

Canada's Treaties 1-11

What Are Treaties?

Indigenous treaties in Canada are legal agreements between the crown (Canada) and Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit). The treaties were made post-Confederation (after Canada became a country). The Indigenous people agreed to share their land in exchange for a variety of payments and promises. These treaties are as important today as they were when they were created.

Numbered Treaties

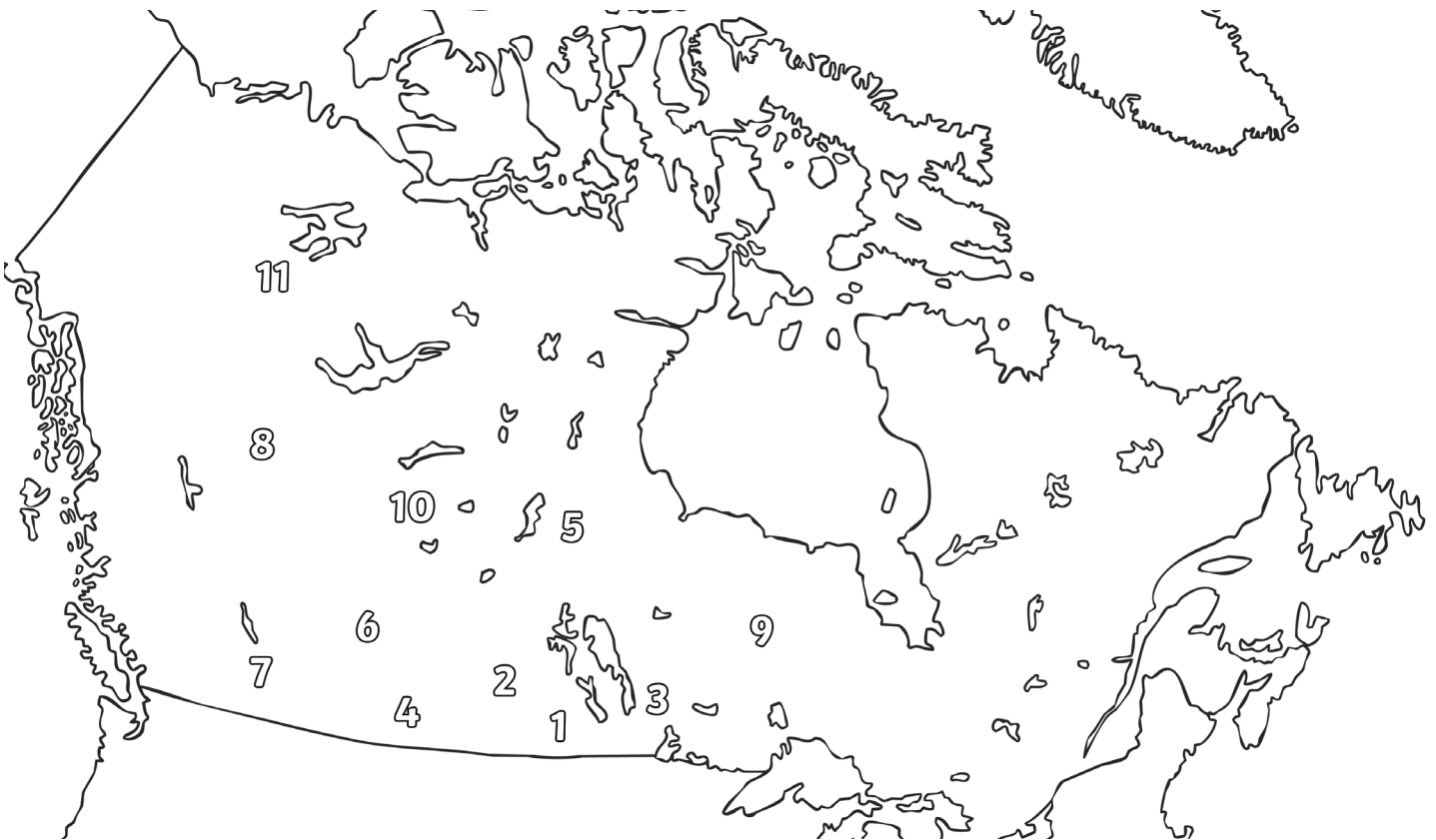
The Numbered Treaties were treaties that were made between the government and Indigenous peoples between 1871 and 1921. The Numbered Treaties gained the government of Canada a vast amount of land. Each of the numbered treaties had different rules. The rules were representative of what was most important to each group involved in the negotiations. For example, the Woodland and Plains Cree signed Treaty Six requesting medical support as part of the conditions of their treaty, because a smallpox epidemic had just killed many of their people. The Plains Indigenous groups were experiencing starvation because the buffalo had been over hunted by the Europeans.

