

The Importance of national parks and historic sites



Overview

This activity is meant as a primer for the 2023 Cross Canada Virtual Road Trip program, a collaboration between [Parks Canada](#), [Exploring by the Seat of Your Pants](#), and [Canadian Geographic Education](#). By the end of this activity, students will be able to answer the following questions:

- What is Parks Canada's mandate?
- Why is it important for Canadians to preserve and protect Canada's cultural and natural heritage?

Time required

One class period

Grade level

Grades 3-8

Subjects

Social studies, history, geography, environmental science

Materials needed

- Parks Canada cards (7)
- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers
- Electronic devices with internet access

Learning goals

Student will:

- Learn about Parks Canada's mandate.
- Identify different types of protected areas in Canada that Parks Canada presents.
- Build an understanding of the importance of protecting and celebrating natural and cultural heritage.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Begin by introducing students to the [Cross-Canada Virtual Road Trip](#). By participating in this program, students will be taken on an amazing, whirlwind trip across Canada to 10 Parks Canada sites, all without leaving the classroom!

Ask students if they have ever heard of the organisation known as [Parks Canada](#). Parks Canada is an agency of the Canadian government tasked with preserving and protecting areas of ecological, cultural, and historical significance in Canada. They currently administer more than 200 sites across Canada that are open to the public for education and enjoyment.

Inform students that not all Parks Canada sites are the same. There are different classifications, which include:

• National historic sites:

- ▶ There are more than a thousand national historic sites in Canada, located in every Canadian province and territory. Parks Canada is responsible for managing 171 of them.
- ▶ National historic sites can be found in almost any setting, from rural and urban to wilderness. They include sacred spaces, archaeological sites, battlefields, heritage houses, historic districts, places of scientific discovery, and more.
- ▶ These sites allow us to learn more about Canadian history, including the diverse cultural communities who make up Canada, and the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples.

• National marine conservation areas:

- ▶ There are currently five national marine conservation areas in Canada.
- ▶ National marine conservation areas include submerged lands, the water above them, and any species found within those areas. They can also include wetlands, estuaries, islands, and other coastal lands.
- ▶ These areas are established and managed to protect and conserve representative marine areas for the benefit, education, and enjoyment of the people of Canada and the world.

• National parks or national park reserves:

- ▶ There are 37 national parks and 10 national park reserves in Canada.
- ▶ These wild places, located in every province and territory, range from mountains and plains, to boreal forests and tundra, to lakes and glaciers, and much more.
- ▶ Parks Canada is responsible for protecting these areas and for managing them in such a way that visitors can understand, appreciate, and enjoy these natural spaces without compromising their ecological integrity.

• National urban parks:

- ▶ Parks Canada is collaborating with partners, including Indigenous Peoples, to create a network of national urban parks in Canada's large urban centres.
- ▶ These parks will create a network with a shared vision of conserving nature, connecting people with nature, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.
- ▶ Rouge National Urban Park is the first national urban park in Canada.

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Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Spatial significance
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspectives

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Acquire geographic resources
- Interpret and analyse
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements
- Spatial representations
- Technologies

Begin the lesson by asking the students if they have ever visited a national park, national historic site, or national marine conservation area maintained by Parks Canada. Ask them to describe what they saw or did there. What was unique about the place they visited? What memories did they make there? What about their experience would they classify as “natural” or “cultural”?

Next, ask the students if they can guess Parks Canada’s mandate (i.e., the purpose of the agency) based on the previous discussion and what they’ve learned so far. Elicit responses from the students and write them on the board or on chart paper.

Direct students to the [Parks Canada website](#), which outlines their mandate, roles, and commitments. Review as a class to better understand the foundation of the Cross-Canada Virtual Road Trip as intended by Parks Canada.

Share with students that they will have the opportunity to visit different Parks Canada sites through the Cross-Canada Virtual Road Trip events, where they will learn directly from Parks Canada rangers about what makes these places so special!

