



THE

WAR  
OF  
1812

*and*  
**ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLES**

EDUCATION GUIDE



Canada



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## Message to TEACHERS

*This guide is designed to complement The Historica-Dominion Institute's introductory War of 1812 guide by offering an in-depth discussion of the role of Aboriginal communities in this significant conflict.*

It presents some of the key figures and contributions to the war through integrated learning activities. Two other in-depth guides are available to complement this series. These education guides use themes of perspective, identity, historical significance and personalities to engage students with defining moments in Canadian history, international relations, and Aboriginal and multicultural history in both historical and contemporary contexts. These guides also focus on developing important historical thinking skills that assist students in thinking critically about the past.

The largest independent organization dedicated to Canadian history, identity and citizenship, **The Historica-Dominion Institute** is committed to bringing the stories and experiences of Canada to the public. This guide is made possible with generous support from the **Government of Canada**.

The tools provided here are supplemented with additional activities and resources at [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](http://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812). We hope this guide will assist you in teaching this important aspect of Canadian history in your Social Studies, Geography or History classroom.

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# INTRODUCTION

The 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 presents an opportunity for Canadians to turn their attention to this significant time in the country's history. The War of 1812 had a major impact on the future of **British North America** and, in particular, on the continent's **Aboriginal peoples**, many of whom played an important role in protecting the Canadas (Upper and Lower Canada; now Ontario, Québec and Labrador) from American invasion.

At the beginning of the war, Aboriginal communities were a large part of the North American population. Tens of thousands of Aboriginal warriors fought on both sides of the border to protect their lands, independence and culture, either as allies to the British or to the United States.

Aboriginal peoples' involvement in the war was complex and motivated by many factors. During the period leading up to the War of 1812, several conflicts occurred between **Indigenous peoples** native to the land and American settlers.

The year before war broke out, the Shawnee people of Prophetstown fought against the governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison, and 1,000 men in the Battle of Tippecanoe. During the battle, Harrison's men burned Prophetstown in an attempt to break up the **Western Confederacy** led by Tecumseh and his brother, Tenskwatawa ("The Prophet"). This resulted in an alliance between the Confederacy and the British to counter American expansion. This alliance continued during the War of 1812. Aboriginal warriors fought in the belief that the partnership would bring benefits to both sides. Therefore, while Indigenous peoples fought alongside the British, they were also fighting to preserve their own lands and way of life.

There were many Aboriginal communities in North America at the outbreak of the War of 1812, including the Iroquois (also known as the Six Nations, or Haudenosaunee), Mississauga (Anishinabe) and Huron (Wyandot) peoples. Some leaders stayed neutral, though the Six Nations confederacy was divided by alliances to either Britain or the United States.



**THE SHAWNESE PROPHET AND TECUMSEH**  
TENSKWATAWA ("THE PROPHET") RECEIVES ADVICE FROM  
HIS BROTHER, TECUMSEH. COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.





BATTLE OF THE THAMES  
WILLIAM EMMONS, 1833

#### BATTLE OF THE THAMES

AT THE BATTLE OF THE THAMES, TECUMSEH WAS KILLED BY AMERICAN FORCES ON OCTOBER 5, 1813, DESTROYING THE WESTERN CONFEDERACY. PAINTING BY WILLIAM EMMONS, 1833. COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA.

Leaders such as Mohawk chief John Norton played crucial military roles in battles at Queenston Heights, Chippawa and the Battle of Lundy’s Lane.

Debate continues over who won the War of 1812, though many historians believe that the losses suffered by Aboriginal communities in North America during the war were catastrophic. Among other things, they lost 7,000 to 10,000 lives from all causes, which is nearly the same as the number of British deaths from the war.

American victories, including the **Battle of the Thames**, helped shatter the important Western Confederacy, separating it from its British allies. The Treaty of Ghent—which ended the war—was supposed to return “all possessions, rights and privileges” to Aboriginal peoples affected by the conflict. This was to include the return of Aboriginal lands. None of these terms were honoured.

