

Reasons for Confederation

During the early 1860s, politicians and citizens of British North America recognized six reasons for Confederation.

- a) Give each student 1 “reason” to read.
- b) Have them come up with a version in their own words.
- c) Join with the others with the same “reason”
- d) Together, come up with a group version – write on board/paper
- e) Share with the class.
- f) Go around the class “taking notes” of all the other reasons.

1. Political Deadlock

Upper Canada and Lower Canada had an equal number of representatives in the Legislative Assembly. Each group took opposite sides in discussions, leading to political deadlocks. Few changes could be made due to the bitter conflicts between the two groups.

It was necessary to work out a new system of government to help solve the continuing problems between the English- and French-speaking representatives of the united province of Canada, who had different priorities.

The “Great Coalition”, which involved leaders such as John A. Macdonald (Canada West/Upper Canada), George Brown (Reformer), Alexander Galt (Independent) and George-Étienne Cartier (Canada East/Lower Canada), had proven by their influence that it was possible for English and French-speaking Canadians to agree on big questions such as government reform.

2. American Expansion

The people of British North America were worried about an American invasion. They felt that if they united, they would have a better chance of defending themselves and keeping their land.

The United States was very rich and powerful, and it was always looking for new lands. The U.S. wanted to take over the lands of **Canada**, and they were trying to convince the people of **Canada**, many of whom were American immigrants, that this would be a good idea.

At the time of Confederation, the United States was extending its territory westwards. Between 1864 and 1890, nine new states were created, four of which were on the Canadian border. In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from Russia. The end of the American Civil War saw renewed investment in land, in railway construction and in the exploitation of natural resources in the American west. At the end of the 1860s, American merchants and colonists began to look at lands in the Canadian west as a place where they could get established and the American government did not hide the fact that such a possibility was attractive.

The fear of American expansionism then led Great Britain to favour the purchase, by Canada, of the Northwest Territory and Rupert's Land. If the coveted territory were under the jurisdiction of a legally constituted country, Canada in this case, rather than under the jurisdiction of a trading company, logic would dictate that the United States would stop seeing annexation as a possibility.

3. A railway from east to west was needed.

Each colony had its own railway system at this time, however, they were all in financial difficulty and unable to expand. To add to the problems, the St. Lawrence River froze in the winter, halting transportation and the Gaspé Mountains made it almost impossible to get goods to the Atlantic colonies.

As the colonies grew, they were building railroads and roads, which cost a great deal of money. If several smaller colonies combined, they would have more taxes and more money to pay their debts as they grew.

4. Great Britain wanted to break some ties.

Great Britain was beginning to wonder if New France was of any use to them. Only some politicians saw the raw materials and a market for manufactured goods to be of use to Great Britain. Others saw it as a place to move to if war erupted. Great Britain encouraged Confederation in order to make the Canada's more self-sufficient, but still loyal to Britain.

Britain wanted to become less involved in the government of their colonies, because it was very time-consuming and expensive. It was time for the colonies to become more independent.

5. Expansion to the West

Upper Canada and Lower Canada began looking for more available arable land and land for settlement. Present-day Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta were still available. Expansion to the west would help Canada assert its authority over a greater territory. The two Canadas needed to expand but were required to act quickly as the threat of U.S. expansion into these western lands was a pressing possibility.