

Historical Thinking Mentorship Project:
Cause and Consequence in Canada 1914-1929

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Section 1. Historical Thinking Concept

Chosen concept: Cause and Consequence

Student explanation for learners:

When considering the causes and consequences of any historical event, it is important to go beyond the immediate. Immediate factors are important, but they are not the only factors to consider. By looking at multiple factors, immediate and distant, historians can get a bigger picture of any particular event. It is up to historians to determine the influence of these factors, as not every factor is equally important. This same logic applies to the consequences of historical events. What new events occurred as a result of this event? Some consequences may be intended, but often there are unintended results of a particular event. Examining these consequences allows historians to gain a greater understanding of an event and the landscape around it. This landscape allows for a richer understanding of a historical event, for the cycle of cause and consequence to repeat itself.

Section 2. Curricular Alignment:

Grade level: CHC2D - Grade 10 History

Ontario Curriculum Overall Expectation: B2. Communities, Conflict, and Cooperation: analyze some key interactions within and between different communities in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and between Canada and the international community, from 1914 to 1929, and how these interactions affected Canadian society and politics.

Teacher facing curricular note:

Cause and Consequence are imperative to understanding any historical event. It is by looking at many aspects, such as communities, cooperation and conflict, that these historical causes can be fully and deeply understood. This time period is where Canada has a dramatic shift in society and political autonomy, from conscription to Vimy Ridge. This means that exploring Cause and Consequence allows for a much richer understanding and deeper student engagement. Allowing students to develop richer understandings of certain key events makes showing and explaining broader outcomes much clearer. This is a timeframe when many aspects of Western Society are tested, where many Causes and Consequences converge, which has a drastic implication for Canada and the rest of the world. This is exactly where exploring Cause and Consequence shines.

Section 3. Primary Source and Worked Example:

Primary source selection:

The sources we chose are a Robert Borden speech and an image of him in England, addressing troops at Seaford Camp, a military training camp. We chose this image to situate the

speech in the appropriate historical context and to show a visual representation of where he might have presented this speech in real life.

The speech we selected is a documented version of a speech delivered by Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden during the First World War. In this address, Borden called for strong support from Canadians in the European conflict. As stated, “As to our duty, all are agreed: we stand shoulder to shoulder with Britain and the other British dominions in this quarrel.” His words reflect the political messaging used at the time to justify Canada’s participation as part of the British Empire. It also supports pro-imperialistic sentiment held by Borden and his government at a time when Canada was still considered a part of the British Empire as a British colony. The speech demonstrates and justifies why Canada was joining a conflict that did not affect it geographically. Borden states, “Not for love of battle, not for lust of conquest, not for greed of possessions, but for the cause of honour, to maintain solemn pledges, to uphold principles of liberty, to withstand forces that would convert the world into an armed camp”. This sentiment solidifies Borden’s reasoning behind joining and enlisting men in support of Canada in its war effort; it is honourable and not greedy to join the fight, and that’s why we’re here, asking you to support us.

Our second source is a photograph showing Borden in England, speaking directly to Canadian troops stationed at Seaford Camp, a military training camp at the time. This image provides visual context for the kind of setting in which Borden could have delivered his wartime messages and highlights his efforts to connect with soldiers on the front lines.

Together, these sources help situate Borden’s rhetoric within its historical environment. The speech offers insight into the arguments used to rally support for the war, while the photograph grounds those ideas in the lived reality of Canada’s military presence overseas.

Context for learners:

During the First World War, Prime Minister Robert Borden travelled to Europe to visit Canadian troops serving on the front lines. The speech and photograph you will see come from this period, when Canada was still closely tied to Britain, the Crown, and deeply involved in the war effort overseas. The image shows Borden addressing soldiers in England, while the speech reflects the kind of messages political leaders used to explain and justify Canada’s participation in the conflict. Together, these sources offer a glimpse into how Canada’s role in the war was presented to both troops and the public, inviting you to consider how leaders shaped wartime attitudes and expectations.

