



# THE WAR OF 1812



## EDUCATION GUIDE



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## Message to TEACHERS

*This Guide is designed to enhance your students' knowledge and appreciation of this seminal historic conflict through engaging discussion and interactive activities.*

The largest independent organization dedicated to Canadian history, identity, and citizenship, The **Historica-Dominion Institute** is committed to bringing the stories and experiences of Canada to the public. With the arrival of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, Canada commemorates and remembers the conflict. The War of 1812 set Canada on the slow path toward nationhood, and also represents the last time that Canada was directly invaded by a foreign military. This Education Guide uses themes of perspective, identity, historical significance, legacy, and personalities to engage students on defining moments in Canadian history, international relations, Aboriginal and multicultural history in both historical and contemporary contexts.

This Guide also has a focus on important historical thinking skills that assist students in thinking critically about the past.

This Guide was made possible with the generous support of **TD Bank Group**, whose roots are interwoven with the history of the War of 1812. The bank's first president, James Grant Chewett (1793 – 1862), fought as an officer with the 3rd York Militia Regiment during the defence of York (Toronto) during the War of 1812. His story, like that of hundreds of early settlers and First Nations, speaks to an essential era in pre-Confederation history.

The tools provided here are supplemented with additional activities and resources at [www.historica-dominion.ca/1812](http://www.historica-dominion.ca/1812). We hope this Guide will assist you in teaching this important aspect of Canadian history in your Social Studies or History classroom.

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## OVERVIEW

The origins of the War of 1812 are rooted in a European power struggle between France and Great Britain in the **Napoleonic Wars**. Napoleon ordered a naval blockade (the Berlin Decree) to cripple the British economy. Tensions between America and Great Britain escalated when Britain stopped American ships bound for French-occupied Europe and began impressing (or forcing) American sailors into service on Royal Navy vessels, namely in the **Chesapeake-Leopard Affair**. In June of 1812, President James Madison, who was convinced a diplomatic solution was impossible, declared war against Great Britain.

As a colony of Great Britain, British North America, which included Upper and Lower Canada, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton and Newfoundland, was swept up in the war. Unable to strike at Britain directly, the Americans targeted the only British territory they could reach: the two Canadas, which they invaded a number of times. Many in the United States believed the capture of Canada, as former American president Thomas Jefferson put it, was “a mere matter of marching.” The population of 600,000 people would

be overpowered if the Americans effectively mobilized their population of 6 million. The British colonies in the two Canadas were defended by 6,000 regular soldiers, Aboriginal allies and several thousand militiamen. Two American attacks were repulsed in the first year of the War, including at Queenston Heights. Following an American invasion, the British forces under General Brock and Aboriginal leader Tecumseh captured Fort Detroit in 1812. The only success enjoyed by the United States during 1812 was in their gaining control of Lake Ontario in November, which they would use to advantage in the following year.

In 1813, the Americans launched a surprise seaborne attack on the capital of Upper Canada, sacking York. That same year, American forces attacked Niagara and captured Fort George, forcing the British to withdraw from the Niagara Peninsula. American fortunes declined following their defeats at Stoney Creek and Beaver Dams. That autumn, the Americans undertook their largest offensive of the war by sending one army down the St. Lawrence River and another across the border into Lower Canada (Québec) to



◆ **MOHAWK WARRIOR**  
NEAR TYENDINGAGA CIRCA 1813 (COURTESY NATIONAL DEFENCE, REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES, 2011).

capture Montréal. One of the armies was stopped by French-Canadian commander Charles de Salaberry and his group of Canadian Voltigeurs, militiamen, and Aboriginal warriors at the Battle of Châteauguay. After a second defeat at Crysler’s Farm, the Americans gave up the invasion of Lower Canada.

The year 1814 proved to be a turning point. Following the defeat of Napoleon, the British sent a large number of troops to the Canadas to begin a series of offensives including the successful attack on Washington. The Americans made a major effort in the Niagara Peninsula, where several major battles including Lundy’s Lane occurred. This campaign ended with the Americans leaving their positions in November. On December 24, representatives of Britain and America signed the Treaty of Ghent, which, once ratified, officially ended the war in 1815. The war’s final land action occurred in early 1815, when British forces were defeated at New Orleans.

It is estimated that 10,000 British and Canadian soldiers were lost from all causes, while the Americans suffered 15,000 casualties. Between 7,000 and 10,000 Aboriginal men, women and children were lost. The debate over who won the War of 1812 remains to this day.

USS CONSTITUTION AND HMS GUERRIÈRE  
BY THOMAS CHAMBERS (COURTESY  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART).



## CAUSES

*“British cruisers have been in the practice also of violating the rights and the peace of our coasts. They hover over and harass our entering and departing commerce...and have wantonly spilt American blood within the sanctuary of our territorial jurisdiction.”*

*– President James Madison’s war message to Congress, June 1, 1812*

The War of 1812 officially began on June 18, 1812, when the United States, under the leadership of President James Madison, declared war against Great Britain. Less than a month later, the Americans had invaded Upper Canada under General Hull and the hostilities had begun. But many of the causes of the war had been brewing for some time. Other causes were more immediate.

One of the first questions a person may have about this war—or any war—is how it began. In history, the causes leading to an event are never simple. Here are a few things to consider.

1. There are many causes to an event and they sometimes overlap.
2. There are long-term causes as well as short-term (immediate) causes.
3. Individuals as well as institutions play a role in causing events.

