

TURNING POINTS: CRISES IN FRENCH-ENGLISH RELATIONS

Dr. Paul Bennett, Québec

INTENDED GRADE/SUBJECT AREA

Grade 9 and 10 History of Québec and Canada

RECOMMENDED TIME FRAME

A minimum of 5 class periods.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

This extended role-playing exercise will provide opportunities for students:

- to study and investigate a series of major crises and turning points in Québec-Canada relations, 1830s to 1891;
- to identify and explain the actual viewpoints and arguments used by the key political figures;
- to develop the ability to analyze primary documents, to write historically accurate speeches, and to define the viewpoints in a press conference setting;
- to develop a real sense of history and a passion for the subject;
- to produce a short analysis (500 words) explaining the crisis in its proper context.

CONCEPTS/BACKGROUND

Introduction

The years from 1837 to 1885 produced a series of crises in the relations between French and English-speaking Canadians that profoundly affected the relationship between Québec and the rest of Canada. The social and political conflict of the 1830s found its clearest expression in the Rebellions of 1837-38 led by Louis Joseph Papineau and the Patriotes.

Following the rising, Lord Durham issued his famous report attributing the causes of the existence of “two nations warring in the bosom of a single state.” The Union of 1840 united the two Canadas and gave rise to a form of bicultural compact symbolized by the Baldwin-Lafontaine alliance. A movement for a wider union culminated in the dramatic Québec Conference where the Confederation agreement took its final shape. Just twenty years after Confederation, Louis Riel led a North West Rebellion and the political crises that followed threatened to tear the Dominion apart. Confederation survived the series of events and somehow emerged stronger than before.

The Simulation Exercise

A historical simulation exercise involves students in re-enacting past events using authentic documents and the skills of historical role-playing. In this exercise, Grade 9 students will be both introduced to, and immersed in, the major political “crises” and turning points in French-English relations from the Patriotes Revolt of 1837-8 to the national crises over the fate of Louis Riel.

All students will be expected to research and present (or role-play) ONE major historical character over the course of the simulation exercise. When not engaged in lead roles, all students are expected to cover the events as press reporters assigned by actual British North American newspapers of the time. As reporters, they must keep a record of the public debates and file periodic press stories.

EVALUATION

All Grade 9/10 students will be expected to:

1. Write and deliver at least one 150-200 word press statement (i.e., speech) which explains the actual viewpoint of the historical figure.
2. Play the role of a press reporter when not engaged in re-enacting a major crisis or turning point episodes. You are responsible for taking accurate notes and submitting one feature article (500 words).
3. Stay “in role” for the whole simulation exercise, using the character’s names, authentic accents, manners of speech, and – of course – costumes. (A standard 19th century dress code will be enforced for all participants).
4. Be prepared to raise questions, heckle, offer verbal salvos and show authentic demonstrations of moral outrage.

ACTIVITIES

The “Turning Points” 1837-1885

Dateline 1837

The Patriotes Revolt in Lower Canada

Scenario: A street rally of the Patriotes called by Louis Joseph Papineau to protest the misdeeds of the “Château Clique” and demand far-reaching political changes. Sir John Colborne, the Commander of British forces in the Canadas, rejects the Patriotes demands and it leads to a full public debate. The voices of rebellion are a precursor to armed conflict.

Time: Eve of Rebellion, 1837

Locations: St. Eustache and Montréal

Leading Historical Roles:

- Louis-Joseph Papineau, Parti Patriote
- Sir John Colborne, Commander of British Forces
- William Lyon Mackenzie, Radical Reformer, Toronto
- Etienne Parent, Editor, Le Canadien, Montréal
- Chevalier DeLorimier, Patriote, Montréal notary
- Susanna Moodie, author and settler, Cobourg, Upper Canada

Dateline 1839

Lord Durham’s Report and the Reaction in Lower Canada

Scenario: Lord Durham (“Radical Jack”), appears in Montréal with British colonial officials to present his famous report focusing on his analysis of the Lower Canadian troubles and his political reform solutions. Lord Durham’s critics respond with a press conference to denounce his report and its proposals.