Many Indigenous groups agreed to the treaties because they saw their ways of life changing. Indigenous people believed that a treaty would include everything the two groups had agreed on. Indigenous people had been negotiating treaties between their own nations since time immemorial. They believed these treaties between themselves and the government of Canada would be honoured in the same way their own treaties were. The government on the other hand, believed the treaties only included what was written in the treaty document.

Treaty Number	Date of Treaty	Between the government of Canada or the Crown's representatives and...
Treaty 1	1871	Anishinabek and Swampy Cree of southern Manitoba
Treaty 2	1871	Anishinaabe of southern Manitoba
Treaty 3 (Known as the North-West Angle Treaty)	1873	Some Saulteaux (Ojibwe people)
Treaty 4 (Known as the Qu'appelle Treaty)	1874	Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine

Thoughtful consideration has been taken to ensure we pay respect to Indigenous peoples in our resources, with Truth and Reconciliation as our mission.

Treaty 5 (Known as the Winnipeg Treaty)	1875	Ojibwa and the Swampy Cree of Lake Winnipeg
Treaty 6	1876	Cree, Assiniboine and Ojibwe
Treaty 7	1877	Plains First Nations - Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (PEigan), Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuut'ina (Sarcee)
Treaty 8	1899	First Nations of the Lesser Slave Lake
Treaty 9 (Known as the James Bay Treaty)	1905	Cree, Ojibwe
Treaty 10	1906	Métis
Treaty 11	1921	First Nations (Dene, Gwich'in, Tlicho-Dogrib, Sahtu)



Broken Promises

Promises were made to Indigenous people in return for the land agreements under the treaty. Indigenous people were promised farming assistance, tools, blankets, reserve lands, schools if they wanted, hunting and fishing rights, an annual census and sometimes payment. Indigenous people were expected to be peaceful, follow the rules for law and order and not drink alcohol on reserve lands. The treaties were not consistent across all the treaties either. Some treaties had oral agreements in addition to the signed documents which led to conflict when the Indigenous people said the agreements were not being honoured. Not only did the federal government not uphold all of their treaty promises, they also forced Indigenous people to live on reserves. Reserves are land that was set aside by the government for use of Indigenous people only. In 2016, almost half of the 744,855 Indigenous people in Canada were living on reserves.

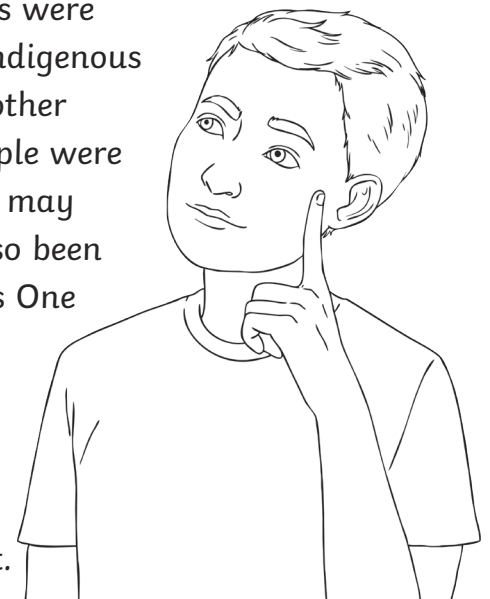
Purpose

The purpose, as were many of the laws against Indigenous people, was to control Indigenous people and to gain control of Indigenous land and natural resources that could be found there. The promise of education for example, showed up as educating Indigenous people on settler ways of living. Even the farming tools and advice were meant to reinforce the European settler way of life. The goal was to make Indigenous people more like European settlers, removing their way of life, traditional ways of knowing, their language and their self-reliance.

