

CONTRIBUTING TO HISTORY DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND THE RCMP

By Maralyne Narayan

EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Understand the concept of diversity within the RCMP and its importance in modern policing;
- Explore the historical context of diversity within the RCMP and its evolution over time;
- Examine the historical events and actions that contributed to current diversity policies and initiatives implemented by the RCMP;
- Expand their knowledge of the concepts of bias and discrimination;
- Consider ways to promote inclusivity and cultural competence within the RCMP.

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEMES

Diversity and Inclusion, Canadian History, Indigenous Reconciliation

KEY VOCABULARY

Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Bias, Discrimination, Cultural Competence, Stereotype, Intersectionality, Representation, Law Enforcement, Law and Order, National Security

GRADES

6-8

DURATION

5 classes

SUBJECTS

History

Language Arts

Social Studies

MATERIALS REQUIRED

→ [Riding Through History website](#)

→ Prepared **Worksheets #1-4**

→ Computers or devices with Internet access



BACKGROUND

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), also known as the Mounties or Gendarmerie royale du Canada (GRC), is Canada's federal and national police force, operating at all levels of government across the country. With its iconic Red Serge uniform and Stetson hat, the RCMP symbolizes the intersection of civilization and the wild frontier.

Established in 1873 as the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) by Sir John A. Macdonald, it aimed to maintain law and order in the North-West Territories amidst challenges like American whisky traders and conflicts such as the [Cypress Hills Massacre](#). Inspired by British cavalry regiments, the NWMP's distinctive red uniforms emphasized its British heritage.

Over the years, the NWMP's jurisdiction expanded, reaching the Yukon during the [Klondike Gold Rush](#) and extending to the Arctic coast. The force's conduct during historical events like the Gold Rush earned global recognition, leading to its evolution into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920. Despite commendable actions, the RCMP faced challenges, including its involvement in suppressing events like the [Winnipeg General Strike of 1919](#) and the [“On-to-Ottawa Trek” of 1935](#).

The RCMP also handled counterintelligence until the late 1970s, when reforms led to the creation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). Incidents like the [Mayerthorpe tragedy in 2005](#), where four officers lost their lives while executing a search warrant, underscored the risks faced by the force.

Internally, the RCMP is divided into provincial divisions, with exceptions like Ontario, which has two divisions: A Division (Ottawa) and O Division (rest of the province). Its headquarters are in Ottawa, ON, with the Depot Division in Regina, SK, serving as its training academy.

Scan the QR code to access all the links in this lesson plan



A group of NWMP officers about to set off for Yukon in 1895.

Source: N.W.M.P., *Original Contingent Leaving Regina June 1, 1895, for the Yukon*. 1895. Ernest Brown Fonds. Yukon Archives.



NWMP officers at Fort Constantine, the first police post in Yukon.

Source: Supt. Constantine and N.W.M.P. at Fort Constantine, Y.T. 1896. Glenbow Museum Collection. Yukon Archives.

Beyond law enforcement, the RCMP is a unique military unit of dragoons (mounted regiments) bearing battle honours for its wartime service. Immortalized in popular culture through Hollywood depictions and characters like Sergeant Preston of the Yukon, for many in Canada and abroad the Mounties represent Canadian identity and resilience; whereas for others, they are a symbol of colonization.

STEP ONE

WHO AND WHAT IS THE RCMP?

Start by establishing a safe and respectful classroom for discussing complex, potentially emotional issues related to policing. You may want to begin the conversation by showing students some relevant images related to the history of the RCMP, such as these:

- [RCMP 1935 postcard](#)
- [Female RCMP officer](#)
- [Protestors at RCMP blockade, Fairy Creek, BC](#)

Ask students to consider the images and, if comfortable, share what they think about them and the RCMP.

Explain that any policing institution has a complicated history with its population, and Canada is no different. Encourage the class to consider that there are various perspectives on the RCMP and their role in Canadian history.

Watch several of the videos from the [Riding Through History website](#) to give students examples of these various perspectives.

Have students reflect on why it is essential to consider diverse perspectives when learning about the RCMP.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Over the course of this unit of study, students will need to choose 3-5 critical events from the history of the RCMP. Inform students that at the end of the unit they will each be creating a timeline to showcase these events.

