

First Nations and Métis Leaders

Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear, Cree, 1825-1888)



Glenbow Archives NA-1315-17

Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear) was born near Jackfish Lake, Saskatchewan. He was a Cree leader in the 1870s. He was among the wisest and most noble leaders of his people, and guided them through times of great suffering. The bison were disappearing and European settlers were moving in. The Canadian government tried to get people to accept unfair treaty conditions. To Big Bear these treaty conditions seemed to increase poverty and the loss of his people's way of life. In 1876 he refused to sign the treaty. However, by 1882, his people were starving. Mistahimaskwa felt that he had no choice but to sign the treaty if he wanted them to get food, so he signed.

In 1885, some of Mistahimaskwa's followers decided to fight to preserve their way of life, and attacked settlements at Frog Lake and Battleford.

Big Bear always believed in peace, but because of the actions of some of his followers he was tried for treason. He was found guilty and sentenced to three years in jail. Big Bear only served two years of the term, but prison was hard on him and his health suffered. He was released in March 1887 and died the next year.

Louis Riel (Métis, 1844-1885)



Glenbow Archives NA-2631-2

Louis Riel was a Métis man who led two fights against the Canadian government in the 1800s. He led the Manitoba Métis people in the Red River Resistance in 1869. The Métis people were afraid that European settlers would take their lands. The resistance ended in 1870 when government troops stopped the conflict. Riel fled to the United States and was viewed as an outlaw.

In the 1880s, as a new Canadian railway moved closer, many Métis peoples in Saskatchewan became afraid they would lose their land to the European settlers, so Métis leader Gabriel Dumont asked Riel to return to Canada and help them lead their fight against the Canadian government. In March 1885, Riel set up a provisional government at

Batoche. He demanded that the Canadian government negotiate with the Métis. However, the talks never took place. Soon Riel led his second fight against the government in the Northwest Resistance. Within three months, the government defeated Riel. He surrendered, and was charged with treason. He was tried in Regina and the jury found him guilty. Riel was hanged on November 16, 1885.

First Nations and Métis Leaders - Continued

Gabriel Dumont, Métis, 1837-1906



University of Manitoba Archives A-98-15

Gabriel Dumont was born on the Red River Settlement in Manitoba. He fought his first battle at the Grand Coteau when he was just 13. An excellent marksman and hunter, he became the leader of the Métis buffalo hunt in the area around Fort Carlton, Saskatchewan in 1863. In 1885, Gabriel Dumont became the military leader of the Northwest Resistance. He and Louis Riel led the Métis in a fight for land rights against the Canadian government. After three months, they were defeated and Dumont fled to the United States.

Dumont received a pardon from the Canadian government in 1886 and was not charged for his involvement in the Northwest Resistance. He returned to Saskatchewan and died in Batoche on May 19, 1906.

Pitikwahanapiwiyn (Poundmaker, Cree/Blackfoot, 1842-1886)



Glenbow Archives NA-1681-4

Pitikwahanapiwiyn (Poundmaker) was an important Plains Cree chief. He spent much of his life as a peacemaker. Like many First Nations leaders, he led his people through years of hunger and hardship.

In 1876, Pitikwahanapiwiyn gave in and signed a treaty with the Canadian government. In 1879, when it was clear that there would not be enough bison to feed his people, he settled on a reserve. He believed that peaceful negotiation was the only hope for his people. He wanted his people to learn how to farm.

Some warriors on Pitikwahanapiwiyn's reserve disagreed with him. They chose to fight in the 1885 Northwest Resistance. He did not join them. His men fought and won the Battle of Cut Knife. However, after learning that Louis Riel had been defeated, Pitikwahanapiwiyn gave himself up to the Canadians. Pitikwahanapiwiyn served one year in prison for his part in the Northwest Resistance. He died of tuberculosis on July 4, 1886, soon after his release.

First Nations and Métis Leaders - Continued

Kitchi-manito-way (Almighty Voice 1875-1897)

Saskatchewan Archives Board B4512



Kitchi-manito-way (Almighty Voice) was born near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan in 1875 and grew up on the One Arrow Reserve. He listened to stories about his grandfather, who opposed reserves and his father, who had fought in the Northwest Resistance. An expert marksman and hunter, Kitchi-manito-way experienced firsthand the changing way of life for his people, once free to roam the plains, now confined to reserves with limits on where they could hunt.

