

# Sir Wilfrid Laurier

## EDUCATION GUIDE



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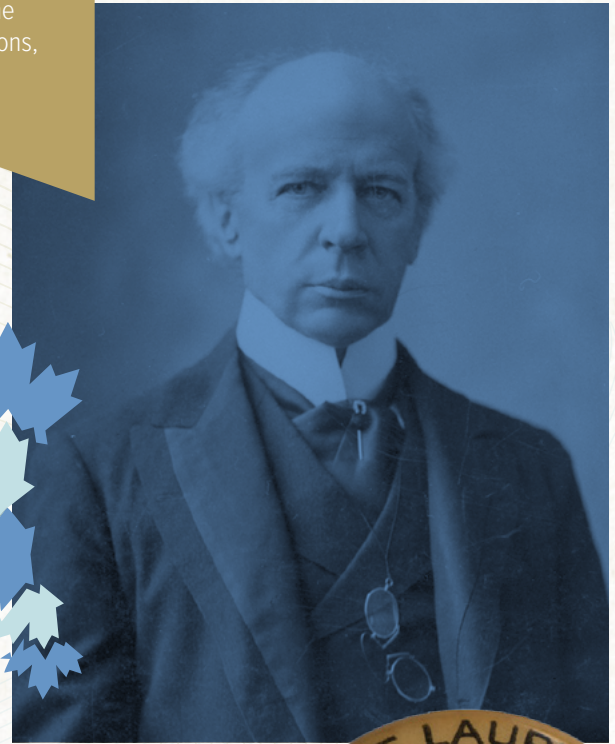
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## NOTE TO EDUCATORS:

Accommodations for Special Education, ELL and ESL students are included under the appropriate sections, and identified as “modifications.”

Cover Caption:  
Canada in 1906 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Cartographic Materials). Wilfrid Laurier in 1874, his first year as a Member of Parliament (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/ William James Topley/PA-026430). Laurier in 1906 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/William James Topley/C-001971).

Laurier in 1906  
(courtesy Library and Archives Canada/  
William James Topley/C-001971).



## Message to Teachers

To mark the 175th birthday of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Historica Canada has created this Education Guide on Canadian history during Laurier's life and the importance of his legacy.

Using the concepts created by Dr. Peter Seixas and the Historical Thinking Project, this Guide complements Canadian middle-school and high-school curricula. It invites students to deepen their understanding of Laurier's role in Canada's evolution, and how his politics shaped Canada's future, through primary- and secondary-source research and analysis, engaging discussion questions and group activities. The Guide asks students to look at Canada's evolving identity by examining the tensions between national unity and cultural conflict, international affairs and imperialism, and national expansion and immigration.

This Guide was produced with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Historica Canada is the largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship. Additional free, bilingual educational activities and resources are available on *The Canadian Encyclopedia (TCE)*. A comprehensive **Timeline** of Laurier's life is available for download through the **Laurier Collection**. We hope the Guide will help you teach this important period in Canadian history.



Vive Laurier! pin, ca. 1896  
(courtesy Library and Archives Canada/R1300-1012).

## Online Resources

Recommended articles and resources can be accessed by visiting the **Wilfrid Laurier Collection** at [LaurierCollection.ca](http://LaurierCollection.ca). The articles, timelines and exhibits featured in the Guide (**in bold**) are located in the Collection. You can also search for articles by title by visiting *The Canadian Encyclopedia* at [TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca](http://TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca).

Several activities in this Guide have accompanying worksheets, located in the **Worksheets Package**, which can be downloaded from the **Laurier Collection**.

The following resources contain additional information about Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Canada during his era, and are referenced throughout this Guide:

• [The Wilfrid Laurier Collection](http://LaurierCollection.ca) (Access **articles**, the **Timeline**, the **Education Guide** and the **Worksheets Package** online)  
[LaurierCollection.ca](http://LaurierCollection.ca)

• [The Heritage Minutes](http://historicacanada.ca/heritageminutes)  
[historicacanada.ca/heritageminutes](http://historicacanada.ca/heritageminutes)

• [The Historica Canada Education Portal](http://education.historicacanada.ca)  
[education.historicacanada.ca](http://education.historicacanada.ca)

• [The Historical Thinking Project](http://historicalthinking.ca)  
[historicalthinking.ca](http://historicalthinking.ca)

• [The Canadian Council for Refugees: Immigration History](http://ccrweb.ca/en/hundred-years-immigration-canada-1900-1999)  
[ccrweb.ca/en/hundred-years-immigration-canada-1900-1999](http://ccrweb.ca/en/hundred-years-immigration-canada-1900-1999)

• [Dictionary of Canadian Biography](http://www.biographi.ca)  
[www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca)



## Introduction: Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919)

Historical figures and events are commemorated in many ways: statues, plaques, museums, on bank notes and stamps, buildings and parks named in their honour, and national days. Wilfrid Laurier, Canada's prime minister from 1896 to 1911, can lay claim to all of these: there is a statue of Laurier on Parliament Hill in Ottawa (unveiled in 1927), his childhood home has been declared a national historic site, his face adorns the \$5 bill, Sir Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario is named after him, and his birthday, 20 November, is celebrated as "Laurier Day" by an Act of Parliament.

Laurier's influence is felt even today. In 2015, on the night of his election victory, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked Laurier's "Sunny Ways" speech, reviving Laurier's optimistic approach to politics more than a century later. In both leadership and personality, Laurier's charm, flair and silver tongue still draw praise and admiration.

