

Lesson Plan: James Douglas and the Founding of British Columbia

Grade Level: High School (Grades 10–12)

Subject: Social Studies, Canadian History, Civics

Duration: 1-2 class periods (50–60 minutes each)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. Understand the policies and vision of Governor James Douglas and the British Government through Edward Lytton in the early Colony of British Columbia.
 2. Analyze the principles of indigenous land rights and multiculturalism established during the colony's founding.
 3. Reflect on how early colonial ideals were challenged and altered in subsequent years.
 4. Connect the historical context to contemporary issues of reconciliation and multiculturalism in British Columbia.
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Materials Needed

1. Video called [James Douglas and the Founding of British Columbia](#).
 2. Video Script and Supplemental Video Notes.
 3. Visual aids:
 - Maps showing the Colony of British Columbia and its reserves.
 - Timeline of key events (e.g., Douglas' governorship, establishment of reserves, multicultural policies).
 4. Handouts with key terms and discussion questions.
 5. Whiteboard/Smartboard for brainstorming and notes.
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Lesson Outline

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Hook Question:** *“What do you think it means for a society to be multicultural? How does this connect to land and rights?”*
 - Facilitate a brief discussion, tying the question to British Columbia's history and present-day context.

- Provide a brief overview of the Colony of British Columbia and Governor James Douglas' leadership.
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2. Storytelling: The Founding of British Columbia (15 minutes)

- **Video/Reading:** Share key excerpts from the script, highlighting:
 - The unique policies of the early colony, including the "no settlement" policy.
 - The principles of indigenous land rights and multiculturalism.
 - The challenges posed by the influx of American settlers and miners.
 - The opposition Douglas faced and the eventual rollback of some of his policies.
 - Use maps and visuals to illustrate the creation of reserves and the multicultural population of the colony.
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3. Group Activity: Analyzing Colonial Policies (20 minutes)

- Divide students into small groups and assign each group one of the following focus areas:
 1. **Indigenous Land Rights:** Analyze Douglas' reserve policy and its significance for indigenous communities.
 2. **Multiculturalism:** Explore the policies encouraging diversity and their impact on the colony's population.
 3. **American Influence and Resistance:** Investigate the effects of the gold rush and the influx of American settlers.
 4. **Political Challenges:** Examine the opposition Douglas faced and the dismantling of his policies after the colony ended.
 - **Task:** Each group creates a short presentation or visual (e.g., a poster or infographic) summarizing their findings.
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4. Class Discussion: Legacy and Reflection (10 minutes)

- Facilitate a discussion using these guiding questions:
 - How do Douglas' policies reflect the values of fairness and inclusion?
 - Why were these ideals dismantled, and what were the consequences for indigenous and immigrant communities?
 - How does this history inform our understanding of reconciliation and multiculturalism today?
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5. Reflection and Wrap-Up (5–10 minutes)

- **Reflection Prompt:** Students write a brief response to one of these prompts:
 1. *What lessons can we learn from James Douglas' vision for British Columbia?*
 2. *How can British Columbia today strive to uphold the original ideals of land rights and multiculturalism?*
 3. *Consider the different approaches of the United States and Britain towards indigenous people in the old territory of Columbia.*
 4. *Why did the Aborigines Protection Society support a colony in British Columbia but not colonies in other places?*
 - Volunteers share their responses, connecting the lesson to contemporary issues.
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Assessment

1. **Participation:** Evaluate engagement in group work and discussions.
 2. **Group Presentations:** Assess understanding of colonial policies and their significance.
 3. **Reflection Responses:** Use a rubric to evaluate critical thinking and connections to modern contexts.
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Key Terms and Concepts

- James Douglas
 - Indigenous Land Reserves
 - Multiculturalism in the Colony
 - Aborigines Protection Society
 - Edward Lytton
 - American Settlers and the Gold Rush
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Extension Activities

1. **Research Project:** Investigate the role of a specific group in early British Columbia (e.g., indigenous communities, black settlers, Chinese miners).
 2. **Debate:** Should the British have abandoned British Columbia to the United States or was there another option?
 3. **Creative Writing:** Write a diary entry from the perspective of an indigenous leader, a settler, or James Douglas during the gold rush era.
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Conclusion

This lesson engages students with the foundational history of British Columbia, emphasizing the progressive ideals of indigenous land rights and multiculturalism. By examining the challenges and eventual rollback of these policies, students are encouraged to connect the past with ongoing efforts toward reconciliation and diversity in modern society.

Video Script of James Douglas and the Founding of British Columbia

Until 1858, there were no settlers, no military and no religious missions on the entire British Columbia mainland. This is because the government was an unusual Company State which enforced a 'no settlement' policy. Wherever it governed, aboriginal communities were stronger than any other part of North and South America.

But in the 1840s, 3,000 settlers from the US arrived believing their destiny was to govern the whole continent. The President threatened war, Britain considered abandoning the coast, but withdrew to the 49th parallel. Governor James Douglas moved his administration from old Vancouver to Victoria.

