

The Conscription Debate Lesson Plan

Description: In this lesson, students learn about the conscription debate in Canada in 1917. Students are organized into three groups (anti-conscription farmers, anti-conscription French Canadians, and pro-conscription English Canadians), and conduct research on the argument for or against conscription made by their assigned group. Students then participate in a debate on the topic.

Recommended Grade Range

All provinces and territories except Quebec: Grades 10 to 12

Quebec: Secondary 4 and 5

Prerequisites: This lesson should follow previous discussions and lessons on the First World War.

Objectives:

- Students learn why Prime Minister Borden introduced the Military Service Act in 1917, enacting conscription by law;
- Students learn why many farmers and French Canadians opposed conscription;
- Students work in groups assigned to represent farmers, French Canadians, and English Canadians, and conduct research for a debate on conscription;
- Student groups organize their research results in a table;
- Students conduct a debate on the issue of conscription using their research.

Estimated Time: 3-4 class periods

Materials Required:

- Overhead transparencies of First World War recruitment posters printed from the resources section, or copies of these posters to hand out to students, downloaded from resources sections;
- Projector (if not using copies);
- Internet/computer lab access for 1-2 class periods;
- Copies of the Conscription Debate Worksheet.

Lesson:

Warm-up

- Project or hand out images of recruitment posters
- Ask students to discuss the posters, prompting them to consider issues related to joining the military. What reasons might people have for volunteering to go to war? What reasons do the posters suggest? Are the posters effective in convincing the

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viewer? What reasons might people have for not volunteering to go to war?

- Remind students to keep in mind the social context of Canada during the First World War.

Main Activity

Ask students to imagine that it is 1917. At the start of the war in 1914ans had eagerly volunteered to participate in the First World War. Now, however, the number of war dead has reached at 30,000, and is increasing steadily, and there is no end to the war in sight. Fewer and fewer Canadians are willing to enlist voluntarily. As a result, Prime Minister Borden has enacted the Military Service Act, which essentially requires all able-bodied men aged 20-45 to join the military. The implementation of conscription is very controversial.

Draw a table on chart paper (you will return to it after students complete their research projects), with two columns: “For” and “Against”. Ask students to brainstorm reasons people might have for supporting the conscription or protesting it.

Explain to students that they will be researching three key groups involved in the conscription debate during the First World War. Assign all students to one of three groups: farmers, French Canadians, and English Canadians.

Distribute the Conscription Debate Worksheet, and explain to students that they will be researching the argument made by their assigned group during the First World War conscription debate.

Allow one to two class periods for students to conduct research in the library and/or on the internet. Below are some web pages that you may want to direct students toward in the initial phases of their research:

- Canadian War Museum: Canada and the First World War
- Canadian Encyclopedia : Conscription
- Histori.ca: The Conscription Crisis of 1917
- CBC archives: The First World War: Canada Remembers
- McCord Museum: Wanted! 500, 000 Canadians for WW I
- Library and Archives Canada: Serving the World From Our Shores
- Alternative Service: History (In English only)
- Mennonite Central Committee: A Short History of Conscientious Objection in Canada (in English only)
- Université de Sherbrooke: Bilan du siècle (In French only, search for conscription,

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1917-1918)

Once research has been completed, allow students some time to consolidate their research as a group and prepare for the debate. When groups have their arguments prepared, have them sit together and conduct the debate with you as the moderator.

Wrap-up

When the debate has ended, show the class the “For” and “Against” chart that was completed before the students conducted their research. Use the chart to help students reflect on what they have learned. What arguments made by each of the three groups are already on the chart? Are there any new points students would add as a result of their research? Have students summarize the results of conscription. Do they think it was the right thing to do? How did it affect Canada?

Remind students that not all French Canadian and farmers were against conscription; and not all English Canadians were for it.

Assessment:

Conscription Debate worksheets:

- Ensure each student hands in his or her worksheet (not just one per group).
- Student should cite information from several sources - you may want to assign students a specific number of required sources.
- Information cited should be relevant to the perspective taken by the group assigned to the student.
- Main points that should be included by each group:
 - *Farmers:* Many farmers were angry about conscription. They were initially exempted from conscription because they were working at home to provide valuable supplies for the war effort. Prime Minister Borden broke this promise in 1918 with an announcement that farmers were now eligible for conscription.
 - *French Canadians:* Many French Canadians were against conscription. They felt little connection to the British government that had drawn Canada into the war, and so were not motivated to participate in the war by the same patriotic emotions felt by many English Canadians. In addition, the Canadian military was almost exclusively English-speaking.
 - *English Canadians:* Many English Canadians supported conscription because of patriotic connections to Britain and a desire to support Britain in the war.