In 1895, Kitchi-manito-way was arrested for killing a cow to feed his family. The police said it belonged to the government. Kitchi-manito-way, afraid he would be hanged, escaped from jail. The police went after him. Kitchi-manito-way then shot and killed a police sergeant, and escaped. For more than a year he could not be caught, and a \$500.00 reward was offered for his arrest. In a final gunfight with police, May 30th, 1897, Kitchi-manito-way was killed, along with his two companions.

The incident of Kitchi-manito-way showed how hunger and the loss of traditional ways of life could quickly turn a man to desperate actions.

Investigation

Research the key facts about one of these key figures in Manitoba's early history and the role they played in Canada's Confederation. Try to discover why each individual got involved in rebelling against the Canadian government.

- ☛ Louis Riel
- ☛ Gabriel Dumont
- ☛ Big Bear



Gabriel Dumont

Storyboard Example



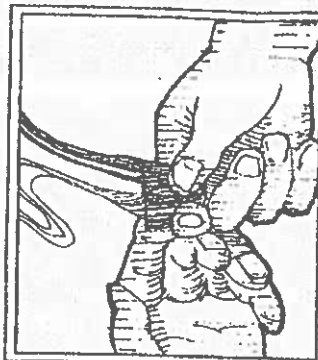
1. Crowfoot was a great Blackfoot warrior from southern Alberta. As a young man, he even fought a grizzly bear that attacked his camp.



2. He was once shot in the back, and lived with a musket ball in his back.



3. As he got older, Crowfoot looked for peaceful solutions to problems. He became friends with the fur traders.



4. He made peace with the Cree.



5. He welcomed the NWMP when they came to Alberta to get rid of whiskey traders.



6. He helped negotiate Treaty 7 in 1877.



7. He travelled to Ottawa and met Sir John A. Macdonald.



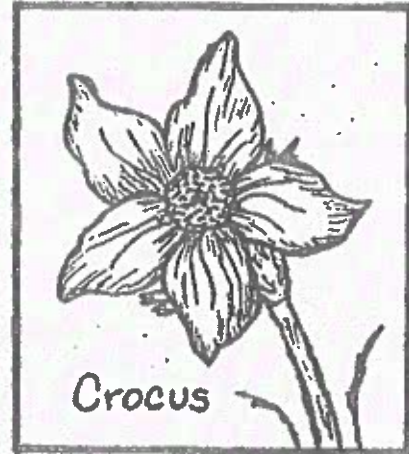
8. He became sad about how the Canadian government treated his people. Before he died in 1890 he said "Life is like the flash of the firefly in the night."

And Manitoba Makes Five

The North West Resistance History

1867 saw the union of the first four Canadian provinces: Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The dream, though, was to see the colonies of Great Britain united from Atlantic to Pacific. Between 1867 and 1905, five more provinces were to become part of the Dominion of Canada.

At the time of Confederation, western British North America was known as Rupert's Land. This land had been under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company for over 200 years. Rupert's Land was a huge area of almost eight million square kilometers inhabited by about 30,000 First Nations people. An important segment of this population were the Metis, descendants of people from Quebec. The Metis of the Red River area just west of Ontario had developed their own culture and identity. In the meantime, the government of Canada was becoming increasingly uneasy about American interest in Rupert's Land. In 1869, the Canadian government purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company for \$1,500,000. The government named the region the **North-West Territories**.