Conflicts

Not all Indigenous leaders were willing to sign the treaties. Plains Cree Chief Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear) did not sign Treaty Six in 1876. He was worried the Cree people would lose their traditional way of life and their freedom. Many Indigenous leaders were concerned about the lack of honesty and fair negotiations. Most Indigenous leaders did sign the Numbered Treaties but they felt they had no other choice. There has been debate over whether or not Indigenous people were given fair translations of what the treaties promised. Translations may not have been honest with the terms that were used. There has also been a lot of conflict in regards to promises that were made for Treaties One and Two that were verbal. The Indigenous people were told they would be given training on how to farm. But, they didn't receive that training.

In British Columbia, most land is not ceded. In other words, the First Nations people did not enter into a deal with the government.



However, the government took the land anyway, forcing First Nations peoples onto reserves without agreement. Indigenous people did not have freedom to travel wherever they wanted, nevermind live wherever they wanted on land that belonged to them for centuries, and still belongs to them. More than 80% of the reserve lands are in remote areas. These lands are away from basic services, some swamplands or sand dunes and some reserve lands are even under water. The federal government continues to have control over the reserve lands and enforces their control over it.

The Numbered Treaties have a lot of problems including the fact that across all of them, there is little consistency. In 1876, the Indian Act was established. In 1885, the pass system was enacted. Both of these acts controlled the movement of Indigenous people the minute they left reserve land. Indigenous people believed they were entering into a kinship with the government, but they soon found out they had no control or say in what happened to either themselves or their land.

Some treaties were signed later than others, like Treaty 11, because the land covering Treaty 11, originally appeared to have no use to the government until 1921 when oil and gas was found in the region. That was when the government became interested in that land. In the non-treaty territories, settlers simply moved onto the land without permission from Indigenous people.

