

Nationalism: Identity, Nation, and Competing Loyalties

Related Issue 1: To what extent should nation be the foundation of identity?

Audience: Grade 11 Social Studies 20-1 students, typically aged 15 to 17, studying the Key Issue of nationalism as part of the Alberta Social Studies 10-12 program.

Grades: Grade 11

Subjects: Social Studies 20-1

Time: about 60 minutes



Overhead view of historical maps, flags, and documents arranged on a study desk representing nationalism.

Overview

This lesson addresses outcome 1.9 of Related Issue 1 of the nationalism Key Issue. Students define nation, state, and nationalism. They tell these terms apart. They apply the definitions to four case studies. These cases are both historical and modern ([Outcome](#)). The lesson begins with direct

teaching for the whole class. Then students move into a jigsaw structure. This builds deep content knowledge. It also builds peer-teaching skill. The lesson ends with a written reflection done alone. This reflection addresses ideas from Related Issue 1. First, why peoples use nationalism to promote identity ([Outcome](#)). Second, students will analyze nationalism as an identity, internalized feeling and/or collective consciousness shared by a people. ([Outcome](#)).

This lesson opens the guiding question for Related Issue 1. The question is: how much should nation shape identity ([Topic](#))? It builds the vocabulary students need. It builds the case studies students need. Later lessons build on this work. The course explores the relationships among identity, nation and nationalism. It will also turn to ultranationalism. ([Outcome](#), [Topic](#)).

Outcomes covered

- Appreciate why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism. ([Outcome](#))
Understanding the motivations behind nationalist identity-building helps students critically assess nationalist movements they encounter in historical study and current events, rather than treating nationalism as a single, uniform phenomenon.
- Appreciate why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism. ([Outcome](#))
Understanding why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism prepares students to analyze nationalist movements.
- Explore the relationships among identity, nation and nationalism, addressing the question: To what extent should nation be the foundation of identity? ([Topic](#))
This general outcome guides the Related Issue 1 inquiry and provides students with an analytical question to apply across cases.
- Students will appreciate why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism, including examples such as the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, Canadian nationalism, Québécois nationalism, American nationalism, First Nations and Métis nationalism, and Inuit perspectives. ([Outcome](#))
Examining multiple examples of nationalism across different contexts helps students understand how nationalism operates as an identity and collective consciousness.
- Appreciate why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism. ([Outcome](#))
Understanding why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism builds the critical thinking students need for this topic.
- Explore the relationships among identity, nation and nationalism. ([Outcome](#))
Exploring the relationships among identity, nation and nationalism provides a foundational understanding for the rest of the unit.
- Explore a range of expressions of nationalism. ([Outcome](#))
Exposure to multiple expressions of nationalism, such as civic, ethnic, cultural, and territorial forms, prevents students from oversimplifying nationalism into a single stereotype.
- Develop understandings of nation and nationalism, including relationship to land, geographic, collective, civic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, spiritual, religious, and patriotic dimensions. ([Outcome](#))
This vocabulary gives students precise language to classify and compare nationalist movements throughout the unit and in diploma-style analysis.
- Analyze how the development of nationalism is shaped by historical, geographic, political, economic and social factors, using the French Revolution and Napoleonic era and contemporary examples. ([Outcome](#))
Recognizing multiple causal factors prevents students from attributing nationalism to a single cause and builds the multi-causal analysis skills the course requires.

Materials

- Whiteboard or projector for displaying key terms and running lists
- Graphic organizer handout (four columns: shaping factors, forms of nationalism, reasons for promoting identity, competing loyalties) for each student
- Reading excerpts or textbook access for four case studies: French Revolution and Napoleonic era, Canadian and Quebecois nationalism, First Nations and Metis nationalism with Inuit perspectives, American nationalism
- Exit reflection slips (half-sheet, one per student)
- Sticky notes or markers for group work (optional)