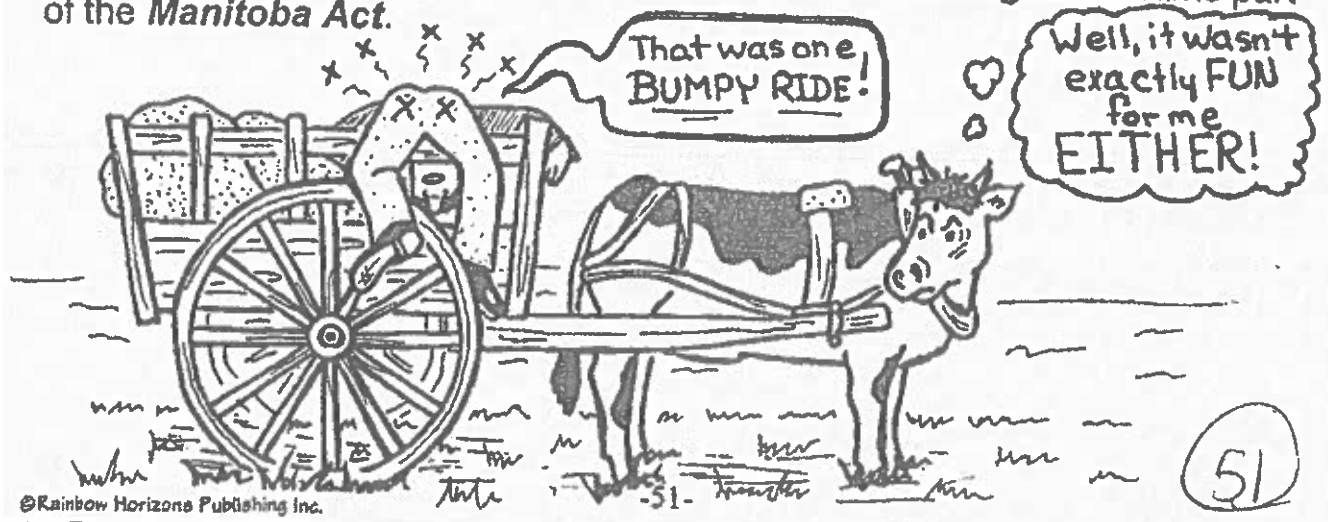
Problems arose when the Canadian government sent surveyors into the Red River territory. The surveyors began to divide the land into the large square lots with which they were familiar back in the east. This manner of dividing farmland, however, was different from the rectangular homesteads which stretched back from the Red River.

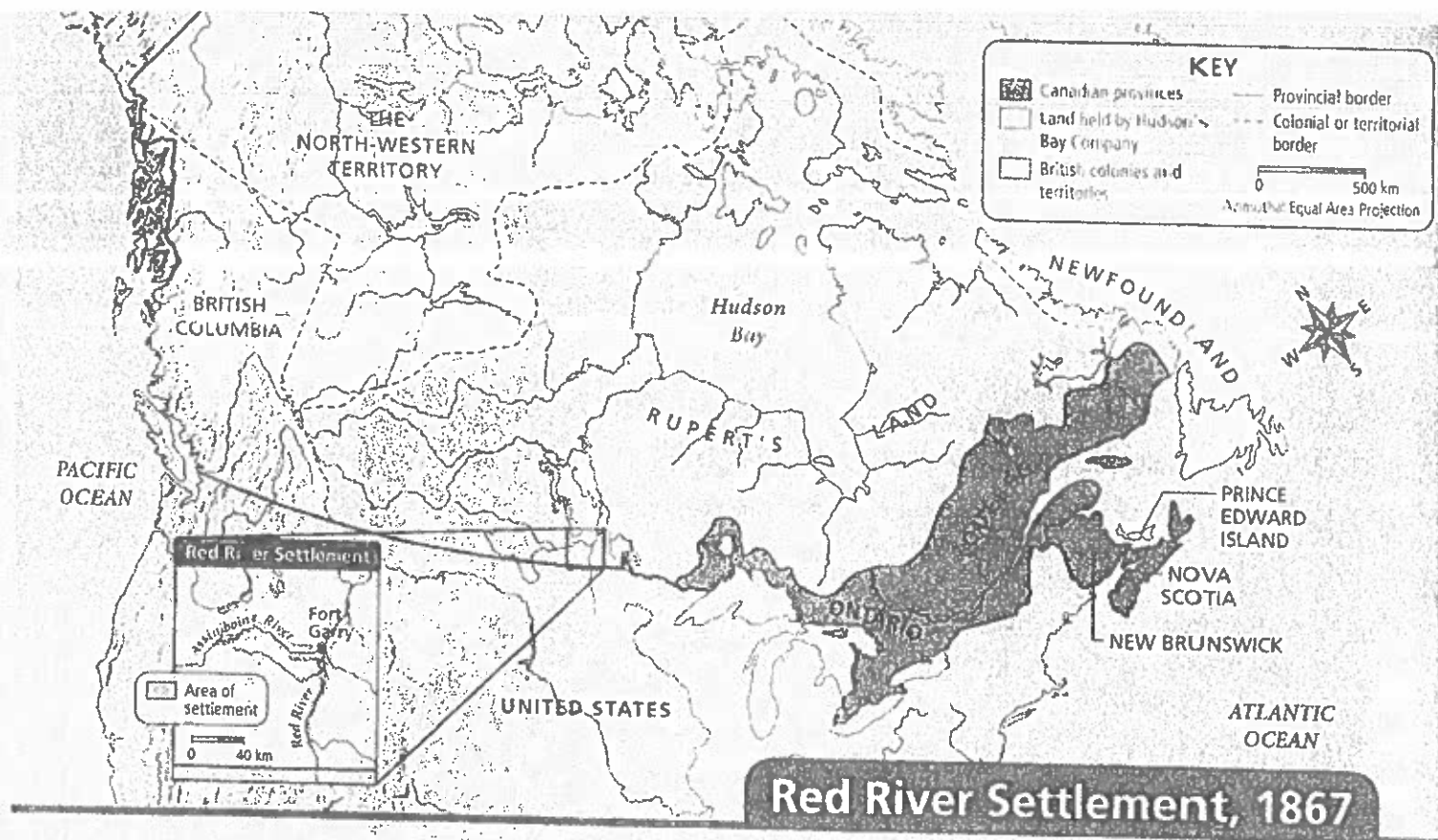
Louis Riel emerged as the leader of the Metis. Born in the west, he was an eloquent speaker who rallied the people of the Red River area against eastern Canadian plans to expand into their area. The Metis seized Upper Fort Garry and barred the governor, William McDougall, sent by John A. Macdonald to take over the region. On December 8, 1869, Riel and his followers formed a provisional (or temporary) government at Fort Garry (Winnipeg) and drew up a **Metis Bill of Rights**.

