# Portail de l'éducation de Historica Canada

## The Confederation Debates: Ontario Intermediate Mini-unit

This mini-unit for intermediate/senior-level classes helps students to understand and analyze the key ideas and challenges that preceded the creation of Ontario and Quebec. The first section deals with the debates in the provincial and/or federal legislatures, while the second section addresses more specifically founding treaty negotiations with the First Nations. Each section can be taught independently.

The activities and attached materials will help students understand the diversity of ideas, commitments, successes and grievances that underlie Canada's founding.

By the end of this mini-unit, your students will have the opportunity to:

1. Use the historical inquiry process—gathering, interpreting and analyzing historical evidence and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources—in order to investigate and make judgements about issues, developments and events of historical importance.
2. Hone their historical thinking skills to identify historical significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, and historical perspective.
3. Develop knowledge of their province/region within Canada, minority rights and democracy, and appreciate the need for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

## Primary Source: John A. Macdonald's Views on Confederation

*Macdonald, as co-Premier of the Province of Canada and member of the Grand Coalition, was among the speakers who introduced the terms of union.*

*When the Province of Canada's legislatures debated Confederation in February and March 1865, John A. Macdonald said the following points:*

**SCHOOLS / MINORITY RIGHTS**

"As to the school question, it had been announced by Hon. Mr. Galt, at Sherbrooke, that before Confederation took place, this Parliament would be asked to consider a measure which he hoped would be satisfactory to all classes of the community. There was a good deal of apprehension[91] in Lower Canada on the part of the minority there as to the possible effect of Confederation on their rights on the subject of education, and it was the intention of the Government ... to lay before the House this session, certain amendments[92] to the school law, to operate as a sort of guarantee against any infringement[93] by the majority of the rights of the minority in this matter.... I only said this, that before Confederation is adopted, the Government would bring down a measure to amend the school law of Lower Canada, protecting the rights of the minority, and which, at the same time, I believe, would be satisfactory to the majority, who have always hitherto[94] shown respect for the rights of the minority, and, no doubt, will continue to do so."

Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

**REPRESENTATION BY POPULATION**

"Now, we all know the manner in which that question was and is regarded by Lower Canada; that while in Upper Canada the desire and cry for it was daily augmenting,[95] the resistance to it in Lower Canada was proportionably[96] increasing in strength.... For though Upper Canada would have felt that it had received what it claimed as a right, and had succeeded in establishing its right, yet it would have left the Lower Province with a sullen[97] feeling of injury and injustice. The Lower Canadians would not have worked cheerfully under such a change of system, but would

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[91] Apprehension = fear
[92] Amendments = changes or additions to a document
[93] Infringement = limitation
[94] Hitherto = until now
[95] Augmenting = growing
[96] Proportionably = proportionately
[97] Sullen = gloomy

The mini-unit includes primary documents from prominent historical figures who contributed to the debate, such as John A. Macdonald.

## Antoine-Aimé Dorion in Brief

*This summary borrows from the* Dictionary of Canadian Biography *entry listed in the "Additional Resources" section of this mini-unit.*

Born in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade (La Pérade), Lower Canada in 1818, Antoine-Aimé Dorion was born into a prominent merchant and Catholic family that had long supported the progressive ideas of the politician and rebel leader Louis-Joseph Papineau. After attending school and studying law, he became an articling student; however after his father suffered a financial setback, he took the role of a junior clerk in Montreal. During this period, he developed deep ties with Lower Canada's intellectual elites, read philosophy and literature, developed a strong reputation as a lawyer, and married Iphigénie Trestler. As a liberal, he was a strong advocate of responsible government. He helped found the short-lived Montreal Annexation Society, where he worked closely with English-speaking Protestants. Yet, Dorion was also something of a moderate in that he did not support the anti-clericalism that had wide support among many *Rouge* politicians and thinkers. He first held provincial office in 1854, when he won the support of English-speaking Montrealers with promises of progress, more elected government positions and reciprocity with the United States. He almost immediately became the Rouge leader in the Legislative Assembly, where he continued to balance progress against anti-clericalism and the survival of French-Canadian culture against the assimilationist intentions of the emerging English-Protestant population in the province of Canada. Dorion spent nearly all of his pre-Confederation political career in opposition; his only time in government was as co-Premier in the ill-fated two-day Grit-Rouge government with George Brown, and a year as co-Premier with John Sandfield Macdonald from 1863 to 1864.

Image held by Library and Archives Canada.

Dorion did not join the Great Coalition of 1864 and was not present at the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences. During the Legislative Assembly's debate on the Quebec Resolutions in 1865, he led the Rouges in opposing the Confederation deal. The federal principle, Dorion claimed, created extra and unnecessary levels of government. Like many politicians from Canada East and West, he contended that the resolutions needed to be ratified by the Province's voters. He was also deeply concerned that English Protestants from across British North America would dominate French Canadians in the House of Commons.