Instead, the Americans made separate agreements with Indigenous nations in the **Old Northwest**. Trade restrictions and other measures made life difficult for these bands living in American territory. All trade between Aboriginal peoples and foreigners in U.S. territory was banned by the American government in 1816. In the 30 years after the war, the United States military built new forts deeper into Aboriginal territory and restricted their movement. Their goal was to increase American settlement in the region.

After the War of 1812, the British, who had benefited greatly from Aboriginal support, became more interested in keeping peace with the United States than in honouring their promises to Indigenous communities. With the Old Northwest firmly in American control, they backed away from their alliance with the Aboriginal peoples living in that area.

#### SUNSET AT THE AMHERSTBURG NAVY YARD

FORT AMHERSTBURG WAS THE BASE OF OPERATIONS FOR THE 1812 SIEGE OF DETROIT, IN WHICH FORCES LED BY MAJOR-GENERAL ISAAC BROCK AND TECUMSEH CAPTURED FORT DETROIT. PAINTING BY PETER RINDLISBACHER, 1990.



## DEFINITIONS

**British North America** – The term for British colonies and territories in North America after U.S. independence (1783) until Canadian Confederation (1867).

**Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples** – Modern terms for people native to North America, including the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. The Inuit are Arctic Indigenous peoples, while the Métis are a mix of First Nation and European heritage.

**Western Confederacy** – Alliance established by Aboriginal peoples within U.S. borders following the American Revolution with the aim to resist American expansion.

**Old Northwest** – The territory east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio River, where many battles between the U.S. and Aboriginal groups took place beginning in 1785.

As one chief wrote at the time:

*“After we have fought for you, endured many hardships, lost some of our people, and awakened the vengeance of our powerful neighbours, you make peace for yourselves, leaving us to obtain such terms as we can.”*

Studying the history of Indigenous communities and the War of 1812 will give you a better understanding of how the struggles and contributions of Aboriginal peoples are an important part of Canada’s history.

For a complete timeline and glossary, visit [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](https://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812).







## DEFINITIONS

**Surrender of Fort Mackinac** – On July 17, 1812, a force of Aboriginal warriors, fur traders and British soldiers in canoes paddled to Fort Mackinac in Michigan and forced the unprepared Americans to surrender.

**The Battle of Queenston Heights** – On October 13, 1812, American forces attempted to take over Upper Canada at Queenston Heights. They were defeated by local militia and Aboriginal warriors under the leadership of John Norton and Major-General Sheaffe after the death of Major-General Brock early in the battle.

**The Battle of Beaver Dams** – On June 24, 1813, 400 Mohawk warriors, supported by a few British regulars, forced the surrender of nearly 500 advancing American soldiers who planned to destroy a nearby British outpost.

# PERSONALITIES FROM THE WAR OF

# 1812

*In this section, you will consider the roles played by prominent Aboriginal leaders during the War of 1812.*

*You will also have the opportunity to conduct original research on a historic personality of your choice.*



*John Norton*  
**(TEYONINHOKARAWEN)**

John Norton, the son of a Cherokee father and Scottish mother, was educated in Scotland before joining the British 65th Regiment of Foot in 1784. Once in British North America, Norton served as an interpreter and trader, and was named a Mohawk chief. During the War of 1812, Norton led Grand River warriors at the **Battle of Queenston Heights**. This was one of many successful actions led by Norton and supported by Aboriginal warriors, including the **Battle of Beaver Dams** in 1813 and the Battle of Lundy's Lane in 1814.

◆ **JOHN NORTON (TEYONINHOKARAWEN)**  
PAINTING BY MATHER BROWN, 1805. COURTESY YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART.

*Black Hawk*  
**(MAKATAIMESHEKIAKIAK)**

During the War of 1812, Black Hawk, a Sauk war chief from within the American territory, led a force of warriors in several battles including the capture of **Fort Mackinac**, the sieges at Fort Meigs, the attack on Fort Stephenson and in concentrated efforts south of the Great Lakes supporting British troops. For his actions, Black Hawk was recognized by the British army. He would continue to lead warriors in the resistance to American expansion after the war.