Action

Display the Parks Canada cards before the class. For each card, ask students to guess the type of Parks Canada site that is represented in the photo and have them provide their reasoning. Encourage guesses by using simple language and providing examples that are relevant to the students’ experiences (e.g. a national park is like a big playground for animals and people, an historic site is like an outdoor museum, and a marine conservation area is like an underwater park).

• Answers:

- › Card 1 - Halifax Citadel National Historic Site (Halifax, Nova Scotia)
- › Card 2 - Elk Island National Park (Alberta)
- › Card 3 - Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park (Quebec)
- › Card 4 - Jasper National Park (Alberta)
- › Card 5 - Gwaii Haanas Marine Conservation Area Reserve (British Columbia)
- › Card 6 - Rideau Canal National Historic Site (Ontario)
- › Card 7 - Rouge National Urban Park (Greater Toronto Area, Ontario)

**Make a special note to students that card number seven is the first (and currently only) national urban park in Canada. Parks Canada is working to establish more national urban parks in the future.*

Next, put students into pairs or small groups and have them access the Cross-Canada Virtual Road Trip [Google Voyager Story](#) on their electronic device. The Voyager Story includes background information, interactive maps, photos, videos, and classroom activities for each of the 10 sites featured in the 2023 Cross-Canada Virtual Road Trip.

Note: You can invite students to navigate in the Voyager Story to the specific Parks Canada site they will be visiting during their upcoming live event. Have students read through the information provided, look at the photos and videos, and complete the activity in their groups. If your students will not be attending a live event, they can simply explore freely. Different groups can be assigned different sites, or the class can focus on the site that is closest to them.

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After 15-20 minutes, have the students share what they learned.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Review the key terms and concepts covered in the lesson (e.g., Parks Canada's mandate, national parks, historic sites, marine conservation areas, national urban parks).

Ask students why they think it is important to protect and celebrate natural and cultural heritage sites. Record their responses on the board or chart paper.

Wrap up the lesson by emphasising the value and significance of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, as well as the importance of preserving it for future generations. Bring students' attention to the following:

- Natural heritage sites are home to a diverse range of plant and animal species. By protecting these areas, we can help maintain biodiversity and ensure that these species have a safe habitat.
- Cultural heritage sites are often tied to important cultural traditions and histories. Preserving these sites can help maintain the culture of past generations and provide opportunities for people to connect with their heritage.
- Heritage sites offer opportunities for education and research, allowing us to learn more about the natural world and our cultural heritage.
- These sites can help to create jobs and bring visitors to a specific region.
- These sites can make us feel proud of our shared history and environment.
- There are a multitude of health benefits that can be enjoyed from visiting natural spaces.
- The work being done at these sites can support important initiatives and movements, such as truth and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Extend your geographical thinking

- Participate in one or more of the live [Cross-Canada Virtual Road Trip](#) events taking place at different national parks, historic sites, and marine conservation areas across Canada. Parks Canada guides will offer virtual tours and interactive experiences. Have students take notes on what they observe during the virtual tour and write a short reflection on their experience.
- Organise an in-person class field trip to a nearby national park, historic site, or marine conservation area.
- Have students research and present on a national park, historic site, or marine conservation area in Canada, using pictures, videos, and fun facts to share with the class.
- Have students create a poster that promotes the importance of protecting and celebrating natural and cultural heritage sites in Canada. Encourage them to be creative with their designs and include a catchy slogan or message.
- Have students brainstorm ways they can help protect the environment and natural resources in their local community. They can create posters, write letters to their local representatives, or organise a community clean-up. Encourage them to think about the impact their actions can have on the environment and the importance of sustainability.
- Have students write a creative story or poem about a visit to a national park, historic site, or marine conservation area. Encourage them to use descriptive language and vivid details to bring their experience to life. They can share their writing with the class or create a class book.