## ACTIVITY

Using your own sources or one such as **The Canadian Encyclopedia** ([www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com)) or **Ontario Archives** ([www.archives.gov.on.ca](http://www.archives.gov.on.ca))—search for “War of 1812”—research the causes of the War of 1812 and record your information in a chart such as the one below, a PDF of which may be downloaded at [www.historica-dominion.ca/1812](http://www.historica-dominion.ca/1812).

Element of Causation	Historical Example
Long-term causes	
Short-term or immediate causes	
Individuals	
Institutions	

### Critical Thinking Extension

In groups of three or four, rank the causes of the War of 1812 from most significant to least significant. You might also decide on the most important example in each type of cause. For example, which individual played the biggest role? Which institution? What is the justification for your thinking?

HMS SHANNON AND USS CHESAPEAKE  
THE HMS SHANNON LEADING THE USS  
CHESAPEAKE INTO HALIFAX HARBOUR  
(PAINTING BY J.G. SCHETLY, COURTESY  
NOVA SCOTIA ARCHIVES AND RECORDS  
MANAGEMENT).



## DEFINITIONS

**Long-term causes** – Underlying conditions that contribute to the outbreak of an event. Usually have existed for many years. For example, the ongoing trade dispute between Great Britain, France and the United States during and after the Napoleonic Wars.

**Short-term causes** – Specific events or incidents that contribute to the outbreak of an event. For example, the impressment (forcing) of American soldiers into service by the British.

**The Napoleonic Wars** – France, under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, engaged in a series of conflicts between various European powers. The Napoleonic Wars engulfed Continental Europe and much of the world in major land and sea campaigns between 1803 and 1815.

**Chesapeake-Leopard Affair** – Please see page 4.

**Militiamen** – Unlike professional soldiers, militiamen were Canadian settlers (ordinary farmers, labourers, and members of the community) between the ages of 16 and 60 who were given training and weapons to help defend Canadian towns and settlements.

## Pre-War

**3 September 1783: Treaty of Paris.** After the treaty that ended the American War of Independence, British Loyalists who supported the Crown during the conflict and are now unable to live in the United States begin to arrive in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Québec from America. Famous migrant Loyalists include Lieutenant James Moody and Laura Secord.

**1803: The Treaty of Amiens is broken.** The breaking of this treaty, which ended the war against Revolutionary France, resumes the fighting in Europe, which becomes ablaze in the Napoleonic Wars. British military resources are greatly drained and the Royal Navy seeks to impress Americans into service.

**1807: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair.** The British frigate HMS *Leopard* attacks USS *Chesapeake* looking for British sailors that deserted from the navy earlier that year. British crew board the American ship and force one American sailor into service with the Royal Navy. The incident brought American outrage against impressment to a peak that would lead to a declaration of war.

**September 1811: General Brock appointed.** General Isaac Brock is appointed provisional president of the executive council of Upper Canada and commander of its British forces. He would defend against American attacks into Upper Canada, enlisting the support of First Nations in exchange for the promise of an independent Aboriginal nation.

**November 1811: The Battle of Tippecanoe.** William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, attacks the Shawnee and Tecumseh's confederacy at the First Nations village of Prophetstown, Indiana. Enraged, Tecumseh and his confederacy enter into an alliance with the British to counter American expansion into Aboriginal lands. Aboriginal warriors would be essential to the defense of Canada.

**BATTLE OF QUEENSTON HEIGHTS**  
THE DEATH OF ISAAC BROCK AT QUEENSTON HEIGHTS (PAINTING BY JOHN DAVID KELLY, COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).

# WAR OF 1812 TIMELINE

# 1812

◆ **GENERAL ISAAC BROCK**  
DEFENDER OF UPPER CANADA; KILLED IN THE BATTLE OF QUEENSTON HEIGHTS.



◆ **TECUMSEH**  
SHAWNEE WARRIOR AND LEADER OF THE ABORIGINAL CONFEDERACY, HE FOUGHT WITH THE BRITISH AGAINST THE AMERICANS.



**9 May 1812: The Royal Newfoundland Fencibles mobilize.** The Royal Newfoundland Fencible Infantry, a provincial unit that was formed in 1803, is ordered into Upper Canada and to detach five companies for naval service to protect the Great Lakes.

**1 June 1812: President Madison recommends war.** President James Madison recommends to Congress to declare war against Great Britain over the forced impressment of American sailors into service with the Royal Navy, and the ongoing British support for American Aboriginal frontier communities. America declares war on Great Britain June 18.

**12 July 1812: Attack on Upper Canada.** American Brigadier-General William Hull launches his attack against Upper Canada from Fort Detroit. Hull's men enter Upper Canada and capture the town of Sandwich (Windsor). Hull is eventually forced to withdraw.

**17 July 1812: Capture of Fort Mackinac.** Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island, Michigan is captured by a party of 50 soldiers, 200 fur traders and 400 Aboriginal warriors that were stationed in Fort St. Joseph, near Sault Sainte Marie. This victory helped solidify relations with Aboriginal peoples while contributing to Hull's decision to withdraw.

**August 1812: Creation of Coloured Corps.** Black Loyalist and American Revolutionary War veteran Richard Pierpoint advocates for the creation of an all-Black militia unit. Captain Robert Runchey is commissioned to command the volunteer force known as the Coloured Corps. This unit would serve in the Niagara region.

**16 August 1812: Tecumseh and Brock capture Fort Detroit.** General Brock and Shawnee warriors led by Tecumseh capture Fort Detroit after General Hull surrenders the fort.

**19 August 1812: HMS Guerriere sunk.** USS *Constitution* sinks HMS *Guerriere*. This naval victory in the Atlantic is a morale boost to the American public and Congress. This is one of 26 naval actions between the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy on the high seas, half of which were American victories.

