

Canada Day

Information & Worksheets

Canada Day

Canada Day is Canada's national holiday. It is held on July 1. Canada Day celebrates the creation of the dominion of Canada through the British North American Act on July 1, 1867 which was Canada's Confederation. Sir John A. Macdonald played an important role in the development of Canada.



Sir John A. Macdonald was born on January 11, 1815 in Glasgow, Scotland. He moved to Kingston, Upper Canada with his family when he was only five years old. His mother insisted that John should have a proper education and he was sent to the Midland Grammar School in Kingston. He later attended a smaller school operated by a clergyman from Scotland. At the age of 15, he was apprenticed to a Kingston lawyer named George Mackenzie. By the time Macdonald was 18, Mackenzie regarded him with such admiration that he sent him to open a law office in Napanee. The following year, he took over the practice of a relative in Hallowell and when Mackenzie died in 1835, Macdonald returned to Kingston to start his own legal practice. He was called to the bar a year later.

His legal reputation grew steadily based on a succession of small cases rather than on any one large case. By 1842, his law practice had become one of the busiest in Canada. In 1843, he began his long career as a politician by becoming an alderman on the Kingston Town Council. In 1844, he ran for a seat in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, which consisted of the two former colonies of Canada West (Upper Canada) and Canada East (Lower Canada). He won his seat by a large majority.

From the beginning, Macdonald was a Conservative. He opposed the power of the ruling class, the Family Compact, and helped to build the power of a more moderate group, the Liberal Conservative party, which later became the Progressive Conservative party. Even though his party lost its majority in the election of 1848, Macdonald was one of the few Conservatives to be re-elected. He did not take part in any of the protests and rebellions that occurred during 1837, choosing instead to work to broaden the party base. He even decided to work with his enemies, the French Canadian politicians. He worked with George Brown, the leader of the Grits (later to become the Liberal Party), to defeat the Reform government in the election of 1854.

In the government of 1854, Macdonald served as Attorney General deciding against becoming Premier in favour of Etienne Tache, as it was important to retain the French votes in Canada East. In 1858, when a law was passed to make Ottawa the official capital of the Province of Canada, George Brown defeated the government on this issue. He became Premier, but his only lasted for a few days. For the next few years, the government seesawed back and forth between the two political parties reaching a political impasse in 1864. At this time, a government was formed called the Tache-Macdonald government. George Brown was in the government on the condition that it would work towards a federal union of all North American colonies. Macdonald was not in favour of such a union, but he agreed that order could be restored to the government. He may have been slow to agree, but he did, he made it his own personal goal.

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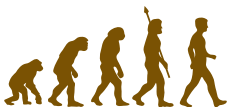
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The Maritime colonies were considering the possibility of forming their own union and planned a meeting in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island for September 1, 1864. Macdonald heard about the up coming conference and requested permission for the Province of Canada to send a delegation. The Maritimers agreed and decided to put off their own discussion until they heard what the Canadians had to say. At this meeting, John A. Macdonald took the lead, pointing out the advantages of a confederation of all the colonies. He helped to draft the Seventy-Two Resolutions and also took the lead at the Quebec Conference in the same year. It was Macdonald who actually wrote the British North America Act (the Canadian Constitution) making Canada a federal nation with two levels of government – federal and provincial – and outlined how the system was to work. His aim was to give Canada a federal system with a strong central government and executive. This is the same constitution, with a few amendments, that Canada still has today.

When the Act became law on July 1, 1867, Macdonald became the first Prime Minister of Canada. He remained in power until 1873, but he returned as Prime Minister in 1878. He served in this position until his death in 1891. During his terms of office, he worked to make the dream of Canada a nation from sea to sea. He brought Manitoba, Prince Edward Island and British Columbia into the Confederation. He oversaw the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway to link British Columbia with the rest of Canada. He is known as the father and founder of Canada.

In earlier years this holiday was known as Dominion Day. It was officially changed to Canada Day on October 27, 1982. Canada Day is celebrated in many ways across our great land. The largest official celebration is held on Parliament Hill in our capital city, Ottawa. Every Canada Day, hundreds of thousands gather on Parliament Hill to celebrate Canada's birthday. The entire event is presided over by the Governor General.

Most cities and towns across Canada have parades, sports days, folk or film festivals, street dances, picnics, carnivals and citizenship ceremonies. In ethnic communities it is a cultural celebration. The people sing songs, play games and sports, dance folk dances and eat traditional foods.

Canada Day usually ends with a big bang and impressive fireworks. Everyone proudly sings O Canada and wishes our country many more birthdays.



Canada Day

Canada is a great country and everyone enjoys celebrating its birthday. Read the information on "Canada Day" to find out how it came to be celebrated and why it is such an important day.



a) Complete the following activities:

1. How did Macdonald gain experience as a lawyer?

2. What did he do instead of taking part in the Rebellions of 1837?

3. Why did he form a coalition government with George Brown?

4. Why was he in favour of Etienne Tache becoming Premier instead of taking the job himself?

5. Why did he change his mind and decide to support the idea of Confederation?

6. What did Macdonald become in 1867?

b) "O Canada how proud we are of thee!" Brainstorm and record ten good reasons why we should be proud of our country.

Canada Day:

- a)**
- 1.** He took over the practice of a sick relative and then opened his own office.
 - 2.** He chose instead to broaden the party base.
 - 3.** He formed a coalition with George Brown because he knew that cooperating with the politicians from Canada West was the only way the government would be able to get any work done.
 - 4.** He knew that Tache would be better at dealing with French speaking voters.
 - 5.** He agreed to Confederation to try and restore some order to the government.
 - 6.** He was the first Prime Minister of Canada.
- b)** Answers may vary.