

**On All Fronts**  
**World War II and the NFB**  
**Lesson plan for**  
***Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis***

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**Overall Objective**

There are several group activities to get students thinking about Canada's role in wars present and past. They will analyze the role of politicians and Canadian army commanders as well as civil freedoms and responsibilities.

**Grade Level**

Advanced 9–12 and beyond. This unit can be adapted to younger grades and different courses of study in various Canadian provinces and territories.

**Warning**

Documentary contains strong language.

**Content Areas**

Languages  
Social Sciences  
History  
Personal development

**Content Items**

*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis*, 1991 (31 min 3 s)  
Excerpt 1 (4 min 11 s – 7 min 48 s)  
Excerpt 2 (9 min 8 s – 11 min 58 s)  
Excerpt 2 (26 min 59 s – 30 min 14 s)

NB: Content items can be viewed online free of charge at: <www.nfb.ca/ww2>.

**Materials required**

Depending on availability: computer, Internet access, video or DVD player, TV, video projector, projection screen, "Inspiration" software, video camera, sound recording equipment.

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## Summary

*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada, will help students understand Canada's role in international conflicts. Activities will also help comprehension: designing a conceptual table and making a film or sound recording.

## Introduction Activity (45 minutes)

Discussion in groups of three or four students, then as a class.

Before screening the film, distribute the following pre-film questionnaire to each group. Each member should play a part in the activity (time-keeping, note-taking, understanding the questions, spokesperson). Although each member gives an opinion on each question, the team must reach a consensus.

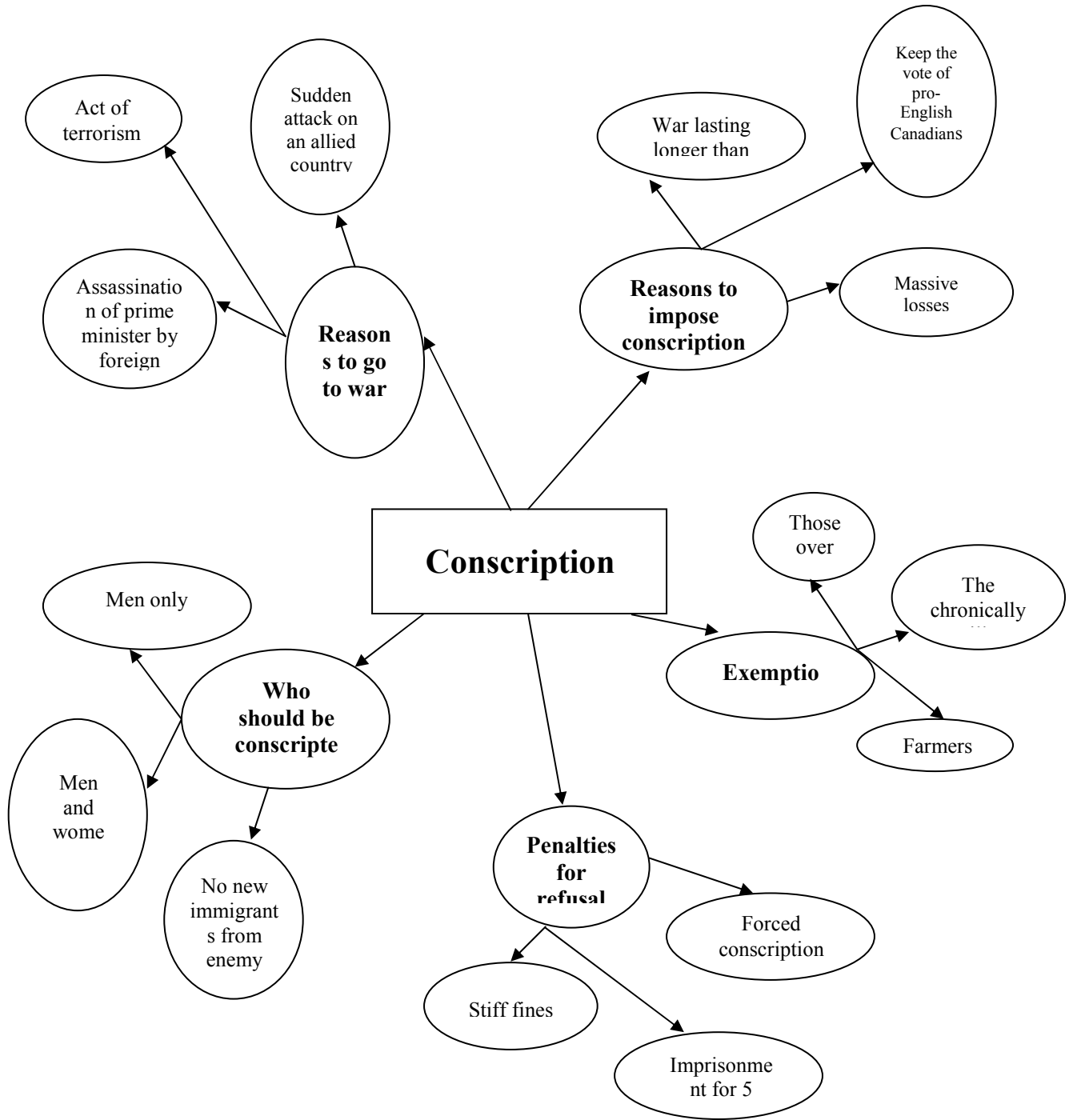
Allow around 20 minutes for team discussion, then ask each spokesperson to say what conclusions the team has reached. Enter the conclusions in a conceptual table (using software such as "Inspiration"). The model table below gives examples of possible answers. At this stage, accept all answers. Print the table and display it. Answers can be changed as activities progress.

