

Grades 6-8

Learning about cause and consequence

Overview

This lesson is one of a series that introduces six historical thinking concepts developed by Peter Seixas of the University of British Columbia. Each lesson supports teachers in using a video to introduce one of the concepts. The videos are available at <http://www.tc2.ca/videos.php>. The lessons are available in different versions for grades 6-8 and grades 9-12.

This lesson's written materials and six-minute *Cause and Consequence* video offer an engaging way to introduce the concept of cause and consequence to students in grades 6-8. The video features the mysterious murder of the Donnelly family from the *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* website. The question is asked, *What are the range of factors that contributed to the event?* Factors such as people, ideas and beliefs, institutions and even other events are considered, as well as whether causes are immediate or underlying. The question, *Which of the causes are most influential?* is also addressed. The video ends with a look at the consequences of this event, expected and planned and unexpected and unplanned.

Cause and consequence

Historians are like detectives; they try to understand what happened in the past, and why it happened. The concepts of cause and consequence address who or what influenced events to occur and what the repercussions of those events were.

Objectives

Students will understand that:

- events have a variety of different and often unappreciated causes
- causes can be immediate or underlying
- consequences can be immediate or long-term
- broad underlying causes are often more important than immediate causes
- people, alone or in groups, can cause events, but so can other forces such as ideas, beliefs (religion, politics), institutions (governments) and other events
- consequences can be intended and unintended

This resource was developed with contributions from:



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Suggested activities

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Consider personal causes and consequences

Invite students to consider causes and consequences of the grade they received on a recent test. Display the list of ideas and ask students to answer the following:

- What are the wide-ranging causes of the grade they received? Which of these are more immediate and which are underlying? Ask students to think beyond how much time they had, and consider broad factors such as health, economics or other aspects of their social and physical environment. Possible student responses may include having to work to support their family thus leaving little time for study, suffering from an illness or having to care for a family member.
- What are the immediate and possible long-term consequences of the grade they received? Again, ask students to think as broadly as possible about aspects of their social and physical environment, including possible economic and psychological impacts. Possible student responses may include a negative impact on a grade required for post-secondary acceptance or a loss of confidence in a student's ability.

Create a cause and consequence web

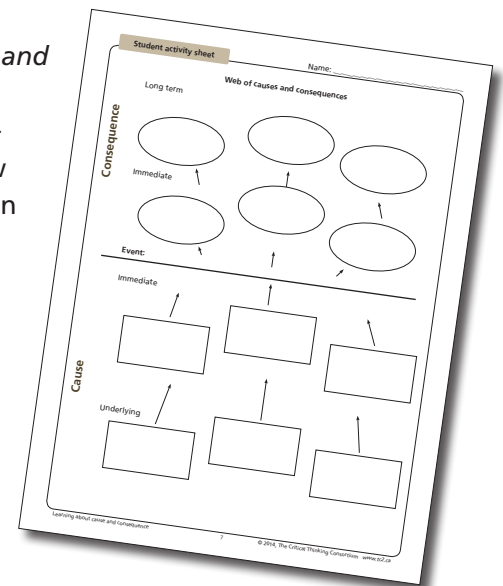
Invite students to record their thoughts using the activity sheet, *Web of causes and consequences*. Ask students to organize the causes and consequences in a way that communicates immediate and underlying causes and immediate and long-term consequences. Encourage students to elaborate on connections and show how one event may have led to another using arrows and possibly text between circles.

Determine importance

Discuss with students how causes and consequences of events in history are similar to those in their own lives in that they can be immediate, underlying or long-term, and some causes and consequences are more important than others. Explain to students that in order to determine the most important causes and consequences, they need to provide evidence to support their claims by using the following criteria.

Determining the importance of causes

- **Evidence of a causal connection.** Is the cause clearly connected with the event and not just a coincidence? If this factor were removed, how likely is it that the event would still have occurred?
- **Degree of influence.** To what extent did the cause contribute to the direction and intensity of the event or make other causes more or less important?
- **Absence of alternative explanations.** Is there no reason to suspect that some other factor, closely aligned with the suggested causal factor, can explain the outcome?



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Determining the importance of consequences

- **Depth of impact:** How deeply felt or profound was the consequence?
- **Breadth of impact:** How widespread were its impacts?
- **Duration of impact:** How long-lasting was the consequence?