**3-6 September 1812: Siege of American forts.** Aboriginal warriors launch coordinated sieges on Fort Madison, Iowa; Fort Harrison, Indiana; Fort Wayne, Indiana; and Pigeon Roost Creek, Indiana. Eventually the American forces are able to lift the sieges.

**13 October 1812: Battle of Queenston Heights.** Americans cross the Niagara River in an attack on the high ground of Queenston Heights. General Brock leads troops into battle and is fatally wounded by an American sharp-shooter. Eventually, a combined attack from Aboriginal warriors and British soldiers under Major-General Roger Sheaffe forces over 1,000 American soldiers to surrender.

1813

... sunset of an especially warm day, after having walked twelve miles, which I at the time thought was an exertion which a person of his slender frame and delicate appearance was unequal to make.  
James FitzGibbon  
Capt. Henry  
Lieut. John St. John

**16 February 1813: Winter march of the 104th Regiment.** Desperate for reinforcements, Prevost orders the transfer of soldiers from the Atlantic provinces into the Canadas. Soldiers from New Brunswick begin their snow-shoed winter march from Fredericton to Québec City, and eventually Kingston, Ontario. Some die of frostbite on the journey, which lasts many weeks.

**27 April 1813: Invasion and burning of York.** American forces led by General Pike launch a seaborne invasion of the capital of Upper Canada, York (Toronto). The Americans capture, sack and burn the city, but not before the local militia commit acts of sabotage against American occupiers. Fort York's grand magazine (gunpowder storage) is set alight, causing a large explosion which kills and wounds over 240 Americans.

**27 May 1813: Battle of Fort George.** The Americans continue to exploit their dominance of Lake Ontario by landing forces led by General Dearborn in a seaborne attack against Fort George, the main British garrison and headquarters on the Niagara River. Americans overwhelm the British defenders and force them to withdraw from the Niagara Peninsula.

**1 June 1813: Capture of USS Chesapeake.** HMS *Shannon* defeats USS *Chesapeake* and tows the American vessel into Halifax, Nova Scotia. This victory reclaims the honour of the Royal Navy, which had suffered from earlier defeats in ship-to-ship actions.



**CANADIAN VOLTIGEURS**  
PERFORMING TARGET PRACTICE,  
c. 1812-1813 (ARTWORK BY  
EUGENE LELIEPVRE, COURTESY  
PARKS CANADA).

**FITZGIBBON'S TESTIMONIAL**  
1820 TESTIMONIAL REGARDING LAURA  
SECORD (FROM BROCK TO CURRIE  
(TORONTO, 1935)).

**24 June 1813: Battle of Beaver Dams.** Upper Canadian Loyalist Laura Secord overhears American troops stationed at Fort George talk of the impending American advance. Secord treks to warn Lieutenant James FitzGibbon of the attack. A force of Grand River and Mohawk warriors and British soldiers defeat the American attackers at what is now Thorold, Ontario.

**July 1813: First muster of Canadian Volunteers.** A military unit of Canadian renegades who join the American cause is mustered at Fort George. The commander, Joseph Willcocks, enforces a reign of terror in the Niagara region. Many loyal inhabitants, including those who have "given their paroles" not to fight, are taken as hostages and imprisoned in the U.S.

**5 October 1813: Battle of the Thames (Moraviantown).** British and Aboriginal forces are overwhelmed at the battle of Moraviantown. The British forces are routed from the battle and the warrior chief Tecumseh is killed. American occupation of the western district of Upper Canada ends any hope of creating an Aboriginal homeland in the Old Northwest.

**25 October – 11 November 1813: Attack on Lower Canada.** The United States launches its largest offensive of the war, attempting to capture Montréal. 7,300 men are sent down the St. Lawrence River, while a land force of 4,000 men crosses from New York State into Lower Canada. The land force is defeated by 1,700 French-Canadian Voltigeurs, fencibles, and Aboriginal warriors, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Charles de Salaberry at the Battle of Châteauguay. The army on the St. Lawrence is halted when British and militia units defeat the Americans at the Battle of Crysler's Farm. These defeats cause the Americans to give up the St. Lawrence Campaign and guarantee British control of this important river.

1814-1815



**BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS**  
THIS PAINTING BY EDWARD PERCY MORAN DEPICTS THE LAST MAJOR CONFRONTATION OF THE WAR OF 1812, THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS (COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS).

**25 July 1814: Battle of Lundy's Lane.** In one of the bloodiest battles fought on Canadian soil during the war, British troops, fencibles, militia and Aboriginal allies led by John Norton clash fiercely with Americans near Niagara Falls. Both sides lose nearly 900 men, but the battle ends American advances into Upper Canada as they retreat to Fort Erie.

**24 August 1814: Sacking of Washington.** British forces land 4,500 men at Benedict, Maryland and advance on the American capital. The British soldiers quickly overwhelm the American defenders guarding Washington. The British proceed to sack government buildings and set fire to the U.S. Capitol and White House. The Americans destroy the Washington naval yard so the ships and stores won't fall into British hands.

**24 December 1814: Treaty of Ghent.** Peace talks between Great Britain and the United States that began in the Netherlands in August end with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on Christmas Eve. As the Americans had gone back on three previous treaties, the British insist this agreement not take effect until it is approved by both governments. It is ratified by the Prince Regent in December and the Americans in February 1815, thus ending the war.

**8 January 1815: Battle of New Orleans.** In the last major land battle of the war, the Americans, led by Major-General Andrew Jackson, repulse the British under Major-General Edward Pakenham, near New Orleans. This battle is often cited in debates over who actually won the war because it left Americans with a sense of victory.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR AN EXPANDED TIMELINE, PLEASE VISIT [WWW.HISTORICA-DOMINION.CA/1812](http://WWW.HISTORICA-DOMINION.CA/1812).