Modelled historical thinking:

To understand these sources, historians begin by situating them in the broader circumstances of the time. They ask questions of sources constantly. By asking questions such as Who created these sources? For what audience? Under what pressures or motivations? Historians can better understand not only what Borden said, but why he said it, and how his words fit into the political and social climate of wartime Canada.

When historians specifically use the concept of Cause and Consequence, they look at why something happened and what results followed. With these two sources, we can trace how political messaging shaped wartime actions and attitudes.

Questions that might arise for a historian include: What caused Borden to deliver this kind of speech? Canada was facing enormous pressure to sustain its military commitment to the First World War, and as a dominion of the British Empire, the government felt obligated to support Britain's war effort. These conditions help explain why Borden emphasized loyalty, sacrifice, and duty—his speech was a response to the need for continued public and military support.

Next, historians consider the consequences of such messaging. Borden's speeches contributed to shaping public opinion, reinforcing pro-imperial sentiment, and encouraging enlistment or continued service. The photograph of him addressing troops shows one of the ways these messages were delivered directly to soldiers, which may have boosted morale or reinforced expectations of perseverance. Historians might ask: How did these speeches influence soldiers' experiences? How did they affect debates at home about conscription or Canada's role in the war? By examining both the causes behind Borden's rhetoric and the consequences that followed, historians can better understand how political leadership influenced Canada's wartime trajectory.

Teacher note:

This example can be used to help students practice identifying and explaining cause-and-consequence relationships in historical sources. A teacher might emphasize how Borden's speech was shaped by wartime pressures and Canada's imperial ties, prompting students to consider why leaders framed the war in certain ways. Students may point to consequences such as increased support for the war, reinforcement of imperial identity, or tensions surrounding conscription. This activity supports conceptual learning by showing students how to move beyond description and instead analyze how actions, decisions, and messages produce short- and long-term effects within a historical context.

Section 4. Visual Accompaniment to the Primary Source:

Type of visual or organizer: Primary source analysis chart

This primary source analysis chart helps students break down the primary document into paragraphs and provides space to organize their thoughts about the reading.

Description of the tool:

In this primary source analysis chart, students work through Robert Borden's WWI speech paragraph by paragraph, recording key ideas, unfamiliar terms, emotional tone, and emerging questions. By breaking the speech into smaller sections, the organizer slows down the reading process, helps students identify potential causes of this speech and of WWI more

broadly, and encourages students to use critical thinking to predict outcomes based on these words. The chart provides students with a structured space to observe what Borden argues, how he explains Canada's actions, and how this speech affects Canadians. This supports reading comprehension and analysis by prompting students to notice details, track Borden's logic, and begin interpreting how he connects events, decisions, and outcomes during WWI.

Pedagogical purpose:

This visual structure supports historical thinking by guiding students from noticing details to forming interpretations of why events happened and their impacts. By organizing their ideas systematically, students can compare patterns across paragraphs, identify the causes Borden emphasizes, and evaluate the short- and long-term consequences of these words and the war more generally. The chart provides scaffolding for students; instead of being overwhelmed by dense political speech, students can sort evidence, highlight problem areas for them, and track causes and consequences comprehensively. Ultimately, the organizer helps students move from "What is Borden saying?" to "How is this speech displaying cause and consequence, and what does this reveal about Canada in a wartime context?"

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS CHART

PARAGRAPH NUMBER	KEY CONCEPTS OR IDEAS IN THIS SECTION	WHAT CAUSED THIS TO BE SAID? (CAUSE)	WHAT DO YOU THINK IS A POTENTIAL OUTCOME ? (CONSEQUENCE)

Link to full chart: <https://canva.link/90cvvjnjmhzt4u3>

Section 5. Scholarly Rationale for Pedagogical Design:

Scholarly rationale:

In the *Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*, Peter Seixas and Tom Morton warn historians against what they, following Swedish high school teacher Ola Halden, call “personalisation”, namely explaining historical events through the actions of one person (111). In an earlier era, emergent social historians referred to this kind of history as “history of great men” and dismissed it as unjust and dismissive of the experience of ordinary people. Best represented by the mid-nineteenth English historian Thomas Carlyle who claimed that “the history of the world is but the biography of great men”, this approach was opposed by the mid-twentieth century English historian Edward Palmer Thompson who, in his magisterial history of *The Making of the English Working Class* set out “to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity.” Leo Tolstoy, a contemporary of Carlyle, also disagreed that great men who got the credit for making history actually made history. Instead, in *War and Peace*, he claimed that they were “history’s slaves” who are merely lending their names to what is a social process of much greater magnitude.

