

TIMELINE ACTIVITY

IDENTIFYING TURNING POINTS

The **Key Moments in Indigenous History Timeline** poster that accompanies this guide, available on the **Education Portal**, provides a chronological overview of Indigenous history in what is now Canada from time immemorial to present.

- Working in small groups, review the Timeline points and identify three to five turning points.
- Provide an explanation for why your selections are turning points, using the criteria to the right.

Turning points are significant and dramatic changes. They often mark the beginning of a social, political, or economic trend or change.¹ A turning point is not always the biggest or most obvious event, but can represent a moment in time that led to significant change.

KEY MOMENTS IN INDIGENOUS HISTORY

This timeline is designed to accompany *Historica Canada's Indigenous Perspectives Education Guide*, which includes lesson plans and classroom activities based on the *Historical Thinking Concepts*. Download the Guide at education.historicacanada.ca.

Note: This timeline presents key events and moments in Indigenous history in what is now Canada, from time immemorial to present. While no timeline can be exhaustive in its coverage, it provides a broad chronological overview to support educators and students.

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Introduction

Indigenous nations tell their own stories about the origins of the world and their place in it; all claim their ancestry dates to time immemorial. At the same time, there is considerable archaeological debate about when humans first came to North America, though broad assumptions suggest waves of migration from northeastern Asia, by both land bridge and boat, between 30,000 and 13,500 years ago.



18,000–10,000 BCE

Irrefutable archaeological evidence of human occupation in the northern half of North America, including in the Tanana River Valley (Alaska), Haida Gwaii (British Columbia), Vermilion Lakes (Alberta), and Debert (Nova Scotia).

2300–1000 BCE

Northeast Woodlands Indigenous groups introduce agriculture.

500–1200

Developed communities on the Plains employ treaties to share territory with humans and non-human beings.

c. 1450

The **Haudenosaunee Confederacy** (Iroquois League), organized by **Dekanawideh** (the Peacemaker) and **Hiwawatha**, tries to provide a peaceful and equitable means to resolve disputes among member nations in the lower Great Lakes region.

c. 1600

Estimates for the Indigenous population in what would become Canada range from 200,000 to 500,000 people, though some suggest it was as high as 2.5 million, with between 300 and 450 languages spoken.

1683

The **Two-Row Wampum** (Kaswenhtha) establishes the **Covenant Chain**, a series of agreements between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and European representatives. They agree to work toward peace as well as economic, political, and cultural sovereignty; gift exchanges honour promises and renew alliances.

1616

The first European missionaries (**Récollets** and later **Jesuits**) arrive to convert Indigenous populations to Catholicism.

1701

Three dozen Indigenous groups and the French colonial government sign the **Great Peace of Montreal**, forging peaceful relations that end nearly a century of war between the Haudenosaunee and the French (and their Indigenous allies).

1754–1763

The **Seven Years War** begins in North America. Hostilities between the French and English centred in Europe (beginning in 1756), but the fight for control of North America, with Indigenous allies on both sides, starts in 1754.

1763

King George III of Britain declares dominion over North America east of the Appalachian Mountains. His **Royal Proclamation** gives limited recognition of title to Indigenous communities and provides guidelines for negotiating treaties on a nation-to-nation basis.



1791

Haida chief Koyah organizes the first of many attacks on the British, who had begun coastal explorations in an emergent west coast fur trade.

1812–1814

The **War of 1812** sees tens of thousands of Indigenous people fight for their land, independence, and culture, as allies of either Great Britain or the United States. In British North America, the Western Confederacy, led by **Tecumseh** and **Tenskwatawa**, plays a crucial role in protecting Upper and Lower Canada from American invasion. By the end of hostilities, almost 10,000 Indigenous people had died from wounds or disease. The **Treaty of Ghent**, which is supposed to return lands and "all possessions, rights and privileges" to Indigenous peoples affected by the war, is ignored.