1. In your opinion, what are the three most significant events on the timeline?
2. Use your thinking skills to classify or organize the events on the timeline. You might want to work with a partner to devise some categories and start sorting. Try to do this with 2 categories, then 3 and, finally, 4 or 5.
3. Choose one item on the timeline that interests you and try to find out a bit more about it. Find one good resource that has information on the topic.

# PERSPECTIVES

As a history student it is important to be able to look at history from multiple perspectives. For example, how would the life and perspective of an officer in the military be different from that of a member of the local militia (volunteer soldier), a civilian, an Aboriginal, a merchant living in York, a New Brunswick militiaman dispatched to Kingston or an American ex-patriot living in Canada? How differently was the war viewed along the Niagara frontier, which witnessed heavy fighting, destruction and displacement of civilians, as opposed to Nova Scotia, which served as the base for the naval blockade of the United States?

We can also consider how the war is viewed by Canadians, Americans and the British. Even the approach to remembering the War of 1812 by these countries tells us something about perspective.

## LIFE OF A SOLDIER, SAILOR AND CIVILIAN

Using some archival material from the website of the Archives of the Government of Ontario ([www.archives.gov.on.ca](http://www.archives.gov.on.ca)), record some information about the life of a soldier by answering the following questions.

1. Who was the core of defense in Upper Canada during the War of 1812?
2. What was one advantage of being an officer?
3. What was the daily ration for “enlisted men”? How sufficient was it?
4. If you had to design a ration for a soldier today, what would you include in it?  
Conduct some research to find out how much that would cost.
5. What were living conditions like for soldiers in the militia?

Use the primary and secondary sources found at the above website and on page 7 to gain a portrait of life as a soldier. You may want to use a chart to record your information based on the subheadings found on the site, such as “Shortages,” “Sickness and Desertion” or “Civilian Life.”

For example, in the primary source sample, below, taken from a letter written in 1813, we see just the difficulties posed by winter as soldiers attempted to advance from one place to another.

*“We have had a most harassing journey of 10 days to this place when we arrived last night in a snow storm. It has been snowing all day & is now half a foot deep.”*

*— Letter from Lieutenant Thomas G. Ridout, 3rd Regiment of York Militia*

◆ GORDON DRUMMOND  
BRITISH OFFICER, CIVIL  
ADMINISTRATOR, AND  
COMMANDER AT THE BATTLE  
OF LUNDY’S LANE.

## A NOTE ABOUT PRIMARY SOURCES

Letters and diaries are primary sources, meaning they are documents that originate from the historical period you are studying. To analyze a primary source, you should consider the following:

1. Who wrote the source? Does his or her perspective matter to our interpretation of the document? For example a soldier’s view on the war may be different from that of a farmer whose home was raided.
2. Who is the intended audience of the source? This matters because private letters may be more revealing than a public speech.
3. When is it from (the date)? This helps us place the document and information in context. For example, is the document from the early part of the war or later?
4. Where is it from? This matters as an Aboriginal view might be different from a French-Canadian view. Or an American might view the burning of York differently from a Canadian.
5. What does the source reveal to us—or what do we learn from it? This is what we try to get from every source.

## ABORIGINALS

*“Our lives are in the hands of the Great Spirit. We are determined to defend our lands, and, if it be his will, we wish to leave our bones upon them.”*  
—Tecumseh, in a speech September 18, 1813

Tecumseh is the most famous Aboriginal warrior from the War of 1812. The Shawnee war chief led a confederacy of more than a dozen First Nations in the war. Ultimately, he fell in the Battle of the Thames in 1813.

Aboriginals played a key role in the War of 1812. Some 76,000 Aboriginal warriors fought on both sides as they hoped to protect their lands and culture, either as allies to the British or the Americans. Some Aboriginal people, such as Red Jacket, advocated neutrality. Others, like John Norton, played an essential military role in battles like that at Lundy’s Lane. While which side won the war is hotly debated, many historians have concluded today that it is Aboriginals who lost the most in this war. As Victor Suthren has written in his book, *The War of 1812*:

“Neither Canada nor the United States seems sufficiently aware that the disparate Indian nations of the Old Northwest, which fought and gave so much in the struggle, received in the war a death blow to their identity as a social and political power—from both the American soldiery and the abandonment of their cause by Britain in the peace that followed.”

## EXERCISE

Conduct research into the impact of the war on Aboriginal peoples. You may use some of your own sources or the ones at the top of the next page.

◆ JOHN NORTON  
(TEYONINHOKARAWEN),  
MOHAWK CHIEF AND INDIAN  
DEPARTMENT INTERPRETER  
(PAINTING BY MARY ANN  
KNIGHT, COURTESY LIBRARY  
AND ARCHIVES CANADA).





## DID YOU KNOW?

Commander-in-Chief George Prevost's daughter, Anne Prevost, kept a diary chronicling the events of the war.