Introduce the Donnelly family murders

Read the following information to the class:

During a winter night in 1880, the Donnelly family was massacred by an angry mob and their farm was burned to the ground. These Irish Catholics had lived in southern Ontario for decades, eking out a living from the land. The head of the clan, James, had done prison time for killing another Irishman who had questioned the Donnellys' right to the land they lived on. Thirteen men were tried on two separate occasions for the murder of the Donnellys; no one was ever convicted. Interest in the event remains high; several books and a play have been written and a museum has recently been established.

Based on this introduction to the Donnelly murders, ask students in pairs or small groups to identify and record the immediate and underlying causes and the immediate and long-term consequences of the event, in the first row of the activity sheet, *Causes and consequences*.

DURING THE VIDEO

Invite students to view the video, *Cause and Consequence*, and to look for any evidence that will inform and change their decisions while they learn about the Donnelly murders. They may wish to refine the "Introduction to the Donnelly family murders" section of the activity sheet, *Causes and Consequences*, by circling evidence that is corroborated by information in the video, and underlining evidence that is not supported by the video. If possible, provide students with multiple opportunities to view the video.

AFTER THE VIDEO

Expand causes and consequences with additional evidence

Using information from the video and the information sheet, *Murder of the Donnellys: Cause and consequence*,¹ invite students to complete the "Video and reading" section of the activity sheet, *Causes and consequences*.

Student activity sheet

Source	Causes and consequences			
	Immediate causes	Underlying causes	Immediate consequences	Long-term consequences
Introduction to the Donnelly family murders				
Video and reading				
Group discussion				

Student information sheet

Murder of the Donnelly: Cause and Consequence

The Donnellys emigrated from Ireland during the 1840s and settled in the township of Biddulph, near Lucas, Ontario, north of London. Their property did not legally belong to them; they had "squatted." It was actually owned by the Canada Company and granted to another settler, James Grace. There were a number of squabbles about this and several neighbours became involved. Eventually, James Donnelly Sr., fuelled by liquor at a community logging job, killed one of these neighbours with an ice pick. James paid for this crime with seven years in prison; his family paid by having their reputation sullied forever.

Trouble followed the Donnellys. Their Irish background and their commitment to the Catholic faith were often at the root of it. Though Roman Catholic, they were friendly to Protestants as well, which created difficulties. A parish priest could exert tremendous influence over a community and John Connelly was such a priest. He did not like the Donnellys because they did not conform to his vision of a proper Catholic. He actively turned the community against them.

The Donnelly's community were accustomed to violence. It would be impossible to list all of the crimes perpetrated by the Donnelly clan but they were not always the perpetrators; sometimes they were the victims. Crime was so rampant in Biddulph that in 1859 a local authority told Attorney General (and future Prime Minister) John A. Macdonald that it was not safe to go there and recommended travel during daylight hours only. The Donnellys may not have committed all of the crimes for which they were blamed. Many of their accusers were long-standing enemies and members of the infamous Vigilance Committee, supposedly created to help prevent crime in Biddulph. Constable James Carroll, a Donnelly enemy, was involved in this committee. He encouraged townsfolk to abhor the Donnellys and promised to rid the township of them.

On January 15, 1880 the barns of Patrick "Grouchy" Ryder were burned down. James Donnelly was falsely accused. On February 3rd, James complained that his family were "blamed for everything." That night, thirteen-year-old Johnny O'Connor was at the Donnelly homestead spending the night so he could feed the animals in the morning while the Donnelly's travelled to a nearby town for a trial hearing about the Ryders. He hid under his bed in the middle of the night, witness to a vicious mob who killed James Sr., his wife, one son and a niece. The mob then set fire to the cabin before continuing to the home of William Donnelly, William's brother John awake and went to the door to see what was happening. He was mistaken for William and shot dead.

The town of Lucas was shocked when they heard about the murders. Local newspapers called it "the blackest crime ever committed in the Dominion" of Canada. Some lamented the loss of others celebrating. Local officials arrested 13 people for murder, including James Carroll. The family could not come to a decision but preparations began immediately for a second trial in which James Carroll was given a not guilty verdict.

The Donnelly family moved on with their lives, but they promised to avenge the deaths of their family members. Two of James' children, Patrick and Jenny, moved away. William and Robert remained in the Lucas area, becoming both lawmakers and lawbreakers. In 1906, Robert was admitted to the London Psychiatric Hospital. Interestingly, some of the members of the Vigilance Committee also suffered violent deaths: a fact William made a note of on his deathbed.