1828

The Mohawk Institute opens in Brantford, Upper Canada (Ontario), as a day school for boys from the Six Nations Reserve. In 1831, it begins to operate as a **Residential School** with the goal of assimilating Indigenous children. It is the precursor to the more elaborate system of Residential Schools.

1867–1870

A federal **White Paper** on Indian Affairs proposes abolishing the **Indian Act**, Indian status, and reserves, and transferring responsibility for Indian affairs to the provinces. In response, Cree Chief **Harold Cardinal** writes the Red Paper, calling for recognition of Indigenous peoples as "Citizens Plus." The government later withdraws the proposal after considerable opposition from Indigenous organizations.

1971

The Inuit Tapirist of Canada, renamed **Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami** in 2001, is formed as a national organization advocating for self-government, social, economic, environmental, health, and political welfare of Inuit in Canada, and preservation of language and history.

1850–1854

The Robinson-Superior and Robinson-Huron treaties are signed in what is now Ontario, as are the Douglas treaties in what is now British Columbia. The controversial agreements allow for the exploitation of natural resources on vast swaths of land in return for annual cash payments, and make evident the differing understandings of land ownership and relationship-building through treaties.

1867

The **British North America Act** creates the Dominion of Canada. Colonial responsibility for Indigenous peoples and lands is transferred to the new federal government, under the Department of the Interior.



1871–1921

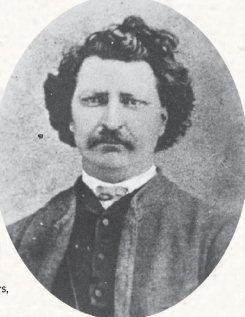
The 11 **Numbered Treaties** are signed by the Canadian government and Indigenous nations. These treaties, still controversial and contested today, make vast areas of traditional Indigenous territory available for white settlement and development in exchange for a system of reserves (treaty lands), cash payments, access to agricultural tools, and hunting and fishing rights. Elders note that the initial spirit and intent of the treaties have been disregarded.

1880

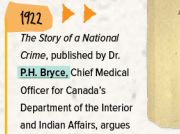
An amendment to the **Indian Act** formally disenfranchises and disempowers Indigenous women by declaring they "cease to be an Indian in any respect" if they marry "any other than an Indian, or a non-treaty Indian."

1860s–1900

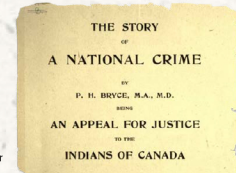
Inuit across the Arctic suffer greatly from malnutrition and starvation as marine mammals, on which they rely for food, plummet under pressure from European whalers, who also introduce many diseases.



1914–1918
Between 4,000 and 6,000 Indigenous people serve in the Canadian military during the **First World War**. They are denied veterans' benefits on their return, despite many winning military awards, like Francis Pegahmagabow, whose medals are pictured above.



1922
The *Story of a National Crime*, published by Dr. **P.H. Bryce**, Chief Medical Officer for Canada's Department of the Interior and Indian Affairs, argues that Indigenous people's health is being ignored in **Residential Schools** and **Indian Hospitals**, in violation of treaty pledges.



1929

Complaints about Inuit not bearing traditional Christian names arise, beginning decades of government labelling strategies to ease the recording of census information and entrench federal authority in the North. Among the failed initiatives are metal discs with ID numbers, and **Project Surname**.

1951

Indigenous lobbying leads to **Indian Act** amendments that give elected band councils more powers, award women the right to vote in band elections, and lift the ban on the potlatch and sun dances. Some soldiers who fought alongside Indigenous men and women support the change.

1954

Elsie Marie Knott becomes the first female chief of a First Nation in Canada when she is elected to lead the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) Curve Lake First Nation near Peterborough, Ontario. She holds the position for 16 years.

1950s and 1960s

Sled dogs are killed as part of the Sled Dog Slaughter, a government assimilationist initiative to force the Inuit of Northern Québec to deny their nomadic lifestyle and move them away from their traditional lands.



