

Historica Canada Education Portal

Jacques Cartier

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Heritage Minute, "Jacques Cartier,"](#) which presents the theory that Canada may have been named after a misunderstanding took place between Jacques Cartier and the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) people.

Aims

Students will explore the relationships between the Indigenous people and early explorers by looking at the First Nations' contributions to European survival, and issues of miscommunication. Students will learn about France's motives for exploration of the new world in the 16th century, as well as examining First Nations' perspectives on the arrival of Europeans.

Activities

1. Learning from First Nations People

When we study exploration and settlement, we sometimes neglect Aboriginal contributions to the Europeans' survival in Canada.

Research the problems that the early explorers and settlers faced in New France. List the problems on a chart. Beside each, explain how the problem was solved. What contributions did Aboriginal people or their lore play in the solutions?

Have students learn about the continuing interaction between French settlers and First Nations people. How did the knowledge of the Aboriginal peoples make survival possible for the settlers?

2. Cultural miscommunication

Misunderstanding between people is often just a problem of language.

Have new Canadians in your class tell stories about specific phrases in English that puzzled or confused them when they first arrived. Some of their stories may involve some funny consequences.

With their help, list some of the phrases (idioms, slang expressions, etc.) that would be confusing to someone learning English. Students should immediately come up with superlatives like "cool" or "bad." With some help, they might come up with idioms like "talking through your hat," "laughing up your sleeve," "barking up the wrong tree," or "wet behind the ears." Students may realize that they are not sure of the meanings of many common phrases (and some will be completely unfamiliar to them).

Have the students translate the phrases you gather from the class, then have them imagine the misunderstandings the phrases might create for a new English speaker.

3. Sailing from France

Cartier was not the only person who had a stake in his explorations. He was part of an historical movement and an era of expansion. This activity gives a broader background to Cartier's mission.

Divide the class into four groups. One group will study Cartier himself, including his statements about the motives for his explorations and his personal background, such as the values surrounding fame in Renaissance Europe. Another group will research Francis I, his character, the political climate of his reign, and the motives for exploration that influenced him. A third group will research the Jesuits and the reasons they participated in colonizing New France. The fourth group will examine the life of the common people of France at the time, to represent one of Cartier's crewmembers, who is thinking of settling in New France.

Each group produces a personal statement in their character's role, giving the reasons they came to New France or were in favour of Exploration. Besides being written, the statement is "performed" for the rest of the class. (It may be written as a document from the period, with appropriate decoration.)

As the class listens to the statements, they should summarize the main points and ask questions.

The class members write a short paper synthesizing the information they have received to understand "The Motives for New World Exploration in Sixteenth Century France."

4. Cooperation or conflict?

It did not take the Indigenous people long to realize that the French had come to their land to stay. Imagine the discussions that arose at gatherings about the strangers in their midst.

As part of a unit on the Indigenous perspective on the arrival of the

Europeans, stage an assembly of Elders to debate how to deal with the foreigners. Here are some possible positions:

- a. Trade with the French will bring prosperity to Indigenous people and should be encouraged.
- b. While trade is welcome, strong negotiation is necessary to limit French expansion. Territorial division must be maintained.
- c. The French will destroy our traditions. We must separate ourselves from them completely.
- d. We must combat their arrival. Unite for war.
- e. If we fight them, they will arrive in larger numbers, with mighty armies. We can only discourage them by making their every move a costly one.
- f. Their culture has made them rich and powerful. We should adopt their ways.

Have students adopt these (and other) positions in the debate, while other students listen. Then open discussion with the listeners about the merits of the positions. How might history have changed had one or another position been adopted? How did other factors, like inter-tribal warfare and disease, contribute to the successes of the colonizers?

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: Jacques Cartier](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Jacques Carier](#)