

VIMY 100 IN THE CLASSROOM



THE VIMY FOUNDATION
LA FONDATION VIMY

With the support from

Tim Hortons

DEBATE: WAS A NATION BORN ON A BATTLEFIELD?

“Every nation has a creation story. The First World War and the battle of Vimy Ridge are central to the story of Canada... A year after the war ended, the brilliant Canadian commander at Vimy, Sir Arthur Currie, put it another way in a speech to Toronto’s Empire Club. Canada was a nation of immigrants before 1914, he said. “Now these men who have come back are your very own.”

--Prime Minister Stephen Harper at Vimy Ridge, 2007

“It had a negligible effect on the war’s outcome. The Canadians had equal casualties and more strategic successes in other battles, such as Amiens and Passchendaele. If French or British rather than Canadian troops had driven the German enemy off Vimy Ridge, history probably would have forgotten about it.”

--journalist Michael Valpy, *Globe and Mail*, April 7, 2007

A popular interpretation of the history of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917 is that it was *the* defining moment for Canada, a turning point during which it truly became a country. After all, for the first time in history, all four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force attacked together in what was a successful battle. As Brigadier General A.E. Ross said at the time of the battle: “In those few minutes, I witnessed the birth of a nation.” On the other hand, 3,598 soldiers were killed and another 7,000 wounded, a huge cost.



29th Infantry Battalion advancing over “No Man’s Land” through the German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Photo credit: Library and Archives Canada. PA-001086.

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But can a nation be born on a battlefield? Was Vimy Ridge the central event in Canadian history that helped to forge our identity? Some say yes; others no. Some of that difference of opinion is expressed in the quotations noted above.

Now is your turn to weigh in on the issue in a class debate.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE WAS CENTRAL TO FORMING THE CANADIAN IDENTITY

Your class can debate this in teams of two or three, with each team taking a side. Or you can have a larger class discussion of the resolution. Regardless of what you do, each student should have three pieces of evidence to support their point of view. Below are some suggested places you could begin your research.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/vimy-ridge-and-the-birth-of-a-nation/>

http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/vimy/index_e.shtml

<https://legionmagazine.com/en/2015/03/face-to-face-was-vimy-ridge-the-canadian-corps-greatest-victory/>

ALTERNATIVE: SNOWBALL DISCUSSION

Instead of a debate, try a “snowball discussion.” In this format, your class is divided into groups of two. After two or three minutes of discussion, pair up with another group, making a group of four and continue the discussion. Finally, join another group of four to make a group of eight and carry on sharing viewpoints on the resolution about the meaning of Vimy Ridge.