A New Flag for Canada:

Before 1965, Canada’s official flag was the Union Jack, Britain’s national flag. But the Red Ensign was also commonly raised on flagpoles. The Red Ensign was originally flown by the Canadian Merchant Marine. It had a red background with the Union Jack in the top left corner and the Canadian coat of arms diagonally opposite. Many French Canadians objected to the Union Jack and the Red Ensign because of their close association with the British Empire and the conquest of New France in 1759.Other Canadian citizens also thought it was time Canada shed its colonial past and had its own distinctive flag. As new immigrants came to Canada from around the world, Canada was clearly establishing a new and more multicultural identity.

Proposals for a new flag began as early as the 1920s. Prime Minister Mackenzie King tried to have a national flag adopted in 1925 and again in 1946, but failed. In 1948, Quebec adopted its own flag, the fleur-de-lys.

During the Suez Crisis in the late 1950s, Canada sent troops as part of the UN peacekeeping force. Egyptians objected to the clearly British elements in the Canadian flag. Britain had invaded the Suez. The Egyptians did not trust the Canadians to be impartial in light of these British symbols.

With these incidents in mind, the Liberals submitted a design for a new flag to Parliament in June 1964. The design purposely avoided British and French symbols – the Union Jack and fleur-de-lys. Instead, there were three red maple leaves sprouting from a single stem on a white background. At the end of the flag were vertical blue bars to suggest the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

In Parliament, John Diefenbaker led the opposition to “Pearson’s Pennant”. Diefenbaker, proud of Canada’s British connections, wanted to keep the Red Ensign. He was not alone. Many veterans who had fought bravely under the Red Ensign in two world wars did not want to see it replaced.

Months of controversy followed. Finally, an all-party parliamentary committee recommended a new design. It was a single red maple leaf on a white background with red boarders on each end. Diefenbaker and some of the opposition hoped to delay the passing of the flag bill by using filibuster. Filibustering means talking on endlessly until the plan has to be dropped so the government can go on with other business.

For thirty-three days, opposition members stated and restated their reasons for rejecting the new flag. Neither side would give in. Finally, the Liberal government ended the flag debate by using closure. Closure is a special rule limiting the amount of time a bill may be discussed in Parliament. At 2:30 in the morning of 15 December 1964, Canada’s new red maple leaf was officially passed. It was a scene full of emotions. As the vote was announced (163 for, 78 against), the MPs rose to their feet to sing *O Canada*. Two days later the Senate gave approval, and Royal assent was granted on 28 January 1965. The new Canadian flag flew for the first time on 15 February 1965.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Prior to 1965, what was Canada’s official flag?
2. Why did many French Canadians object to this flag?
3. Why did Egyptians object to the flag used by Canadian troops during the Suez Canal Crisis?
4. How was the flag debate finally ended? Define the term “closure” in your answer.
5. When did Canada first fly its new flag?

The Debate Over Nuclear Warheads:

After the NORAD agreement, the United States moved to station 56 Bomarc-B anti-aircraft missiles at Canadian NORAD sites. The missiles were equipped with nuclear warheads. In 1960, when Canadians became aware that there were nuclear warheads in the country, there was an uproar. Should Canada adopt nuclear weapons? Was this a result of United States domination of Canadian defence policy?

Both the Canadian and American governments had to agree to put the armed forces on any alert, but the NORAD forces were clearly under an American commander. The atmosphere became even more tense when federal Civil Defence authorities distributed pamphlets with plans for making underground shelters. These shelters were to protect people from nuclear fallout. While experts debated on whether these shelters would serve any purpose, about 2400 were built in Toronto alone, at the cost of about $4000 (around $35,000 in 2015 currency) each.

Anti-nuclear protestors, convinced that the arms buildup would not stop the Soviets from attacking the West, demonstrated across the country. People understood that a nuclear war could mean complete and utter destruction.

The controversy over nuclear weapons in Canada led John Diefenbaker, who had become Prime Minister in 1957, to refuse nuclear warheads for the Bomarc missiles. He felt that arming the Bomarcs with nuclear warheads would set back the hopes for nuclear disarmament around the world. He preferred storing nuclear warheads south of the boarder until they were needed. His opponents argued that Bomarc missiles without nuclear warheads were useless.

The question became critical during The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, when the world came dangerously close to nuclear war. Cuba was a communist country. The Soviet Union had installed missiles in Cuba. From the Cuban launch sites, missiles could attack most major American and Canadian cities. The United States demanded the Soviet missiles be removed. It blockaded the shipment of military equipment to Cuba.

The United States asked Canada, as a defensive partner, to put all Canadian forces on alert. War was the next step. Canada hesitated to put its forces on alert, causing a rift between the American and Canadian governments. Canada’s Bomarc missiles were still not armed with nuclear warheads.

Diefenbaker accused the United States of pressuring Canada. He also accused Liberal leader Pearson of flip-flopping on the issue of nuclear arms. Pearson had opposed nuclear missiles in Canada, but in 1963 decided that Canada had an obligation to accept them. After Pearson was elected as prime minister in 1963, the Bomarc missiles were armed with nuclear warheads. The issue highlighted the controversy in Canada over fears of nuclear attack on the one hand, and the desire for a strong anti-nuclear policy on the other.

Comprehension Questions:

1. In your opinion, should Canada have accepted nuclear weapons during the 1950s? Justify your answer.
2. How do you think most Canadians reacted to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962?
3. In modern times, is WWIII a possibility? Justify your answer.