They should select events that depict different perspectives of the RCMP, their contribution to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and their impact on the Canadian identity. Students can include milestones for progress, setbacks, and challenges to DEI. Encourage them to analyse the sequence of events and reflect on the changes over time.

Throughout the in-class investigations and discussions that will follow, encourage students to record events and ideas for their timeline in their journals/notebooks.



NWMP officers in front of the police barracks in Whitehorse, Yukon.

Source: Group of NWMP, Yukon Territory. 1902. Ernest Brown Fonds. Yukon Archives.

STEP TWO

BREAKING GLASS CEILINGS: THE ENTRY OF WOMEN INTO THE RCMP

On September 16, 1974, 32 women across Canada collectively pledged to serve as police officers, marking a profound transformation within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. As a class, watch the following video from the RCMP's YouTube channel:

- ["40 years of women in serge"](#)

In groups or individually, students can choose one pioneering woman in the RCMP to create a profile on. They can record their findings on **Worksheet #1** and then share them with the class. Some suggested RCMP officers to research: Imane Gourramen, Katherine Ryan (a.k.a. Klondike Kate), Bev Busson, Shelley Peters Carey, Christine Windover, and many others to consider.

STEP THREE

2SLGBTQI+ AND THE RCMP

The LGBT* Purge

(*Note that the use of *LGBT* in this case is a contextually specific historical acronym)

The LGBT Purge was a period when the Canadian government discriminated against 2SLGBTQI+ employees, lasting from December 1, 1955, to June 20, 1996. It affected workers in the RCMP, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and other government agencies.

These employees either identified as 2SLGBTQI+ or were suspected of doing so. They were investigated by special units of the RCMP and other police agencies, leading to various forms of mistreatment like harassment, interrogation, abuse, and termination. Many suffered trauma, mental health issues, and career setbacks as a result.

A class action lawsuit in 2016 sought compensation for Purge survivors, leading to a settlement providing financial compensation (managed by the [LGBT Purge Fund](#)), individual reconciliation measures, the creation of a [National Monument](#) (to be completed by 2025), and more.

In 2017, the government passed Bill C-66 to address the unjust criminalization of individuals involved in consensual same-sex relationships. This allowed for the removal of their criminal records. That same year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized to the 2SLGBTQI+ community for the discrimination faced during the Purge, acknowledging the harm caused by the government's past actions.

Have students [watch](#) or [read](#) Justin Trudeau's apology for the LGBT Purge. Below are several suggested activities that can be used depending on your classroom dynamics and individual students' prior knowledge about social justice issues.



Divide the class into small groups and give each group one of the following questions to discuss. You may want to provide a large whiteboard or presentation page so that groups can share their major points with the class. Reiterate respectful discourse as an essential element of the project.

- How would you feel if you were part of a marginalized community that received an apology for past discrimination?
- How can society continue to support and uplift marginalized communities beyond just apologies?
- Can you think of any other historical injustices that deserve a similar apology? Why?

Alternatively, students can create a piece of artwork (a drawing, collage, or poster) representing their interpretation of the apology and its impact.

Finally, consider a short individual research project to build on the impact of this lesson. Students can look into other instances when the Canadian government issued official apologies, and then should write a brief paragraph discussing the impact, similarities, and differences between their chosen apology and the apology for the LGBT purge.

STEP FOUR

BREAKING BARRIERS: BALTEJ SINGH DHILLON'S STORY

Baltej Singh Dhillon was born in Malaysia in 1966 and faced a significant loss when his father passed away in 1982. Moving to Canada with his family a year later, they encountered financial struggles but stood together for support. Dhillon, committed to his Sikh faith, wore his turban despite challenges and discrimination.

He wanted to join the RCMP, but the force's dress code banned turbans at the time. Dhillon didn't give up, however, and his determination eventually led to policy changes within the RCMP that allowed Sikhs to serve while upholding their religious beliefs. Dhillon's career in the RCMP showcased his dedication to service and advocacy for diversity.

Students will conduct research for the following questions and record their answers on **Worksheet #2**:

1. What challenges did Baltej Singh Dhillon face in his journey to join the RCMP?
2. How did Dhillon's efforts impact the RCMP's policies toward religious inclusion?