Now explain that Canada has twice faced conscription, during the First and Second World Wars, and the country's unity was seriously threatened. Explain that the film they are going to watch is about the Second World War conscription crisis and how the then prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, faced it.

### Thoughts on conscription

1. In your opinion, what would justify Canada going to war, either alone or in a coalition?
2. What reasons would you accept as justifiable for the federal government to impose conscription, i.e. obligatory enrolment in military service?
3. Who should be conscripted? Men, women, recent immigrants, immigrants from the countries with which Canada is at war? What should be the age limits?
4. What would justify, in your opinion, exemption?
5. What penalties do you think those who refuse conscription should incur?

**Example of a conceptual table**



## **ACTIVITY 1: Viewing *Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis* (165 minutes)**

### **Objective**

**Active viewing and sharing ideas.**

#### **Step 1** (45 minutes)

- Distribute the longer questionnaire below and read it before viewing the film.
- Students watch the film without taking any notes, then answer the questionnaire briefly.

#### **Step 2** (60 minutes)

- Say that the second screening will be stopped at intervals so the students can give more detailed answers. Some questions just require short answers, others need more consideration.
- Screen the documentary again, stopping it where indicated on the questionnaire, long enough for students to write down their answers.
- If they want to see it again, tell them they can access it online.

#### **Step 3** (60 minutes)

- Divide the class into eight groups and assign one question to each group. Note that question 7 is not included in this step and that question 5 is divided into two groups.
- Ask the students to discuss their assigned question and reach a consensus. One person writes down a short paragraph of the group's main ideas, to pin up on a wall.
- Each group's spokesperson presents the answer to the class and encourages a short discussion on the subject. If any new ideas emerge, they can be added to the sheet.

*Note: Questions 1 and 4 can be assigned to weaker students*

**Questionnaire on *Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis***

**Question 1**

Who are the following people and what was their role in the conscription crisis of World War Two?