## START YOUR RESEARCH

### Primary Sources:

1. The Journals of Anne Prevost, 1812-1815
2. The Journal of Major John Norton (Teyoninhokarawen), 1816  
<http://link.library.utoronto.ca>  
(Search Major John Norton)
3. Merry Hearts Make Light Days: The War of 1812 Journal of Lieutenant John Le Couteur, 104th Foot
4. Shadrach Byfield: A Private's Experiences in the War of 1812  
[www.fortyfirst.org/writings/byfield.htm](http://www.fortyfirst.org/writings/byfield.htm)

### Secondary Sources:

1. Department of National Defence:  
[www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca](http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca)  
(Search Aboriginal People in the Canadian Military)
2. The Canadian Encyclopedia:  
[www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com)  
(Search War of 1812)
3. PBS: [www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812/](http://www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812/)  
(Search Essay: A Native Nations Perspective on the War of 1812)

“Our forefathers, when they first took the English by the hand, agreed to risk with them. When those who had surrounded our villages under the name of brothers, raised their arm against our Father the King, we all joined him because he was our father; at the peace we removed here to live under his protection, and if he is attacked, we will risk with him: we are not alarmed at the boasted numbers of the Americans, for it is who dwells above that will decide on our fate.”

—John Norton, 1812

**BATTLE OF TIPPECANOE**  
WAS AN AMERICAN VICTORY OVER ABORIGINAL FORCES DURING TECUMSEH'S WAR, ON 7 NOVEMBER 1811 (PAINTING BY ALONZO CHAPPEL, COURTESY SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE).

## Writing Activity

Write a diary entry set during the War of 1812. Write on the same topic from three perspectives: soldier, civilian, Aboriginal.

For a different approach to the concept of perspectives, as a Canadian, write a letter to an American student about the War of 1812. Reply to this fictitious letter from the perspective of an American.

Or, half the class can be “Americans” and the other half “Canadians.” Write letters to each other about your views on the War of 1812.

## FRENCH CANADA

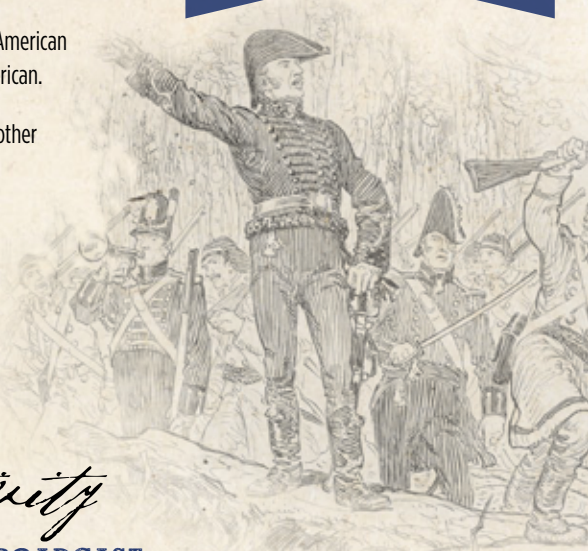
*“Lower-Canadian militiamen were able to neutralize numerous American invasion attempts. Altogether, this impressive participation in the war effort helped redefine the military character of French Canadians. It also dissipated the British authorities’ fears that French Canadians were disloyal subjects.”*

— Martin F. Auger, historian

The capture of Montréal was a key objective of the Americans in the War of 1812. Since it was a critical economic and military centre in what was then called Lower Canada (Québec), the Americans believed that by taking Montréal, they could cut off the interior of Canada and win the war. In 1813, two important battles took place that threatened Montréal: the Battle of Châteauguay and the Battle of Crysler's Farm. Led by Charles de Salaberry, the Provincial Corps of Light Infantry (the Canadian Voltigeurs), a French-Canadian regiment, along with militia, Aboriginal warriors, and Canadian Fencibles, defeated the Americans at Châteauguay, and Montréal was saved from attack.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the Voltigeurs should be a source of pride for the people of Québec today?
2. What makes the Voltigeurs regiment different from some of the other fighting forces in Upper or Lower Canada at the time of the War of 1812? (Hint: think about who made up the regiment and where they were from.)



## Activity

### A RADIO BROADCAST

Write a radio broadcast interviewing a key person from one of the battles noted above. Choices could include: Charles de Salaberry, an Aboriginal soldier, a French-Canadian Voltigeur, or a militiaman.

### WRITE A NEWS REPORT

Alternatively, write a report for a newspaper on one of the battles. Note the key consequence of the battle.

**BATTLE OF CHATEAUGUAY**  
CHARLES-MICHEL DE SALABERRY AND MILITIAMEN DURING THE BATTLE OF CHATEAUGUAY WHEN CANADIAN TROOPS UNDER HIS COMMAND DEFEATED A LARGER AMERICAN FORCE (SKETCH BY C.W. JEFFERYS, COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Drummondville, Québec team in the Québec Junior Hockey League is called the Voltigeurs.

The regimental band of the Voltigeurs was the first to perform “O Canada!” on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day in 1880. To view a Heritage Minute, visit: [www.heritageminutes.ca](http://www.heritageminutes.ca).



◊  
**GEORGE PREVOST**  
 BRITISH OFFICER,  
 GOVERNOR GENERAL,  
 AND THE MILITARY  
 COMMANDER-  
 IN-CHIEF OF THE  
 CANADAS DURING THE  
 WAR OF 1812.

# THE WAR OF 1812 AND CANADIAN IDENTITY

*“History gave the conflict short shrift; and yet for all its bunglings and idiocies, it helped determine the shape and nature of Canada.”*

—Pierre Berton in

*Flames Across the Border: 1813-1814*

It has often been said that while Canada didn't know exactly what it was after 1812, it knew what it wasn't—an American conquest. The War of 1812 solidified borders and had an impact on relationships between early communities in Canada including Aboriginals, British colonists, French colonists and Black Canadians.

Identity can mean many things to many people. Generally speaking, in the Canadian context, it is the aspects of the country that make us who we are—our history, culture, people, attitudes, geography, etc.

It might be described as the characteristics that define Canada and Canadians. Others might refer to the things with which most, or all, Canadians can “identify.”