Sequence of activities

1. Hook: What Is a Nation? What Is a State? (10 min, whole class)

1. Display these six terms on the board without definitions: nation, state, nation-state, nationalism, patriotism, ultranationalism.
2. Ask students to individually write a one-sentence guess for each term (2 minutes, no discussion yet).
3. Cold-call three or four students to share one guess each. Do not correct yet, just collect ideas on the board.
4. Deliver a short direct-instruction segment (4 minutes) that clarifies:
 - Nation: a group of people who share a collective identity, which may be based on ethnicity, culture, language, religion, history, or attachment to land ([Outcome](#)).
 - State: a political and legal entity with defined borders, a government and sovereignty.
 - Nation-state: a state whose borders roughly correspond to a nation's population, though in practice few states achieve this perfectly ([Outcome](#)).
 - Nationalism: an identity, internalized feeling, or collective consciousness shared by a people, tied to their nation ([Outcome](#)).
5. Ask: 'Can a nation exist without a state? Can a state contain more than one nation?' Take two or three quick responses to surface examples (e.g., Kurds, Quebec, First Nations and Metis peoples) without going deep yet, since this is developed further in the case-study activity.

Checkpoint: listen for whether students conflate 'nation' with 'country.' If most guesses equate the two, spend an extra minute contrasting Canada (a state containing multiple nations) with a stateless nation example before moving on. Keep this brisk since the bulk of the period is the case-study work.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

2. Direct Instruction: Forms and Expressions of Nationalism (12 min, whole class)

1. Introduce the Related Issue 1 question that frames the unit: 'To what extent should nation be the foundation of identity?' ([Topic](#)).
2. Present the range of forms nationalism can take, drawing directly on the curriculum categories: relationship to land, geographic, collective, civic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, spiritual, religious, and patriotic ([Outcome](#)).
3. For each of four contrasting pairs below, give one real-world example and ask students to jot the pair in their notes:

- Civic nationalism (shared citizenship and institutions, e.g., inclusive definitions of 'Canadian') versus ethnic nationalism (shared ancestry or bloodline, e.g., some 19th-century European nationalist movements).
 - Cultural/linguistic nationalism (shared language and traditions, e.g., Quebecois nationalism) versus political nationalism (shared commitment to self-governance, e.g., movements for sovereignty).
 - Territorial/land-based nationalism (relationship to land as the basis of identity, e.g., Inuit perspectives on Inuit Nunangat) versus religious nationalism (shared faith as the unifying identity).
 - Patriotic expression (symbols, anthems, ceremonies) versus internalized collective consciousness (a felt sense of belonging that does not depend on symbols).
4. Explicitly note that these categories overlap in practice and that a single nationalist movement often draws on several forms at once ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)).
 5. Pose a transition question to the class: 'Why would a people actively choose to promote their identity through nationalism, rather than simply letting it exist quietly?' Take two responses, then bridge to the case-study activity, where students will answer this question with evidence.

Checkpoint: cold-call one student to restate the difference between civic and ethnic nationalism in their own words before moving to group work. This confirms the vocabulary is landing before students apply it independently.

Sources: [Topic](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

3. Case Study Jigsaw: Nationalism Across Four Contexts (30 min, small group)

1. Divide the class into four groups. Assign each group one of the following case studies ([Outcome](#)):
 - Group A: Nationalism during the French Revolution and Napoleonic era.
 - Group B: Canadian nationalism and Quebecois nationalism (contrast the two within the group).
 - Group C: First Nations and Metis nationalism, including Inuit perspectives.
 - Group D: American nationalism.
2. Distribute a graphic organizer with four columns: 'Historical, geographic, political, economic or social factors that shaped this nationalism' ([Outcome](#)), 'Form(s) of nationalism expressed (see board list)' ([Outcome](#)), 'Why this people sought to promote their identity through nationalism' ([Outcome](#)), and 'A non-nationalist loyalty that complicates or competes with this nationalism (religion, region, culture, race, ideology, class)' ([Outcome](#)).
3. Give groups 12 minutes to complete the organizer using their prior knowledge, the textbook or provided reading excerpts, and the vocabulary introduced in the direct-instruction segment. Circulate to prompt groups that are stalled, e.g., ask Group C: 'How does relationship to land shape Inuit or Metis nationalism differently than a European model based on shared ethnicity?'
4. Reorganize into new groups of four, with one representative from each original group (A, B, C, D) in every new group. **Note for uneven class sizes:** If the class does not divide evenly into four groups, some expert groups will have unequal numbers. Assign two representatives from the larger groups to different new groups, or pair two representatives from the same case study in one new group and have them teach together. Ensure every new group has at least one representative from each case study.
5. Each representative has 2 minutes to teach their case study to the new group using their completed organizer. Total teaching time: 8 minutes.
6. As a new group, spend 2 minutes identifying one similarity and one difference across all four cases in how nationalism was expressed or promoted.