Afterwards, engage in a class discussion about their findings.



RCMP officer Baltej Singh Dhillon.

Source: Baltej Singh Dhillon / [South Asian Canadian Digital Archive](#)

STEP FIVE

EXPLORING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND RCMP HISTORY

Engaging with local Indigenous speakers, leaders, and activists should be considered the educator's first and most relevant resource, followed by Indigenous-created sources and publications. The objective of this lesson is to encourage students to understand that there are many ongoing conversations related to DEI and policing that they should continue to engage with, now and in the future.

Have the class read the following documents:

- ["The Mounties: 150 years of conflict with Indigenous Peoples"](#)
- ["Advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples"](#)

Discuss each one, ensuring students understand that they are small snapshots of information and certainly not exhaustive.

As a class, talk about the following questions:

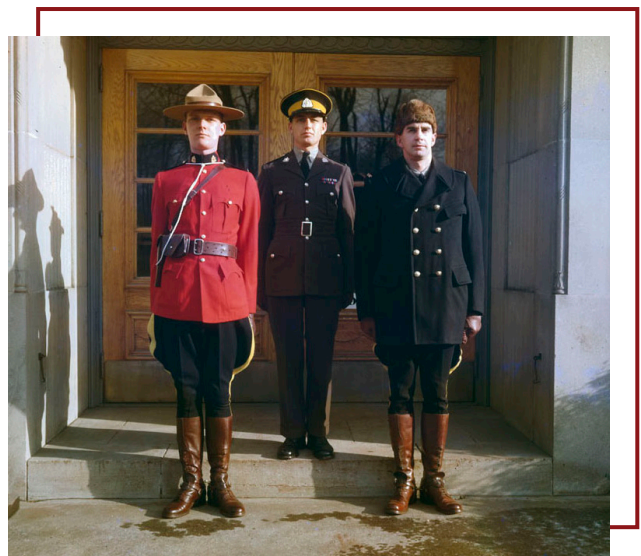
1. What is systemic bias?
2. How long does institutional change take to reach grassroots levels?

Have students record the class' responses on **Worksheet #3**. After the discussion, students will answer the remaining two questions on the worksheet individually.



Members of the NWMP in Dawson City, 1898.

Credit: E008128887. 1898. Library and Archives Canada.



Examples of various RCMP uniforms, 1948.

Credit: Beaver, A. 1948. National Film Board of Canada / Library and Archives Canada.

STEP SIX

REFLECTIONS AND CONNECTIONS

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Throughout the in-class investigations and discussions, students should have curated a list of 3-5 major events related to the RCMP that contributed to the organization's role in Canadian history. Now, students will thoughtfully and creatively construct a timeline showcasing these events. Inform students that their timelines can include a collage of images, artistic representations of events, use of language to convey important points, and so on. They can be digital, or in any other format that successfully demonstrates students' understanding of the variety of perspectives surrounding these events, as well as the ongoing changes within the RCMP to better engage with, represent, and serve Canadians. Timelines may also include future goals for the RCMP that students would like to see the institution strive toward.

Create a gallery walk of the completed timelines, so students can view the work of their classmates.

Afterwards, ask students to reflect on their learning journey by completing the 5-4-3-2-1 chart on **Worksheet #4**.



***Maralyne Narayan** recently completed her practicum at Admaston Public School in the Renfrew District School Board in a Grade 5/6 split class. She will be completing her Bachelor of Education, with qualifications to teach Junior and intermediate level classes, in 2025 at the University of Ottawa. She looks forward to pursuing a career as an educator in Ontario.*



RUBRIC

Assessment	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-89%)	Level 4+ (90-100%)
Knowledge and Understanding	Student demonstrated a limited knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated some knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated a good knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated a great knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated an outstanding knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.
Thinking and Inquiry	Student's planning and processing skills were not evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with limited proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were somewhat evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with some proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with good proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were very evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with great proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were extremely evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with outstanding proficiency.
Communication	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with limited proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with some proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with good proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with great proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with outstanding proficiency.
Application	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with limited proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with some proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with good proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with great proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with outstanding proficiency.