



# Pre-War Canada

## Learning objectives

- Students will learn about Canada’s demographic trends in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Students will observe the rapid growth of Canadian urban centres from 1851 to 1921.

## Time required

30-40 minutes

## Grades

7-12

## Materials

- tiled map: *A Nation Takes Shape*
- city growth chart (1851-1921) (Appendix 1)
- sticky notes
- digital projector (optional)

## Set-up

Print out the tiled map and arrange your classroom to accommodate its size when assembled. Either print or project the chart showing city growth. Research current population for the six cities identified in the city growth chart.

## Links to Canadian National Standards for Geography

### Essential element 1:

#### The world in spatial terms

- map projections
- major cities of the province, Canada and the world

### Essential element 2:

#### Places and Regions

- how culture affects places and regions
- how physical and human processes shape places and regions
- changes in places and regions over time
- political and historical characteristics of regions

### Essential element 6:

#### The uses of geography

- influence of geographical features on the evolution of significant historic events and movements

## Introduction

As a class, assemble the tiled map. Discuss what is and is not labelled on the map, and ask what differences students notice between this map and present-day maps of Canada. Using sticky notes, ask students to identify, label and mark the current populations of some of the largest cities in Canada on the tiled map.

Next, ask students to guess what these populations were 100 years ago at the start of the First World War (1914) and at the end of it (1918). Keep track of their guesses on the board, and discuss any patterns and trends that exist between these major cities. Ask students how they think Canadians travelled between these cities at the time of the First World War.

Highlight the railroad on the tiled map and explain that since there were few privately owned automobiles at the beginning of the First World War, long distances were travelled primarily by train. Choose two cities on the map and use the scale to calculate the distance between them. Have students predict how long it would take to travel by train at the beginning of the 20th century, and discuss how travel has evolved.

## Development

Hand out or project the population data for Canada’s largest cities in 1851, 1891, 1914 and 1921. As a class, discuss the best way to display this type of information. Have students create a graph showing the growth of these cities over time with the four measurement years representing one bar for each city. See the appendix for an example.

Repeat this activity for 1891 and see if the students are surprised or have new opinions. Ask them to predict the 1914 numbers before you reveal them. Finally, have students predict population numbers after the war (1921) and then reveal these numbers to the class. Discuss whether your students were surprised and if their predictions were accurate.

## Conclusion

Summarize the patterns and trends identified by your students of the top cities by population in Canada at the beginning of the First World War (1914) and after the war (1921). Discuss which cities grew the most, which grew the least, if any decreased in size and why this might be.

Explain that rapid expansion of the railways, a boom in industry (which brought people in from rural areas) and a huge wave of immigration were among the main causes of this rapid growth.

Have students compare populations of the largest cities in 1921 with the largest cities today and examine how they have changed, looking at which cities have decreased in population and what may have caused this.

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### Extend your geographic thinking

Ask students to make predictions about Canada's population in the future. What factors will influence growth in some areas and decline in others? Will the changes be less drastic than, as drastic as or more drastic than those between 1851 and 1921?



## GROWTH OF CANADIAN CITIES



Sources: Statistics Canada: [www66.statcan.gc.ca/acyb\\_000-eng.htm](http://www66.statcan.gc.ca/acyb_000-eng.htm)  
Library and Archives Canada: [bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1851/Pages/about-census.aspx](http://bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1851/Pages/about-census.aspx)