What role has the War of 1812 played in shaping Canada and its identity?

What role does mythology play in our appreciation of history?

At first, these questions may seem difficult to answer, because the events of the war occurred 200 years ago. But by looking at events and consequences of the war more closely, a sense of how the war contributed to Canadian identity may emerge.

## Group Work COMPARING CANADA THEN AND NOW

What are the features of Canadian identity today? In groups of 4 or 5 brainstorm a list of as many things as you can that seem to be a part of Canadian identity today.

After you have done a bit of reading about the War of 1812 in your history text or at [www.historica-dominion.ca/1812](http://www.historica-dominion.ca/1812), develop a list of things that seem to define Canada around the period of the war. Think about geography, relationships

with other countries, people, or perspectives.

You might also consider what events, people or ideas from the War of 1812 remain with us today.

Record your answers in a chart like this one, which is available for download at [www.historica-dominion.ca/1812](http://www.historica-dominion.ca/1812).

**Then**

**Example:**

–Colony of British Empire; Upper Canada was “British” yet made up of diverse peoples, many of whom had never been to Britain.

**Now**

**Example:**

–Canada is an independent country and is multicultural and diverse; maintains links to Great Britain through constitutional monarchy and Commonwealth of Nations.

## CONSEQUENCES SHAPING IDENTITY

Another way to analyze the question of Canadian identity in light of the War of 1812 is to examine how the consequences of the war had an impact on Canada today. Consider the following consequences of the war.

1. British North America remained a British colony and repulsed attacks by the United States to conquer it.
2. Canada and the United States began a peaceful co-existence that has lasted to this day.
3. Major events and personalities are still studied today.

Are these consequences important to Canada today?



# QUOTATION ANALYSIS

Here are a few quotations about Canada and the War of 1812. Analyze each one by commenting on the source of the quotation as well as what it says about Canada and its identity.

*“But I think, as we see from the way the battle is being memorialized here, that it did give people a sense of identity, a sense that they were different citizens of North America from their American neighbours.”*

—Andrew Pocock, British High Commissioner to Canada, 2011

*“As the 200th anniversary of this old conflict approaches, we should get ready to retell the stories of our brave ancestors. Because what they did then, ladies and gentlemen, made a difference to who we are today, what side of the border we live on, what flag we salute.”*

—Prime Minister Stephen Harper, 2010

*“Not only did the colony [of Canada] remain intact: It had acquired heroes, British and French, and a narrative of plucky defense against foreign invasion, that helped carry it to nationhood.”*

—Eliot Cohen, author of *Conquered Into Liberty*, 2011

*“General Brock and Tecumseh were both killed in the War of 1812. The contributions of Chief Tecumseh and First Nations to the War of 1812 are not well-known. This is something that should be studied by historians, members of Parliament, and citizens of Canada. These citizens call upon Parliament to approve a monument to honour Chief Tecumseh at the place of his death.”*

—Peter Adams, MP, presenting a petition to the House of Commons, 2003



◆ **BLACK HAWK**  
(MAKATAIMESHEKIAKIA),  
SAUK WAR LEADER (PAINTING  
BY CHARLES BIRD KING, COURTESY  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After researching and thinking about the War of 1812, do you think it played a role in shaping the Canadian identity?
2. One historian, Alan Taylor, has made the argument that ideas such as Canadian identity or nationalism are notions that have been added on to our interpretation of the war to suit our own times. In other words, few people at the time of the War of 1812 considered this to be a part of Canadian identity. But now some do.
3. Compare the promotion of the War of 1812 commemoration of the Canadian government to that of the American government. What differences strike you, and what might explain them?
4. Geographically, the War of 1812 took place in a very limited part of what is Canada today, namely Québec and Ontario, with some activity in the Maritimes. Does that fact limit the extent to which someone could argue the war is part of what shaped Canada?

## Writing Exercise

### For High School Students

Write a 600-word essay on one of the following questions:

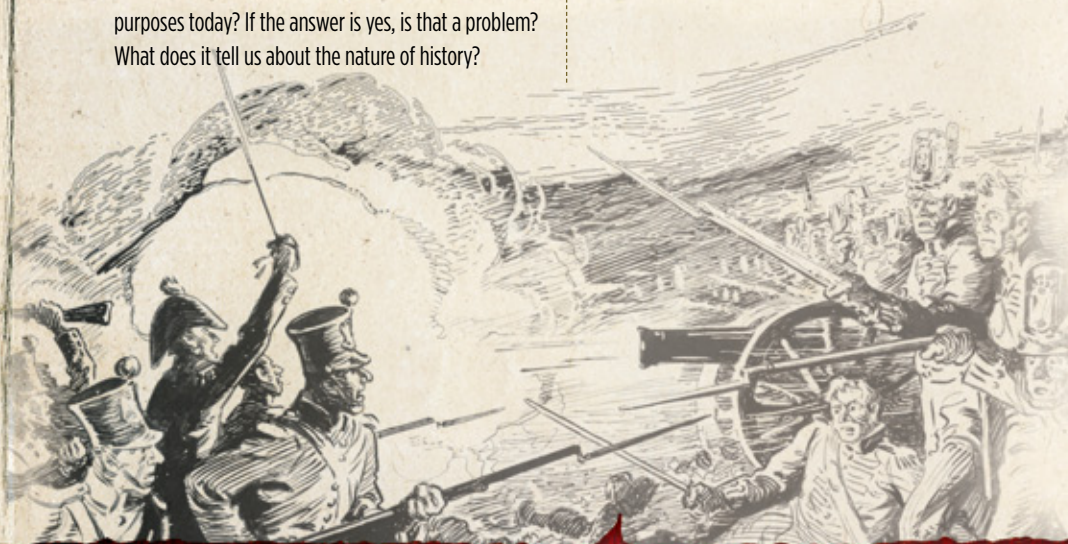
1. Did the War of 1812 play a role in shaping Canadian identity?
2. Is the War of 1812 important to Canadians today?