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Debate:

- For this portion of the lesson, mark based on student participation, behaviour within and amongst groups, and relevance of the points made by the student during the debate;
- Student should work well with other students in his or her group, and should not dominate the debate if other group members wish to speak (you may wish to ask students in each group to evaluate their fellow group members based on their participation in the assignment);
- Student should treat the opinions of other groups with respect.

Extension Activities:

- Discuss as a class how students would feel if there was conscription today under similar circumstances. Would they support it or not? Why? Under what circumstances would they support conscription? Do students know of any countries today that have conscription?
- There was already tension between English and French Canadians when Borden introduced the Military Service Act. Reasons for this tension include the fact that during the war, both Ontario and Manitoba had removed guarantees that they would provide French language schools, while English Canadians were frustrated that fewer French Canadians than English Canadians were volunteering for the war effort. Have students research different elements of the tense relations between French and English Canadians over the course of the war. Students can present their findings to the class.

Conscription Debate Group Worksheet

Student name:

Names of the other students in your group:

What group do you represent?

List some public figures who support/represent your group:

List the main points of your argument:

Conscription Debate Group Worksheet

List the information sources you used for your research:

Conscription Debate, Grades 10 to 12
Resources: Recruitment Posters



This is Your Flag

Recruitment poster for the 207th Battalion of Ottawa-Carleton. Recruitment took place at the recruiting office on Sparks Street. The unit went overseas in 1917, but was broken up and its men sent to reinforce other front-line infantry battalions, including the 2nd, the 21st, the 38th Battalions and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19820376-008



Shall We Help to Crush Tyranny?

Patriotic symbols such as the maple leaf and the Union Jack were familiar images in recruitment posters. Patriotism was a driving factor in early enlistment, as many Canadian and British-born recruits flocked to serve King and country.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19800283-010



Heroes of St. Julien and Festubert

This is the English version of a Canadian recruitment poster. Produced in both French and English, it was meant to encourage recruitment by highlighting the Canadians' heroic stand at the battles of St. Julien (Ypres) and Festubert.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19750046-010



Les Heros de St-Julien et de Festubert

This is the French version of a Canadian recruitment poster. Produced in both French and English, it was meant to encourage recruitment by highlighting the Canadians' heroic stand at the battles of St. Julien (Ypres) and Festubert.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19880207-002

Conscription Debate, Grades 10 to 12
Resources: Recruitment Posters



Canadiens-Français, Enrolez Vous!

This recruitment poster for the 163rd Battalion depicts a Canadian infantry soldier standing shoulder to shoulder with a French soldier. This image, made an appeal to French-Canadians' illustrious military history with specific references to famous soldiers, including the Marquis de Montcalm, who had died in 1759 attempting to defend Quebec against British attack. It also highlights the links that existed between Canada and France, and asks French-speaking Quebecers, in an oblique reference to the Quebec Act passed in 1774, if they would prefer Prussian (German) institutions to their own. The unit is named after Charles-Michel d'Irumberry de Salaberry, who raised and commanded a French militia unit during the War of 1812, and successfully defeated a stronger American force at the Battle of Chateauguay in 1813.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19750046-009



150ieme Carabiniers

A uniformed soldier of the 150th Battalion urges enlistment in this French-Canadian recruitment poster. Because this battalion was unable to meet its authorized strength, it was broken up, its troops sent as reinforcements to the 22nd Battalion, the only French-Canadian infantry battalion that served at the front.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19820376-009



The Happy Man

This poster for the 73rd Battalion, the Royal Highlanders of Canada, promises that the happy man today is the man serving at the front. Montreal, Canada's largest city during the war, sent several infantry battalions overseas. The 73rd Battalion served with the 4th Division from 1916 to its demobilization in 1919.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19900348-020

Conscription Debate, Grades 10 to 12
Resources: Recruitment Posters



Help the Boys

Shells explode and German soldiers flee in panic, in this colourful recruitment poster for the 245th Battalion, Canadian Grenadier Guards. Raised in Montreal, the 245th sailed to England in 1917 where the battalion was broken up and absorbed by the 23rd Reserve Battalion. The soldiers were subsequently sent to the front as reinforcements for numerous other front line battalions.

Wartime Recruiting Poster

CWM 19820376-004