**Andy MacNaughton**

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**“Chubby” Powers**

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**Layton Ralston**

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**Question 2** (*The entire documentary needs to be seen to answer this.*)

Mackenzie King is the longest-serving Canadian prime minister: 22 years. He is also the only wartime leader to be re-elected in peacetime. His political genius is often mentioned. Cite four occasions when Mackenzie King showed political genius.

a) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Question 3**

*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis*, 1991

Clip (4 min 11 s – 4 min 53 s)

Mackenzie King spoke out against conscription as soon as Canada entered the war against Nazi Germany on September 7, 1939, even before knowing how the war would take its course. Justify his position.

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**Question 4**

After the German advance in Europe in 1940 and attacks on Great Britain, English Canadians supported conscription, while French Canadians demanded Mackenzie King keep his promise. King compromised by passing the National Resources Mobilization Act, which requisitioned the services of Canadians for home defence. He promised they would fight only to defend Canadian shores.

What was the nickname of this armed division?

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How do you interpret this nickname?

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**Question 5**

*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis, 1991*

Clip (9 min 37 s – 11 min 7 s)

- a) This scene shows the difficulties Mackenzie King faced within his cabinet. The narrator states a political truth: “Politicians can’t ignore the voters, even when they’re wrong.”

What do you think of this axiom and with the benefit of hindsight what would you have advised Mackenzie King to do?

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*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis, 1991*

Clip (22 min 20 s – 23 min 14 s)

- b) Another scene demonstrating Canada’s ambivalence at the time towards war and conscription. The MPs express two points of view: anger of English Canadians, and the fact that French Canadians would remember conscription and never forgive the government for introducing it. Do you think the risk of civil war, like the one in Ireland, was exaggerated? Justify your opinion.

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**Question 6**

*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis, 1991*

Clip (12 min 54 s – 13 min 59 s)

How do you interpret the famous dictum of Mackenzie King: “Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription”? What choice would you have made? Explain.

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**Question 7**

Who attended the first Quebec Conference in 1943? Was the choice of its site strategic? Explain.

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**Question 8**

*Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis, 1991*

Clip (28 min 20 s – 29 min 24 s)

Comment on the gestures and posture of Mackenzie King in this clip.

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*Note: The two following activities require more thorough research on William Lyon Mackenzie King and other influential figures during the Second World War. The suggested Web sites will be useful, although they are solely about Mackenzie King.*

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## **ACTIVITY 2: Audio or video production** (duration: 5 or 6 lessons)

### **Objective:**

**Make a program on someone who played an important role in the war as it affected Canadians.**

### **Step 1: Preparation** (30 minutes or more)

You're making a 15-minute program for the "History Makers" series. It can be TV or radio. Choose one Canadian who played an important role during the war in Canada or internationally, and present this person via the following points of view:

- his/her own;
- an expert (historian, economist, sociologist, military expert, etc.);
- one of his/her contemporaries (spouse, child, another parent, colleague, enemy, etc.);
- a journalist.

Teams of 4 or 5 will work out a script based on precise information and real statements. One thing is especially important: **your characters do not speak to each other**. It's a series of scenes of the four people speaking separately. They should be linked logically and contrasted, there should be some artistry and there should be a soundtrack. Your teacher will provide an evaluation grid to assess your production. Use it as a guide. Do not neglect the technical aspect. Include music, sound effects, lights, video/audio clips, images, costumes, etc.

### **Step 2: Research and planning** (one or two lessons)

Concentrate on the following:

- Is your production about the whole career of a “History Maker” or one particular event? Once this is decided you can start gathering materials.
- Each team member is responsible for his/her own research, finding their own documents and getting the material needed for the production.
- Gather and arrange documents and ideas. Create an outline scenario for the links, logic, atmosphere, how the different statements and opinions of the people will interact.
- Each group member builds up their statement bearing in mind those that proceed or follow. Each character should appear eight to ten times.
- Choose the music, sound effects, costumes and makeup and various technical elements.
- Together, write your script, including stage directions and technical notes.

**Step 3: Creation** (one or two lessons)

- Rehearse, record and edit. The production must last around fifteen minutes.
- Keep a critical eye on it. At the editing stage, discard what is weak. Keep the best and most creative elements for the final version.