So what is it that makes the seventh prime minister of Canada worth remembering?

Laurier's importance as Canada's first French-Canadian prime minister cannot be overestimated. Laurier built on Sir John A. Macdonald's politics of compromise and balance, leading Canada with confidence into the 20th century. Laurier's significance is also marked by his longevity: his career in politics spanned nearly 50 years, bridging the 19th and 20th centuries. Elected to the Québec Legislative Assembly in 1871, he switched to federal politics three years later and remained a Member of Parliament until his death in 1919. Prime minister from 1896 to 1911, Laurier won four back-to-back elections.

Laurier was closely involved with a number of events that shaped the future of the country: Canada's relations with Britain and the United States were redefined; the population exploded as immigration boomed in the West, changing the cultural face of the nation; Yukon, Alberta and Saskatchewan joined Confederation; the Grand Trunk Pacific expanded the national railway network; and wheat production soared in Canada.

The Laurier years brimmed with confidence and promise, and the Prime Minister's dignified and dashing presence both at home and abroad personified the young nation's hopes for a bright future.

Often caught between the extreme viewpoints of English and French, Protestant and Catholic, Laurier never gave up on the dream of a united Canada. He always appealed to the population's better nature. He defended Louis Riel and the Métis when few others would. Even his opponents respected — if not loved — him for his eloquence, character and optimistic efforts to balance French and English interests.



▲ Statue of Laurier on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, ON (Dreamstime.com/Gary Blakeley/1186849).



Shortly before his death, Laurier offered words of advice to young people: "I shall remind you that already many problems rise before you: problems of race division, problems of creed differences, problems of economic conflict, problems of national duty and national aspiration." He believed in a positive outlook: "Let me tell you that for the solution of these problems you have a safe guide, an unfailing light, if you remember that faith is better than doubt and love is better than hate."

Like any prime minister, Laurier was not perfect. But that advice from the early 20th century is still worth considering today.

This Guide asks you to examine Sir Wilfrid Laurier's role in the development of Canada, and to consider what his legacy means today. In many ways, we interpret history through a present-day lens. While you investigate Laurier's life and legacy, think about how your own experience and perspective might shape your interpretation of history.

◀ Laurier's face on the five-dollar bill (Dreamstime.com/Ken Pilon/1980742).



# The Age of Laurier

To better understand Sir Wilfrid Laurier, we need to examine what Canada was like during his time as prime minister.

## HISTORY BY THE NUMBERS: Creating an Infographic

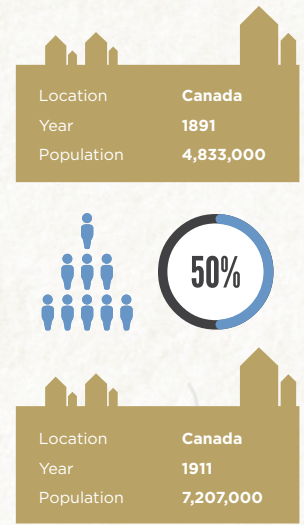
History is full of statistics about important events and changes, but the data are only valuable if they tell a meaningful story. Infographics are a great way to tell a story with numbers. During Laurier's 15 years as prime minister, Canada's population, political boundaries, transportation networks and resource production all changed.

Use the information below to think of a story you might tell. For example, how could you represent the changes in Canada's population? Working on a computer or by hand, create an infographic telling the story of one of the major changes that took place during the period.

- Divide into groups of three or four students, and select one of the five topics outlined below.
- Read articles in the **Laurier Collection** related to your chosen topic.

1. Create an infographic that tells a story. Include numbers, dates, symbols, or maps — anything that brings your story to life.
2. Write a short answer to the question(s) associated with your topic.
3. Present your infographic to the class, explaining what you have chosen to show, and present your answers to the questions.

Example of an infographic. You can make a similar infographic using free online software like Canva.com, or draw one by hand.



To access the **Laurier Collection**, visit [lauriercollection.ca](http://lauriercollection.ca)

▼ Left to Right: Map showing approximate route of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and connections (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Cartographic Materials). Railways increased immigration to the West (Dreamstime.com/Winconsinart/26411388). Cutting Marquis wheat in Beatty, SK (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Canada Dept. of Interior/PA-048331). Prospectors ascend Chilkoot Pass, BC, en route to the Klondike gold fields, ca. 1898-1899 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/ C-004490).



## 1. POPULATION

**Statistic:** In 1891, the population of Canada was 4,833,000 people, and by 1911 this had grown to 7,207,000.

**Question:** What were the most significant reasons the population grew by almost 50% during Laurier's time as prime minister?

**Articles:** [Population](#), [Immigration](#)

## 2. PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

**Statistic:** In 1896, Canada consisted of seven provinces and one territory. By the end of Laurier's time as prime minister in 1911 there were nine provinces and two territories.

**Question:** What factors led to the creation of the new provinces and territory?

**Articles:** [Alberta and Confederation](#), [Saskatchewan and Confederation](#), [Yukon and Confederation](#)

## 3. RAILWAYS

**Statistic:** In 1896, Canada had 25,563 kilometres of railway, and this had expanded to 42,763 kilometres by 1912 — an increase of more than 60%.

**Question:** When Laurier became prime minister, one transcontinental railway already existed, but he oversaw the creation of a second. Do you think this was a significant achievement of the 20th century? Why or why not?

