

THE COMMONAGE & LAND CLAIMS

ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES



11255 Okanagan Centre Rd. W.
Lake Country, BC V4V 2J7

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

1. Students will be introduced to the concept of legal rights
2. They will then learn about the establishment and dissolution of the Commonage that could lead them into a lesson about Indigenous land claims
3. Mapping activity provides visual learning



BIG IDEA: We shape the local environment & the local environment shapes who we are & how we live; Our rights, roles, & responsibilities are important for building strong communities; interactions between First Peoples & Europeans lead to conflict & cooperation; Canada's policies/treatment of minority peoples have negative & positive legacies.

COMPETENCY:

Inquiry processes, cause & consequence, continuity & change, ethical judgement

CONTENT:

Relationships between a community & its environment; roles, rights, & responsibilities in the local community; key events & developments in the local community/First Peoples communities; demographic changes in pre-Confederation British Columbia in First Peoples/non-First Peoples communities; impact of colonization on First Peoples in B.C.

WHAT WILL WE KNOW:

- What are human rights
- History of the Commonage
- Introduced to the concept of land claims

FURTHER INQUIRY:

Field Trip Suggestions

1. Sncewips Heritage Museum
2. Lake Country Museum and Archives



We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which the Lake Country Museum is situated, where this lesson was developed, is on the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) Peoples.

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Lake Country Heritage and Cultural Society

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The Commonage & Land Claims

DISCLAIMER

Some of the terms used within The Commonage story reflect the beliefs and values at the time when referencing the people who lived there. The term “Indian” is no longer correct when referencing Indigenous nations, though it is still used in governmental policies and roles. You may wish to include a brief discussion with your class about this term.

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| Learning Objective(s) | By learning about the relationships between settlers and First Peoples, students will develop an understanding about how the Canadian government has historically handled issues around land claims. |
| Suggested Grades | Elementary |
| ACTIVITY | |
| Introduction | This activity can be used as a hook/introduction to human rights and land claims. Students will learn what rights are, what rights they have, and then, through the history of the Commonage, be introduced to land rights and land claims. |
| What are ‘rights’? | <p>To begin, ask your students what the difference between something that is right (correct) and a right (something we are entitled to). Check to see if your class can give you examples of both</p> <p>To further develop their understanding, have students discuss with a shoulder partner what their rights are as children, then have them share out as a class. Here are some examples of what they may come up with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to go to school • The right to practice a religion • The right to medical care • The right to express your ideas • The right to safety <p>Have your class answer what each of them mean so you know the class has an understanding of some basic rights before continuing.</p> |
| The Commonage | <p>Next, go over the history of the commonage. Be sure to emphasize the change in purpose over time (communal land → private property).</p> <p>Then, have students discuss in groups/with a shoulder, then out with the class, the following questions:</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are land claims? Why are they important to bring forward? • Did the government have the right to give away the land of the commonage without the Syilx peoples' consent? • Who should the commonage belong to today? |
| <p>Mapping</p> | <p>Give students the handout below. Print off the two maps of Lake Country – we recommend double siding and giving them to students in plastic sleeve protectors so they can be reused.</p> <p>Ask the students to use the two maps to follow the questions on the handout. For this assignment, students are mapping the area of the Commonage land claim as well as how the land was divided up by early settlers here in the Okanagan.</p> <p><i>Optional follow up</i> – lead students into a discussion about current geography to look at lasting legacies and make positive connections to what students already know.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What names do they recognize? • What areas are still named after those ranchers today? |
| <p>Land Claim Disputes</p> | <p>After the Okanagan Commonage Reserve spanning from Oyama to the Vernon Army Base was established by the Indian Reserve Commission in 1877, Premier William Smithe and Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald are alleged to have had secret meetings where they negotiated auctioning off the land to incoming settlers in 1893. In 1899, the Indian Reserve Commission established a new reserve on the Northwest side of Okanagan Lake. According to the Okanagan Indian Band, the reserve was removed by the government without the consultation or lawful surrender of land by the band. In 2015, CN Rail tried to sell the land, but the band argued that it is not their land to sell.</p> <p><u>Have a class discussion:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does the idea of fairness come into play? If the class agrees that this is unfair, why do they think it happened anyway? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How does this make them feel about Canada's history (legacy)? • If the roles were reversed, would the Indigenous peoples have been able to divide and sell the land without consulting the settlers? • Or, if the settler government had consulted with the Syilx, do you think the land would be different today? |
| <p>Key Terms</p> | <p>Pre-emption: A plot of land the settler could claim before the land was surveyed.</p> |