We focus here on the image and a speech of one such ‘great man’, not because we believe, with Carlyle, that he was the one who made history, but to get a glimpse into the mindset of a Prime Minister of the Dominion of Canada. We recognize the need for an in-depth and careful examination of the thoughts and actions of ‘great men’ not because they make history, but because they seek to make history. They may not be all-powerful makers of history. But they matter, and what they say matters. As Sefiani Dwi Azmi puts it:

In political discourse, the speaker is not merely an individual, but a representative of institutions and ideologies. Every word choice, syntactic structure, metaphor, repetition, and emotional tone is part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy designed to establish credibility (ethos), appeal to emotion (pathos), and present logical arguments (logos). For example, when a president speaks of a “war on terror” or “nation-building,” these expressions are imbued with ideological undercurrents such as nationalism, state sovereignty, or justification for policy directions. (39)

While recognizing limitations of focusing on ‘a great man’, we still find it important to analyze the words of a Prime Minister who worked hard to bring Canada into war and who ultimately made the decision to do so. We think that his rhetorical strategies and persuasions matter and should be studied in high schools.

We use visual aids - a photograph and a primary source analysis chart - to enhance the student experience. The photograph of Robert Borden speaking to the troops in England is useful in a variety of ways described by M. Murphy et al in their *Unframing the visual: Visual literacy pedagogy in academic libraries and information spaces*, that are not available from a written document. They explain and advocate the practice of “unframing” to help students become more visually literate. Analyzing the context of the image is as important, they claim, as analyzing its content. But again, we see the value in a deep analysis of the content as well, not to worship

Borden or endow him with special powers of ‘great men’, but to see him for who he really was and to see what he had to do in order to get his way. We do so critically, following Seixas and Morton’s advice, and ask students to inquire into what may be the motivations of the photographer or what is the message of the photo? (58) Another visual aid - the primary source analysis chart - helps students make sense of a written document, a speech that may appear confusing and overwhelming. It helps them break down the speech into small, manageable chunks that may come together in the end or may not have to be brought together at all.

Rather than trying to answer the big question of what all the causes and consequences of World War One, we chose to focus intently on the worldview and intentions of one man who represents the Canadian ruling elite. We think that this is a valid way of teaching history as it is limited and manageable for students and as it hones critical thinking and analysis learning skills.

Primary Sources:



Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden speaking to troops at Seaford Camp on 11 August 1918.

George Metcalf Archival Collection

CWM 19940003-060

<https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/objects-and-photos/photographs/photographs-of-prominent-people/sir-robert-borden/?back=451>

"Canada at War"

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE
DOMINION PARLIAMENT
AUGUST, 1914

SPEECH

By

Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Laird Borden
K.C., P.C., G.C.M.G.

Aug. 1914

"As to our duty, all are agreed; we stand shoulder to shoulder with Britain and the other British dominions in this quarrel. And that duty we shall not fail to fulfil as the honour of Canada demands. Not for love of battle, not for lust of conquest, not for greed of possessions, but for the cause of honour, to maintain solemn pledges, to uphold principles of liberty, to withstand forces that would convert the world into an armed camp; yea, in the very name of the peace that we sought at any cost save that of dishonour, we have entered into this war; and while gravely conscious of the tremendous issues involved and of all the sacrifices that they may entail, we do not shrink from them, but with firm hearts we abide the event."

Speech by Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden in August 1914.

<https://wartimecanada.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CanadaAtWar.Aug.1914.pdf>

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