**Articles:** [Grand Trunk Pacific Railway](#), [Railway History](#)

## 4. WHEAT

**Statistic:** Wheat production grew exponentially during Laurier's years. In 1901, Canada produced 32.3 million bushels of wheat, by 1911 it had grown to 132 million bushels, and in 1914 wheat production had increased even further to 231 million bushels per year.

**Question:** What made this increase possible? Why do you think this growth is significant to Canadian history?

**Articles:** [Wheat](#), [Marquis Wheat](#)

## 5. KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

**Statistic:** Gold was discovered in August 1896, leading to a massive influx of prospectors to the Klondike region between 1897 and 1899. During the gold rush, 100,000 people tried to reach the Klondike. Between 30,000 and 40,000 actually made it, and only 4,000 found gold. Some prospectors trekked as far as 4,000 kilometres.

**Question:** How did the Klondike shape the development of Western Canada? How did the gold rush influence the Alaska Boundary Dispute?

**Articles:** [Klondike Gold Rush](#), [Alaska Boundary Dispute](#)



**DISCUSSION:** Indigenous peoples were affected by national expansion. In 1899, 1905 and 1906, the government signed Treaties 8, 9 and 10, respectively, restricting the rights of Indigenous peoples. Read more in the [Treaties in Canada Education Guide](#) on the [Historica Canada Education Portal](#) (see [Online Resources](#)). Visit the [Indigenous History](#) section of the [Laurier Collection](#), and watch the “[Naskumituwin \(Treaty\)](#)” [Heritage Minute](#). As a class, discuss how government policies to promote white settlement and land development (including railways, land grants and mining) affected Canada’s Indigenous peoples.



◀ Sir Wilfrid Laurier making a speech in 1910 from the bandstand at Riverside Park in Medicine Hat, AB (courtesy Esplanade Archives/Fred Forster family fonds/Image 0206.0012).

## Laurier Makes His Mark

*“History will accord to Laurier front rank as a Parliamentary debater, for in that sphere he had no superior, perhaps no equal. When that tall, dignified, picturesque figure rose, silence, attention and respect were always commanded.”*

— Radio address by [Cairine Wilson](#), Canada’s first female senator, on 20 November 1941

Laurier had been active in Canadian politics for more than two decades before becoming prime minister. As a young man, he was more radical — and even opposed Confederation — though his politics became more moderate as time went on.

### IN LAURIER’S WORDS: Quotation Analysis

Laurier was celebrated for his eloquent and well-reasoned arguments. His writing and speeches often made powerful statements, and he presented strong positions on [Confederation](#) and [Immigration](#), among other issues. However, Laurier was not exempt from changing his viewpoint, or from holding contradictory positions. The following quotations present an opportunity for students to compare and contrast Laurier’s viewpoint on two important issues of his day.

#### MODIFICATION:

In your own words, rewrite one of Laurier’s quotes below. Make sure to focus on the main message.

- *Quote selection:* Read Laurier’s words below and choose a topic: [Confederation](#) or [Immigration](#).
- *Active reading:* Underline the key words or phrase(s) in the quotes, and read the articles indicated below on the [Laurier Collection](#).
- *Paraphrase:* Rewrite the quotations in your own words
- *Analyze:* Write short answers to the following questions:
  - What changed in Laurier’s viewpoint? What stayed the same?
- *Reflect:* Imagine that you could speak to Laurier today. Write down one or two questions that you would ask him about his viewpoint on your chosen topic. Begin your question with, “I would like to know why...”

### 1. [On Confederation:](#) Read [Sir Wilfrid Laurier](#) and [Parti Rouge](#) in the [Laurier Collection](#)

**7 March 1867, in *Le Defricheur* newspaper**

“Confederation is the second stage on the road to ‘anglification’ mapped out by Lord Durham ... We are being handed over to the English majority ... [We must] use whatever influence we have left to demand and obtain a free and separate government.”

**10 November 1871, Legislative Assembly of the Province of Québec**

“Our respective forefathers were enemies and waged bloody war against each other for centuries. But we, their descendants, united under the same flag, fight no other fights but those of a generous emulation to excel each other in trade and industry, in the sciences and the arts of peace.”

### 2. [On Immigration:](#) Read [Immigration](#), [Immigration Policy](#) and [Chinese Head Tax](#) in the [Laurier Collection](#)

**27 March 1903, House of Commons**

“[T]here exists a very strong feeling against Asiatic immigration ... After giving it full consideration, everyone who has looked into the matter must come to the conclusion that this antagonism is based upon ethnical consideration, the difference between the two races. It seems impossible to reconcile them ... There are so many differences of character that it is supposed to be impossible to overcome them ... The ethnical differences are also of such a character as to make it very doubtful whether assimilation of the two races could ever take place.”

**1 September 1905, Edmonton, Alberta**

“I welcome those of our kith and kin from the old land ... Those who come at the eleventh hour will receive the same treatment as those who have been in the field for a long time. We want to share with them our lands, our laws, our civilization ... We do not want nor wish that any individual should forget the land of his origin. Let them look to the past, but let them still more look to the future ... Let them become Canadians ... and give their heart, their soul, their energy and all their power to Canada.”

#### EXTENSION:

Select another quotation from [Sunny Ways: the Speeches of Sir Wilfrid Laurier](#) exhibit on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).



