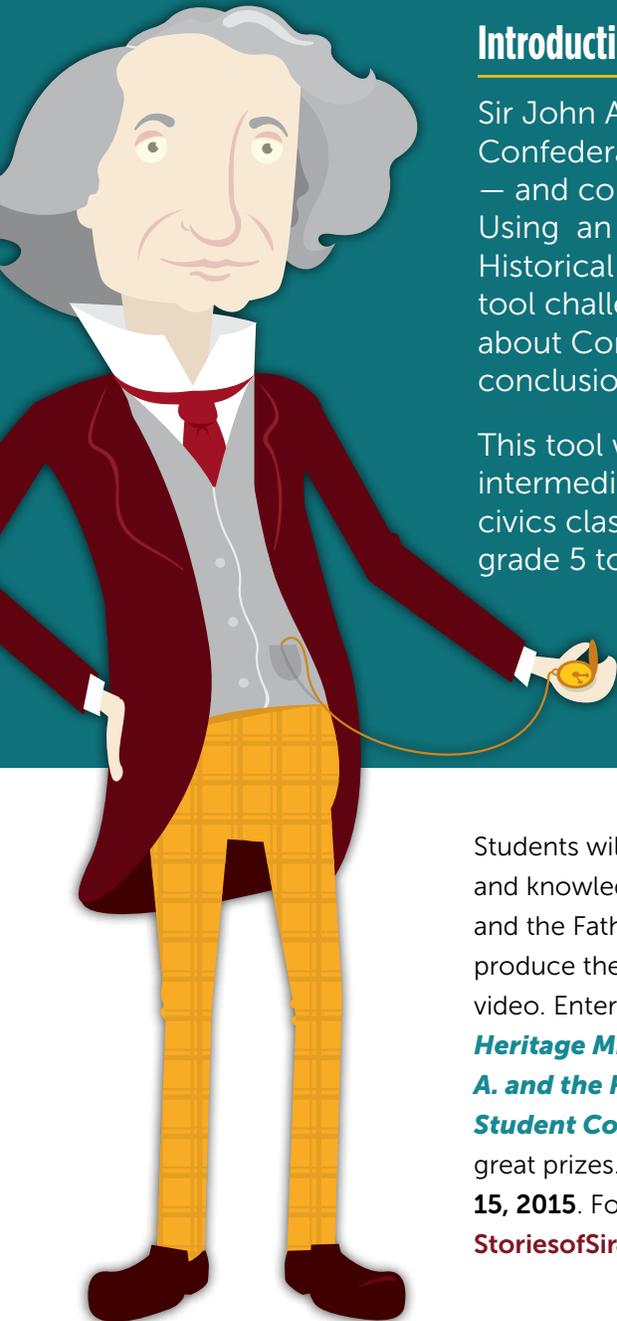


# Sir John A. Macdonald & Confederation

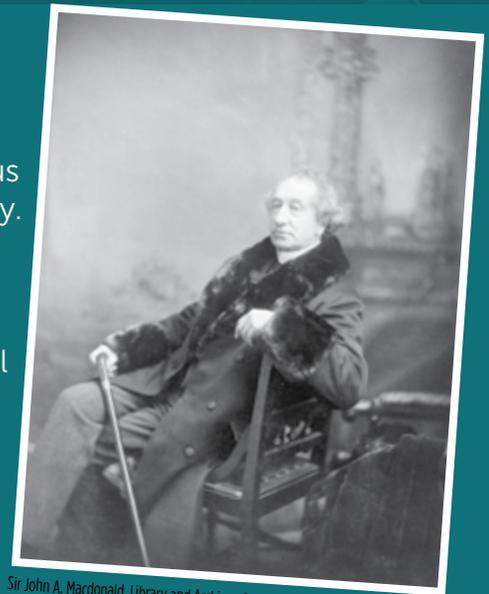
## Junior/Intermediate Learning Tool



### Introduction and Note to Educators:

Sir John A. Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation are among the most famous – and controversial – Canadians in history. Using an approach developed by the Historical Thinking Project, this learning tool challenges students to think critically about Confederation and draw meaningful conclusions by examining evidence.

This tool was developed for junior/intermediate social studies, history and civics classes from grades 5–8 and grade 5 to secondary II within Québec.



Sir John A. Macdonald, Library and Archives Canada.

**Note to Educators: Accommodations for Special Education, ELL and ESL students are included under the appropriate sections and identified as “modification”.**

Students will also apply their creativity and knowledge of Sir John A. Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation to produce their own *Heritage Minute*-style video. Enter it into the ***Make Your Own Heritage Minute: Stories of Sir John A. and the Fathers of Confederation Student Contest*** for a chance to win great prizes. Submissions are **due August 15, 2015**. For more information, visit [StoriesofSirJohnA.ca](http://StoriesofSirJohnA.ca).

**Historica Canada** is the country’s largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada’s history and citizenship. For more information, visit [www.historicacanada.ca](http://www.historicacanada.ca). This learning tool is made possible with the generous support of the **Government of Canada**.

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Educators may want to review the outline of historical significance found on the Historical Thinking Project website (<http://historicalthinking.ca/historical-significance>).



Canadian Pacific Railway Co., Land Grant in Manitoba and North West Territory, McCord Museum.



Charlottetown Conference, 1864, Library and Archives Canada.

## Step One: What is history and what makes something historically significant?

1. Students are rarely asked to think about what history actually is. Explain to a partner how you would define it. Share your ideas with the class.
2. Make a list of the **five** most important events you have studied in history this year. Compare your list with three other people. Work together to make a top-five list your whole group agrees on. Share the list with your class, and discuss what criteria you used to decide which events were most important.

Modification: Students may need to be guided to explain their criteria. Consider asking what made them determine their first choice.