1869–1870

The **Red River Resistance** sees the **Métis** and First Nations allies defend the Red River Colony from the federal government's attempt to transfer **Rupert's Land** to Canada without consultation. Fearing a deluge of settlers and trying to safeguard their lands and culture, the Métis – led by **Louis Riel** – establish a Provisional Government to coordinate the resistance and lead an uprising. In the wake of the armed conflict, Riel flees to the United States. White settlement continues to expand westward. Promises to protect Métis rights are ignored.



1876

The **Indian Act** is passed by the Government of Canada on the premise that economic, social, and political regulation of First Nations peoples (and lands) would facilitate assimilation. Many subsequent amendments further restrict their rights and freedoms. Changes include banning hereditary chieftains and other forms of governance; expropriating reserve lands for public purposes; requiring permission to be off-reserve in some provinces; prohibiting the **potlatch** and **sun dances**; requiring attendance at **Residential School**; revoking Indian status when enfranchised; and requiring the consent of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs before hiring lawyers to initiate land claims in the courts.

1883

Prime Minister John A. Macdonald authorizes the creation of **Residential Schools**, run by Christian churches, to force Indigenous children to assimilate to Euro-Canadian culture and practices.



1885

The **Métis** and their First Nations allies lead the five-month **Northwest Resistance** against the federal government in what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta. Anxious about white settlers and government encroachment on their lands, the Métis form a second provisional government in the region, again led by **Louis Riel**. The Métis Bill of Rights demands improved treatment for all residents of the region, including land rights, political representation, and better education. As calls go unheeded, the Métis, led by **Gabriel Dumont**, take military action, but federal troops prevail. Riel is hanged for treason and Cree chiefs **Mistahimaskwa** (Big Bear) and **Pikwahapanapiywin** (Poundmaker) are imprisoned.



1910s–2000s

The Supreme Court makes several key decisions respecting Indigenous people, including but not limited to: 1) a 1997 ruling that traditional Indigenous land rights and title cannot be extinguished by the British Columbia government and validating oral testimony as a source of evidence; and 2) a 2003 ruling prescribing three conditions for Métis status: self-identification as a Métis individual; ancestral connection to a historical Métis community; and acceptance by a Métis community.

1976

The closure of Gordon Residential School in Punnichy, Saskatchewan, marks the end of the Residential School system in Canada.

1973

Inuit and the governments of the Northwest Territories and Canada sign the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the largest in Canada's history. A new territory, Nunavut, is created from the central and eastern portions of the N.W.T. in 1999.

1976

The final report of the **Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples** is published. It recommends a public inquiry into the effects of Residential Schools and calls for improved relations between governments, Indigenous peoples, and non-Indigenous Canadians.

2000

The terms of the **Nisga'a Final Agreement** come into effect, granting the Nisga'a \$196 million over 15 years plus communal **self-government** and control of natural resources in parts of northwestern British Columbia.

2006

The Nunavut Inuit Land Claims Agreement comes into effect, addressing ownership of land and resources in James Bay, Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, and Ungava Bay, as well as part of northern Labrador.

2008

Prime Minister Stephen Harper issues a statement of apology to former students of Residential Schools in Canada for the harm caused by assimilationist goals, abuse, and cultural loss. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau extends the apology in 2017 to students of Residential Schools in Newfoundland and Labrador.



2015

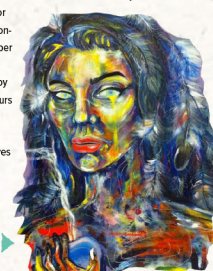
Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin notes that the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples is the "most glaring blemish on the Canadian historic record." She further states that assimilationist efforts constitute "cultural genocide."

2016

In *Daniels et al. v. Canada*, the Supreme Court rules that Métis and non-status Indigenous peoples are "Indians" within the meaning of s. 91.24 of the **Constitution Act, 1867**. Like the Inuit, they are not included under the **Indian Act**.

2016

Canada officially signs the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, cultural practices, land, and security.