## DEFENDING LOUIS RIEL

Louis Riel addresses the court during his trial for treason on 31 July 1885 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/O.B. Buell/C-1879). ▶

Laurier's rise to prominence was closely tied to his vocal defence of **Métis** leader **Louis Riel**. Laurier first spoke out in 1874, when Riel was elected to Parliament and attended the House of Commons in Ottawa. Laurier again supported Riel in 1885, in the wake of the **North-West Rebellion** (also known as the North-West Resistance), after which Riel was convicted of treason and executed in November 1885. Riel's conviction divided French and English Canadians. French Canadians saw Riel as a hero for defending Métis land, while to English Canadians he was largely considered a traitor who was responsible for the execution of **Thomas Scott**.

Laurier continued to vocally oppose Riel's execution through 1886. However, his defence of Riel was not based on compassion for Indigenous peoples, but on defending French Canadian history and culture, challenging the government's authority and weakening the Conservative hold on power. Indeed, despite his accusations that Sir John A. Macdonald had contempt for the Métis and was responsible for the rebellion, Laurier's own record on other Indigenous issues is decidedly negative.

◀ Métis leader Louis Riel, ca. 1879-1885 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Duffin and Co./C-052177).

To access the **Laurier Collection** visit [lauriercollection.ca](http://lauriercollection.ca)

**Louis Riel:** Métis leader and the founder of Manitoba, Riel was a controversial political figure even before the North-West Rebellion of 1885. Riel led the 1869-70 **Red River Rebellion**, which resulted in the founding of the province of Manitoba. Riel led two popular Métis governments before his execution in 1885 for high treason for his role in the **North-West Rebellion**, which sought title to lands promised to the Métis.

▲ A modified version of this print of Laurier appeared in *Vanity Fair* London, 19 August 1897 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/1990-497-6).

**Thomas Scott:** In 1870, during the Red River Rebellion, Louis Riel appointed a tribunal that convicted Irish Canadian Thomas Scott of treason. Scott's death intensified hostility toward the Métis and enraged Protestants in Ontario, who held him up as a martyr and called for revenge against Riel.

▲ Wilfrid Laurier in 1874, his first year as a Member of Parliament, and the same year he first spoke in defence of Riel (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/ William James Topley/PA-026430).

## TWEET AS LAURIER

With a 140-character limit, Twitter posts can share only the most important information. Imagine how Laurier might have used Twitter, if it had existed in his time, and reflect on events from his perspective.

1. Research the **North-West Rebellion**, **Louis Riel** and **Sunny Ways: the Speeches of Sir Wilfrid Laurier** on the **Laurier Collection**.
2. Identify five significant moments between 1874 and 1886 that relate to Laurier's support for Riel.
3. Using the **Twitter Profile** template, located in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Laurier Collection**, write five tweets from Laurier's perspective. If you would like, include an image with each tweet. Include the date of your tweet, and ensure that it accurately reflects Laurier's reactions and opinions toward the events.
4. To complete Laurier's Twitter profile, write a short biography, and add four followers who would have been active in politics at the time.



## EXTENSION:

After completing this activity, tweet your questions about Laurier, Riel or the North-West Rebellion to @CdnEncyclopedia (for real!) for an answer from our subject editors.



# Shaping the West

Map of Northwestern Canada, ca. 1889-1895  
(Dreamstime.com/Ken Pilon/4252208).

## MAPPING CANADA

Laurier played a central role in changing the boundaries of Canada's provinces and territories. He oversaw the creation of the Yukon Territory (1898) and the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan (1905). Maps provide important clues and information about a moment in history. Read about the **Historical Boundaries of Canada** on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Working in pairs, compare the two maps in the **Worksheets Package** and identify three to five key changes during the period. Choose one province, territory, or provisional district visible on one of the maps and investigate its history. Write a short paragraph that addresses its creation, and include three interesting facts about its history.

### EXTENSION:

Examine a map of Canada today. Compare it with one of the historical maps, and identify five things that are the same and five that are different.



## INVESTIGATING IMMIGRATION

Expansion in Western Canada during the late 19th and early 20th century relied on an aggressive immigration campaign. The activities in this section ask you to explore the contrast between immigration policies that welcomed some to Canada, and excluded others. While Laurier is recognized as a humanitarian who profoundly opposed bigotry and intolerance, he also supported discriminatory policies, as did many politicians at the turn of the century. Though Canada advertised free land in the West to attract European and American settlers, this invitation was not open to everyone equally. Laurier's government raised the head tax on Chinese immigrants from \$50 to \$100 and then to \$500, and he signed an order that briefly prohibited Black immigration to Canada, after which Ottawa sent agents to the US to actively discourage Black immigrants from coming to Canada. These actions raise important questions about race and racism in early 20th century Canada.



Immigration certificate and head tax receipt for \$500 for Lee Shing Dok, a Chinese immigrant to Canada, 23 April 1913 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Government of Canada/R1206-178-X-E).

### Investigation:

Investigate the history of immigration by exploring the **Canadian Council for Refugees** timeline (see **Online Resources**).

1. Working as a group, select the three to five most significant events in the history of immigration from 1900 to 1919.
2. For each of your entries, write two to three points to explain the event and justify why it has **historical significance**.

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

People and events in the past have historical significance if they created **change** that affected many people over time, or if they **revealed** something about larger issues in history or the present day. For more information on the Historical Thinking Concepts, visit [historicalthinking.ca](http://historicalthinking.ca).

