

Unit 1: Video 2 Transcript

Q3: What is your view on how we should examine pre-Confederation Canadian history? What is the difference between studying history and doing history?

A: In a course on pre-Confederation Canadian history, I think it's important to think of the landscape as a much more fluid one rather than being constrained by the political geography that we know today. And I think that's useful for a number of reasons. One is because, of course, at the time, nobody knew how things were going to turn out. And nobody has a map to the future. And that's really the difference between being interested in history and doing history.

If you're interested in history, you know the names and the dates, and you can rattle those off, and that's fine. In 1663, this happened. Or in 1535, this happened. Great. But why did they happen? And the only way you can get at that question of why is by looking at people's motivations. What was their— people never act in the past for the past. They act in the past for the future. They have an idea of what sort of outcome they'd like. We'd like to acquire horses so that we could become better bison hunters. And the outcome of that would be a more well-nourished society, better clothing, perhaps more trade goods. We could improve our quality of life more broadly. So that's all with a vision towards the future. I think we'll immigrate to Canada. Why on earth would you do that? Because we'll be able to earn more money, better standard of living, the kids might get an education. It's always looking towards the future. So when we're looking at Canada in the past in this course, pre-Confederation Canadian history, I think what's really important is to realize that nobody in 1663 envisions a country that stretches from sea to shining sea to shining sea. What they're trying to do is make decisions based on that little horizon they've got, with an eye to a future that they think they can almost see. And that could go in any number of ways and that's, I think, what makes it really exciting. It's not where it's going to wind up. It's where it might go.