

Role Cards: Residents of Red River

First Nations

Read and discuss your story with your group. Be prepared to retell it in your own words.

You have lived here as long as anyone can remember – much longer than anyone else. Your peoples used to be free to go wherever they wished – to hunt and fish and camp. The arrival of Canadians and Europeans has changed that. The last years have been particularly bad for you. More than 100 000 First Nations peoples across the west have died from smallpox. Hunting and trapping have become almost nonexistent. Settlers have cut trees, cleared the land, ploughed the grassland, and built homes and fences. Animals have been driven away in search of food. You have to travel farther and farther away to hunt.

You are among only a small number of First Nations peoples who live permanently in the Red River area. Most of you are Saukteaux (Ojibwe), descendants of the people led by Chief Peguis, and you live on farms in St. Peter's, an Anglican parish. Henry Prince is your leader. Thousands of other people live in the north.

Métis

Read and discuss your story with your group. Be prepared to retell it in your own words.

You are the descendants of the French fur traders (those who worked for the NorthWest Company) and First Nations women. You are the largest group in the settlement. You are farmers, traders, and freighters, and you still hunt bison. The bison hunt organization is very important in this story, because it becomes a military organization that helps you in the Resistance. You see yourselves as a nation, and you have had a flag of your own since 1815. You are doing well in the colony; however, you are concerned about what will happen to you if others take over your lands.

Most of you are Roman Catholic and speak French. You have also developed a language known as *Michif*, which is a combination of French and First Nations' languages (such as Cree and Ojibwe). Michif is still spoken today. Louis Riel is the most prominent Métis leader.

Country-Born

Read and discuss your story with your group. Be prepared to retell it in your own words.

You are the descendants of Hudson's Bay Company men (often Scots) and First Nations women. Some of you have been well-educated and have travelled to and worked in Europe – Alexander Kennedy Isbister, for example, went to Europe and did very well there. Others have stayed and worked in Red River and in the Northwest. Some of you would like Red River to join Canada and some want to remain a British Crown colony. Most of you see yourselves as united with the Métis, but you are not as opposed to joining Canada as the Métis are – as long as you are respected and have a place in the new country.

You are usually a member of the Anglican Church and speak English. You have also developed a language known as *Bungay** (Bungee), which is a combination of Gaelic, English, Ojibwe, and Cree languages. John Bruce is a prominent country-born leader.

* Today, Bungay is no longer spoken.

European and Canadian settlers

Read and discuss your story with your group. Be prepared to retell it in your own words.

You are among a more recent group of immigrants. Some of you are French-speaking and live at settlements such as St. Boniface and St. Charles. Some of you are Canadian and English settlers (and some professional people) who live at Headingley, High Bluff, Portage la Prairie, Poplar Point, and St. James. Most of you are farmers looking for a place to settle. Some of you paid previous settlers for your land; some of you just claimed your land. You are concerned about land ownership and just want to be left in peace. You are not very hopeful right now, because the last 10 years have been terrible years for farming. There have been droughts, grasshopper infestations, and crop failures. Canada has sent you some help, so many of you favour joining Canada, as long as you are consulted about it first. Some of you join with the Canadians in Red River; many of you do not know what to do.

Most of you speak English and are Protestant. Kenneth Lynch and Kenneth McKenzie are both immigrants who farm in Red River.

Scots

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You are of Scottish ancestry. You have been here for a long time and have a longer history in Red River than most other Europeans. Most of you farm, but some of you are businessmen in the area that will become Winnipeg. Many Hudson's Bay traders have retired to live in your communities. You are not too worried about land, because many of you received yours from Lord Selkirk or through the Hudson's Bay Company. You, along with other groups in Red River, have had a system of government through the Council of Assiniboia. You are the most divided group of people here. Some of you do not want to be involved with politics at all; some of you are happy to live under the Hudson's Bay Company rule; others want to join Canada. A few support the Métis.

You speak English and belong to the Anglican Church or Presbyterian Church. Your leaders include Alexander Ross and A.G.B. Bannatyne.

Canadian Party

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You are from Canada, mostly from Ontario. Many of you have been in the army and have powerful relatives in Canada. Several of you moved to Red River to work on projects such as building the Dawson Trail. Some of you are land speculators. You hope to buy or claim land for a low price and then sell it for a big profit. Others, such as John Christian Schultz and Charles Mair, hope to get good government jobs when Canada takes over. You expect to be the powerful people in Red River. Other people in the settlement think you are arrogant outsiders. You are not very popular with many of the long-time settlers.

Americans

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You are a very small group, but you have done your homework and know a lot about the area. You believe Red River should be part of the United States, and you are working hard to convince the Métis to join you. Many of you are Irish-born Americans and do not like Britain very much – you believe the people of Red River would be better off joining the United States than Canada. You have set up headquarters at a local hotel, and most of you own inns, taverns, and shops in Red River. Many of you support Louis Riel, and you hope to persuade him to join the United States. Most Canadians from the east who live in Red River travelled on your railroads to Minnesota, because there are not yet trains in Canada that travel west. These Canadians then travelled by riverboat or cart to Red River. Your country has already persuaded many Canadian settlers to live in the northern United States. You think it is only natural for Red River to want to join.

Your leaders include William O'Donoghue, and businessmen such as William Fonseca and Edmund Barber.