### Discussion:

Multiple factors influenced immigration policy, including economic development (attracting settlers to the West), political interests (maintaining an Anglo-centric Canada), and prejudice and discrimination (restricting immigration of specific nationalities). Read more in the **Immigration** section of the **Laurier Collection**. As a class, discuss these factors and answer the following questions.

1. How did immigration and immigration policies change over time?
2. How were economic and political interests involved in shaping changes in immigration?
3. How did race and nationality affect a person's ability to immigrate to Canada in these years?

Arch decorated with wheat, advertising Canada as "Britain's Granary" with "Free Homes for Millions" in London, July 1902, in honour of the Coronation of King Edward VII (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Canada Immigration Branch/C-063260).



## "THE LAST BEST WEST": Analyzing Advertisements

At the turn of the century, Laurier's government undertook a major advertising campaign to attract immigrants to Canada. It distributed posters across the US and Europe, and, for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, built a five-storey arch in London, England, extolling the merits of immigrating to Canada.

Examine the posters in the **Worksheets Package**, and compare them with what you have learned about immigration. Choose one image and complete the **Advertisement Analysis** in the **Worksheets Package** of the **Laurier Collection**. After completing the 5Ws chart, work in pairs to answer the following questions about your chosen ads:

1. What message is the ad sending?
  2. What points of view are represented?
  3. What or who is left out?
- Answer in point form, and discuss your findings with another pair. What can you determine about Canada at this time? Come together as a class and discuss your findings.



"Canada West: The Last Best West." Cover of a pamphlet advertising immigration to Canada, produced by the Department of the Interior in 1909 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-30620).



# The Art of Compromise

*“Laurier tried to teach us that we must hold our democratic convictions in a civilized way, without hate or bitterness. Throughout all his long career, no matter how much he was the storm centre of controversy, he never made a difference of opinion a cause for hatred.”*

– *Ottawa Journal*, 21 November 1941

Sir Wilfrid Laurier was well known for his politics of compromise. He was determined to find solutions to problems that divided the nation, solutions he called the “sunny way.” The phrase refers to Aesop’s fable “The Wind and the Sun,” in which the two elements argue over who is stronger. They decide that whoever can get a passing gentleman to remove his coat first wins. The wind blew powerful gusts, but the man kept his coat on. The sun warmed the man pleasantly until he took off his coat. As Laurier said, “I would try the sunny way.” It was this positive approach (as well as his charisma and charm) that made Laurier a successful prime minister.

Laurier’s Canada was divided between English-speaking Canadians, who were largely Protestant and pro-empire, and French-speaking Canadians, most of whom were Catholic and nationalist. As prime minister, Laurier had to balance these competing views. As he said during the 1911 election campaign, “I am accused in Québec of having betrayed the French, and in Ontario of having betrayed the English ... In Québec I am attacked as an Imperialist, and in Ontario as an anti-imperialist. I am neither ... I am a Canadian. Canada has been the inspiration of my life.”

Laurier was not always praised for his approach. As his political adversary, Henri Bourassa, once quipped: “Upon his arrival at the gates of Paradise, Mr. Laurier’s first action will be to propose [an] ‘honourable compromise’ between God and Satan.”

Historian Réal Bélanger noted that while Laurier tried to create a middle ground, his compromises often favoured the majority rather than balancing the needs of the minority. “With Macdonald, [Laurier] remains the most important prime minister. A partisan of national unity, he lacked courage during key moments, which hurt the realization of a bicultural Canada,” he wrote. But as public historian and journalist (and now Senator) André Pratte reflected, “Does the persistence of tensions between Francophones and Anglophones mean that Laurier failed in his work? Yes and no. Yes, because the Canadian patriotism he wanted to see emerge has not made the progress he hoped in his native province. No, because the reality never lives up to the ideal — but that is no reason to give up on the ideal.”

## POLITICS OF COMPROMISE

Many of the issues Laurier had to deal with — as has been the case with several Canadian prime ministers — involved differences between English- and French-speaking Canadians. Laurier was known for finding compromises that balanced the interests of both. In this activity, students will focus on the success and legacy of Laurier’s quest for national unity.

Conduct further research on the [Laurier Collection](#) to investigate Laurier’s solution to each of the following events. In pairs or small groups, examine Laurier’s actions in response to the issue, and copy out the chart and fill it in using point form notes.

## THE MANITOBA SCHOOLS QUESTION

When Manitoba was founded in 1870 it included relatively equal numbers of French- and English-speaking Canadians, and the province embraced bilingualism. This was reflected in education, with a dual school system established to represent Catholics (largely Francophone) and Protestants (largely Anglophone). At this time, language and religion were interconnected and were a strong representation of identity. As new settlers arrived in Manitoba, Francophones became more of a minority. In 1890, French was abolished as an official language and education laws were changed to eliminate Catholic schools. This caused a crisis for French Catholics in Manitoba who found it difficult to receive education in their religion and language. The Laurier-Greenway Compromise of 1896, and Laurier’s “sunny ways” philosophy, went some way towards resolving the crisis.

