

Historica Canada Education Portal

Cariboo Trail

Overview

In this lesson, students will begin by examining the concepts of cause and consequence of a well-known local or provincial issue. They will investigate the causes leading up to Governor James Douglas' decision to finance the building of the Cariboo Road and explore the intended and unintended political and economic consequences resulting from the decision. Finally, imagining themselves in the role of Douglas, students will prepare a written or oral brief arguing the ramifications to the colony and its people if the road had not been built.

Aims

Prescribed Learning Outcomes:

- apply critical thinking skills, including questioning, comparing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, defending a position
- demonstrate effective research skills, including accessing information, assessing information, collecting data, evaluating data, organizing information, presenting information, citing sources
- demonstrate effective written, oral, and graphic communication skills, individually and collaboratively
- describe the development of British Columbia's economy from 1815 to 1914

- analyze how geography influenced the economic development and settlement patterns in regions of Canada from 1815 to 1914

Background

Known by some at the time as the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” the Cariboo Trail stretched 650 km along through Fraser River Canyon from Yale to Barkerville. It was begun in 1862 to provide a wagon route to the Cariboo region goldfields. Covering treacherous terrain, much of the road had to be blasted from solid rock, and was built by hand, pick and shovel. The road was designed by the British Royal Engineers, who began the work and completed the two most difficult sections—the 10 km stretch from Yale to Boston Bar and a 15 km stretch from Cook’s Ferry along the Thompson River. The rest of the construction was done by private contractors. The road was opened in 1864 and cost more than \$1 million. The trail opened up the Interior enabling services, communication, and transportation to be extended to remote areas.

Activities

Time Allowance: 2-3 class periods (60 minute periods)

Procedures:

1. Introduce the concepts of cause and consequence. Present a well-known local or provincial issue currently under debate (e.g., whether or not to allow agricultural land to be rezoned to allow the building of a big box store, or if municipalities are justified in raising taxes to pay for

additional fire or police services). Invite students to identify the:

- agents (individuals or groups involved in promoting, shaping and resisting the decision);
- types of causes (e.g., political, economic, environmental, cultural, psychological, social) influencing the decision;
- broader consequences resulting from the decision.

Use the issue to point out that causes are complex and multi-layered, and that they involve long-term visions and conditions, as well as short-term actions and events. Indicate that actions often have unintended consequences. Speculate on the unintended consequences of the issue.

Discuss the history of the Cariboo Road with your class. Suggest that there were multiple causes influencing Governor James Douglas' decision to build the road and many resulting consequences.

2. Assign students to work individually or in pairs to research the historical context (e.g., conditions, causes, motivations) leading up to Douglas' decision to build the road, then examine the intended and unintended political, social and economic consequences of the decision.

3. When students have finished recording their data, ask them to indicate, using a "+" or "-" sign, which of the consequences resulted in a positive impact for BC or its people and which ones resulted in a negative impact. Encourage students to share their findings.

4. Invite students to imagine that they are James Douglas, and have been asked to justify his decision to build the Cariboo Road to the Queen's political advisors, who are concerned about the debt incurred by its construction. Instruct students to complete a written or oral brief

arguing the position: “If the Cariboo Road had not been built...”

Encourage them to consider the political, social, and economic impacts and to use evidence from their research to support their claims.

Extension:

Direct students to the BC Tourism website, where they can read about the [Gold Rush Trail Tour](#). Ask them to read the description of the Gold Rush Trail and create an annotated tourist map highlighting the key communities and points of historical significance along the road.

Resources

[Cariboo Road - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Cariboo Gold Rush - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Sir James Douglas - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Historical Thinking Benchmarks](#)

Cranny, M. et. al (1999). Horizons: Canada Moves West. Toronto, ON: Prentice Hall, pp. 216-225. Seixas, P. and P. Clarke, Ed. (2006).

Tools for Historical Understanding: Teaching about Historical Thinking. Vancouver, BC: The Critical Thinking Consortium.