The US Army waged a dozen wars, removing native people from their lands onto remote reservations. They were forced to sign Treaties forbidding contact with native people in British territories. The US takeover of California was more traumatic; 100,000 native people died in the first two years.

But in 1858, 30,000 US fortune seekers streamed over the border, up the Fraser Canyon seeking gold. After meeting native resistance, they formed military units, burned villages, killed many and forced their way into the country.

In London, the powerful Aborigines Protection Society urged Parliament to "adopt measures to protect the Indians". It rarely supported Colonies but without settlement, the territory would be annexed by the United States.

The Society defended aboriginal people in British territories. The Anti Slavery Society defended them in other countries. Their memberships were almost identical, including Members of Parliament, influential citizens, even a King. Its publications regularly documented atrocities in the US.

Oxford Professor Herman Merivale had been a fierce critic of British Colonies. He was recruited to head the colonies department and recommend a new model. He wrote, 'The protection of natives should be withdrawn from the legislature and entrusted to the central executive'; it

should not just rely on a good 'systematic arrangement' but more importantly, a person of 'zeal, courage and humanity'.

James Douglas was that person, chosen as the first Governor, part black, married to an aboriginal woman. He spoke the trade language Chinook Wawa and had already opposed an elected assembly in defence of native people.

Governor Douglas went around the province meeting three large First Nations gatherings to discuss the new Colony of British Columbia.

He wrote to London, "There was one subject which preoccupied their minds, the abject condition of the native people reduced by the American system of removing whole tribes from their homes into distance reservations where they are compelled to stay. They look forward with dread to their own future condition, lest the same wretched fate await the native of British Columbia."

He told them that the "that government felt deeply interested in their welfare, and had sent instructions that they should be treated as Her Majesty's other subjects, that the local magistrates would attend to their complaints and guard them from wrong... that they had instructions to stake out and reserve for their benefit all occupied village sites and cultivated fields and as much land in the vicinity as they could till or was required for their support".

In a flurry of exchanges, Colonial Secretary Edward Lytton defined the vision for the Colony on two main principles:

1. First Nations communities would be reserved in place permanently. Lytton wrote, 'the treatment of the Native Indians' is a 'subject which demands your prompt consideration'. Regarding 'the letter from the Aborigines Protection Society invoking the protection of Her Majesty's government. I repeat my earnest injunctions to endeavor to secure this object'. He warned Douglas, 'this country would be strongly opposed to arbitrary or oppressive measures'. He added it is a 'delicate and important portion of your duties'. James Douglas sent Surveyors throughout the province instructing that 'the extent of the Indian Reserves be defined as they may be pointed out by the Indians themselves'.
2. British Columbia would be Multicultural. Outside the reserves, native individuals could own their own land privately, but this land would also be open to other settlers. Lytton wrote, there is a 'strong desire of Her Majesty's Government to attract to this territory all peaceful settlers without regard to nation. Naturalization should therefore be granted to all who desire it'. British Columbia was one of the first jurisdictions in the world to be explicitly 'multicultural' from its inception. But US miners would have to swear allegiance to Queen Victoria; many refused and left.

Douglas acted on his instructions to attract immigrants 'without regard to nation'. He invited 600 black people fleeing persecution from the US and found a legal loophole so they could vote

in the first election. Their votes elected the first Jewish legislator over a racist opponent. He welcomed Hawaiians forced from Oregon and Chinese goldminers. A London Times journalist marveled, "There are no distinctions made against them in these colonies. They have the same protection as all other persons." Douglas reported to London that he hired and paid people equally on public works including 'Africans and Chinese'.

Douglas had confidence in the government. Prime Minister Stanley had decades earlier authored the Bill to abolish slavery; Stanley Park is named after his son. Chancellor Disraeli would become the first Jewish Prime Minister. Lytton himself was a respected author who is still quoted, 'the pen is mightier than the sword'.

James Douglas was unpopular with the first labour organization, the Workingmen's Protective Association which later changed its name to the Anti-Chinese Association. The US linked unions supported Amor De Cosmos's first political opposition and his Chinese Head Tax.

The Colony lasted only 12 years. Douglas' democratically elected opponents began to unravel his policies as soon as he was gone. They sent surveyors back to reduce the reserves.

After the Colony ended, the first fully democratic Legislature removed the right of Chinese and aboriginal people to vote. It would be many decades before the province would return to the original ideals established by Edward Lytton and James Douglas in the Colony of British Columbia.

Supplemental Video Class Notes

As the great powers of the world competed against each other and technology made the world smaller, areas of the world that were still following Hunter-Gatherer lifestyles had limited choices. British Columbia had no co-ordinated indigenous response. Every village was independent, and there was no political unifying structure. The villages were at constant warfare, and there was slave raids to take people from other villages and sell them up the coast. There were different approaches by each world power.

Spain conquered militarily and enslaved some to work farms.

Portugal used military and slaves

France used military alliances

Belgium

England

United States imposed treaties through conquest or threats of conquest

Russia conquered Siberia and extracted tribute each year

Britain in British Columbia, set up a trade network and exchanged trade goods on a voluntary basis and sent no military and restricted religious officials.

The Aborigines Protection Society in London