

Historica Canada Education Portal

Gabriel Dumont

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Gabriel Dumont biography from [The Canadians](#) series and focuses on Dumont and the history of the Métis people. Through Dumont's life, we can trace the culture of the Métis and identify the injustices that were inflicted upon them by an indifferent government.

Aims

With a variety of role-playing activities and debates, students will assess the life and accomplishments of Gabriel Dumont to gain a broader understanding of Métis culture and history.

Background

Métis leader Gabriel Dumont led many lives. He was a warrior, statesman, rebel, General, and later a sideshow attraction.

When he was a child, the buffalo thrived, and the Métis with them. Neither white nor Indigenous, they formed their own distinct culture and customs, following the buffalo in the great hunts and living on the land.

As a young man, the stocky, barrel-chested Dumont proved himself through feats of bravery and strength, and became the leader of the great northern hunt on the Canadian prairies. He saw the buffalo dwindling in numbers and he led his people to take up a more settled life. They became farmers and businessmen and developed a community. They adapted to life without the buffalo.

In their new lives, the Métis continued to look to Gabriel Dumont as their leader. In the past, he had shown his mettle in skirmishes with the Sioux, but had also won their loyalty through his many acts of generosity.

Soon the Métis were faced with a new problem. The Canadian government sent their surveyors to the west and parceled out the land the Métis had settled on. Some were lucky enough to keep part of their homesteads, but much was to be given away to white settlers.

Dumont and his people attempted to petition the government to no avail. The government had broken the pact made with Louis Riel fifteen years earlier; there seemed no other recourse but revolt.

Dumont had been agitating against government restrictions and taxes for years, but his illiteracy put him at a disadvantage. Dumont travelled to the U.S. and invited Louis Riel to lead them.

Riel led the Métis into rebellion, with Gabriel Dumont as his General. Dumont, veteran of numerous battles with the Sioux and a brilliant guerilla tactician, was prevented from engaging the government forces on the open prairie by Riel and his vision of a "divine battle." Despite Riel's increasingly erratic leadership, Dumont followed him, and fought until all was lost.

After Riel's capture, Dumont escaped from the Canadian authorities and fled across the American border. Billed as the "Leader of the Canadian Revolt," he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show for a time, and returned to Canada when amnesty was offered.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

Gabriel Dumont has been called a statesman and hero of the Métis people. He was a capable leader of the Métis at the Battle of Duck Lake, Fish Creek, and Batoche. Some Canadians during his lifetime saw him as a rebel and later when he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as a sideshow attraction. How should history remember this famous Canadian?

1. Create a timeline to illustrate the key events in Gabriel Dumont's life from his birth in December of 1837 to his death on 29 May 1906. Include ten key events or developments. Direct your students to select three key events that they think were turning points in Dumont's life. Have each student, individually or in small groups, describe why they think these three events were major turning points. Compare these events and encourage a group or class discussion on why they have selected different events. Emphasize that there is more than one correct answer, but that all answers need to be supported with historical facts and well constructed arguments.

2. On a map of North America, trace the nomadic life of Gabriel Dumont. Mark the sites of the battles in which he was involved and the locations where he lived.

3. Conduct a fictional trial of Gabriel Dumont. Imagine that Dumont, like Riel, had been captured after the Battle of Batoche. Set up the trial with defence lawyers (these should be French Canadians or Métis) and Crown Attorneys. Be sure to call witnesses from the Métis and other Indigenous people such as Big Bear and Poundmaker. The Crown Attorneys will call General Middleton, and maybe Sir John A. Macdonald as their witnesses.

4. Select what you believe to be the most dramatic moment in Gabriel Dumont's life. Use this moment to create a [Heritage Minute](#) about Dumont. Storyboard your Gabriel Dumont Minute. If you have the equipment and time, produce a video of your Minute.

5. Divide the class into two groups, representatives from the Canadian government and representatives of the Métis people. Have both sides select a leader(s) who will speak for the group when the discussion begins. Give each group an information package with pertinent information concerning their goals and objectives as a group. These packages should also include a brief account of earlier relations/dealings between these groups. For example, the information on the Métis could include: a general summary of the Métis way of life, their social and economic foundations, marriage customs, religious beliefs, political theory/structure, and a brief summary of how the Métis have traditionally been treated by the Canadian government and why they may be skeptical of many official promises.

7. In making the video of Gabriel Dumont for *The Canadians* series, the

production team used various types of information to tell the story. How many different types of information can you identify? Rank the various types of information according to what you found most interesting, most reliable, and most effective. Explain why you ranked them in the order you did with specific examples and references.

8. Write an obituary for Gabriel Dumont. (For examples of obituaries, refer to your local newspaper or go to [The Globe and Mail](#))

9. Riel vs. Dumont: Have students research the life of Louis Riel and make a chart comparing Dumont and Riel. Students should make a chart comparing the following items:

- Early Years
- Education
- Relationship with the church
- Role in the Red River Rebellion of 1870
- Status within the Métis community prior to the Rebellion of 1885
- How and why they came into conflict with Canada
- Role in Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885
- Successes as leaders
- Leadership qualities
- Political success
- Their fates
- Contributions to the Métis people

10. Try a formally structured debate with this resolution: Gabriel Dumont was a better leader of the Métis people than Louis Riel and should have a more prominent place in Canadian history as a result.

Resources

[Gabriel Dumont Worksheet](#)

[Gabriel Dumont - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Métis - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Music of the Métis - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Métis Settlements - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Batoche - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Louis Riel - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

Campbell, Maria, *Half-Breed*. Toronto: Goodread Biographies,
McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1973.

Barnholden, Michael, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*. Vancouver: Talonbooks,

1993.

Harrison, Julia, *Métis: People between Two Worlds*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1985.

McKee, Sandra Lynn, *Gabriel Dumont, Child of the Plains*. Surrey, BC: Frontier Books, 1973.