### For Middle School Students

Write a paragraph on one of the following questions:

1. Is the War of 1812 an important topic to study?
2. Did the War of 1812 help shape Canada into what it is today?

◆ **BATTLE OF LUNDY'S LANE**  
LUNDY'S LANE WAS THE SITE OF A BATTLE FOUGHT BETWEEN AMERICAN TROOPS AND BRITISH REGULARS, ASSISTED BY CANADIAN FENCIBLES AND MILITIA. THE BATTLE WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE WAR (COURTESY NEW YORK STATE MILITARY MUSEUM).



## DEFINITION

**Treaty of Ghent** – Signed in Ghent, in modern-day Belgium, on 24 December 1814, the treaty officially ended all hostilities between Great Britain and the United States. Delegations from the two countries met in August 1814, and eventually brokered an agreement to return all prisoners of war and re-establish pre-war borders.



# THE LEGACY OF THE WAR OF 1812

**TREATY OF GHENT**  
IN HIS 1914 PAINTING "A HUNDRED YEAR'S PEACE," AMÉDÉE FORESTIER ILLUSTRATES THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY OF GHENT BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE U.S. (COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).

After three years of conflict, both sides were looking for a way to end the war, and Great Britain and the United States spent most of 1814 negotiating an end to a conflict that was costing far too much in lives and money. On December 24, 1814, the **Treaty of Ghent** was concluded which essentially returned conditions to the state they were when the war began (status quo ante bellum). No mention was made of the causes that brought the two sides to war in the first place.

The legacy of the War of 1812 has been thought about since. With the war's bicentennial in 2012, questions about the legacy and impact of the war have been reinvigorated.

## DID ANYONE WIN THE WAR OF 1812?

One of the more enduring questions about the War of 1812 is who, if anyone, actually won the war? In fact, 1812 is often referred to as "the war nobody won" or "the war both sides won." One clear result is the disproportionate losses suffered by First Nations. Between 7,000 and 10,000 Aboriginals were killed during the conflict, in addition to which communities lost territory and were left with unfulfilled promises of independence.

This excerpt from Pierre Berton's *Flames Across the Border* gives a good idea why the war is viewed as not having a definitive winner.

*"Having won the last battle, the Americans were convinced that they won the War of 1812. Having stemmed the tide of invasion and kept the Americans out of their country, Canadians believed that they won the war. Having ceded nothing they considered important, the British were serene in the conviction they won it."*

## DEBATE

As a class, debate the following resolutions:

**Be it resolved that: The British won the War of 1812**

**Be it resolved that: The Americans won the War of 1812**

**Be it resolved that: The War of 1812 was a war no side won**

As a class, use a chart to help determine the aims of each side and to track who won and who lost the War of 1812. In a column under "Winners" write down anything that appears as a victory or positive element for any group involved (Americans, Canadians, British or Aboriginals). Do the same for a column with the title "Losers." What do you discover?

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Evaluating the historical significance of an event, person or idea is an essential skill. When thinking about historical significance, historians often look at two things:

- 1. To what extent did the event, person or idea cause change?**
- 2. What is revealed to us about the past by the event and does it help us better understand any issues today?**

For example, in the War of 1812, some consideration should be given to how life for North American Aboriginals changed. As well, the nature of the relationship between what is now Canada and the United States changed. What happened to the borders? Studying the war also reveals some insight into the Canada-U.S. relationship today. Canada is proud of its differences from the U.S. but also celebrates the friendship between the two countries that dates back to the end of the war.

## ACTIVITY

Consider specific battles and personalities from the War of 1812 and note their significance by looking at what **changed** or what was **revealed** by the topic you are studying. Try to explain the significance in two or three sentences.

**Topics for investigation may be chosen from the list below:**

Laura Secord, Battle of Queenston Heights, Tecumseh, Fort York, Charles de Salaberry, Battle of the Thames (Moraviantown), Battle of Châteauguay, Battle of Crysler's Farm, Treaty of Ghent, Lake Ontario, Battle of New Orleans.

## Ranking Historically Significant Events

For another critical thinking challenge, rank the events and people noted in this section from most significant to least significant. Justify your choices, particularly for the first and last items on your list.

Use a rating scale from 1 to 4 to help you whereby 1 represents little change (affected fewer people; effects were not as long-lasting) and 4 represents great change (affected many people; changes were longer-lasting).

## 1812 HISTORICAL MAPS

To view maps from the War of 1812 visit [www.historica-dominion.ca/1812](http://www.historica-dominion.ca/1812).

## DISCUSSION

As a class, discuss the significance of the War of 1812. What kind of an impact did it have on Canada? Refer to specific historical events when giving your opinion.

## COUNTERFACTUAL QUESTIONS: AN APPROACH TO HISTORY

Counterfactuals are the “what if” questions of history. For example:  
What if American invasions into the Canadas had been successful?  
How would the war, or Canada, be different if events had turned out another way?

With a partner research and discuss one of the counterfactual questions below.

1. What if Brock’s promise to Tecumseh of an independent Aboriginal nation had been honoured?
2. What if General Brock had not been killed at Queenston Heights?
3. What if Laura Secord had not warned Lieutenant FitzGibbon of the coming American attack?
4. Consider another event or person from the war and develop a counterfactual question of your own.

