The history of Canada is unique. While native peoples have lived in Canada for thousands of years, Canada has absorbed many different kinds of people throughout its history. There has been tension among these groups of people, but Canada has usually resolved these conflicts peacefully through compromise, or establishing common ideas that people agree to follow.

**Canada’s Early History**

Many thousands of years ago, people migrated across a land bridge from Asia to North America. By the 1500s, distinct groups of Native Americans lived throughout the land that is now Canada. Each group had its own culture, shaped by the geography and natural resources available to it.

**Native Canadian Groups** Native groups who lived south of the Arctic region in Canada are known as the First Nations. They shared similar lifestyles, using the available resources to build houses and make clothing, although groups developed distinct political systems, economies, and religious beliefs.

The Algonquins were skilled hunters who lived in present-day Quebec. Their birch-bark canoes and dog sleds helped them hunt large areas. The Iroquois lived in what is now southern Canada, in large farming villages. They grew corn in the milder climate, trading it for Algonquian forest products.
To the west, Plains dwellers structured their lives around hunting buffalo.
Farther west, the mild climate and resources of the Pacific Coast, including salmon, whales, and forests, maintained populations such as the Yale and Yekooche people.

The Inuit people lived and continue to live in the Arctic region of the far north, and are not part of the First Nations. Inuits migrated year-round, in search of animals to hunt in their harsh climate.

Contact With Europeans Europeans first arrived off the coast of eastern Canada in the late 1400s, seeking a route from Europe to Asia, called the Northwest Passage. Although they did not find this route, they did find fish and animal furs. European fishermen stayed along the coasts, drying their catches and returning each year to Europe. European pursuit of furs had far-reaching effects for the First Nations people and for Canadian history.

As European traders made their way inland, they traded wool cloth and metal goods for Native American furs. Trading posts sprang up throughout southeastern Canada. A complex relationship developed between Europeans and Native Americans, as each sought to control the profitable fur trade. However, like the European colonists who were settling other areas, these traders carried many diseases and many native people died even as the fur trade grew in strength.

Reading Check What does the term First Nations describe?

France and Britain Struggle for Control
For more than 200 years France and Britain struggled to claim territory, control the fur trade, and secure Native American allies.

New France In 1534, Jacques Cartier arrived in eastern Canada and claimed it for France, giving it the name New France. Although French traders established a profitable fur trade in New France, it took many years for them to settle in colonies. In 1608 Samuel de Champlain established a colony at present-day Quebec City. Over the next hundred years, the French settled the region near the St. Lawrence River. For 200 years, the fur trade supported New France’s economy.
British Canada  British fur traders also operated trading posts outside of New France. They learned that the best land for furs was north of New France, around Hudson Bay. In 1670 the British king granted this territory to the Hudson Bay Company.

As the French and British settled their territories, conflicts grew. Each wanted to dominate the fur trade. Each had native people as allies, who increasingly fought each other for influence with the Europeans. These struggles were most intense during the Seven Years’ War, fought from 1756 to 1763. This war, which began in Europe and spread to America, resulted in victory for Britain. Canada became British.

Roots of a Nation
Canada was now a colony of Britain, yet it had a history of French culture, language, and government. Also, most French Canadians were Roman Catholic, while most new British settlers in Canada were Protestant. These differences in language and religion helped define Canadian culture and posed many challenges.

The Quebec Act
When Britain took control of Canada, it wanted the colony to be British. Yet, to avoid rebellion, it knew that it had to recognize the rights of French Canadians. With the Quebec Act of 1775, Britain allowed religious freedom and French laws. The act also extended Quebec’s boundaries. American colonists saw this territory as theirs, and strongly opposed the Quebec Act.

Closer Look
The Battle of Quebec, 1759

1756–1763
Seven Years’ War
Fighting between France and Britain during the Seven Years’ War made Canada part of the British empire.

Conflict and Compromise
Britain and France fought to control early Canada. Britain won control of the area. Immediately, leaders in Canada had to balance the interests of the French and British citizens. Later, Canada won independence from Britain through negotiation and compromise, and without a revolutionary war.

Think Critically: What factors might have led Britain to negotiate with British- and French-Canadian citizens?

It is hereby declared, That His Majesty’s Subjects professing the Religion of the Church of Rome, of, and in the said Province of Quebec, may enjoy the free Exercise of the Religion of the Church of Rome; and that the Clergy of the said Church may enjoy their accustomed Dues and Rights.

1774
The Quebec Act
The Quebec Act was Parliament’s first attempt at balancing the interests of both British and French citizens.
A Canadian Identity Develops

The Quebec Act helped drive a wedge between Canada and the other British colonies in America. After the United States won independence from Britain in 1783, Americans who had remained loyal to Britain poured into Canada. To avoid conflict between the French and the new British citizens, Britain divided the colony into Upper and Lower Canada in 1791. Both colonies would remain under British rule, but Lower Canada would retain French customs, language, and religion.