Checkpoint: during circulation, check that each group's organizer names a specific non-nationalist loyalty ([Outcome](#)) rather than leaving that column blank, since this is the column students find hardest. Support struggling groups by suggesting a concrete example (e.g., for Group B, the

Catholic Church's role in Quebecois identity as a competing or reinforcing loyalty). Extension groups that finish early can add a fifth case from current events (e.g., Catalonia, Kurdistan) to their organizer.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

4. Consolidation: Exit Reflection (8 min, individual)

1. Return to whole-class configuration. Ask each new group to share, in one sentence, the similarity or difference they identified. Record these on the board as a running list (3 minutes).
2. Introduce the idea that understandings of nation and nationalism are not fixed but continue to change over time and across contexts ([Outcome](#)). Ask: 'Based on today's four cases, what is one way an understanding of nationalism has evolved or might evolve further?' Take one or two responses.
3. Distribute the exit reflection slip. Students respond individually in writing (4 minutes) to this prompt: 'Choose one case study from today (not necessarily the one your original group studied). Explain, in a short paragraph, why that people sought to promote their identity through nationalism, and identify one non-nationalist loyalty that complicates that nationalism.'
4. Collect exit slips as students leave. Note that this same organizing question, 'To what extent should nation be the foundation of identity?' ([Topic](#)), will carry forward into the next lesson on the relationship between nationalism and national interest ([Outcome](#), [Topic](#)).

Checkpoint: use the exit slips as a formative check. Look specifically for whether students can name a concrete reason for promoting identity ([Outcome](#)) and a specific competing loyalty ([Outcome](#)), rather than a generic restatement of the definition of nationalism. Slips that only define nationalism without addressing 'why' or 'competing loyalty' indicate the student needs a follow-up conference before the next class.

Sources: [Outcome](#), [Topic](#), [Outcome](#), [Topic](#)

Differentiation

Extension

- Groups that finish the organizer early add a fifth, current-events case (e.g., Catalonia, Kurdistan, Scottish independence) and compare it to their assigned historical case.
- Ask advanced students to draft a follow-up question connecting today's case studies to the next Related Issue question, 'To what extent should national interest be pursued?' ([Outcome](#), [Topic](#)), anticipating how nationalism might shift into national interest or ultranationalism.
- Invite students to research how one case study's nationalism has evolved since its origin, addressing [Outcome](#) in more depth, and prepare a two-minute update for the next class.

Support

- Provide a pre-filled vocabulary reference sheet with the six key terms (nation, state, nation-state, nationalism, patriotism, ultranationalism) and one example each, so students can check their guesses during the hook rather than generating definitions from scratch.
- For the jigsaw case study, provide struggling groups with a simplified organizer that includes sentence starters, e.g., 'This group promoted its identity through nationalism because...' and 'One loyalty that competes with this nationalism is... because...'
- Pair students who need support with a stronger reader within their case-study group and allow them to contribute verbally while a peer scribes on the shared organizer.

Inclusive supports

- Offer the graphic organizer in both digital and printed formats, and allow students to record their case-study notes as an audio memo instead of handwriting if that better suits their needs.
- Ensure case-study reading excerpts are available in a text-to-speech compatible format for students using assistive technology.
- When discussing First Nations, Metis, and Inuit nationalism, invite students with lived or family knowledge to contribute if they choose to, without requiring them to represent their community, and affirm that Inuit perspectives on land-based identity are a distinct and valid form of nationalism ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)).

