

Operation Yellow Ribbon

Big inquiry question

How did geography shape Canada's response to the events of September 11, 2001?

About this activity

On September 11, 2001, the closure of U.S. airspace forced hundreds of aircraft travelling over or toward the United States to change course. Operation Yellow Ribbon was Canada's response to redirect and receive many of these diverted flights at airports across the country. In this activity, students will use the interactive Operation Yellow Ribbon map to investigate where flights landed in Canada and how communities responded. Students will analyze what the map reveals about the role geography played in Canada's response to 9/11.

Grade Level

6-12

Learning goals

Students will:

- use an interactive map to gather and compare geographic information;
- identify patterns in the locations and experiences of Canadian communities involved in Operation Yellow Ribbon;
- use evidence from the map to explain how geography influenced Canada's response.

LESSON BREAKDOWN

Get Thinking

Before opening the interactive map, introduce students to the situation connected to global airspace after the 9/11 attack. Explain that on September 11, 2001, U.S. airspace was closed. Aircraft already travelling toward the United States had to land elsewhere, and many international flights were diverted to Canada because it was the closest available country to support.

Have students complete the Get Thinking section of their worksheet.

Ask:

- Which parts of Canada do you predict received the most diverted flights?
- What might make one Canadian airport or community better able to receive an unexpected aircraft than another?

Students do not need background knowledge or a correct answer at this stage. Encourage them to make a prediction based on what they already know about Canada's location, cities, airports and transportation connections.

Briefly invite several students to share their predictions before revealing the interactive map.

Explore, Notice & Gather

Introduce the Operation Yellow Ribbon interactive map.

Allow students a few minutes to explore the map freely before directing them to their worksheet. Encourage students to click the yellow dots, select different airport locations and notice both the number of flights received and the stories associated with individual communities.

Students will then explore at least five Canadian locations before choosing their top three communities to investigate more closely.

Once students have selected three communities, explain that for each of their communities, students will record:

- the community name
- its province or territory
- the number of diverted flights shown on the map
- one example of how people responded
- one detail that stands out to them.

Encourage students to select communities that are different from one another rather than simply choosing the three locations with the largest numbers.

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As students work, circulate and prompt them to look beyond individual stories:

- Where are the communities located?
- Are there patterns in where diverted flights landed?
- What similarities and differences do you notice between the responses of larger cities and smaller communities?
- What different challenges do students notice?

Dive Deeper

Once students have completed their comparison, bring students' attention back to their three selected communities. Explain that maps do more than show where something happened. They can also help us identify patterns, compare places and ask why events unfolded differently from one location to another.

Write or project the following question on the board and have students use evidence from their worksheet to develop a geographic claim in response.

Which community best demonstrates how geography influenced Canada's response to Operation Yellow Ribbon?

When responding to the claim, students are encouraged to:

- identify one community
- provide two pieces of evidence from the interactive map
- explain how the community's location, size, airport, connections or other geographic characteristics helped shape what happened there.

Remind students that there is no single correct community. A strong response uses information from the map to connect the place with their response, rather than simply identifying the community that received the most flights.

Teacher Support

Students may notice different geographic factors depending on the communities they investigate. Encourage them to consider factors such as:

- location within Canada
- proximity to major flight routes
- airport size or capacity
- community size
- distance or isolation
- access to buildings, transportation or other local resources

Students do not need to identify every factor. The goal is to make a reasonable geographic claim supported by evidence from the map.



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GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



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Think further

Use the following questions for a short class discussion. These do not need to be completed in writing.

- What patterns did you notice in where diverted flights landed across Canada?
- How were the challenges faced by smaller communities different from those faced by larger cities?
- What can the interactive map show us about Operation Yellow Ribbon that a list of airport names and numbers cannot?

Return to the Big Inquiry Question: *How did geography shape Canada's response to an unexpected crisis?*

Invite students to offer one piece of evidence from the map that helps answer the question.

Optional Extension

Ask students to select two communities in different parts of Canada from the interactive map.

Students will compare the two communities and respond to the following question prompt: *How did the same crisis create different challenges and responses in different Canadian places?*

This can be completed as a short written response, a partner discussion or an additional entry on paper from students notebooks.



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Canada

Operation Yellow Ribbon

OPERATION YELLOW RIBBON STUDENT WORKSHEET

Name: _____

Big inquiry question:

How did geography shape Canada’s response to an unexpected crisis?

Get thinking

On September 11, 2001, U.S. airspace was closed and many international flights travelling toward the United States were diverted to Canada.

1. Before exploring the map, where in Canada do you predict many of these flights landed?

- ☐ Atlantic Canada
- ☐ Central Canada
- ☐ Western Canada
- ☐ Across many parts of Canada
- ☐ I’m not sure yet



2. What is one reason for your prediction?

Explore, notice & gather

Visit the Operation Yellow Ribbon interactive map. Explore and identify any five communities that stand out to you. Choose any three communities and complete the chart below.

Criteria	Community #1	Community #2	Community #3
Name			
Province/Territory			
Number of diverted flights			
What is one way the community responded?			
What detail about this community stands out or interests you?			

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Look for patterns

1. What pattern do you notice in where diverted flights landed?
-
-
2. Why do you think some Canadian communities received more diverted flights than others?
-
-
3. What is one difference you noticed between how two communities responded?
-
-

Dive Deeper

Use evidence from the interactive map to answer the question below. There is no single correct answer. Choose a community that you can support with strong evidence from the map.

Which community best demonstrates how geography influenced Canada’s response to Operation Yellow Ribbon?

My Community: _____

Evidence #1	Evidence #2

Explanation

Final thinking

Complete the sentence:
The Operation Yellow Ribbon map shows that geography mattered because...