## Step Two: Introducing Sir John A. Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation

1. Watch the *Heritage Minutes* on Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier by visiting [www.historicacanada.ca/content/videos](http://www.historicacanada.ca/content/videos).
2. Choose one of the videos. Discuss why you think it was created. What is it trying to say about Confederation? How did it make you feel? Share your thoughts with the class.
3. The filmmakers felt that these stories were historically significant. Do these events fit the criteria you talked about as a class? Discuss with a partner and then the class.

Modification: Explain to the class what “historically significant” means, using the previous activity in your example. For some students it may be helpful to rephrase the questions, “Is the story that we watched important for Canadian history? Why or why not?”

## Step Three: More about Macdonald

1. Go to [www.StoriesofSirJohnA.ca](http://www.StoriesofSirJohnA.ca). Watch the video called *Making Confederation Happen*, and answer the following questions:

Modification: While watching the video, pause it when necessary, to explain concepts to students or to give background knowledge. Once the video has finished, recap it for the whole class and identify the story’s main idea.

This video presents Sir John A. Macdonald as a great leader who helped make Confederation happen. In your own words, what were his strengths as a leader?

Modification: Have the students brainstorm what the attributes of a leader are. Ask them, “What are some characteristics and strengths leaders have?” Put these answers on the board and explain any words that ESL and ELL students may not understand. Ask the students which attributes, if any, describe Sir John A. Macdonald. The teacher may need to prompt the students to add new strengths.

2. Did the *Heritage Minute* on Macdonald depict his leadership skills? Discuss as a class.

Visit *The Canadian Encyclopedia's* Sir John A. Macdonald exhibit online at <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/exhibit/sir-john-a/>

Working with a partner, create a T-chart listing his "Accomplishments" and "Negative Events".

Modification: Draw the T-chart on the board and give one example for each category. Give students extra time to complete the reading, and encourage them to look up words that they do not know. Depending on the students, reading aloud as a class before they work with a partner to complete the T-chart may be helpful.

Review your list, and identify the three most historically significant events, both positive and negative.

## Step Four: Introducing Historical "Perspectives"

It would be easy to look at an event, like the creation of the Chinese head tax and decide that Sir John A. Macdonald was a terrible man who does not deserve to be remembered. Historians, however, try to avoid that sort of quick judgement. Instead, they try to take a **historical perspective**, meaning they try to understand why people in the past believed things that are different from what we believe today. This can be difficult, as it requires us to think about the possible causes of someone else's beliefs.

1. Looking at modern-day behaviour can help us understand perspective. Can you think of a modern example of someone who does something you can't understand or that you think is wrong? With a partner, think of **five** reasons to explain that person's actions. Share your answers with the class.
2. Now that you've thought critically about decision making, let's look at some of Macdonald's actions. Divide your class into groups. Assign each group one of Macdonald's negative actions and use *The Canadian Encyclopedia* to research why Macdonald acted as he did. Were his beliefs about minorities shared by the rest of society? Did his behaviour help achieve a goal he considered important? Have one group member record your findings and present them to the class.

Modification: Write the instructions on the board and review them with the class before beginning. Depending on your class, you may want to give each group an article(s) to read rather than have them conduct research.

## Step Five: Assessing a *Heritage Minute*

1. In groups of four, brainstorm criteria for evaluating a *Heritage Minute* in the following three categories: historical significance of topic, clarity of message, and audiovisual effectiveness.
2. As a class, compare your criteria and create a checklist.
3. Watch the Macdonald or Cartier *Heritage Minute* again. With your group, evaluate it using your checklist.

### Note for Educators:

It is recommended that educators browse the *Encyclopedia* prior to this assignment to help students find useful articles.

"Come to your genuine poppy!"  
 "I'm the Father of Confederation."  
 "Gracious! Me own chellid don't know me!"  
 "Don't it recognise its real daddy?"



Confederation - The Much-Fathered Youngster John Wilson Bengough 1886, 19th century, McCord Museum.

### Important Note for Students:

Taking an historical perspective does not require us to see Macdonald's decisions as being morally correct. It does help us, however, understand his motives and point of view.



The Last Spike, McCord Museum.

**Note to Educators:**

**While costumes, props and sets are great add-ons, communicating the story accurately and effectively should be your focus.**



Quebec Conference, 1864. Library and Archives Canada.



Fathers of Confederation, John David Kelly, 1900-1925, Library and Archives Canada.

**Activity questions in this learning tool are based on the Historical Thinking Concepts created by professor Peter Seixas. For more information visit: [www.historicalthinking.ca](http://www.historicalthinking.ca).**

## Step Six: Make your own *Heritage Minute*

1. In small groups, decide what topic you wish to address and what message you'd like to convey.

Modification: Before placing students in groups, brainstorm important moments in Canadian history. Remind them of the list they created at the beginning of the lesson.

2. Consider which moments in your subject's life would best illustrate your message. How might you tie these moments together into an easy-to-understand presentation?

Modification: Give the students a worksheet to fill out that includes space for the topic, message and key events. Consider giving the students the option to fill out the sheet like a storyboard with drawings rather than complete sentences.

3. Plan out your video using the chart below. Know the limitations of your equipment, and plan your scenes accordingly.

Key Events	What will our corresponding scene look like?	Materials Needed

### Significant:

When something is relevant and important or worth noting.  
E.g. Marta made a significant contribution to her class project.

### Perspective:

A specific point of view or attitude towards something.  
E.g. Patrick and Carol got into a disagreement because they could not understand the other's perspective.

**Visit our resource section at [www.StoriesofSirJohnA.ca](http://www.StoriesofSirJohnA.ca) for more tips on how to engage students with Sir John A. Macdonald and Confederation.**