## THE WAR OF 1812 TODAY

By investigating what governments and historical organizations are doing today to remember the War of 1812, we can see history in a contemporary light as well as see what interpretations are being given to the events of the past.

### ACTIVITY

Conduct some research into what the Canadian and some American state governments are doing to commemorate the War of 1812. Visit [www.1812.gc.ca](http://www.1812.gc.ca) to see what the federal government has planned. Some states have special commemorations, like Michigan which details its plans at [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov). Search for 1812 Bicentennial.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What types of activities are governments planning to commemorate the war?
2. Why do you think the Canadian government has decided to commemorate the War of 1812 Bicentennial?

### MAKING COMMEMORATIONS

Since the end of the War of 1812 numerous memorials have been constructed, including the monument to Brock at Queenston Heights. The Canadian government will be building a new memorial to the War of 1812 in Ottawa. What type of commemoration project would you create?



To watch a Heritage Minute on the story of Laura Secord, visit: [www.heritageminutes.ca](http://www.heritageminutes.ca)

Laura Secord  
(COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF  
ONTARIO ART COLLECTION,  
ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO).

### ACTIVITY

In this activity you are being asked to design your own commemoration project. It could be a postage stamp, it could be a monument, it could be a poster. Your commemoration may look at only a particular aspect of the War of 1812. For example, perhaps you want to draw attention to Aboriginal contributions or a specific event such as the burning of York or Laura Secord’s efforts. You may work with a partner or on your own.

### PRE-PLANNING

Answer these questions before beginning:

1. What aspect of the war are you commemorating?
2. Justify your choice.
3. What form will your commemoration take?

ORIGINAL BROCK’S MONUMENT  
A PAINTING OF THE ORIGINAL BROCK’S  
MONUMENT PRIOR TO THE 1840 BOMBING  
(PAINTING BY PHILIP JOHN BAINBRIDGE,  
COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).



# PERSONALITIES FROM THE WAR OF 1812

*“Canada’s destiny, for better or for worse, was in the hands of human beings, subject to human ... strengths and emotions.”*

*—Pierre Berton in  
Flames Across the Border*



**ROGER HALE SHEAFFE**  
ARMY OFFICER AND COLONIAL ADMINISTRATOR (COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).



**BLACK HAWK**  
(MAKATAIMESHEKIAKIAK), SAUK WAR LEADER (PAINTING BY CHARLES BIRD KING, COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS).



**COLONEL WILLIAM CLAU**  
STATIONED MAINLY AT FORT GEORGE, WAS KNOWN TO HAVE HAD A BITTER RIVALRY WITH JOHN NORTON FOR INFLUENCE AMONG THE SIX NATIONS (PAINTING BY ANDREW PLIMER, COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).



**RICHARD PIERPOINT**  
AN ILLUSTRATION OF BLACK LOYALIST RICHARD PIERPOINT (ARTWORK BY MALCOLM JONES, COURTESY CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM/1.E.2.4-CGR2).



**JOHN STRACHAN**  
GARRISON CHAPLAIN AT YORK, WHO CONFRONTED AND NEGOTIATED WITH THE AMERICANS (COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES).



**LAURA SECORD**  
(ARTWORK BY MILDRED PEEL, COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO ART COLLECTION, ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO).



**MAJOR GENERAL HENRY DEARBORN**  
THE AMERICAN GENERAL WAS A POOR TACTICIAN AND MORE EFFECTIVE AS A FOLLOWER THAN AS A LEADER (SKETCH BY ALFRED SANDHAM, 1902, COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).



**ISAAC BROCK AND TECUMSEH**  
MEETING OF ISAAC BROCK AND TECUMSEH, 1812 (PAINTING BY C.W. JEFFERYS, COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA).



**COLONEL CHARLES DE SALABERRY**  
WAS CALLED THE HERO OF CHÂTEAUGUAY FOR HIS BRAVERY IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE AMERICANS IN 1813.



**JOHN BRANT**  
(AH'YOU'WA'EGHS), MOHAWK GRAND CHIEF AND INDIAN SUPERINTENDENT (PAINTING BY CHARLES BIRD KING, COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS).

Part of the fun of history is being able to explore some of the personalities involved. During the War of 1812, there was no shortage of interesting characters and stories. People, sometimes even more than events, control the course of history as in the case of 1812.

In this activity, you are being asked to create a “history card” about one of them.

## CREATING A WAR OF 1812 HISTORY CARD

Choose a personality from the War of 1812 and create a “history card” of that person. Each card should contain the following:

- An image of the personality
- A brief description of that person’s role in the war
- A quotation either by the person or about the person
- An interesting or trivial piece of information about the person that goes beyond basic information.

For example, did you know that the tunic worn by General Isaac Brock is on display at the Canadian War Museum?

Use both sides of the card to display your information.

As an added feature, you may give your personality a ranking from 1 to 4 in terms of how significant this person’s role was in the War of 1812. This can be like a “power rating” similar to some card trading games. Cards can be traded among classmates and mounted in the classroom.

## PERSONALITIES

Choose from the list to the right or come up with a name on your own. Alternatively, you may choose to create a card about a particular event from the War of 1812. A great place to start your research is *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography* ([www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca)).

## WHO IS?

- Dominique Ducharme
- Francis de Rottenburg
- James Yeo
- George Prevost
- Robert Heriot Barclay
- John Norton (Teyoninhokarawen)
- Henry Procter (Proctor)
- William H. Merritt
- Robert Ross
- Zebulon Pike
- James Madison
- Mary Henry
- Charles Frederick Rolette