To access the [Laurier Collection](#), visit [lauriercollection.ca](#)



ISSUE	KEY FACTS	LAURIER’S COMPROMISE AND CONSEQUENCES
<a href="#">Manitoba Schools Question</a>		
<a href="#">Canada’s participation in the South African War (Boer War)</a>		
<a href="#">The Naval Service Act</a>		School near Brandon, MB, ca. 1900-1940 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Canada Dept. of Mines and Resources/C-002074). ▼

After completing the chart, discuss in groups of four which issue was most significant (in a positive or negative way) for national unity. Do you think that Laurier’s policy of compromise was successful?



▲ Sir Wilfrid Laurier on his last trip to Western Canada (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-015568).



## POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS

At the turn of the 20th century, newspapers and magazines were the main news sources for Canadians and often included political cartoons. These cartoons used exaggeration, symbolism, stereotypes and caricature (comically exaggerated representation) to make a point and provide insight into key issues of the day.

Working in pairs, students will select one of the cartoons found in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Laurier Collection**. As a pair, complete the **Decoding Political Cartoons Chart**. You may choose to complete the 5Ws Overview and/or the In-Depth Analysis (see below). After completing the chart, come together as a class to discuss the following questions:

1. What can political cartoons reveal about people and events in the past?
2. As a primary source, political cartoons are evidence of beliefs and views of the past. As primary sources what value do political cartoons offer for helping us understand how Laurier was viewed?

### EXTENSION :

Ask students to bring a political cartoon from a current newspaper to class. In pairs, ask students to compare their 21st century cartoon with the one they have analyzed. As a class, discuss similarities and differences between political cartoons in the past and today.

## PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

**Primary sources** are original documents and objects from the time, the “raw materials” that historians use to uncover the past. **Secondary sources** are accounts or interpretations of events created by someone not present at the time, or who does not have a personal experience of the event.



Sir Wilfrid: “Bear down, you fellows, and she'll fall like ripe fruit from the parent tree.”

▲ Cartoon commenting on Canada's relationship with the British Empire, ca. 1911 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W. S. Johnston & Co., Ltd./R1300-5).

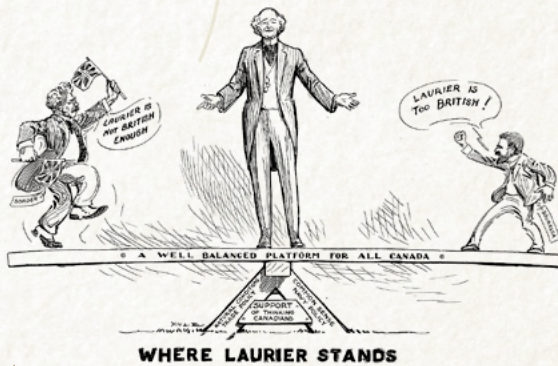
“Sir Wilfy: I could maybe have led one of these horses, but both at once, it might be better to give up!” Cartoon showing the key issues in the 1911 election campaign, in *Le Nationaliste*, 30 April 1911 (courtesy Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales de Québec).

### MAUVAISES MONTURES



SIR WILFRID: J'aurais peut-être pu mener un de ces chevaux-là mais les deux à la fois, ça serait mieux d'y renoncer!

### SIR WILFRID AND THE EXTREMISTS



### WHERE LAURIER STANDS

▲ A political cartoon by Fergus Kyle published during the 1911 election campaign showing Laurier balancing two opposing points of view (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/1989-612-3).

Printable charts and additional cartoons are available in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Laurier Collection**.

<b>WHAT?</b>	What key words, titles or labels appear in the cartoon? What event or theme is the cartoon about? What is the main idea of the cartoon? What further questions does this cartoon raise for you?
<b>WHO?</b>	Who are the main people depicted in the cartoon (if any)?
<b>WHEN?</b>	When do you think the cartoon was created?
<b>WHERE?</b>	Where do the events depicted in the cartoon take place? Where was it published?
<b>WHY?</b>	Why do you think this cartoon was made?

<b>CARICATURES AND STEREOTYPES</b>	A caricature exaggerates certain characteristics of an individual, usually for comic purposes, while a stereotype oversimplifies an individual or group, often in an insulting way. Has the cartoonist exaggerated any physical features of the people in the cartoon? Does the cartoon use stereotypes? If so, what do these visual messages communicate?
<b>SYMBOLS</b>	Symbols in political cartoons are any visual details that hold meaning. This can include characters, labels or other details in the image. Write a list of the details and symbols in the cartoon, and explain their significance. This can include any words or dates.
<b>METAPHOR</b>	In political cartoons, metaphors are often used to symbolize or represent something else. Identify any metaphors used in this cartoon. Do you think they are effective? Why or why not?
<b>ARGUMENT</b>	Political cartoons are not objective, but rather present a particular argument through visual cues and labels. Consider the symbols, labels, characters and context, and write an explanation of what you think the cartoonist meant to convey.
<b>PERSPECTIVE</b>	Political cartoons always represent a particular historical perspective. Read about the context of the political cartoons, and based on the other elements you have just considered, write a short statement about the perspective of this cartoon. Is the perspective easily identified, or is it unclear?



# Laurier on the International Stage

Canada's international relations were marked by both change and continuity during Laurier's years as prime minister. Still considered a **Dominion** of the British Empire, Canada did not have complete independence. The British Government controlled Canada's foreign policy, Canada gave Britain priority in economic trade, and Canada was expected to support British military endeavours. Still, Laurier's time in office set the country on a course toward greater independence.

Queen Victoria in the late 1800s (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/1962-108-1/C-095254).

