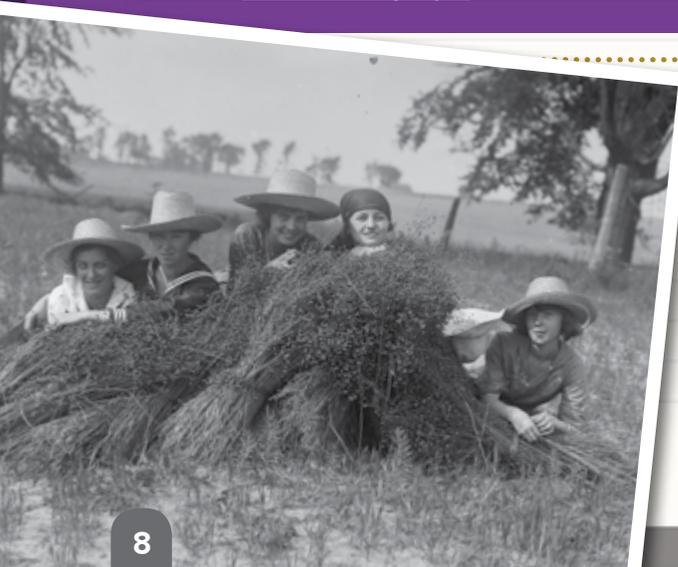
Describe the scene in this painting. Make a list of vocabulary you know from the First World War that applies to the painting.

Farmerettes with harvested flax, 1917–18 (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/ Fonds 1244, Item 640A).

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary sources, such as diaries, letters and photographs, help historians understand the past. For something to be called a primary source, it has to have been produced during the time in question. On the other hand, secondary sources, such as a textbook, are interpretations of the past that draw their evidence from primary sources.

During the First World War, a large number of **propaganda** posters were made to promote enthusiasm for the war. These are considered primary sources about the First World War. Studying them is a way to make an interpretation about the past.



WHAT IS PROPAGANDA?

Propaganda is an organized effort by governments, media or other organizations to influence the thinking and actions of citizens, particularly during wartime. The use of posters with powerful images and slogans that appealed to the emotions was a very common and visually effective method of delivering messages during the First World War, a time when there was no radio or television to communicate ideas to people.



Poster: "Victory Bonds will help stop this," 1918 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19850475-034).



Poster: "Pave the way to Victory. Buy Victory Bonds," 1918 (courtesy Archives of Ontario/C 233-2-1-0-26).

Take a look at the posters included below and, with two or three classmates, consider the following for each one:

1. What is the message of the poster?
2. Who is the intended audience for the poster?
3. Is the poster trying to evoke any particular emotion to influence the viewer?

After looking at all of the posters, decide which one you think is the most effective and explain your choice.



Postcard: "'Kultur' and Nurse Cavell" (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19710240-010).

Poster: "The Happy Man Today" (courtesy Library of Congress/LC-USZC4-12397).



Poster: "Once a German — Always a German!" (courtesy Library of Congress/LC-USZC4-11170).



Poster: "The Empire Needs Men!" (courtesy Library of Congress/LC-USZC4-10913).

FURTHER READING

For further background reading on the home front, visit *The Canadian Encyclopedia's* First World War collection.

/// Opposition to the War ///

"Some of my friends were pacifists and resented Canada's participation in a war of which we knew so little."

—NELLIE McCLUNG RECALLING THE WAR IN HER 1945 MEMOIR

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND PACIFISTS

During the course of the war, small numbers of people publicly expressed their opposition to Canada's participation in the war. "Pacifists" were opposed to all war and violence and "conscientious objectors" were opposed to war for deeply held personal or religious convictions. They faced great challenges and personal threats as they advocated positions that went against public opinion of the day.

Read about pacifism in Canada on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.



Fred Dixon, Manitoba MLA and pacifist, c 1921 (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/N21098).



Reverend James Shaver Woodsworth, pacifist and minister, 1874–1942 (courtesy Glenbow Museum/NA-1486-1).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

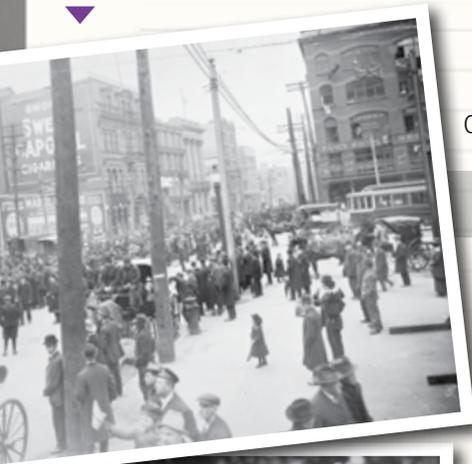
1. Conduct some research about pacifists and conscientious objectors. Identify two or three groups or individuals who held antiwar beliefs and describe some of their objections to war. Begin your research with the following:
 - J.S. Woodsworth
 - Fred Dixon
 - Richard Rigg
 - Mennonites
 - The Seventh-day Adventists
 - The Society of Friends (Quakers)
2. What motivated a pacifist or conscientious objector to stand up for his or her beliefs when most of society was opposed to those views?
3. Did pacifists or conscientious objectors face consequences for standing up for their beliefs during the war?