When Governor McDougall gave up and returned to Ottawa, Macdonald next sent Donald Smith, a senior official of the Hudson's Bay Company, to explain the government's plans to the Metis. Smith assured the people that their land titles would be recognized. While negotiating with the Canadian government, Riel and his followers executed a trouble-maker by the name of Thomas Scott. This incident caused Riel and his provisional government to lose support among people across Canada. As a result of the reaction, Macdonald decided to send troops to western Canada to quell the unrest caused by Riel and his followers.

Leading the troops was Colonel Wolseley, who arrived at Red River on August 23, 1870. Fearing for his life, Riel fled to the United States. This expedition also sent an important message to the United States that Canada was prepared to defend this vast western region.

The troubles created by Riel and his followers caused the Canadian government to make the area around the Red River settlement into a province. On July 15, 1870, the **Manitoba Act** was brought into effect, creating Canada's fifth province. Manitoba was much smaller than the province we know today. The rest of the North-West remained a territory. It is also of interest that many items from the **Metis Bill of Rights** became part of the **Manitoba Act**.





▲ Lord Selkirk

The Métis Nation Comes Together at the Battle of Seven Oaks

From 1670 to 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), a fur-trading company, controlled much of the land in the west. In 1811, HBC gave a large area of land along the Red River in Manitoba to a British lord named Thomas Douglas Selkirk (1771–1820). Lord Selkirk moved poor farmers from Scotland onto this land to start a settlement. This came to be called the Red River Settlement.

People living in the Red River area were concerned by this change. The North West Company (NWC), a fur-trading company that operated in the area, was afraid that the newcomers would interfere with its trade. The company thought the HBC was trying to take control of the fur trade in the area by starting the settlement. First Nations and Métis peoples feared that the new farmers would drive away the bison and affect their trade with the NWC.

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In March of 1816, the governor of HBC, Robert Semple (1777–1816), ordered Fort Gibraltar, a NWC post on the Red River, to be captured and burned. He wanted to take control of an important trading route and stop the flow of trade goods between the Métis people and the NWC. This angered the Métis people.

In June 1816, a Métis man, named Cuthbert Grant (1793–1854), led a group of Métis people to see the governor at Seven Oaks. A gun battle broke out between the Métis people and the governor's men. The governor, 20 of his men, and one Métis man died.

The Battle of Seven Oaks showed that the Métis people were willing to go to great lengths, including risking their lives, to defend their rights. For them, this battle marked the start of the Métis Nation. Cuthbert Grant came to be seen as the first Métis leader.



▲ Robert Semple



▲ Cuthbert Grant

▼ This painting by C.W. Jeffreys shows the Battle of Seven Oaks.





What do you think happened between 1816 and 1869?

provisional existing or serving for the time being; temporary

bill a proposed or suggested law, also referred to as legislation or an Act

▼ This map shows Manitoba when it was first created in 1870.

