

CGC1P Unit 3: People, Places and Patterns

Activity 4: Aboriginal Peoples

Overview

In Canada there are many different First Nations (a Native group whose members share a common culture and history) with different ways of living and speaking. The reason for so many types of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is based on the geography of the area in which they work and live.

Lesson

Aboriginal = the original people

There are over 600 bands of aboriginal people in Canada. These bands are now known as First Nations. The Canadian government divides Native peoples into three groups: Indian, Metis, and Inuit. In Canada there are many different First Nations with different languages, cultures, government and ways of life.

A Focus on some First Nation Groups

Some examples of traditional lifestyles:

Cree

- an example of peoples in the Subarctic region
- nomadic
- lived in cone-shaped or dome-shaped homes that could be moved quickly
- community is important, so is harmony with nature
- government intervention has changed the traditional way of life. For example, the Cree people now usually live in one place in settlements across Canada; James Bay Cree have had to move seven times in the past fifty years as their land has been flooded for hydroelectric power.

Mohawk

- an example of peoples in the Eastern Woodlands region
- built longhouses to adapt to the environment, where families lived together and shared their resources
- Mohawk still live peacefully together and share resources
- members of the Six Nations have over five centuries of history in self-government
- never gave up (signed treaties giving up) their lands, but most live on a reserve.

Haida:

- an example of peoples in the Northwest Coast region
- have lived here for centuries
- very skilled craftspeople who make high-quality artifacts: totem poles, canoes, decorated boxes, bowls
- have opposed logging on their traditional lands, especially clear cutting

A Focus on the Inuit First Nation

While there are several Inuit groups across the arctic, those in the area which is now part of Nunavut have achieved a form of self-government. In 1999 a new territory was carved out of the Canadian north. This is Nunavut, the land of the Inuit. Examine the population pyramid of Nunavut. Inuit means "the people" in Inuktitut. Eskimo, a Cree Indian word meaning "eaters of raw meat," was meant as an insult, and is no longer used in Canada. Nunavut has many features as the newest territory of Canada.

Indian, Metis and Inuit Treatment by the Canadian Government before Multiculturalism

The treatment of Aboriginal peoples by the government of Canada decades ago was an unfortunate example of a time before Canada accepted and promoted multiculturalism.

Over a hundred years ago, as immigrants came to Canada, the government moved the Aboriginal people off the most valuable land and on to reserves, which often were located on less valuable land. The First Nations were given Aboriginal rights, which included the right to hunt and fish in traditional ways.

The government also had a policy of assimilation, whereby they tried to eliminate the cultures of the aboriginal people.

Decades ago, Aboriginal children were taken away from their families and forced to stay in residential schools, where they learned and spoke English only, and dressed like Europeans. These children lost part of their identity, and often grew up feeling they did not belong in either culture. The government of Canada stopped the policy of assimilation by the 1980s and began to show more respect to the First Nations people. Canada officially apologized in the 1990s for the shameful treatment of Aboriginal children in residential schools.

There are no residential schools anymore, but many of those children are now adults trying to recover their cultural identity.

Many First Nation people are promoting self-government and are negotiating with the Canadian government to achieve it.

Assignment

STEP ONE

Calculate the percentage of the Aboriginal population that lives in each province/territory.

To calculate percentages:

1. add up the total aboriginal people (Status, Metis and Inuit)
2. divide that number by the **total population** of that province (from 2001 census)
3. multiply by 100 to get a percentage

Province/Territory	Total Population	Status Indian	Metis	Inuit	Total Aboriginal Population	% of total
Newfoundland	512,930	5 430	4 685	4 265		
Prince Edward Island	135,294	825	120	15		
Nova Scotia	908,007	11 340	860	210		
New Brunswick	729,498	9 180	975	120		
Quebec	7,237,479	47 600	16 075	8 300		
Ontario	11,410,146	118 830	22 790	1 300		
Manitoba	1,119,583	82 990	46 195	360		
Saskatchewan	978,933	75 205	36 535	190		
Alberta	2,974,807	72 645	50 745	795		
British Columbia	3,907,738	113 315	26 750	815		
Yukon Territory	28,674	5 530	565	110		
Northwest Territories	37,360	11 400	3 895	24 600		
Nunavut	26,745	(included in Northwest Territories)				
Canada (TOTAL)	30,007,094	554 290	210 190	41 080		

STEP TWO

Answer these questions:

1. What parts of Canada have the most Aboriginal people?

2. First Nations people living in northern Canada have managed to keep the everyday use of their native languages. People living further south have not. Why do you think this is?

3. People living on reserves are more likely to be able to speak their native language than people living in cities. Why do you think this is?