

Commemorate Canada - Prince Edward Island: The road to Confederation



Overview

Students will learn about the history of Prince Edward Island leading up to the province joining Canada.

Time required

75 minutes

Grades

6-8

Subjects

Geography, History

Learning goals

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Understand the history of Prince Edward Island leading up to Confederation.
- Identify important regions on a map of pre-Confederation Canada.
- Identify reasons the Province of Canada wanted to unify the British North American colonies.
- Explain how Prince Edward Islands' geography influenced its decision to join Canada.

Materials

- Devices with Internet connection
- White or blackboard
- Writing utensils
- Word scramble: Leading up to Confederation
- Word scramble: Leading up to Confederation teacher answer sheet
- Mix and match: Prince Edward Island joins Confederation
- Mix and match: Prince Edward Island joins Confederation teacher answer sheet
- Map of Canada: Pre-Confederation

Lesson implementation

Minds on

Have students close their eyes and ask them to imagine that it is the mid-1860s and they are standing in Charlottetown Harbour in Prince Edward Island, a colony of Great Britain. Women are walking by in Victorian dresses, men are accompanying them in suits and top hats. The air smells faintly of salt; you hear wooden ships creaking. Beyond the sights, sounds, and smells, there is also another sense — a sense of change and new beginnings — bringing with it a feeling of excitement but also apprehension.

Explain to students that this change was to bring about the start of Canada as we know it today, and the unification of the British North American colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Province of Canada (formerly Upper and Lower Canada, today Ontario and Quebec) into one dominion governed by a single government. Prince Edward Island would be an important player in the road to the unification, although they joined years after the initial colonies joined together. Charlottetown is now known as the “birthplace of Confederation.”

This unification, known as Confederation, would not be a simple or short process. Today, students will be learning about Prince Edward Island joining Canada, and the history leading up to this important partnership. Play the *Canadian Geographic* GeoMinute “[Prince Edward Island becomes Canada's seventh province.](#)”

Action

To help students understand Prince Edward Island and its economy in the period before Confederation, project an image of Prince Edward Island on the SMARTboard using [Google Earth](#) or another map of your choosing. Ask students how they think the province's geography might have affected its decision to join Canada. One thing they may notice is that Prince Edward Island is Canada's only province completely surrounded by water. Before it joined Canada, the British colony did not have a way to reliably connect to the mainland in all seasons, which affected its economy. The province could not finance the type of project to make that continuous connection, such as a year-round steamship that could safely operate in the icy waters of the Northumberland Strait or a bridge to connect the island to the mainland. It was also a land of farmers, consisting largely of agricultural land. Without a diversity of incomes, the island was economically vulnerable.

Today, students will lead their own research into why Prince Edward Island joined Canada by completing three worksheets. This activity can be done in pairs or individually. Distribute a copy of each worksheet and a device with internet access to each student or group. Go over the instructions with the class.

To help students visualize where different pre-Confederation territories are located in present-day Canada, students will complete the **Map of Canada: Pre-Confederation** worksheet. For this, they will need to create a map where they outline listed territories on a map of Canada. Remind students about the components of a map that they should include. For this activity, they should include a title, a legend, and a north arrow.

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Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective
- Spatial significance

Inquiry Process

- Gather and organize
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements
- Spatial representations

For the **Word scramble: Leading up to Confederation** worksheet, students should read the clues and conduct online research to find the answers to the clues. If they would like hints, they can unscramble the words at the bottom of the page, which are the answers to the clues.

For the **Mix and match: Prince Edward Island joins Confederation** worksheet, students must determine which term on the left matches best with the descriptor on the right and draw a line connecting them.

Suggested resources are included in the Additional resources section to help students start their research.

Conclusion and consolidation

Once students have learned a little about the history of Prince Edward Island joining Canada, explain that you'll now create a class word cloud on the board. Invite students up to the board to write down words that they feel are important when discussing Prince Edward Island becoming Canada's seventh province. These might be adjectives, places, dates, people, concepts, etc. Stand back and notice any words that are repeated.