Time: January 1839

Location: Montréal

Leading Historical Roles:

- John George Lambton (Lord Durham), Lord High Commissioner, 1837-39
- Arthur Buller, Chief Secretary to Lord Durham
- Charles Poulett Thompson (Lord Sydenham), Governor-General, 1839-41
- Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine, Reformer, Lower Canada
- Editor of L'Avenir, Rouge newspaper, 1839

Dateline 1848

The Triumph of the Bicultural Compact—the Baldwin-Lafontaine Alliance

Scenario: The political reform alliance of Robert Baldwin (Upper Canada) and Louis H. Lafontaine (Lower Canada) wins the Canadian elections of December 1847 and succeeds in gaining both the responsible government and representation on the Executive Council. Leading political figures respond to the Baldwin-Lafontaine alliance and its program, including the Rebellion Losses Bill and amnesty for the Patriotes of 1837-38.

Time: March 1848 and 1849

Location: Parliament buildings, Montréal

Leading Historical Roles:

- Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine, Reformer, Canada East
- Robert Baldwin, Reformer, Canada West
- Etienne Parent, Editor, Le Canadien
- Louis Joseph Papineau, former Patriote
- Lord Elgin, Governor-General, 1847-54

Dateline 1864

The Quebec Conference and the Fate of French Canadians

Scenario: A re-enactment of the key debates at the crucial Québec Conference leading directly to Canadian Confederation. The leading Canadian politicians present the case for British North American Union and its advantages for French-speaking Lower Canada. The Parti Rouge, led by Antoine-Aimé Dorion, call a press conference to reject the proposals and release its manifesto.

Time: October and November 1864.

Location: Québec City and Hochelega (Dorion's Montréal Riding)

Leading Historical Roles:

- John A. Macdonald, Liberal/Conservative, Kingston
- Georges Etienne Cartier, Parti Bleu, Montréal
- Antoine-Aimé Dorion, Parti Rouge, Hochelaga
- E.P. Tache, Parti Bleu, Chair of Conference
- George Brown, Reform-Grit, Toronto
- Mercy Coles, Daughter of former PEI Premier, Charlottetown, PEI

Dateline 1885

The Trial of Louis Riel and Its Consequences

Scenario: A re-enactment of the trial of Louis “David” Riel for treason in Regina, SK, July 28 to August 1, 1885. Riel represents his own defence and witnesses are called to give evidence for and against his execution by hanging. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald announces his position on Riel’s execution and Honoré Mercier, Leader of Parti National, expresses his grief over the hanging of Riel.

Time: August 1, 1885 and November 1885

Locations: Court room, Regina; Parliament Hill, Ottawa; and champ de Mars, Montréal.

Leading Historical Roles:

- Louis David Riel, Leader of the Métis Nation
- John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister
- Honoré Mercier, Leader of the Parti National
- Big Bear, Chief of Cree People, Saskatchewan
- Marie Anne Gaboury, Mother of Louis Riel (Ghost)

PRESS GALLERY ROLES

Recognized newspapers in British North America

A. Lower Canada/Canada East/Québec

The Gazette, Conservative, Montréal

La Minerve, Bleu, Montréal

Le Pays, Rouge, Montréal

Le Canadien, Moderate Independent, Québec

The Mercury, Tory-Mercantile, Québec

La Vérité, Patriote and Nationaliste, Québec

Vindicator, Irish Radical, Montréal (1834-37; closed in 1847)

B. Upper Canada/Canada West/Ontario

The Globe, Reform, Toronto

Intelligencer, Conservative, Belleville

Evening News, Orange/Conservative, Toronto

The Citizen, Conservative, Ottawa

Colonial Advocate, Radical Reform, Toronto. (The Constitution, after 1836)

Chronicle/Whig Standard, Moderate Tory, Kingston (1819-47 and 1847-)

Grip, Liberal/Grit, Toronto (1874-85)

C. Other Provinces and Territories

The Gleaner, Anti-Confederate, Chatham and Fredericton, NB

Morning Chronicle, Liberal, Halifax, NS

The Herald, Anti-French, Battleford, SK

The Reporter, Pro-Confederate, Fredericton, NB

British Colonist, Expansionist, Victoria, BC

About the Educator

Dr. Paul Bennett, a history teacher and textbook author, has instilled in his students a passion for Canada’s history and a commitment to playing a role in shaping

Canada's future. Paul has inspired both his students and colleagues to embark on current affairs and Canadian history initiatives at the senior and intermediate levels. Highlights include: the Destiny/Destin Canada Committee; a student group that organized a national Student Forum and Constituent Assembly on Canada's future; a national Student Forum on Québec-Canada relations in 1994; two Referenda "observer missions" to Québec; and Destiny Québec 1999, a forum for Québec youth to discover different opinions about their province's future (lesson plan for *Destiny Canada: Observing the 1995 Québec Referendum* is also available on this site).