The Red River Resistance

About 50 years after the Battle of Seven Oaks, another conflict took place. In 1869, the Canadian government announced plans to divide the Red River area into farm plots for newcomers. The Métis people were not consulted, and they feared that their way of life would be threatened.

The Métis people protested by blocking government surveyors from dividing the land. They then took control of Fort Garry, an important fur-trading post. With Louis Riel (1844–1885) as leader, the Métis people formed a **provisional** government.

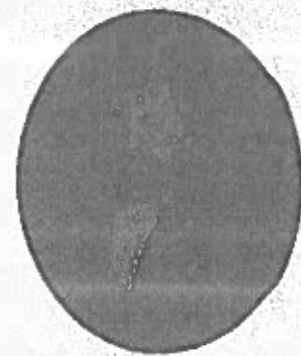
The provisional government drew up a list of rights, called the Métis Bill of Rights. The **bill** outlined how the settlement should be run. In 1870, the Manitoba Act was passed after much discussion with the Canadian government. The act created the province of Manitoba and guaranteed most of what was in the Métis Bill of Rights. It also granted land. Most Métis people never received their land. Some took small amounts of money instead, while others simply moved farther west without receiving anything.



Preserving Métis Heritage

We must cherish our inheritance. We must preserve our nationality for the youth of our future. The story should be written down to pass on.

Louis Riel, Métis leader



The Northwest Resistance

After 1870, many Métis people moved farther west, into Saskatchewan, and formed communities. Some of these communities grew along the South Saskatchewan River. One of them was Batoche, which began in 1872. Here, Métis people farmed, raised cattle, and hunted bison.

Growing Concerns

Soon, however, the Métis people living along the South Saskatchewan River felt that their way of life was threatened by the arrival of Europeans. For years, the Métis people had asked the Canadian government to recognize their rights to the land in which they lived, but their requests had been ignored. They became alarmed as government surveyors began measuring and dividing the land for the newcomers.

First Nations peoples in the area also had concerns. They believed that the government was not respecting the agreements made between them and the government. Many had lost their traditional way of life and did not get the help that was promised.



▲ Some Métis Communities in Saskatchewan, 1885

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▲ This painting shows what Batoche looked like in 1885.
It was created by Armand Paquette, an artist from Manitoba.



▲ After the Northwest Resistance, Gabriel Dumont escaped to the United States. He later returned to his home near Batoche, where he lived for the rest of this life.

Leaders Take Action

In 1884, Gabriel Dumont (1837–1906) and other Métis leaders turned to Louis Riel for help to speak with the government. Louis Riel began by sending a petition to the government. Unable to get a response, he formed a provisional government in Batoche.

First Nations Chiefs Poundmaker (about 1842–1886), Big Bear (about 1825–1888), Almighty Voice (about 1875–1897), and Whitecap were reluctantly drawn into the conflict. In fact, Métis oral history tells that Whitecap was asked by the Métis people to get involved, but he said no. In the end, Whitecap had little choice. He was forced by the Métis people to join the resistance.

(62)