Now, ask students how Prince Edward Island and Canada would look different if the island had never joined Canada in 1873. Do students think the province would be independent or part of another country? Would there be a physical connection to mainland Canada? How would their economy and infrastructure be different? Ask students to explain their answers.

Extend your geographical thinking

- Research when and why other provinces joined Canada.
- Explore the history of Prince Edward Island.
- Learn about Indigenous Peoples that have lived on the island since time immemorial.
- Have students rewrite the history of Prince Edward Island as if it had not joined Canada.

Modifications

- Activity sheets can be completed as a class.
- Clues on the **Word jumble** can be broken up with each group researching one clue.
- Teachers can provide specific sites for students to use for research.

Assessment opportunities

- Student activity sheets can be collected for assessment.
- Teachers can use the opening activity to decide how much direction students need to guide their research.
- Students can exchange activity sheets to check their answers.

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Additional resources

- Canadian Encyclopedia: [Prince Edward Island and Confederation](#)
- Canadian Encyclopedia: [Charlottetown Conference](#)
- CBC: [The Charlottetown Conference](#)
- SenCA+ Magazine: [Let's Make a Deal: How a reluctant Prince Edward Island joined Canada](#)

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Map of Canada: Pre-Confederation

Instructions: Draw the boundaries of the pre-Confederation areas listed below on this map of Canada using a different colour for each area. Create a legend on which you identify which colour represents which territory.

Province of Canada

United States of America

Prince Edward Island

New Brunswick

Newfoundland and Labrador

Nova Scotia

British Columbia

Canada West

Rupert's Land

North-West Territories

Victoria Island

Canada East



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Word scramble: Leading up to Confederation

Instructions: Read the clues about Prince Edward Island's history leading up to joining Canada and unscramble the words in the table below to help you fill in the blank spaces.

1. Prince Edward Island is on the traditional land of the _____.
2. In the 1720s, this name was given to present-day Prince Edward Island by French settlers:
_____.
3. The island was given up by the French to Britain and it became part of Nova Scotia because of the Treaty of _____ in 1763.
4. In this year, the island became an independent colony: _____.
5. This important meeting was a major turning point in the unification of the British North American colonies:
_____.
6. The original purpose of the above meeting was to discuss uniting Prince Edward Island,
_____ and _____.
7. Although they weren't originally invited, delegates from the _____ managed to join in an important event in 1864 to try to convince the provinces in attendance to unify as a British North America.
8. Prince Edward Island considered becoming their own dominion or joining the _____ before joining Confederation.
9. Sir John A. Macdonald, among others, was worried about the _____ of the United States, and was eager to unite British North American colonies to defend against the growing nation.
10. Prince Edward Island had accrued debt leading up to their joining Confederation due to the building of a _____.

Jumbled words

Note: These words are not in the same order as the clues above.

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Word scramble: Leading up to Confederation teacher answer sheet

1. MI'KMAQ
2. ÎLE SAINT-JEAN
3. PARIS
4. 1769
5. CHARLOTTETOWN CONFERENCE
6. NOVA SCOTIA, NEW BRUNSWICK
7. PROVINCE OF CANADA
8. UNITED STATES
9. EXPANSION
10. RAILWAY

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Mix and match: Prince Edward Island joins Confederation

Instructions: Draw a line connecting the word in the left column to the best description in the right column.

Term	Descriptor
Charlottetown Conference	Prince Edward Island joined Canada as its seventh province.
John A. Macdonald	Prince Edward Island's conservative premier and one of the province's delegates to the Charlottetown Conference.
Thomas D'Arcy McGee	To take on railway debt and finish the building of it, to buy land from landlords that were not in the province, to maintain a steamship to connect the island to the mainland.
American Civil War	September 1-9, 1864.
July 1, 1873	Led to the development of a new military power that could threaten Canada.
John Hamilton Gray	Led a talk about nationalist identity at the Charlottetown Conference.
Promises Canada made to Prince Edward Island upon its joining Canada	Led a talk about unifying British North America at the Charlottetown Conference.

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