Interesting Treaty Details

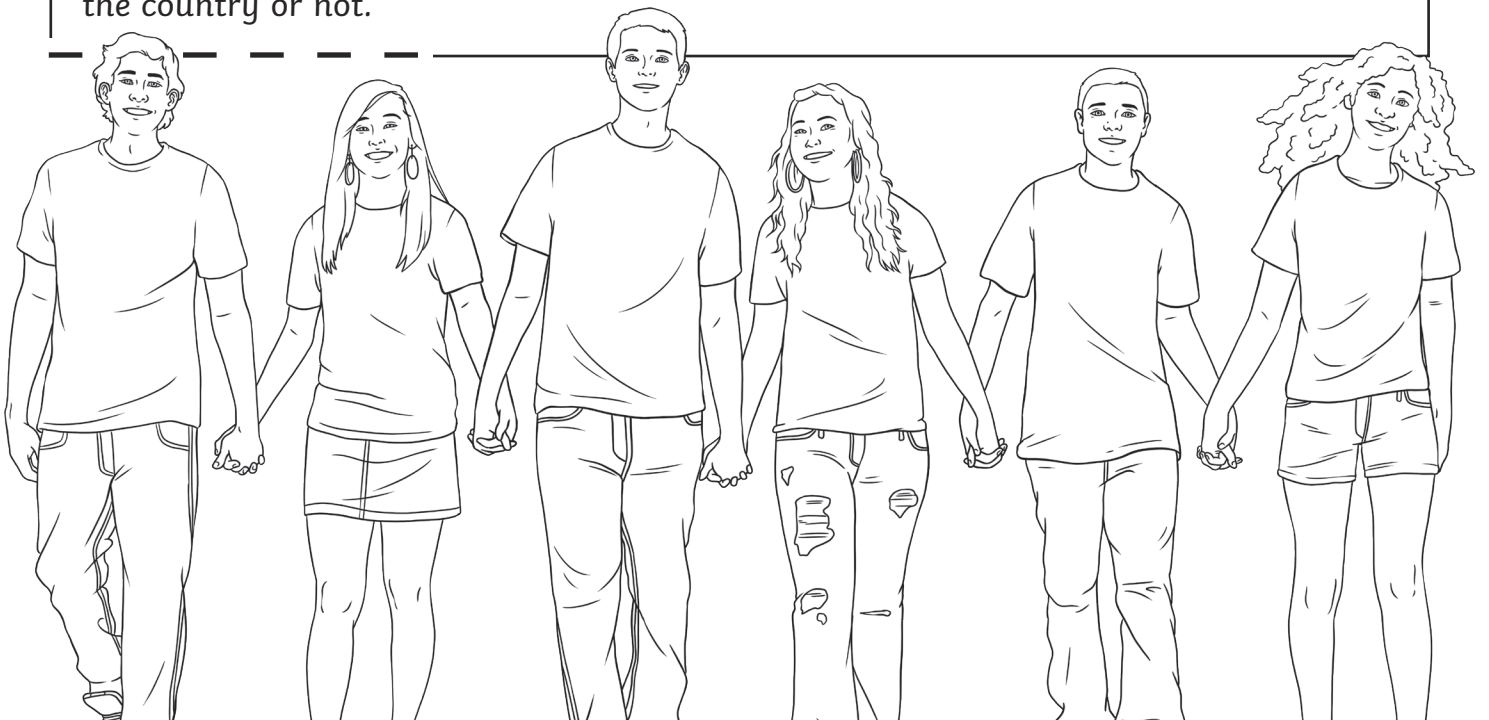
- Treaties One to Seven stood between 1871-1877 and identified land just north of the U.S. and Canada border. It allowed the construction of the railway. It also allowed the lands of the Northwest Territories to be used as farmland.
- Treaties 8-11 stood between 1899-1921 and allowed the development of natural resources in northern Canada. It also allowed settlers to populate the land, creating a relationship between British Columbia and central Canada.
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada was established in 1973, to deal with land/treaty claims between the federal government and Indigenous people.

Negative Impacts to Indigenous Peoples

- The Numbered Treaties have made long-lasting impacts on Indigenous peoples. Immediately after the first treaty was signed in 1871, there have been attempts by the Indigenous people addressing the dishonesty, and broken agreements by the Canadian government.

- Their movements were completely regulated by the government.
- They used to be able to care for themselves. Indigenous people became almost completely dependent on the government and their agencies to sustain their way of life.
- Their traditions such as powwows and potlatches (similar to a potluck and party) were deemed illegal by the government.
- Residential schools were instated. 150,000 Indigenous children were taken to these inadequate old buildings, with poor heating and structures. Children experienced abuse and exposure to diseases such as tuberculosis and untold suffering.

The damage European colonization and the Numbered Treaties have caused to Indigenous people is immeasurable. Despite the struggles, Indigenous peoples have continued to advocate for their rights against the Canadian government who have not and still do not honour their original treaty promises. The Indigenous communities continue to work in a collective (cooperative) manner to strengthen, heal and rebuild themselves after the damage of colonial history. In spite of the way Indigenous people have been treated, most Indigenous people believe we are all treaty people. They believe treaties are an important part of our foundation as a society. They believe we all have our own set of rights and responsibilities. All buildings, roads, organizations in Canada exist because a treaty made them possible. If you live on a land governed by a treaty, you are a treaty person whether new to the country or not.



Canada's Treaties 1-11 Questions

1. Based on your own understanding, what was the purpose of the Numbered Treaties?

2. Did the government uphold the promises of the Treaties? Provide evidence from the reading passage.

3. In your opinion, who benefited the most from the Numbered Treaties? Provide a detailed explanation.

4. In your own words, explain why the reserve system was unfair to Indigenous people.

5. Choose one of the listed negative impacts on Indigenous people to reflect on. Explain your thoughts on it.
