

## **Teacher Background Information – Appendix I**

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**Title: Diefenbaker and South Africa’s re-application  
for membership in the Commonwealth**

**Note:** Students will be sifting through videos, photographs, articles, and so forth to become knowledgeable about Apartheid, the Canadian Bill of Rights, The Commonwealth, and John Diefenbaker (and specifically his stand against apartheid). This document contains excerpts from some of the resources provided to ensure you, the teacher, know the highlights before students begin their exercise.

### **Apartheid**

The separation by race policy of South Africa was controversial from the beginning, but got significant national and international attention after a group of protestors burning their pass cards in front of a police station were shot at by police. At least 69 people were killed – many of them shot in the back – and more than 200 others were wounded.

“Sharpeville Massacre” in South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy, April 15, 2008.

<http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/multimedia.php?id=65-259-E>

To oppose apartheid, the South African United Front was created through the alliance of five major organizations. They organized demonstrations in South Africa and campaigns in key locations around the world to convince world leaders to apply pressure on South Africa to abandon the policy.

“Preview of 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference” on CBC Newsmagazine, January 22, 1961.

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1720717794>

Chief among the anti-apartheid protestors was Nelson Mandela, who initially espoused non-violence, but later led sabotage missions against the government and was sentenced to life in prison for his treasonous behaviours.

Nelson Mandela Foundation, February 28, 2018.

<https://www.nelsonmandela.org>

### **Canadian Bill of Rights**

The Parliament of Canada passed the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960 that identified the human rights that exist in Canada:

- the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;
- the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law;
- freedom of religion;
- freedom of speech;

- freedom of assembly and association; and
- freedom of the press.

It also identified the rights and freedoms of individuals concerning detention, arrest, trial proceedings, and treatment.

Canadian Bill of Rights, Government of Canada, February 5, 2019.

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/download-order-charter-bill/canadian-bill-rights-eng.pdf>

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 embedded the rights and freedoms in the Canadian Constitution, thereby requiring all laws in Canada to conform to them. The Charter also expanded upon the rights identified in the Bill of Rights and categorized them into fundamental freedoms, democratic, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official languages of Canada, and minority language educational rights.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Government of Canada, February 5, 2019.

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/download-order-charter-bill/canadian-charter-rights-freedoms-eng.pdf>

Also in 1960, Parliament modified the *Indian Act*, giving Indigenous peoples in Canada the right to vote without giving up their status.

“The Enfranchisement of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada” at Diefenbaker Canada Centre, March 4, 2017.

<https://diefenbaker.usask.ca/exhibits/online-exhibits-content/the-enfranchisement-of-aboriginal-peoples-in-canada-en.php>

## **The Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth initially rose out of former British colonies, but morphed into a voluntary association of countries who subscribe to the core values and principles of the organization:

1. Democracy
2. Human rights
3. International peace and security
4. Tolerance, respect and understanding
5. Freedom of Expression
6. Separation of Powers
7. Rule of Law
8. Good Governance
9. Sustainable Development
10. Protecting the Environment
11. Access to Health, Education, Food and Shelter
12. Gender Equality
13. Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth
14. Recognition of the Needs of Small States
15. Recognition of the Needs of Vulnerable States
16. The Role of Civil Society

Today, 53 countries from all 6 inhabited continents are members of The Commonwealth, united under the Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The Commonwealth, September 2, 2013.

<http://thecommonwealth.org>

**John Diefenbaker** (and specifically his stand against apartheid)

The Right Honourable John Diefenbaker was a Canadian Member of Parliament from 1940-1979, which included six years as Prime Minister of Canada (1957-1963). He is particularly known for his promotion of human rights in a number of areas, including political appointments of people other than white males, the creation of the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960), and his opposition to South Africa's re-application for membership in the Commonwealth (1961).

Profile: Diefenbaker, John George on the Library of Parliament, accessed March 17, 2019.  
[https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/People/Profile?personId=2369](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/Profile?personId=2369)

Prime Minister Diefenbaker predicted the 1961 Commonwealth Conference would “determine the future of the Commonwealth for many years to come”, which included admission of new members and current global problems, but, above all us, the application of South Africa to regain its membership. The significance of the Commonwealth according to Prime Minister Diefenbaker? “[It] is the greatest agency in the world today for peace.”

“Diefenbaker interviewed before 1961 conference” on CBC Television News, March 8, 1961.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1720717519>

When any nation in the Commonwealth became a republic, they would have to withdraw and then re-apply to be a member. Representation in South African Parliament was limited almost exclusively to whites only, which was not acceptable to the other prime ministers of the Commonwealth, especially Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. After the positions of the prime ministers of the other Commonwealth nations were made clear at the 1961 Commonwealth Conference, South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd withdrew his country's application to re-enter the Commonwealth.

“Dief reflects on South Africa leaving Commonwealth” in CBC's Cross Country Checkup, January 10, 1971.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1720885817>

Diefenbaker returned to Canada to explain the activities at the conference, why Canada took the position it did, and how it might resolve itself in the future.

“We are carrying out internationally within the Commonwealth the policies which we had adopted in Canada ... in the Bill of Rights.”

“Justice and right will endure in the end.”

“My fervent hope is this: [South Africa] will return to the Commonwealth in due course. For such a return, there will always be a light in the Commonwealth window.”

As hoped by Prime Minister Diefenbaker, South Africa did eventually rejoin the Commonwealth – on June 1, 1994.

“John Diefenbaker stares down South Africa” on CBC's The National, March 17, 1961.

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1771019570>