## CANADA AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Wilfrid Laurier was Canada's first international "rock star." He took London by storm at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, riding in the carriage directly behind the Queen. He was knighted in London, becoming "Sir" Wilfrid Laurier. His evolving policies demonstrated that Canada was establishing itself as a nation distinct from the Empire, but Laurier struggled to strike a balance between **imperialist** and **nationalist** views at home.



Canada used the Union Jack (the Royal Union Flag) as well as the Red Ensign until the mid-1900s (Dreamstime.com/Robodread/4299679).

**"SIR" WILFRID:** When Laurier visited London in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, he was unaware that he would receive a knighthood. He was pressured into it on the spot, and he accepted with reluctance. One year before the Jubilee, Laurier had declined the offer of a knighthood based on his democratic principles. However, once in London he understood he could not realistically refuse without giving offence to the Queen.

Four events can be taken as examples of Canada's evolving role on the international stage: **Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897)**, the **South African War (1899-1902)**, the **Alaska Boundary Dispute (1903)** and the **Naval Service Act (1910)**. Divide the class into four groups. Each group will focus on one of the above events, and students will investigate their event in the **Laurier Collection** and in their textbooks. Take notes as you research so your group can discuss the following ideas as a class:

1. How did this event influence the relationship between Canada and Britain?
2. Did this event plant a seed for future change? In what ways?
3. Did it strengthen or weaken Canada's relationship with Britain?
4. Did it cause tension between French and English Canadians? If yes, why?

Left to Right: Canadians on the veldt in South Africa during the Boer War (courtesy Canadian War Museum/CWM 19820205-003). Recruitment poster for the naval service of Canada, ca. 1915 (courtesy US Library of Congress/Prints & Photographs Division/WWI Posters/LC-USZC4-12677). Laurier's carriage in front of the National Gallery at the Diamond Jubilee Parade, 1897, London, England (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-090232). Map showing the Alaska boundary between Canada and the United States, ca. 1890 (Dreamstime.com/Haveseen/11608023).

Come back together for a class discussion. Each group will share what it has learned in a brief presentation that summarizes the answers to the questions above. Then, discuss the findings as a class, and vote on which event was the most historically significant on Canada's road to independence.



## Definitions

### DOMINION:

The Dominion of Canada was the official name given to Canada in the **British North America Act of 1867**. A dominion is a self-governing territory that is still part of the British Commonwealth.

### IMPERIALIST:

In Canada, an imperialist believed in close ties to the British Empire. English-speaking Canadians often thought of themselves as imperialists, but many also viewed themselves as nationalists. Indeed, many hoped that one day Canada would obtain true independence, while maintaining close ties to the British Empire.

### NATIONALIST:

A nationalist had strong feelings for his or her country. For many during Laurier's era, nationalism meant pride in Canada's role in the British Empire, but for others it meant something different. Francophones focused strongly on protecting their language, culture and religion within a predominantly Anglophone Canada. **Henri Bourassa** is the most notable French-Canadian nationalist of the era.



# Laurier and the First World War

In 1911, Laurier lost the election to Robert Borden's Conservatives. Tensions over the Naval Service Act and a freer trade agreement with the United States contributed to a major loss of support for Laurier, and eventually his defeat.

When the First World War began in 1914, Laurier was leader of the Opposition, and he played a significant role in Canada's response to the war. He was a strong supporter of Britain, reflecting public opinion in Canada at the time, and supported voluntary enlistment in the Canadian Forces, attending rallies in support of the war effort. As he said in the House of Commons in 1914: "When the call comes our answer goes at once, and it goes in the classical language of the British answer to the call of duty: 'Ready, aye, ready.'" But while Laurier supported the war, he opposed Borden's implementation of conscription (mandatory military enlistment) in 1917.

Left: Poster showing Lt. Col. H. Barré encouraging French Canadians to support France by enlisting (courtesy US Library of Congress/Prints & Photographs Division/WWI Posters/LC-USZC4-12667). Right: Military recruitment poster, Toronto, 1917 (courtesy US Library of Congress/Prints & Photographs Division/WWI Posters/LC-USZC4-12171).

## CONSCRIPTION

The Conscription Crisis of 1917 was one of the most divisive debates in Canadian history. As death tolls on the front lines in France increased, and as enlistment numbers declined, the government turned to mandatory enlistment to support the British forces. The debate over conscription was complex, and divisions did not clearly follow cultural lines. French Canadians were largely opposed to conscription, but so too were many non-British immigrants, farmers and unionized workers. English Canadians were widely supportive of the measure, as were British immigrants and soldiers' families.

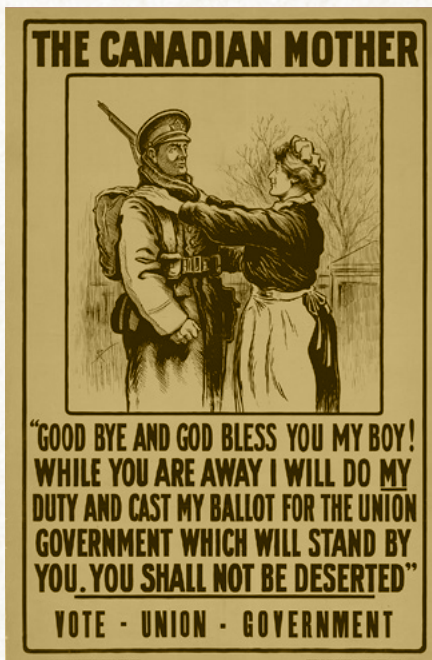
Opposing conscription did not necessarily mean you were against the war, as Laurier demonstrated. He viewed conscription as an attack on French Canadians, and anticipated the divisiveness of the issue. "Is it not true," Laurier asked, "that the main reason advocated for conscription — not so much publicly as privately, not shouted but whispered — is that Québec must be made to do her part, and French Canadians forced to enlist compulsorily since they did not enlist voluntarily?"