**Step 4: Presentation** (one or two lessons, depending on number of students in class)

- Present your production, then invite students to comment.

**Closure activity** (duration: one lesson)

When he was elected leader of the Liberal Party in 1919, William Lyon Mackenzie King gave a speech citing Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.”

Who never sold the truth to serve the hour,  
Nor palter’d with Eternal God for power.

In light of the documentary and the class productions, discuss whether this quotation was justified in the long run. Did the prime minister govern according to these values during the Crisis? Next, write an ode of 12 to 16 lines to William Lyon Mackenzie King, expressing what you know and think of him.

**Check for Understanding**

In his diary of 30,000 pages, published in 1981 despite his strong desire that it be burned after his death in 1950, Mackenzie King wrote that it wasn’t what you did that mattered most, it was what you prevented.

a) Do you agree with this self-assessment? How would you assess what he did and didn’t do? Present some options he had and why he chose one and not another. What would you have done?

- b) In light of this documentary and your thoughts on the prime minister’s attitude to war and conscription, what parallels and what differences are there between him and the current government and its vision of war? Create a grid with at least five criteria such as leadership, political honesty, national vision, and compare Mackenzie King with the current PM. You can fill in the grid yourself or invite classmates or others to do so, then interpret the results.

**Evaluation**

The following grids are a guide for the media project and its evaluation by the teacher, also for self- and peer-assessment.

**Evaluation grid for the “History Makers” projects**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Score (letter or number)</b>
<b>I. Step 1: Preparation</b>		
1) engagement in choosing a Canadian figure		
2) decision making		
3) research work		
<b>II. Step 2: Research and planning</b>		
4) focus on the project		
5) involvement in research		
6) gathering information		
7) outline scenario		
8) technical aspects		
9) script		
10) presence of stage directions and technical notes		
<b>III. Step 3: Creation</b>		
11) rehearsal		
12) ensuring logic and quality		
13) editing and fine-tuning		
14) technical aspects		
<b>IV. Step 4: Presentation</b>		
15) keeping to the subject		
16) creativity		
17) relevance of information		
18) presence of historical documents		
19) logical links		
20) transitions between scenes		
21) suitable music		
22) technical qualities		
23) quality of speeches and analyses		
24) naturalness of presentation		



25) respect for allotted time (15 ins)		
26) cooperation among team		
27) start and finish		
28) interaction with audience during discussion		

### Self-evaluation checklist for students

Subject of “History Makers” project: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your team members: **A** \_\_\_\_\_  
**B** \_\_\_\_\_  
**C** \_\_\_\_\_  
**D** \_\_\_\_\_

Assess your and your team’s efforts as follows.

- 5 Always excellent
- 4 Better than average
- 3 Average
- 2 Less than average
- 1 Very weak

Criteria	Team members				
	A	B	C	D	Me
1. Presence at work sessions					
2. Accomplishment of own share of work					
3. Constructive, clear ideas					
4. Encouragement of others					
5. Useful comments					
6. Listening to others’ ideas					
7. Criticism of ideas, not of the person					
8. Generally cooperative attitude					
My comments on my team members for the “History Makers” project: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____					

Grid adapted from Jim Howden and Marguerite Kopiec: *Ajouter aux compétences*



## Références et Ressources

CBC Digital Archives

[http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-74-1276/people/mackenzie\\_king/](http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-74-1276/people/mackenzie_king/)

Historica – The Canadian Encyclopedia

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=HomePage&Params=A1>

War Museum

[http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/newspapers/canadawar/wlmking\\_e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/newspapers/canadawar/wlmking_e.html)

[http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/newspapers/canadawar/conscription\\_e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/newspapers/canadawar/conscription_e.html)

Library and Archives Canada

[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/king/053201/053201130207\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/king/053201/053201130207_e.html)

[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/king/053201150502\\_e.html#plebiscite](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/king/053201150502_e.html#plebiscite)

<http://www.lac-bac.ca/primeministers/h4-4068-e.html>

Library of Parliament

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/bp328-e.htm>