GRADE 7-8: HISTORY  
CANADIAN CONFEDERATION

**Purpose:** Students will examine the role of Louis Riel in Canadian history and answer the question: Should Riel be considered a Father of Confederation? They will use inquiry skills to research the two perspectives of this question. Students will reflect the ways in which Métis People were shaped by Confederation.

**Estimated time:** 120 minutes

**Resources required:**
- Computer with internet access
- Relevant textbooks, books and encyclopedias

**Activity:**
1. Review with students that prior to Confederation, Canada was divided. Each jurisdiction had its own legal and governance system. On July 1, 1867, Canada was created by Confederation, thus bringing the new provinces together under one government and one system.

2. Ask students to recall what they know about Confederation and the events leading up to it. Ask them who they consider the Fathers of Confederation (e.g., Sir John A. Macdonald, George Brown, George-Étienne Cartier, etc.). If Louis Riel is not mentioned, ask students if they know who Louis Riel is.

3. Introduce Louis Riel to the class. Read to students the following:
   
   When Canada was created under the British North American Act in 1867, the Dominion included Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. While this was a start, it was far from the dream of a Dominion spanning from “sea to sea.” The American purchase of Alaska from Russia spurred Canada’s decision to purchase Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company shortly after Confederation. With the negotiations taking place between Canada and the Hudson’s Bay Company, the local Métis People felt left out of the decision that would decide the fate of their homeland. A young, well-spoken Louis Riel became the voice of the Métis People, leading them in the Red River Rebellion in 1869-1870. Riel was instrumental in drafting the List of Rights, which formed the basis for the Manitoba Act that was passed by Parliament in 1870.

   In the public’s memory, controversy has followed Louis Riel. Riel has been known as many things since he was hanged as a traitor: patriot, martyr, madman, champion, troublemaker and more. Despite how he has been known in the past, every year, on the third Monday in February, the people of Manitoba celebrate Louis Riel Day to remember his dream of a province that embraces all cultures.

4. Tell students that the question they will be considering in today’s class is: Should Louis Riel be considered a Father of Confederation? This question is one that has been debated over the decades, across the country, on the streets and in Parliament.

5. Provide students with an example of this debate, show them a five-minute clip from the CBC news archives: “Is Riel a Father of Confederation?” August 29, 1989:  
   www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/politics/parties-leaders/rethinking-riel/is-riel-a-father-of-confederation.html

6. While students watch the clip, tell them to answer the following three questions:
   a. What is the Conservative Aboriginal caucus asking for?
   b. Why was Riel a good representative for the Métis? (Or maybe he wasn’t. Explain.)
   c. Why, specifically, did Louis Riel want Manitoba to join Canada?

7. Once the clip is finished, have students complete their questions, first on their own and then by turning to their desk mate to fill in any information they may have missed. As a class, ask students to share their answers. Record key points on the board to create a chart for visual learners.

8. In partners, have students build on what they’ve learned by conducting research. Give students 30 minutes to perform this task. Using the Canadian Encyclopedia website, and any other relevant resources they have access to, have students answer the following questions:
   a. What are the main arguments for each side of the issue? List three for each side.
   b. Why was the prospect of Manitoba joining the Dominion a concern for:
      o Louis Riel
      o The Métis People
      o The people in the existing four provinces
      o The people in the regions that had yet to join the Dominion (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, etc.)
      o The Canadian government at the time
      o Who else might have been interested in the proceedings?
   c. What kind of man was Louis Riel? Does this affect how he should be remembered in regard to his actions with Confederation?
9. Once students have completed their research questions, tell them they will now begin to debate their ideas. Divide the class into two groups. One side will represent the side that wants Riel recognized as a Father of Confederation, while the other will represent those who do not.

10. In a debate, two opposing sides of an issue present their arguments to prove their point. A debate typically begins with a question. In this case the question is: Should Louis Riel be considered a Father of Confederation? Two sides emerge from the question: Louis Riel is a Father of Confederation (affirmative side); Louis Riel is not a Father of Confederation (negative side). The affirmative side seeks to promote change while the negative side seeks to keep things the same, to keep the status quo. In a debate a moderator (in this case, the teacher) introduces the side and leads the discussion. There is only one speaker at a time. After the introduction the affirmative side presents their first argument. Once finished, the negative side has the opportunity to disprove or “rebut” their argument by explaining why they do not agree. This process is repeated. The affirmative side has three opportunities to explain their position. Then the negative side has the opportunity to share their three arguments while the affirmative side rebuttal each point.

**Educator’s Note:** Alternatively, divide the class into two sides, one for and one opposed to Louis Riel being named a Father of Confederation. Go back and forth between sides discussing why or why not Riel should receive this position.

Another option would be to have students divide into pairs. Again, one student should be for while the other is against Louis Riel receiving Father of Confederation designation. Students will discuss the two sides in their pairs.

11. Each team will need students to perform and present the following:
   a. Introduction
   b. Argument #1
      o Rebuttal
   c. Argument #2
      o Rebuttal
   d. Argument #3
      o Rebuttal
   e. Conclusion

12. Allow students to prepare for their roles in the debate for approximately 30 minutes. Conduct the debate.

13. Once finished, bring focus to the involvement Métis People have in the years surrounding Confederation.

14. Ask students to write a brief response to the following: Given that the facts surrounding Manitoba joining the Confederation and Riel’s life have not changed, explain why you think Canadian perspectives have (or have not) changed.

15. Completed reflections will be handed in for the teacher to assess and read.

**Educator’s Note:** Students may share their reflection in small groups in lieu of handing them in.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the lesson plan, share these resources with your students:

- CBC Archives: Rethinking Riel: www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/politics/parties-leaders/rethinking-riel/rethinking-riel.html

For a review:

- Canada: A People’s History episode 8 “The Great Enterprise”: youtube.com/watch?v=jh2p9daVQA8
- Canada: A People’s History episode 9 “From Sea to Sea”: youtube.com/watch?v=EJIFoWOviJ8