What changes have you seen in your community over the last few years? Have some things changed slowly, while others have changed quickly? Since Confederation in 1867, Canada had been rapidly expanding. There were increases in land, laws, and settlers. How do you think First Nations peoples were affected by Canada’s expansion?

In August 2015, 10 First Nations from Canada and the United States signed the Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty in Banff, Alberta. This treaty aims to increase the buffalo population, engage youth in the treaty process, and recognize the relationship First Nations peoples have with the buffalo. What happened to the buffalo? For over 5000 years, Métis and First Nations peoples who lived on the prairie land had hunted buffalo as a primary food source. They practised sustainable hunting and made sure to use all parts of the buffalo. For example, meat was used for pemmican (food), horns were used for arrows, skulls for rituals, and tongues for combs.

Examine Figure 3.35.

It shows a huge mound of buffalo skulls from the 1870s. The buffalo population was decreasing dramatically due to a variety of factors. One of these factors was the overhunting by non-Aboriginal people. As more settlers moved west, hunting increased. Non-Aboriginal people often wanted buffalo skin for coats and leather belts, which were used in the new factories in Canada. The population of buffalo, once numbered in the millions, was estimated to have shrunk to a few hundred. The buffalo had reached near extinction.

Examine Figure 3.36.

An excerpt from Treaty 6, signed on August 23, 1876, at Fort Carlton, Saskatchewan, and at Fort Pitt, Saskatchewan, on September 9, 1876. Analyze: What key words in this excerpt tell you about the government’s view of the land?

What else can you learn about the Numbered Treaties from examining the map in Figure 3.37?

The Numbered Treaties

In order for more settlers to move to the Northwest, the Canadian government needed to obtain more land. The Numbered Treaties were a series of 11 treaties negotiated from 1871 to 1921 between the Canadian government and First Nations. In return for giving their land to the government, First Nations received a variety of reserve (set-aside) lands, money, tools, and the right to hunt and fish on the land.

During the negotiations, the government and First Nations used interpreters to help them communicate. After the oral agreements were reached, the treaties were then written in English. Often what First Nations received did not reflect what the First Nations leaders understood to have been negotiated. Read Figure 3.36, an excerpt from Treaty 6. Whose perspective is the agreement written from?

What else can you learn about the Numbered Treaties from examining the map in Figure 3.37?
Often, historical sources do not tell us a lot of information on their own. To understand the meaning of a text from the past, you first must know where, when, and by whom it was written. Next, you need to determine how the text fits into its historical context—its historical time and circumstances. You need to look for information about the historical context in reliable secondary sources and make connections between this context and the text. You can ask questions such as those listed in Figure 3.38 to help you make connections. Then you can decide what the text reveals about the historical context.

In this activity, you will contextualize Figure 3.39, a quote by Chief Poundmaker during the Treaty 6 negotiations. The quote was recorded by Peter Erasmus, the interpreter for the Treaty 6 negotiations. Erasmus was the son of a Danish father and Métis mother and was fluent in English and several Cree dialects. He gave this account of the negotiations to Henry Thompson, a Métis reporter, in the 1920s, at the age of 87. Use your knowledge of the time period and the evidence found in Figure 3.40 and Figure 3.41 to help you answer the inquiry question: Why did First Nations sign the Numbered Treaties?

**Questions to Ask When Contextualizing a Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About Events and conditions at the time</th>
<th>Examples of Contextual Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What else was going on at the time of the events recorded in the text, in the community, the region, the country, or the world?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life at the time</th>
<th>What was it like to be alive in that place, at that time?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What things were different from today? What was the same?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position of creator in society</th>
<th>How was the creator involved in events of the time? What was his or her position or role in society?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worldviews</td>
<td>How did people's beliefs and customs at the time differ from ours today? How is this reflected in the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How might different people have responded to these words at the time?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 3.38** Asking contextual questions can help you understand a historical text.

Start by closely reading Figure 3.39. What type of source is it? When and where was it created?

Examine what the source reveals about life at the time. As well as reserve lands, the government offered cattle, seeds, tools, training, and money to start farms. Why would this be attractive to the Cree?

Review the events and conditions occurring at the time. Read Figure 3.40. What challenges were the Plains Cree First Nations facing during this time period? Why might the Canadian government want the land?