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| | <p>Land claim: A legal declaration by a First Nations band or government of desired control over areas of land. In Canada, land claims fall into two broad categories: comprehensive, known as modern treaties, and specific, which make claims based on pre-existing treaties, agreements, or reserves.</p> |
| <p>Historical Context</p> | <p>Link to video narration</p> <p>To both the Syilx Nation and European settlers, having a space to pasture their livestock was important. Between Okanagan Lake, Wood Lake, and Kalamalka Lake was a large stretch of land that was then called <i>The Commonage</i>. The Commonage was 25,114 acres and extended from Okanagan Lake to Long Lake (Kalamalka and Wood Lakes), north of today’s boundary of Vernon to Okanagan Centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The word ‘commonage’ is a combination of the words ‘common’ and ‘pasturage’, meaning that this area was a common pasture open for everyone to use. <p>In 1877, the B.C. Commissioners passed a decision to formalize the Commonage as communal land for winter grazing, while also establishing other reserves for Indigenous people. These decisions did not police whose cattle could or could not graze in the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Q: What does establishing these two types of land at the same time indicate about the Canadian government’s perspective at the time? <p>To many European settlers, the area was underutilized. In 1889, a new agreement was reached within B.C.’s Chief Commissioner of Land and the Indian Reserve Commissioner. The new agreement stated that the B.C. government would take over the Commonage and, in return, it would establish an Indian Reserve on the west side of Okanagan Lake. This meant that the land within the Commonage was no longer available for the Syilx people to use. In the conversations that led up to this decision, only the European Settlers were represented, not the Syilx people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Q: Why is the lack of Syilx representation unfair? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you think the Syilx had a right to attend the conversations? • How could the lack of access to the Commonage impact the Syilx people? |

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| | <p>Afterwards, the government had the Commonage surveyed and divided into quarter sections. These areas were put up for sale, which attracted a variety of farmers and businesspeople to develop and use the land how they saw fit. This led to the creation of small farming communities, such as Sunnywold (Carr’s Landing) and Oyama.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Q: How is this different from how the land of the Commonage was initially used? <p>Over 100 years after the change, Okanagan Indian Band leader, Murray Alexis of the Syilx Nation, brought a land claim for the Commonage area forward to the B.C. government. The land claim for title to the Commonage has yet to be resolved. We call the Okanagan area the <i>unceded</i> territory of the Syilx Nation because the land was taken away from the Syilx people without any kind of agreement or discussion.</p> |
| <p>Further Inquiry</p> | <p><u><i>Further Reading</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCMA Northern Okanagan Commonage Resource <p><u><i>Field Trip Suggestions:</i></u></p> <p>Visit the Sncewips Heritage Museum in Westbank to learn more about the living history and heritage of the Syilx Okanagan People. Set up a tour through the museum’s website.</p> <p><u>The Lake Country Museum and Archives</u></p> <p>The Museum has a wide range of exhibits and activities for your class to take advantage of. There is also a playground and field behind the building and the lake nearby that students can make use of for various activities.</p> <p>There may be the opportunity for a guest lecturer to visit your classroom or be present at the museum with the knowledge of more local history stories. If interested, please contact the Museum ahead of time.</p> |

Name:

Block:

Date:

Commonage Mapping Assignment

Instructions: Your maps need to include all of the following locations, use the checklist to guide you. You only need to include the bolded word on your map.