1974

The **Native Women's Association of Canada** is established to advocate for the social, political, and economic welfare of Indigenous women and girls. It promotes education, challenges discriminatory policies, and works to reduce inequality.

1910–1981

Activists travel by train from Vancouver to Ottawa aboard the "Constitution Express" to raise awareness about the lack of recognition of Indigenous rights in the proposed Canadian constitution.

1982

The **Assembly of First Nations** is formed out of the National Indian Brotherhood to promote the interests of First Nations in the realm of self-government, respect for treaty rights, education, health, land, and resources.

1984

The **Inuvialuit** and the federal government sign the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, a massive Western Arctic **land claim**.



1985

The **Indian Act** is amended to address discrimination faced by First Nations women who face the loss of their Indian status if they marry non-status Indians. This change occurs when **Sandra Lovelace Nicholas**, a **Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet)** woman from New Brunswick, brings her case to the UN Human Rights Committee.

1980s–1990s

Several politically charged standoffs occur on disputed lands. More than 800 people are arrested during the "War in the Woods" when **Tio-a-quai-ah** and environmentalists fight to protect ancient forests from loggers in **Clayoquot Sound**, British Columbia. The **Oka Crisis** sees Mohawk activists clash with Québec provincial police for 78 days. Tensions over the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation occupation at **Ipewewasi** Provincial Park contribute to protestor Dudley George's death at the hands of an Ontario Provincial Police officer.

TIMELINE DOWNLOAD

*Please note that the Key Moments in Indigenous History Timeline has been reformatted to fit standard display sizes in this interactive guide. Hard copies may be requested from education@historicacanada.ca. If you choose to print the Timeline, please note that the actual file is 17 x 39 inches in size.

Images: Minkus petroglyph in Rasmussen National Park, U.S.; Nova Scotia Museum/PP1968.69.20v.3462; The Royal Proclamation of 1763 (AJC/13-26/16); 1886/32; Joseph Tappan; image called the Brant by George Bennett, 1879 (AJC/40-0836); The Meeting of Brant and Tecumseh by Lucie E. Smith, c. 1820 (AJC/1-0155); Constitution of the Provisional Government of the Métis Nation, 1870 (AJC/PA-0208-4); Goretzky and his children, Qu'Appelle Indian School, c. 1900 (Saskatchewan Archives Board/PA-4222/23-2236); Indian Treaties, from The Northwest Atlas of Canada, 5th Edition, 1991 (Licensed under the Open Government License - Canada, Natural Resources Canada; "A young Aboriginal boy before entering school" and "A young Aboriginal boy after entering school" (Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan/PA-48223-1 and PA-48223-2); Métis leader Louis Riel, c. 1875-1885 (AJC/15-2277); Pegahmagabow's Medal Set (CWM/20060035-049); Conference of League of Indians of Western Canada, Thunderchild reserve, Saskatchewan, 1921 (Internet Archive); Inuit Identification tag, front and back (Canadian Museum of History/PA-4496/02002-0370 and 02002-0371); Sergeant Tommy Prince with his brother, Private Morris Prince, 1945 (AJC/PA-12395); Inuit Council Hall on occasion of federal by-election (AJC/PA-12395); MNAAC Logo (The Native Women's Association of Canada); Senator Sandra M. Lovelace Nicholas (The Office of Senator Sandra Lovelace Nicholas); Gordon Indian Residential School, Punnichy, Saskatchewan, c. 1930 (Anglican Church of Canada Archives/PA-93-103-57-51); Cree youth walkers enter in Ottawa (Greenstream.com/Paul McKinnon/2005/1673); Aesdellville by Jasmine Wemgumpees, 2016 (Indigenous Arts and Stories and Historic Canada); Morning Star by Alex Janvier, 1945 (Canadian Museum of History/PA-0-276/MAC/2009-0085-0001-019); Totem Pole in Stanley Park, Vancouver (Greenstream.com/Jerry Col/4546038).