Assessment

Formative. The teacher checks understanding during the hook. The teacher also checks during direct-instruction. The teacher cold-calls students to define key terms. The teacher also asks students to contrast key terms. These terms include nation, state, nation-state, and civic versus ethnic nationalism. Look for: Students explain, in their own words, that a nation is a group with shared identity. A state is a political and legal entity. Students give at least one example of a nation that does not match a single state. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))

Formative. The teacher moves around during the jigsaw case-study activity. The teacher prompts students during this activity. The teacher focuses on one column of the graphic organizer. This column covers competing non-nationalist loyalties. Look for: Each small group's organizer names one specific factor for their case. This factor can be historical, geographic, political, economic, or social. The group also names at least one clear non-nationalist loyalty. This loyalty complicates the nationalism they studied. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))

Formative. Students complete an exit reflection slip alone at the end of class. Look for: The written paragraph gives a specific reason. This reason explains why a people sought to promote identity through nationalism. It names one competing loyalty. Examples include religion, region, culture, race, ideology, or class. It avoids a generic definition. ([Outcome](#), [Outcome](#))

Vocabulary

- **Nation:** A group of people who share a collective identity, which may be based on ethnicity, culture, language, religion, history, or a relationship to land, regardless of whether that group controls its own state.
- **State:** A political and legal entity with defined borders, a functioning government, and sovereignty, recognized by other states.
- **Nation-state:** A state whose political borders correspond, at least in principle, to the population of a single nation. In practice, few states achieve a perfect match between nation and state borders.
- **Nationalism:** An identity, internalized feeling, and/or collective consciousness shared by a people, often expressed through civic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, territorial, political, spiritual, religious, or patriotic forms.
- **Non-nationalist loyalty:** An attachment or allegiance that competes with or complicates national identity, such as loyalty to a religion, region, culture, race, ideology, or social class.

For families

- Ask your student to explain the difference between a nation and a state using an example from home, such as a family's own cultural or ancestral background versus their citizenship.
- Watch a news segment together about a current nationalist movement (e.g., in Quebec, Catalonia, or Indigenous self-governance discussions in Canada) and ask your student to identify what form of nationalism is being expressed, drawing on the categories from class: civic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, territorial, religious, or political.

Sources

- [Outcome](#): "1.4 - appreciate why peoples seek to promote their identity through nationalism (I, C)"
- [Outcome](#): "1.1 - appreciate that understandings of identity, nation and nationalism continue to evolve (I, C)"
- [Topic](#): "To what extent should nation be the foundation of identity?
General Outcome
Students will explore the relationships among identity, nation and nationalism."
- [Outcome](#): "1.9 - analyze nationalism as an identity, internalized feeling and/or collective consciousness shared by a people (French Revolution and Napoleonic era, Canadian nationalism, Quebecois nationalism, American nationalism, First Nations and Metis nationalism, Inuit perspectives) (I, TCC, C, CC)"
- [Outcome](#): "1.11 evaluate the importance of reconciling nationalism with contending non-nationalist loyalties (religion, region, culture, race, ideology, class, other contending loyalties) (I, C, CC, LPP)"
- [Outcome](#): "2.4 - explore the relationship between nationalism and the pursuit of national interest (PADM, I, LPP)"
- [Topic](#): "To what extent should national interest be pursued?
General Outcome
Students will assess impacts of nationalism, ultranationalism and the pursuit of national interest."
- [Outcome](#): "1.7 - analyze the relationship between nation and nation-state (TCC, PADM, C)"
- [Outcome](#): "1.5 - explore a range of expressions of nationalism (I, C)"
- [Outcome](#): "1.6 - develop understandings of nation and nationalism (relationship to land, geographic, collective, civic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, spiritual, religious, patriotic) (I, CC, LPP)"
- [Outcome](#): "1.8 - analyze how the development of nationalism is shaped by historical, geographic, political, economic and social factors (French Revolution and Napoleonic era, contemporary examples) (ER, PADM, CC, TCC, LPP)"
- [Topic](#): "Key Outcome: Students will understand, assess and respond to the complexities of nationalism."

All content addresses historical and contemporary nationalist movements at an academic level appropriate for grade 11 students, includes Indigenous perspectives respectfully and without requiring students to speak on behalf of their community, and contains no graphic or unsuitable material.