///Canada's Conscription Controversy///

“But I return to Canada impressed at once with the extreme gravity of the situation, and with a sense of responsibility for our further effort at the most critical period of the war. It is apparent to me that the voluntary system will not yield further substantial results.”

—PRIME MINISTER SIR ROBERT BORDEN IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, MAY 1917

Anti-conscription parade in Montréal, Québec, 24 May 1917 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-006859).



“All Canadians who want logically and effectively to oppose conscription ought to have the courage to say and repeat everywhere, ‘No conscription, no enlistments: Canada has done enough.’”

—HENRI BOURASSA IN *LE DEVOIR*, 1917

One of the greatest political wartime controversies in Canada was the debate about compulsory military service, or conscription.

WHAT IS CONSCRIPTION? Conscription is the mandatory enlistment of citizens into the military.

The number of casualties grew as the war continued and Canada faced a shortage of soldiers. By 1917, the government of Robert Borden favoured the idea of forcing people to enlist to make up for a shortage of soldiers. French Canadians opposed conscription, believing that the war did not threaten Canada. Leaders like Henri Bourassa in Québec further argued that Canada had already contributed enough to the war effort. Among English-speaking Canadians, many farmers, trade union leaders and pacifists also opposed mandatory enlistment. In addition, many Aboriginal peoples protested conscription as a violation of their treaties, and because they did not have the right to vote in federal elections.

DEBATE

Historians have debated Prime Minister Robert Borden's use of conscription since it became an issue in 1917. Confronted with 30,000 war dead, Canadians were now facing the prospect of forced military service, which, to many, contradicted the reason Canada was fighting the war in the first place — to preserve liberal ideals about the freedom to choose.

Now it is your turn to recreate this debate. Was conscription the right choice? Some people feel Borden's decision to force citizens to enlist was wrong; others believe conscription was his only option to help end the war.

Your class should be divided into teams. One team will argue for the resolution and one will argue against it.

Each debater should aim to speak for at least one minute. Those arguing in favour of the resolution, usually referred to as “the Government,” will find evidence to support the resolution. Students arguing against the resolution, usually referred to as “the Opposition,” will look for evidence that supports opposition to conscription.

Conduct some research about the historical context and the reasons for the strong opinions on both sides of the debate. You should have one good historical example to go with each point you make. Think about quoting from your sources to give added weight to your debate speech.

Debate Resolution:

“Be it resolved that Prime Minister Robert Borden was correct to bring in conscription during the First World War.”

Henri Bourassa (courtesy Library of Congress/LC-DIG-ggbain-06205).





DEBATE PREPARATION

Read about conscription and related issues on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. A few useful terms and names to help your research include: *Military Service Act*, Henri Bourassa, Wilfrid Laurier, Robert Borden and Union Government.

ASSESSING WARTIME LEADERSHIP: ROBERT BORDEN

“One of the fundamental questions raised in assessing Borden’s wartime leadership pertains to how far democratic nations are willing to go in the pursuit of victory.”

—TIM COOK, HISTORIAN, IN *WARLORDS: BORDEN, MACKENZIE KING AND CANADA’S WORLD WARS*

DISCUSSION

Robert Borden, as the prime minister of Canada during the Great War, earned criticism for some of his decisions. Others praised him for his leadership during a difficult time. Borden is pictured on Canada’s hundred-dollar bill. As a class, you might discuss this question: should he be? If not Borden, what First World War personality would you replace him with?

///The Ethical Dimension: The Case of “Enemy Aliens”///

“A century ago, as a result of fear generated by the onset of the First World War, thousands of new immigrants of European origin were interned during the First World War even though there was no proof that they posed a threat to Canada.”

—PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER, 22 AUGUST 2014

WHAT IS INTERNMENT?

Internment refers to the forced detention or confinement of a person in a time of war.

Historians of the First World War continue to debate subject of the **internment** of “enemy aliens.” The federal government labelled Canadian residents who were citizens of states with which Canada was at war “enemy aliens” and interned more than 8,000 people in a network of 19 camps across the country. Those interned were people of Ukrainian descent (forming the majority of internees), as well as people of German, Turkish, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian origin. Once interned, prisoners faced hunger and forced labour.