The murder of the Donnellys has fascinated thousands. From the days immediately following up to the present, with numerous books and a play written about it.

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¹ Additional information about this historic event can be found on the Great Unsolved Mysteries web site:

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Form and share judgments

Ask students in pairs or small groups to share and discuss their causes, consequences and evidence, and give them an opportunity to adjust their responses in the “Student discussion” section of the activity sheet, *Causes and consequences*, according to their discussion.

Discuss with the class the differences in the actual causes of the Donnelly murders and those they speculated about from the few sentences they were given prior to the video. Invite the class to consider the role that additional evidence from different sources plays in deepening their understanding of cause and consequence.

Suggest that the historical accounts of events may not provide the broad context to explain the cause; in other words, students should be cautious when reaching conclusions about historical causes and consequences based on little evidence.

Identify the most important causes and consequences

In preparation for students to draw conclusions about the most important causes and consequences, invite students to use information from their *Causes and consequences* activity sheet to complete the *Identifying important causes and consequences*.

Form and share judgments

Invite students to share their judgments of the most important causes and consequences.

Reiterate for students that when they make judgements about the most important causes and consequences, they must do so by supporting their claim with strong evidence in light of the criteria. Remind students of the criteria previously established.

You might want to tally the responses on the board and discuss explanations for the differences between student responses (i.e., there are no ‘right’ answers, judgments differ depending on how evidence is used). In other words, be sure to focus on the quality of student reasoning in light of criteria rather than specific choices. Discuss with students whether underlying factors or immediate ones tend to be more important; often it is the former, not the latter.

Revisit everyday life example

An additional option is to invite students in pairs to analyze the causes and consequences they listed earlier regarding the grade they obtained on a test, using the activity sheet, *Identifying important causes and consequences*.

This activity sheet is titled "Student activity sheet" and "Causes and consequences". It includes a "Name:" field. The main table has three rows: "Introduction to the Donnelly family murders", "Video and reading", and "Group discussion". The columns are "Immediate causes", "Underlying causes", "Immediate consequences", and "Long-term consequences".

Source	Causes and consequences			
	Immediate causes	Underlying causes	Immediate consequences	Long-term consequences
Introduction to the Donnelly family murders				
Video and reading				
Group discussion				

This activity sheet is titled "Student activity sheet" and "Identifying important causes and consequences". It includes a "Name:" field. The instructions are: "Identify three causes and three consequences that you deem to be important. Give each cause or consequence a rating and then provide evidence for its importance below." The sheet is divided into "Causes" and "Consequences" sections. Each section has a table with a rating scale from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (very important) and a "Reasons:" field.

	1	2	3	4	5
Causes	Not at all important				very important
Reasons:					
Reasons:					
Reasons:					
Consequences	Not at all important				very important
Reasons:					
Reasons:					
Reasons:					

Learning about cause and consequence

Assess for understanding

In order to assess whether students are beginning to develop an understanding of cause and consequence, you might use the following activities:

- Listen to student conversations when they are asked to discuss cause and consequence. Are they using criteria and evidence in their conversations?
- When identifying causes and consequences of historical events, do students choose powerful and relevant pieces of evidence to support their justifications?
- Examine student use of the activity sheet *Identifying important causes and consequences*. Have they selected accurate and relevant evidence? Do their ratings reflect an understanding of the evidence?
- At a later date, when students are once again asked to determine the causes and consequences of a historical event, do they continue to consider the criteria discussed during this lesson?

TAKING IT FURTHER

The following activities could be used to further develop the concepts of cause and consequence.

- Identify the critical agents of a historical event. For example, what were the causes of Canadian women being given the right to vote?
- Compare intentions with results. For example, were the results of Gavrilo Princip's assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand what he hoped they would be?
- Identify significant causes. For example, significant causes of the Great Depression included easy credit, overspending, stock market speculation and drought.
- Rank order key causes or consequences of an event such as a World War.
- Explore causal interrelationships, such as the causes of civilization collapse, in which there is interplay between factors such as change in climate, natural disasters, overuse of resources and political changes.
- Assess the impact of a historical event such as European contact with Aboriginal peoples.