During this time, the United States felt Britain should withdraw from areas bordering the United States and Canada, such as the area that is now northern Maine. In 1812, the United States declared war on Britain, and quickly invaded Canada.

Nearly three years later, neither Britain nor the United States won. Americans saw the war as a great victory. Canadians viewed the victory as theirs. The conflict united Canadians against a common enemy—the United States.

While Canadians felt some unity as a result of the War of 1812, hard times fell on the Canadian people. Food shortages and disease plagued Lower Canada. Groups formed to oppose British rule, and several rebellions broke out. As a result, the British granted some control to the Canadian people. The 1840 Act of Union reunited Upper and Lower Canada into one province, or a territory that is under the control of a larger country. Britain still maintained control over all of Canada.

Reading Check What were Upper and Lower Canada?

1840

Act of Union

The Act created the Province of Canada, established a system of elected leaders, and led to a bilingual governance of French and British Canadians.

1867

British North America Act

The act created the Dominion of Canada. While still part of Britain, Canada was effectively united and independent.
Canada Grows
Over the next 100 years, Canada experimented with different forms of government, working out its relationship with Britain. The country expanded and prospered, with the help of immigrants.

The Dominion of Canada In the 1800s, Britain feared American westward expansion. To strengthen its position, Britain passed the 1867 British North America Act, creating a new confederation called the Dominion of Canada. A *dominion* is a territory that governs itself but is still tied to its colonizing country. The Dominion of Canada included all of the provinces of British Canada except Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. Britain would still control Canada’s foreign affairs, but the country would govern itself. Like the United States, the Dominion of Canada divided its powers between national and provincial, or state, governments.

In the late 1800s, Canada had expanded its territory. By 1905, the nation had five new provinces, stretching to the Pacific coast. The First Nations people who lived in the west resisted this expansion. The Canadian government feared wars with native people similar to those in the United States. It worked to solve conflict through treaties, which resulted in many native groups being forced to move to reservations.

The Role of Immigration In the early 1900s, Canada’s economy grew by leaps and bounds. New technology and better agricultural methods increased exports of Canada’s main crop, wheat. The growing economy was also fueled by a growth in population, especially from immigrants, who created a strong labor force.

In the early 1900s, the Canadian government encouraged immigration to Canada, especially of farmers. From 1901 to 1911, Canada’s population grew by about 34 percent. In 1901, immigrants made up 12 percent of the population. By 1911, they made up 22 percent of the population. Most of these immigrants were British, American, or Jews from Russia. Immigration continued steadily throughout the 1900s, adding to Canada’s diversity.

**Reading Check** What was the Dominion of Canada?
Independent Canada

In the years after the Dominion of Canada was created, Britain had less to do with governing the country. Canada began establishing itself as a world leader.

World Wars Canada was still part of the British Empire when World War I began. The war demanded many human and natural resources from Canada. The country began to collect an income tax to pay for services, which made the country less dependent on Britain. By the end of the war, Canada proved that it was ready to act as an independent nation. In 1931, Britain recognized Canada’s ability to act independently of the British Empire. Canada, however, remained linked to Great Britain. Canada’s courts were still tied to Britain, and the country’s constitution was officially an act of Parliament.

Canada’s Challenges Canada faced its first major challenge as an independent country with the Great Depression of the 1930s. As in the United States, joining World War II helped lift Canada out of the Depression. Canada’s economy grew rapidly to support the war. This began a period of growth that carried Canada into the next century.

After the war, Canada still faced challenges at home. Tensions between the English and French sides of its society threatened Canadian unity. Many French Canadians felt that they were treated unfairly and that their culture was under attack. Some French Canadians fought with violent means for Quebec to be an independent nation. Others struggled peacefully for a more equal role in Canadian politics. Quebec is still a Canadian province, but French culture is now formally part of Canadian society. These centuries-old cultural conflicts continue to challenge Canadian society.

Reading Check Why do some French Canadians fight for Quebec’s independence?

Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms
1. Who are the First Nations?
2. What compromise did Britain make when it took control of Canada?
3. What is the difference between a province and a dominion?

Key Ideas
4. Identify the relationship between natural resources and European settlement.
5. How did New France shape Canadian culture?
6. Describe the interdependence established between Canada and Britain in 1867.

Think Critically
7. Summarize What role did conflict play in Canada’s early history?
8. Analyze Cause and Effect How did Canada’s participation in World War II affect its economy?

Is conflict unavoidable?
9. How did Canada gain its independence from Britain? Go to your Student Journal to record your answer.