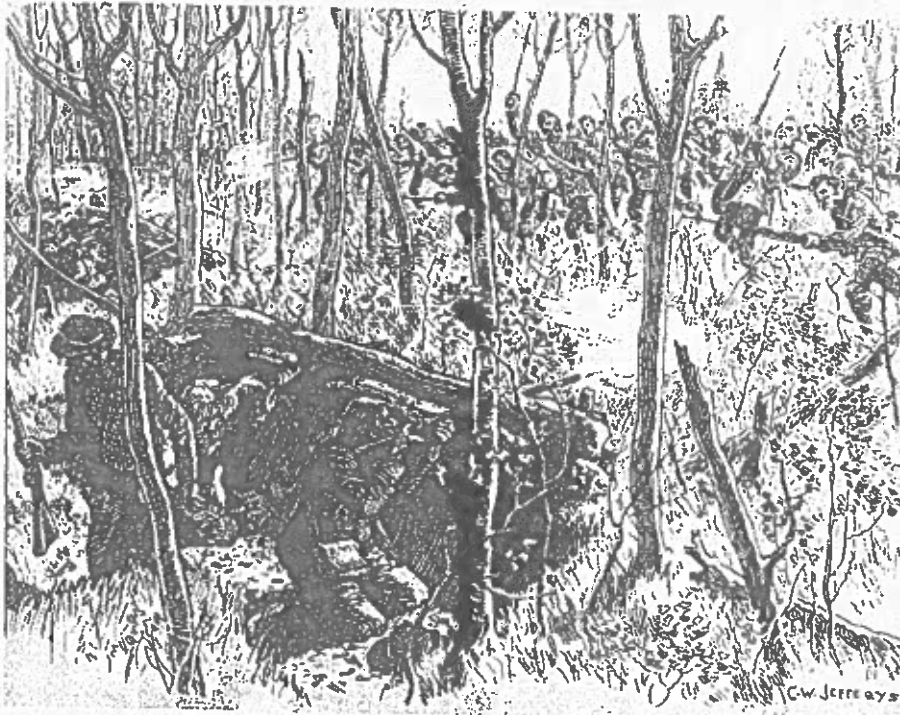
Clash at Duck Lake

On March 26, 1885, there was a clash at Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. It was between the Canadian government's police and some volunteers, and a group of Métis people and a few First Nations peoples led by Gabriel Dumont. When word reached the Canadian government, it began to gather troops to send to the area. The troops arrived about a month later. The conflict that resulted is called the Northwest Resistance.

Battle of Batoche

Several small battles were fought, with the largest and final battle taking place at Batoche. It lasted four days. In the end, Louis Riel, Poundmaker, and Big Bear were arrested. The leaders were tried and found guilty of betraying their country. The First Nations chiefs were put in prison. Louis Riel was hanged in Regina on November 16, 1885.

Today, Louis Riel is considered by many to be a hero. In 1992, the Canadian government recognized his important role in the development of Canada.



Many people think Louis Riel is a hero, but others do not agree. Why do you think many consider him a hero, and others do not?

Go Online!

Listen to the Métis anthem and read the lyrics.

◀ This drawing depicts the battle at Batoche. It was created by artist C.W. Jefferys. Today, Batoche is a national historic site. Many celebrations are held here, including National Aboriginal Day.

LEARNING TIP

With a partner, compare the timelines that you started on page 25. Together, reread and talk about parts that you had difficulty understanding.

The Struggle for Recognition Continues

The struggle for Métis rights continued through the 1900s. It is ongoing today.

Recent Developments

In more recent times, the Métis people's long struggle has helped them gain some recognition. In 1938, the

Alberta government created the Métis Settlements, which are lands set aside for the Métis people. In 1982, Canada's constitution recognized the Métis people as part of Indigenous Peoples and guaranteed them certain rights. In 2013, Canada's Federal Court ruled that the government of Canada has direct responsibility to the Métis people. As a result of the ruling, they are to be granted the same rights and benefits as other First Nations peoples. However, the Canadian government is appealing this decision.

Today, Métis people are proud of their unique identity. Festivals celebrating Métis culture and heritage are held across Canada each year.



▲ Métis Settlements

Thinking It Through

Key Ideas

1. What makes Métis identity unique?
2. How were the Battle of Seven Oaks, Red River Resistance, and Northwest Resistance related to the Métis people's growing sense of identity?

Thinking Creatively

3. If you were to create three symbols for the Métis culture, what would they be? Why? Which of these symbols do you think most strongly represents Métis culture?

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Adopting New Technology

First Nations, Métis, and European newcomers quickly discovered that each group had technology that could benefit the other. For example, Europeans adopted the canoe for travel over lakes and rivers. First Nations welcomed items such as metal pots, which made daily life easier. They also adopted the gun, which was useful for hunting.

FOCUS ON HISTORICAL EVIDENCE What examples of one people influencing the other can you find in the images shown below? When comparing pieces of historical evidence, it helps to establish categories to compare. In this case, the categories might be clothing, weapons, footwear, and manufactured goods.



- ▲ This 1869 painting by Frances Annie Hopkins shows the artist and her husband, a Hudson's Bay Company official, travelling with voyageurs. The illustration above it shows a hunter in New France. What European and First Nations technologies are these people using?

THINKING CRITICALLY In what ways did technology such as the gun and the canoe influence the development of early Canada?



Chapter Question

Who are Canada's Indigenous Peoples?



You have talked and read about the origins of First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis people. You have also learned about their traditional ways of life and how they are essential to Canada's identity.

1. Construct the content for a website in which you explain who First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis people are and how they are essential to Canada's identity.
2. Choose an event or a person from First Nations, Inuit, or Métis history and write an article or create a podcast telling about that event or person.
3. You have looked at several pieces of artwork in this chapter. Do you find them helpful when learning about a culture? How?