Virtually every French-speaking Member of Parliament opposed conscription, while almost all English-speaking MPs supported it. Playing off of this division, Borden created a united political party that pulled pro-conscription Liberals away from Laurier's Liberals, leaving the party a shadow of what it had been. The split over conscription led to the formation of the Union Government, which united the Conservatives and many Liberals over the issue. The new alliance, supported by many English Canadians, won the election against Laurier's Liberals in 1917.

The Conscription Crisis had multiple consequences: it caused protests and riots in Québec, it led to the formation of the Union Government, and it hardened divisions within Canada along French-English lines.

Research these issues by reading the articles in the [Conscription](#) section in the [Laurier Collection](#).

To access the [Laurier Collection](#), visit [lauriercollection.ca](http://lauriercollection.ca)



## WRITE A DIARY ENTRY

Choose an individual from the list below. Investigate their perspective on the 1917 conscription debate, and imagine how they would have responded in a private diary entry to mandatory enlistment. Would they have supported or opposed conscription, and why?

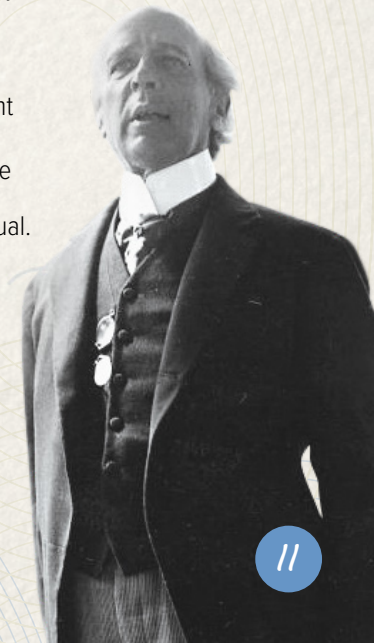
- Sir Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the Liberal Party
- Prime Minister Robert Borden
- A farmer in Western Canada, with children at the age of enlistment
- A francophone Canadian in Québec
- The mother of a Canadian soldier who is already serving in France

1. Write a half-page entry from the perspective of your chosen individual.
2. Clearly explain the perspective of your individual, and include two or three pieces of evidence to support their perspective.
3. In small groups, share this perspective with supporting evidence.

## EXTENSION:

As a class, discuss the long-term consequences of the Conscription Crisis OR what the crisis reveals to us about Canada at this time.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, 1911, by William James (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/ Fonds 1244/Item 581).



▲ "The Canadian Mother" poster encouraging people to vote for the union government, Ottawa, ON, 1917 (courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/Heliotype Co. Ltd./e010697158).



# Laurier's Legacy



What is the legacy and historical significance of Sir Wilfrid Laurier? A 2011 *Maclean's* magazine survey named Laurier the best prime minister in Canadian history. "Laurier's achievements went well beyond accommodation," *Maclean's* wrote. "He established the Canadian Navy and the Department of External Affairs, essential milestones on Canada's path to independence. His government settled the West, throwing open the country to immigrants, and creating the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan." Others are less convinced. As historian Michael Bliss said of Laurier, "[He was a] man most comfortable when the world did not change, he was happier to rest with the status quo than bring in reforms. His goals for the country were vague, often worked out defensively as the least evil of the alternatives the English or French were posing. Often he was at the mercy of events, a follower rather than a leader."

## WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Do you believe that Laurier deserves his reputation or is he overrated? Balance the positive aspects of Laurier's term against those we now see as negative. What does honouring Laurier suggest about the values celebrated in Canada? Write a Letter to the Editor defending the commemoration of Laurier or critiquing it. If you are critiquing, suggest another Canadian historical figure who is equally or more deserving of such recognition. Who has contributed to Canadian history, but been relatively forgotten? Use **Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor** in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Laurier Collection** to guide you.



Commemorative Laurier stamp, issued 29 June 1927 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Canada Post Corporation/Philatelic Record POS-000202).

Statue of Laurier on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, ON (Dreamstime.com/Gary Blakeley/1186929).

## Canada in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### DID THE 20TH CENTURY BELONG TO CANADA?

"The 20th century will belong to Canada" is among Laurier's most famous quotes. But Laurier never uttered those exact words. In 1904, he said, "Canada has been modest in its history, although its history, in my estimation, is only commencing. It is commencing in this century. The nineteenth century was the century of the United States. I think we can claim that Canada will fill the twentieth century."

Was Laurier correct? Did the 20th century belong to Canada? Discuss the quote as a class or in small groups. Hold a debate or have students reflect independently on the question.

Sir Wilfrid on the campaign trail, 1908 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-005598). Film clip courtesy Library and Archives Canada.

Canada in 1906 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Cartographic Materials).



To view a short memorial film from 1919, which includes a rare clip of Wilfrid Laurier delivering a speech, visit the [Laurier Collection](http://Laurier Collection).