Post 1877 Farmlands:

- Barr**
- Chatterton**
- Knox**
- Harvey**
- Belango**
- Wood**
- Postill (Ellison)**
- Swalwell**

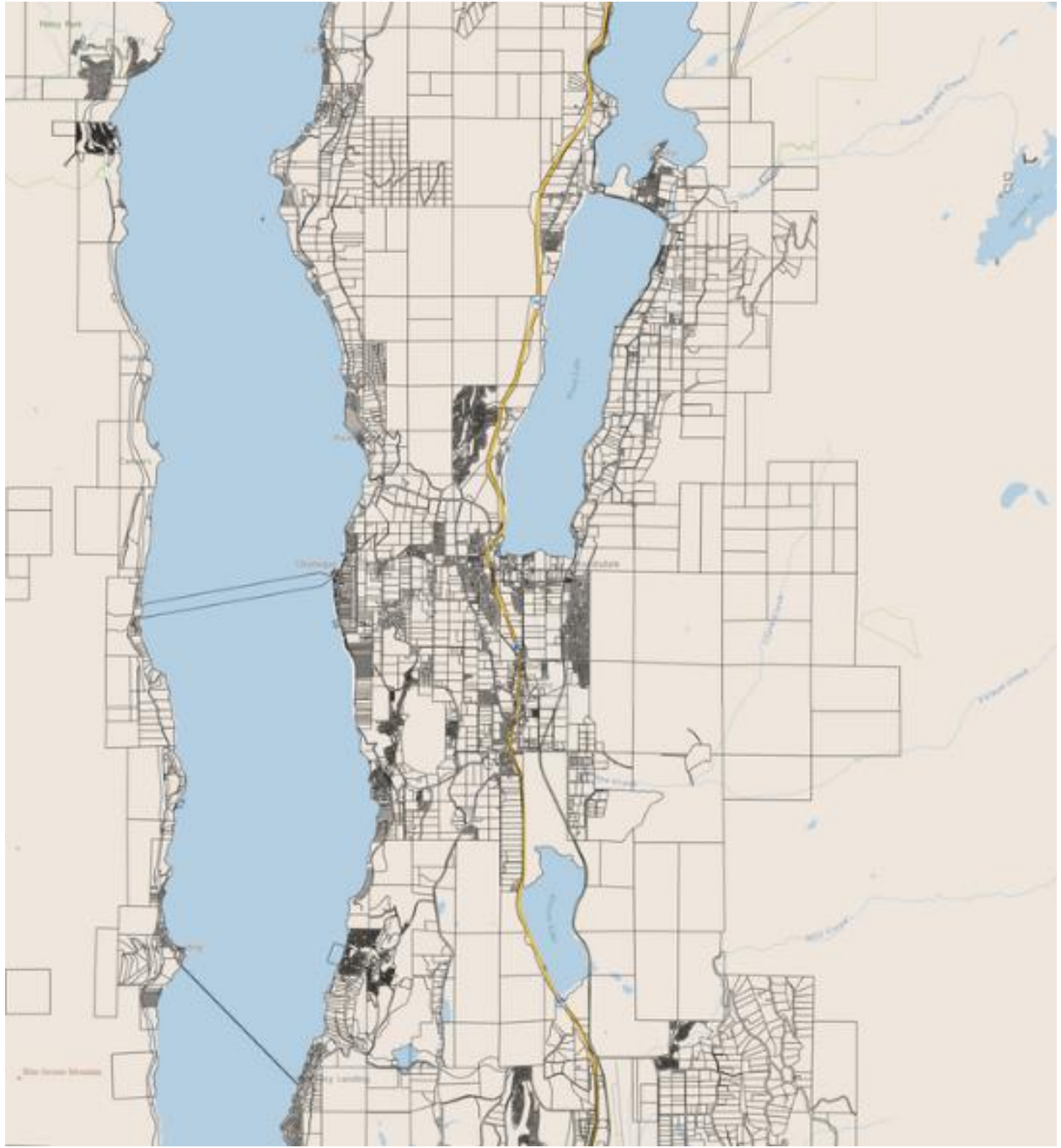
Natural Landmarks:

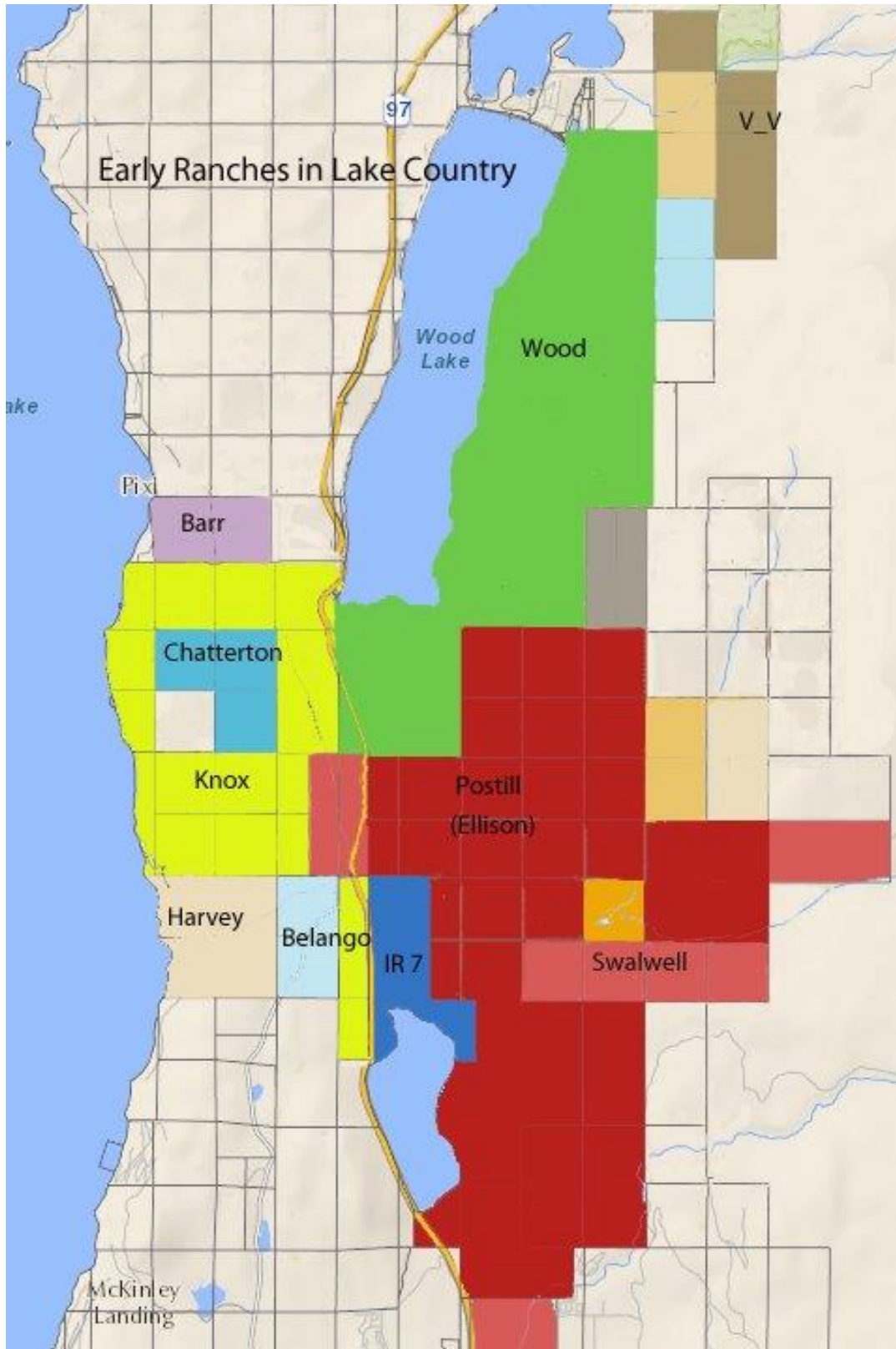
- Wood Lake

Shade in the following area in yellow:

- What land was claimed in the original 1877 Land claim
(TIP: Look for where wood lake is labelled on each map to help)

Map on back page:





Commonage Land Claim