◆ **BLACK HAWK (MAKATAIMESHEKIAKIAK)**  
PAINTING BY CHARLES BIRD KING, CA. 1837. COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Wampum Belt Treaties

Treaties between Europeans and the Aboriginal peoples of North America were first made in the 17th century, and were often represented by objects like wampum belts. Parallel rows of purple beads on the Iroquoian Two-Row Wampum (Kaswentha) indicate that neither group should interfere with the other. Wampum belt treaties continue to be used as legal instruments today.



*Tecumseh*

*“Our lives are in the hands of the Great Spirit. We are determined to defend our lands, and if it is His will, we wish to leave our bones upon them.”*

*– Tecumseh, before the Battle of the Thames, 1813*

◆ **TECUMSEH**  
COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Following the devastating outcome of the Battle of Tippecanoe, Shawnee Chief Tecumseh joined British troops in an effort to create alliances and preserve remaining Aboriginal lands. Under Tecumseh and Major-General Brock's leadership, the British captured Fort Detroit in 1812 after Major-General William Hull surrendered the fort, an important early victory in the war.

On October 5, 1813, British and Aboriginal forces were overwhelmed at the Battle of the Thames. The British forces were defeated and Tecumseh was killed. He led the Western Confederacy, an alliance of more than a dozen Indigenous groups, until his death.

Tecumseh is one of the most intriguing figures from the War of 1812. Since his death in 1813, Tecumseh has inspired poets and artists alike, who have called him everything from a “great Aboriginal hero” to a “gallant and impetuous spirit.”

◆ **TWO-ROW WAMPUM (KASWENTHA)**  
REPRODUCTION AND PHOTOGRAPH BY DARREN BONAPARTE. USED WITH PERMISSION.



# Research Activity

Conduct some research about John Norton, Black Hawk, Tecumseh or one of the figures listed here using sources in your library, or begin your research at [eighteenthelve.ca](http://eighteenthelve.ca).

This exercise may be expanded into a full report about one Aboriginal figure or may serve as a basis for gaining a better understanding of the valuable contributions of Aboriginal peoples to North America's history.

◊ **JOHN BRANT (AH'YOU'WA'EGHS)**  
PAINTING BY CHARLES BIRD KING, 1838.  
COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA.

◊ **RED JACKET (SAGOYEWATHA)**  
PAINTING BY CHARLES BIRD KING, CA. 1837.  
COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Other notable figures for further research:

**Tenskwatawa ("The Prophet")**  
**John Brant (Ah'You'Wa'eghs)**  
**Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha)**  
**Catharine Brant (Adonwentishon)**  
**Roundhead (Stayeghtha)**

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE



COURTESY CANADA POST, 2012.

Historical significance is often determined by looking at the change caused by a person or event, or by looking at what the person or event reveals to us about a time. How individuals and historians have interpreted events through the years reveals how some events are more or less significant to certain people. For example, Indigenous perceptions of history are often linked strongly with oral traditions and place. Historical learning requires understanding of one's past, community and surroundings.

What can we learn about Aboriginal communities by studying the important Aboriginal figures from the War of 1812? How have the interpretations of these figures changed over time?

## DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

In June 2012, Canada Post issued the stamp illustrated above. Look at the stamp and discuss with a partner or in small groups what it says about the status of Tecumseh.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of Tecumseh appearing on a stamp with General Brock?
2. How would you describe the portrayal of Tecumseh on this stamp? Refer to specific details in the stamp to support your view.
3. How do you think this stamp relates to the Aboriginal tradition of oral history?

**Compare the stamp with Lorne K. Smith's painting of a meeting between General Brock and Tecumseh from the 1920s, shown above.**

1. What are the similarities in how Tecumseh and General Brock are portrayed? What are the differences?
2. Who created each of these representations and what might each of their perspectives reveal? Which do you feel is more authentic, and why?
3. Does anyone know what Tecumseh actually looked like? How is Tecumseh represented within today's Indigenous communities?



◊ **THE MEETING OF BROCK AND TECUMSEH**  
PAINTING BY LORNE K. SMITH, CA. 1920.  
COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA.

*For an Indigenous author's story about the War of 1812, read Basil Johnston's "The Wampum Belt Tells Us" in Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past (2004).*

## Activity

Choose one of the following activities to show the lasting significance of your chosen Aboriginal leader:

1. Write a poem about an Aboriginal leader that informs and entertains readers about his or her legacy.
2. Create a trading card explaining his or her accomplishments and appeal, including all relevant information concerning the War of 1812.
3. Choose an Aboriginal figure and write a proposal to Canada Post arguing why he or she should be on a stamp.