In 2005, the federal government set up a \$25-million education fund, part of which was allotted to educating Canadians about the unjust internment of Ukrainian Canadians during the First World War and to provide monies for commemoration, such as erecting historical plaques.



German prisoners of war in CNE compound, Toronto, 1914–16 (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/Fonds 1244, Item 867A).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When studying history, it is important to consider historical context. This involves considering what society and attitudes were like in the past. When trying to understand people’s motivations or beliefs, historians and students of history must balance this awareness of past beliefs while also working to avoid excusing their actions as resulting solely from their historical context.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss the following questions in small groups and meet again as a class to share your thoughts.

1. Why did the Borden government act to intern “enemy aliens”? Taking these factors into account, was the federal government justified in its internment of people deemed a threat to Canada during the war?
2. Do you think there is a responsibility for governments today to apologize or compensate individuals and communities for injustices committed in the past? Consider the consequences of a government's choice to apologize or not to apologize.
3. Does understanding an episode from the past such as the internment of “enemy aliens” help us to understand any current issues?



Prisoners working near internment camp, Castle Mountain, Alberta, 1915 (courtesy Glenbow Museum/NA-1870-7).

/// Legacy & Consequences ///

IDENTITY

“In those few minutes, I witnessed the birth of a nation.”

—BRIGADIER GENERAL ALEXANDER ROSS, COMMANDER OF THE 28TH BATTALION, REFERRING TO THE CANADIAN MILITARY VICTORY AT THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE.

On 11 November 1918, the First World War came to an end, leaving a lasting impact on Canada and the world. Canada's significant contributions to the war effort, both in battle and at home — for example, the victory at the [Battle of Vimy Ridge](#), as referenced in the above quote by Brigadier General Alexander Ross — are sometimes framed by historians as defining moments leading to a new sense of distinct national pride and identity.

Was the First World War the moment that gave Canada its identity? What was the significance of the millions of lives lost? In the century following the start of the war, students and historians continue to debate the causes, consequences and impact of the First World War in an effort to answer these questions.

ACTIVITY: OPINION PARAGRAPH

In this exercise, answer one of the following questions in a short paragraph.

The paragraph will need the following:

- A clear topic sentence that states your opinion in answer to the question
- Two examples drawn from your understanding of the First World War to support your opinion
- A strong concluding sentence that wraps up your point

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

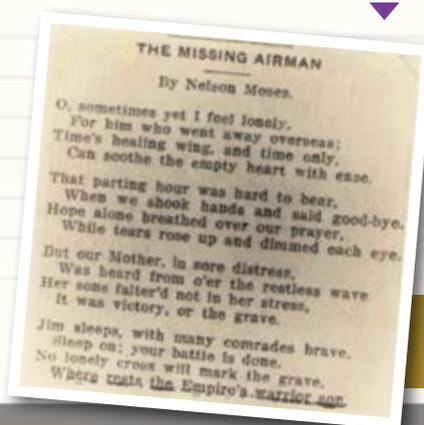
In addition to a significant impact on Canada as a nation, the war greatly affected individual Canadians, particularly through the emotional loss felt by the families and communities of those killed overseas. Canadians continue to commemorate this loss through annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, held on 11 November each year. Coins, postage stamps, books, poetry and archives have also been created to remember Canada's participation in the war.

Conduct some research about the war's consequences in the following additional areas of Canadian society:

- Canada's economy
- The labour movement
- Canada's politics
- Returning soldiers and nurses

As a group, create a chart that lists the main impacts of the war on each of these subjects or groups of people, and decide if the war's impact on them was negative, positive or perhaps both.

Lieutenant James Moses of the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory was reported missing on 1 April 1918 while serving with the Royal Air Force. His father Nelson wrote this poem after receiving the missing-in-action telegram (courtesy John Moses).



OPINION PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that the war was a turning point in the development of Canadian national identity? Why or why not?
2. Given the accomplishments as well as the costs of the war, both at home and overseas, was the war worth it for Canada?

Note: Consider the role that governments, schools, organizations, museums, historians and students of history play in writing about and commemorating the past. What stories do they choose to tell? How does that shape our understanding of Canada's history?

“I USED TO THINK/NOW I THINK”

As a way of reflecting upon what you have learned about the First World War and Canada's experience, engage in an “I used to think/now I think” exercise.

What did you previously think about Canada and its experiences at war? What do you think now? Write down a list of thoughts that show how your thinking about the war has changed. Once you have reflected, share your thinking with classmates in groups of four.

For additional resources and activities related to Canada's participation in the First World War, visit Canada1914-1945.ca.