Examine the creators’ position in society. Do you think Erasmus’s account is reliable? Why, or why not?

Compare different worldviews and perspectives. What do the quotes in Figure 3.39 and Figure 3.41 suggest about how First Nations’ understanding of land ownership differed from that of the Canadian government?

**FIGURE 3.39** In this quote, Chief Poundmaker is responding to the Treaty 6 terms proposed by Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris in 1876.

“The governor … says 640 acres, one square mile for each family, he will give us. This is our land! It isn’t a piece of pemmican to be cut off and given in little pieces back to us. It is ours and we will take what we want.”

— Chief Poundmaker, Plains Cree First Nation

**FIGURE 3.40** In this quote from Erasmus’s account of the 1876 Treaty 6 negotiations, Chief Ahtahkakoop (also known as Starblanket) responds to Chief Poundmaker’s objections. “Queen Mother” refers to Queen Victoria, the British monarch at the time.

“The main criticism of the written version has to do with the language used about the lands. The written version contains the wording ‘cede, surrender, and forever give up title to the lands.’ The Elders maintain that these words were not included in the original treaty. The Chiefs and Elders could not have sold their lands to the settlers as they could only share the lands according to the Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Dene laws. When the Elders were told of these written words, they had difficulty understanding them. These words do not exist in their languages.”

— Sharon H. Venne, historian


“Can we stop the power of the white man from spreading over the land like the grasshoppers that cloud the sky and then fall to consume every blade of grass and every leaf on the trees in their path? I think not... For my part, I think that the Queen Mother has offered us a new way... Surely we Indians can learn the ways of living that made the white man strong... I will accept the Queen’s hand for my people.”

— Chief Ahtahkakoop, Plains Cree First Nation
THE INDIAN ACT

After Confederation, the Canadian government created laws regarding First Nations. In 1876, these various laws were combined to create the Indian Act. The Indian Act was a set of regulations that controlled First Nations throughout the whole country. According to Macdonald's quote in Figure 3.42, what was the goal of the Indian Act?

Read the excerpts from the Indian Act in Figure 3.43. By defining the term Indian, the government dictated which groups of people were legally recognized as First Nations. The Métis and Inuit are not included in the terms of the act. Many of the terms are still in effect today.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

In 1883, the Canadian government established residential schools designed to assimilate and educate First Nations children. These institutions were run by religious groups, including Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and United churches. Children as young as 4 years old were taken from their homes and sent to live in schools away from their families. Students were forced to learn and speak only English or French and were forbidden from practising their own cultural and spiritual traditions. Most of the schools were in western Canada and northern Ontario. You will learn more about residential schools in Chapter 8. Examine Figure 3.44. How do these photos suggest that the creation of residential schools supported the Indian Act and the government’s view of First Nations?

THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE

In 1872, the Dominion Lands Act gave away land in the Northwest to farmers who cleared between 15 and 50 acres of land, planted crops, and built homes within three years of settlement. In May 1873, the government created the North-West Mounted Police, shown in Figure 3.45, to maintain law and order in the area. The North-West Mounted Police were responsible for ensuring that First Nations complied with the regulations outlined in the Indian Act.

Whisky was an illegal alcohol in Canada. However, Americans would cross the border to trade their whisky and rifles for goods from the Assiniboine First Nation. In June 1873, an American trader’s horse went missing. He immediately blamed the Assiniboine and enlisted the help of some wolf hunters to enter the First Nation camp in Cypress Hills (located in present-day Saskatchewan) to forcibly take a horse. A bloody battle took place between the well-armed Americans and the poorly armed Assiniboine. The battle left 22 Assiniboine people murdered and one American wolf hunter dead. How might the Cypress Hills Massacre have confirmed the government’s need for a police force in the Northwest?

Jerry Potts (also known as Ky-yo-kosi) was a Métis who worked with First Nations peoples and the North-West Mounted Police. He helped to develop a relationship of trust between them by teaching each group about the culture of the other. Why was it important to establish cooperation between First Nations peoples and the North-West Mounted Police?

CHECK-IN

1. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: How did the policies introduced by the government regarding First Nations conflict with the First Nations way of life?

2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: What was the most important turning point for First Nations at this time?