*“The thousands of miles that Aboriginal soldiers travelled over the course of more than two centuries to help defend this country make up a thousand memories, so many of which have been ignored or lost. Yet these are the details of our history which we must remember, which we must commemorate.”*

– The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada

◆ NATIONAL ABORIGINAL VETERANS MEMORIAL, OTTAWA. THIS 2001 SCULPTURE CELEBRATES THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ABORIGINAL VETERANS TO CANADA’S HISTORY. INDIGENOUS NATIONS CONTINUE TO ADVOCATE FOR RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES AND RECOGNITION FOR THEIR MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS. COURTESY NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION.

## CONTINUITY & CHANGE

When studying history, it’s a good idea to consider what has changed over time and what has remained the same. In the activities below you will be able to apply the idea of continuity and change to the War of 1812, and its impact on the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

### ABORIGINAL WARRIORS IN BATTLE

For many Indigenous peoples who fought in the War of 1812, life skills such as hunting were easily transferable to battle. Early training in marksmanship and the use of tomahawks and knives meant warriors were prepared to fight one-on-one.

Since most weaponry could easily pierce traditional armour, warriors fought in as little clothing as possible to allow for better movement. They also painted their bodies in different colours and wore boots or moccasins, feathers and medallions.

Aboriginal peoples have made and continue to make important military contributions to Canada. Conduct research on the roles played by Aboriginal peoples in the conflicts listed below. You may research these individually or in groups of 5 or 6, with one topic each.

For each conflict, research how Indigenous peoples fought, whom they fought alongside and against, and what the outcomes were for their communities. Record one or two significant personalities you come across.

Seven Years’ War

Red River and North-West Resistance Campaigns

American Revolution

Second Boer War

First World War

Second World War

*For stories about Indigenous veterans’ experiences in modern conflicts, visit [thememoryproject.com](http://thememoryproject.com).*

## CONSEQUENCE AND MEMORY

How history is remembered can depend on whom you ask. Even 200 years later, opinions vary about the War of 1812. In this section, you will think critically about a selection of modern quotations that discuss the role of Aboriginal peoples in the War of 1812.

*“I would hope that in anything that is drawn up for the commemoration of the War of 1812 that it also looks at the failed hopes of the native people for whom the War of 1812 was the last time they were almost equal to the Europeans.”*

– Former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario James Bartleman, Member of the Chippewas of Mnjikaning First Nation, 2009

*“Canada needs to promote public education to overcome the missing history of the significant contributions made by the Indigenous Nations in the 1812 War and the overwhelming sacrifices made by the Indigenous Warriors.”*

– Resolution 22-2 of the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly, 2009

*“First Nations engaged as allies just as was agreed to in Treaties, to work together for a better future for all of us. This is, and must, be the way forward – returning to that original relationship, working together based on mutual respect and the implementation of rights and the Treaties.”*

– Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations, 2012

### DISCUSSION

1. What do these quotations reveal about how the role of Aboriginal peoples in the War of 1812 is perceived today? In what ways are these perceptions similar and different?
2. There is an old quotation that says, “the victors write the history.” Do you think this is true of the War of 1812?
3. What do you think the Aboriginal leaders discussed in this guide would think of the commemoration of the War of 1812 now?
4. James Bartleman spoke about “failed hopes.” Conduct some research and find out what those hopes were.
5. Use a chart to compare the status of Aboriginal peoples before the War of 1812 and after. What changed and what remained the same?

For a list of sources, visit [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](http://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812).



WAR OF 1812 VETERANS ◆ JULY 1882, PORTRAIT OF SURVIVING SIX NATIONS WARRIORS WHO FOUGHT WITH THE BRITISH IN THE WAR OF 1812. (RIGHT TO LEFT:) SAKAWARATON - JOHN SMOKE JOHNSON (BORN. CA. 1792); JOHN TUTELA (BORN CA. 1797); YOUNG WARNER (BORN CA. 1794). COURTESY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA.