

Colonization and Land Ownership

Name: _____

Content: First Peoples land ownership and use

Curricular Competency: Take stakeholders' perspectives on issues, developments, or events by making inferences about their beliefs, values, and motivations (perspective)

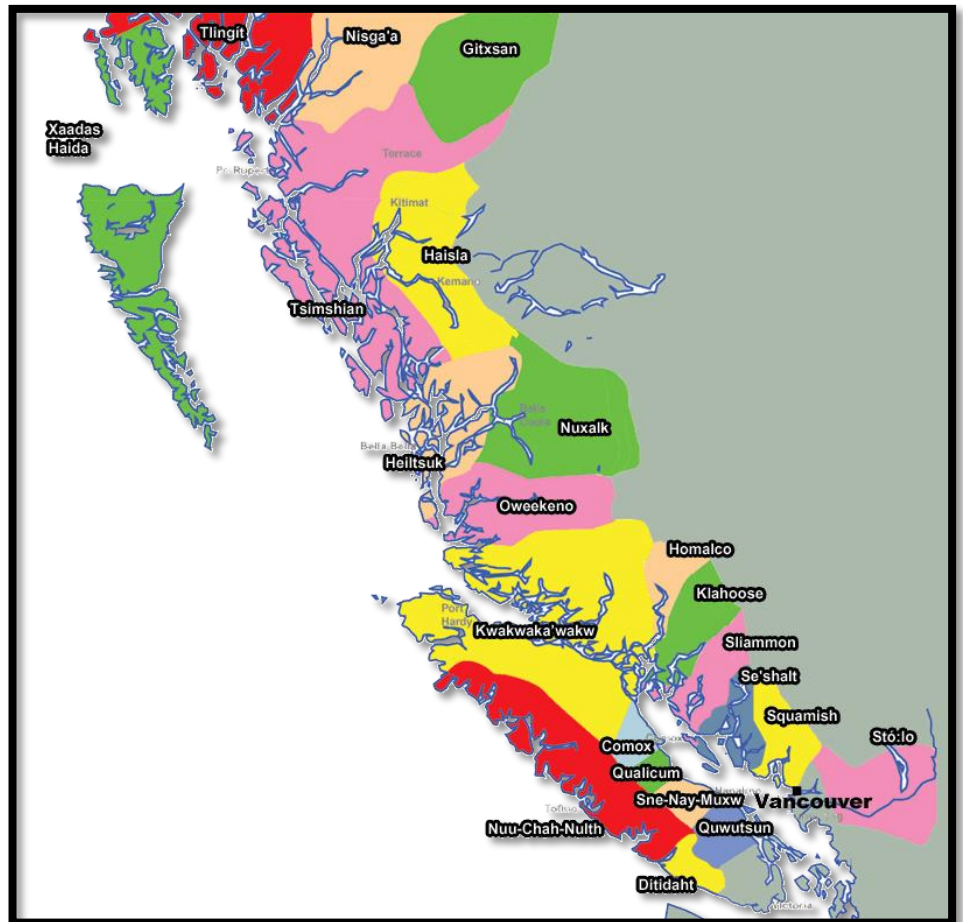
First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning is reflective

Colonization and Land Ownership

Before Europeans arrived in Canada, **Indigenous peoples** had lived on the land for thousands of years. They **did not "own" land** in the European sense. Sometimes First Peoples did have conflicts over hunting or fishing areas, or over resources like **rivers or trade routes**. But their view of land was still very different from the European idea of "owning" land. For First Peoples, land was not something that belonged to one person or group **forever**. Instead, each Nation or community had its own **territory** — a place they used, cared for, and respected. These territories were known and understood by neighboring Nations. When disagreements happened, they were often settled through talking, trade, or agreements, not always through fighting. Sometimes there was warfare over territory, but it was often about defending balance, access, and respect, not about owning or conquering land the way Europeans believed in.

Indigenous nations sometimes fought with one another for different reasons. Some conflicts happened over **territory and resources**, such as hunting or fishing areas, especially when food was hard to find. Others were about **protection**, when a nation defended its land from groups who entered without permission.

Each nation had certain **areas they used, protected, and accessed**. Some groups had **hunting, fishing, or gathering areas** that were known to belong to a particular family or clan, but others could often use them if they asked. Important decisions about land use were often made by **councils of Elders or Chiefs**, who made sure the choices were fair and helped everyone in the community. Land use often changed with the **seasons** — families might move to different places in the summer and winter, depending on where food and resources were available. The most important rule was to **never take more than needed** and to **keep the land healthy** so it could provide for future generations.



While First Nations "owned" territories, and "occupied" those territories, they "owned" the land in a different way that Western culture "owns" land now.

When Europeans arrived, they brought a new idea — that people could buy, sell, or own land **permanently**, and that it **did not have to be shared, once it was owned**. Furthermore, Canadian land was generally kept 'natural' prior to contact with Europeans, while Western culture often **clears** the land, to make room for other things.

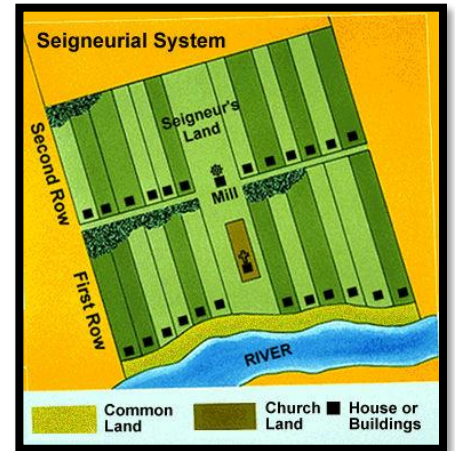
Western culture often cleared massive areas of land for farming, industry, and recreation — this destroyed nature, and entirely changed the way the land was used. Colonization showed us that 'land ownership' meant different things, to different people.

The Seigneurial System in New France

The **seigneurial system** was a way of dividing and managing land in **New France** (what is now Quebec) during the 1600s–1800s. It was influenced by a system in **France** and was meant to encourage settlement and farming in the colony.

How it worked:

- The French king (in France) gave large pieces of land, called **seigneuries**, to **seigneurs** (landowners, often nobles or soldiers).
- The seigneur was responsible for **managing the land** and inviting people to live there.
- Farmers, called **habitants**, rented small plots of land from the seigneur.
- In return, habitants had to:
 - Pay **rent or fees** (money, crops, or work) to the seigneur.
 - Follow certain rules, like giving the seigneur a portion of the grain they harvested.
 - Work on roads or other community projects when needed.



Why it existed:

- To **organize land settlement** in New France.
- To **encourage farming** along rivers for easy transportation and trade.
- To create a **hierarchy similar to France**, with seigneurs at the top and habitants working the land.

Impact on settlers:

- It helped villages grow along rivers.
- Farmers had land to grow crops, but they **didn't own it fully**.
- Life was organized and stable, but some habitants wanted more freedom.

Comparison to Indigenous land use:

- Unlike Indigenous peoples, who saw land as **shared and cared for**, the seigneurial system treated land as something **owned and controlled** by seigneurs.
- This created very different ideas about how land could be used and who could benefit from it.

Looking at Perspective

How would each of these men felt about who "owned" the land? Why would they disagree with the other person?



Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil. Governor General of New France from 1703 to 1725



Hiawatha (Ayenwatha, Aiiionwatha, or Haiëñ'wa'tha) was a 16th-century Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) leader and orator

How would he have felt about who "owned" the land?

How would he have felt about who "owned" the land?

Why would he have disagreed with Hiawatha?

Why would he have disagreed with Vaudreuil?