Murder of the Donnellys: Cause and consequence

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Trouble followed the Donnellys. Their Irish background and their commitment to the Catholic faith were often at the root of it. Though Roman Catholic, they were friendly to Protestants as well, which created difficulties. A parish priest could exert tremendous influence over a community and John Connolly was such a priest. He did not like the Donnellys because they did not conform to his vision of a proper Catholic. He actively turned the community against them.

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On January 15, 1880 the barns of Patrick “Grouchy” Ryder were burned down. James Donnelly was falsely accused. On February 3rd, James complained that his family were “blamed for everything.” That night, thirteen year-old Johnny O’Connor was at the Donnelly homestead, spending the night so he could feed the animals in the morning while the Donnellys travelled to a nearby town for a trial hearing about the Ryder barns. He hid under his bed in the middle of the night, witness to a vicious mob who killed James Sr., his wife, one son and a niece. The mob then set fire to the cabin before continuing to the home of William Donnelly. William’s brother John awoke and went to the door to see what was happening. He was mistaken for William and shot dead.

The town of Lucan was shocked when they heard about the murders. Local newspapers called it “the blackest crime every committed in the Dominion” of Canada. Some lamented the loss; others celebrated. Local officials arrested 13 people for murder, including James Carroll. The family home of the eye witness, Johnny O’Connor, was burned to the ground before the trial. The jury could not come to a decision but preparations began immediately for a second trial in which James Carroll was given a not guilty verdict.

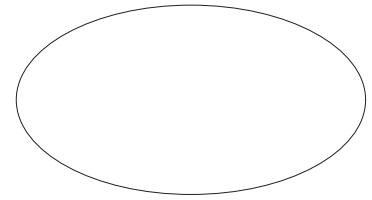
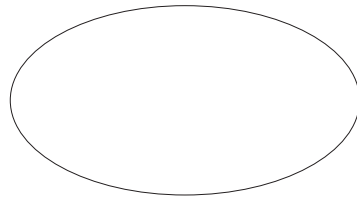
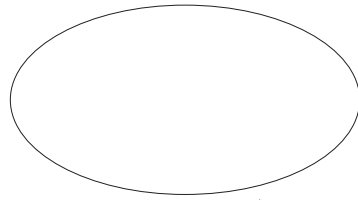
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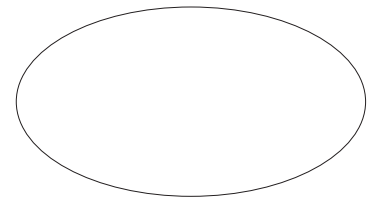
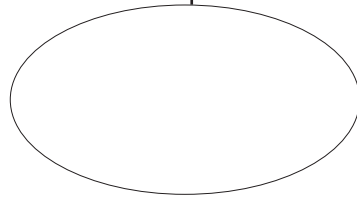
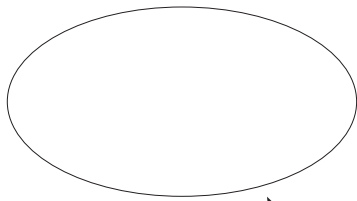
Web of causes and consequences

Consequence

Long term

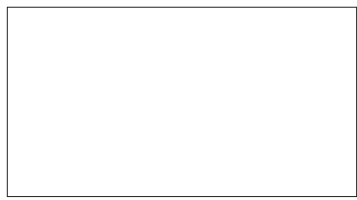


Immediate

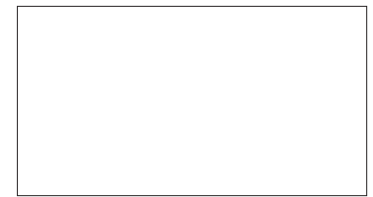
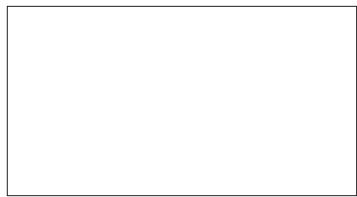


Event:

Immediate



Underlying



Cause

Student activity sheet

Name: _____

Causes and consequences

Source of information	Immediate causes	Underlying causes	Immediate consequences	Long-term consequences
Introduction to the Donnelly family murders				
Video and reading				
Student discussion				

Identifying important causes and consequences

Identify three causes and three consequences that you deem to be important. Give each cause and consequence a rating and then provide evidence for its importance below.

Causes	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all important ←————→ Very important				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Reasons:				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Reasons:				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Reasons:				
Consequences	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all important ←————→ Very important				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Reasons:				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Reasons:				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Reasons:				