The mini unit provides short biographies of all historical figures.

## Handout: Copy of the Robinson Treaty Made in the Year 1850 with the Ojibewa Indians of Lake Huron Conveying Certain Lands to the Crown

Reproduced from http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028984/1100100028994.

**THIS AGREEMENT**, *made and entered into this ninth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty, at Sault Ste. Marie, in the Province of Canada, between the Honorable* WILLIAM BENJAMIN ROBINSON, *of the one part, on behalf of* HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, *and* SHINGUACOUSE NEBENAIGOCHING, KEOKOUSE, MISHEQUONGA, TAGAWININI, SHABOKISHICK, DOKIS, PONEKEOSH, WINDAWTEGOWININI, SHAWENAKESHICK, NAMASSIN, NAOQUAGABO, WWBEKEKIK, KITCHEPOSSIGYN *by* PAPASAINSE, WAGEMAKI, PAMEQUONAISHEUG, *Chiefs; and John Bell*, PAQWATCHININI, MASHEKYASH, IDOWEKESIS, WAQUACOMICK, OCHEEK, METIGOMIN, WATACHEWANA, MINWAPAPENASSE, SHENAOQUOM, ONINGEGUN, PANAISSY, PAPASAINSE, ASHEWASEGA, KAGESHEWAWETUNG, SHAWONEBIN; *and also Chief* MAISQUASO (*also Chiefs* MUCKATA, MISHOQUET, *and* MEKIS), and MISHOQUETTO and ASA WASWANAY *and* PAWISS, *principal men of the* OJIBEWA INDIANS,[1] *inhabiting and claiming the Eastern and Northern Shores of Lake Huron, from Penetanguishine to Sault Ste. Maire, and thence to Batchewanaung Bay, on the Northern Shore of Lake Superior; together with the Islands in the said Lakes, opposite to the Shores thereof, and inland to the Height of land which separates the Territory covered by the charter of the Honorable Hudson Bay Company from Canada; as well as all unconceded lands within the limits of Canada West to which they have any just claim, of the other part, witnesseth:*

THAT for, and in consideration of the sum of two thousand pounds of good and lawful money of Upper Canada, to them in hand paid, and for the further perpetual annuity[2] of six hundred pounds of like money, the same to be paid and delivered to the said Chiefs and their Tribes at a convenient season of each year, of which due notice will be given, at such places as may be appointed for that purpose, they the said Chiefs and Principal men, on behalf of their respective Tribes or Bands, do hereby fully, freely, and voluntarily surrender, cede,[3] grant, and convey unto Her Majesty, her heirs and successors for ever, all their right, title, and interest to, and in the whole of, the territory above described, save and except the reservations[4] set forth in the schedule hereunto annexed;[5] which reservations shall be held and occupied by the said Chiefs and their Tribes in common, for their own use and benefit.

And should the said Chiefs and their respective Tribes at any time desire to dispose of any part of such reservations, or of any mineral or other valuable productions thereon,[6] the same will be sold or leased at their request by the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs for the time being, or other officer having authority so to do, for their sole benefit, and to the best advantage.

And the said William Benjamin Robinson of the first part, on behalf of Her Majesty and the Government of this Province, hereby[7] promises and agrees to make, or cause to be made, the

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[1] Indians = an archaic term for First Nations Peoples
[2] Perpetual annuity = a payment made every year forever
[3] Cede = give up
[4] Reservations = lands set aside for Indigenous bands
[5] Hereunto annexed = listed below
[6] Thereon = following from the thing just mentioned
[7] Hereby = as a result of this document

The mini unit also includes Indigenous primary documents, including texts from the Robinson-Huron Treaty.

## Curriculum Objectives

This mini-unit has been broadly designed for intermediate / senior level classes. The activities described in the pages, for example, fulfill the following “Section 1 | Creating Canada: The Dominion, Ontario And Quebec” requirements from the grade 8 Ontario curriculum.

The mini-unit can be accessed here:

http://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/pdfs/ontario-prov-en.pdf

## Background

Before each province and territory became a part of Canada, their local legislatures (and the House of Commons after 1867) debated the extent, purposes and principles of political union between 1865 and 1949. In addition to creating provinces, the British Crown also negotiated a series of Treaties with Canada’s Indigenous Peoples. Although these texts, and the records of their negotiation, are equally important to Canada’s founding, as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee recently explained, “too many Canadians still do not know the history of Indigenous peoples’ contributions to Canada, or understand that by virtue of the historical and modern Treaties negotiated by our government, we are all Treaty people.”

The vast majority of these records, however, remain inaccessible and many can only be found in provincial archives. By bringing together these diverse colonial, federal and Indigenous records for the first time, and by embracing novel technologies and dissemination formats, *The Confederation Debates* encourages Canadians of all ages and walks of life to learn about past challenges, to increase political awareness of historical aspirations and grievances and engage present-day debates, as well as to contribute to local, regional and national understanding and reconciliation.