The Era of Protest:

With all the movements for change in the 1960s, questions about the values in society should have never been more in the forefront. Most of these questions were raised by young people. The slogan was “trust no one over 30”. Protests arose over rights for Aboriginal nations and Black North Americans. Young people also demonstrated against nuclear armament, American interference in Canadian affairs, and the Vietnam War.

Black Canadians, especially those in Nova Scotia, had been active in human and civil rights struggles long before the 1960s. Groups had succeeded in helping to get anti-racist legislation passed in the 1940s. In the 1950s, organizations such as the Negro Citizenship Association for the Advancement of Coloured People lobbed successfully for improved civil rights.

The movement was energized in the 1960s when Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X became public figures in the United States. In King’s acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in 1964, he referred to the “twenty-two million Negros of the United States … engaged in a creative battle to end the long night of racial injustice”. The US civil rights struggle was characterized by peaceful protests and the more radical voices of the Black Nationalist Movement (under the Nation of Islam), the Black Power Movement, and the Black Panther Party.

Although the Black Panthers did spread into Canada, and helped form the Black United Front in 1969, radical Black nationalism never became a strong political movement in Canada. This was partly due to the civil rights movement in Canada. It was also due to the strategy many Black Canadian leaders followed of working together with other ethno cultural and racial groups for change.

The Era of Protest: Comprehension Questions:

1. Name a popular slogan used by young people during the 1960s.
2. Name three issues that were protested during the 1960s.
3. Why did radical Black Nationalism not become as strong a movement in Canada as it did the United States?

The Women’s Movement:

Many Canadian women in the 1960s were deeply involved in working for social change. The Women’s Liberation Movement burst onto the scene in the 1960s. Women protested and marched for changes in employment practices, life choices, and politics.

After World War II, many women who had been working in factories and other industries were laid off from their jobs. If they were in “replacement positions”, they were expected to give up their jobs to men returning from the war. Nurseries that allowed women with children to work during the war were closed. Women were expected to go back to their traditional roles as stay-at-home mothers and wives.

In reality, many women took jobs outside the home in addition to their household work. They needed the extra income to help pay bills. Many immigrant women had to work to make a living. With the economic boom, industries also needed more workers. Women’s participation in the workforce rose from 18 per cent in 1921 to 39 per cent by 1971.

But many jobs held by women were lower paying and had less prestige than jobs held by men. Ninety-five per cent of all secretaries were female, but fewer than seven per cent of doctors were women. By 1970, less than four per cent of women had management jobs. Women still met with discrimination when they tried to move into jobs previously done by men.

Women in the 1960s also had little voice in politics. There were only a handful of women Members in Parliament and just a scattering of women in local and provincial governments. Women’s Liberationists wanted to be treated equally in the arena of politics just as in other fields. They also wanted more options in their lifestyles. Some women wanted to the chance to combine career and family, while others wanted to devote their lives to their careers and advance professionally at the same rate as men.

There were two groups in the women’s movement: the mainstream and the radical. The mainstream believed that change could be achieved by changes to laws and by publicizing their cause through the media. The radical feminists focused on the fact that men would not give up their power willingly, and therefore stronger actions needed to be taken. They protested for radical changes in education, the division of labour in the home and workplace, and clothing styles. The more aggressive attempt to remove sexual stereotyping made some people view these women as “man-hating” women’s libbers who wanted to overturn traditional values of home and family.

Women made some gains in the 1950s and 1960s. But as the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women would show, there were many areas in which they still faced inequality:

Comprehension Questions: The Women’s Movement:

1. Based on your knowledge regarding the role of women in the 1950s, why do you think the Women’s Movement “burst onto the scene in the 1960s”?
2. Explain the discrepancy in wages and job prestige between men and women in the 1960s and 1970s.
3. Explain the difference between the mainstream women’s movement and the radical women’s movement.

Trudeaumania:

As baby boomers became more powerful in the 1960s, they became tied of the same old faces in politics. They wanted someone new. It was in this atmosphere of change and rebellion that Pierre Trudeau became both leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister. To many Canadians, Trudeau seemed to be the man of the hour. For one thing, he was a French-speaking Quebecer. Many felt he would be able to address Quebec’s concerns. He was also youthful, casual, and stylish. He drove fast sports cars and had been photographed doing jack-knife dives into swimming pools and riding a camel.

As Minister of Justice, Trudeau had convinced people he was cool under pressure, logical, and scholarly. Even more appealing were his wit and confidence, which came through loud and clear in television appearances. Whenever Trudeau appeared to give a speech, it was like a rock concert. Young Liberals screamed themselves hoarse and the crowds swarmed their hero.

Trudeau adopted a new campaign style. He arrived in many cities by jet, and would often descend into a suburban shopping centre parking lot by helicopter. He mingled with the crowds, shaking hands and accepting kisses from admirers. Trudeau talked to the crowds about building a “just society” in which all Canadians were respected and shared in the country’s prosperity. Hecklers were put-down easily with quick-witted replies. He ended his speeches by challenging Canadians to take a chance on the future and vote for the Liberals. Smiling for the cameras, he then tossed tossed the flower from his buttonhole into the crowd. He stepped back into the helicopter and was whisked away to his next rally. The crowds loved him. The press called it “Trudeaumania”.

Next to Trudeau, Robert Stanfield, leader of the Conservative Party, appeared steady but dull. He was particularly uneasy in front of news cameras. He once complained, “you walk out (of The House of Commons) and they shove a bunch of microphones in your face, and in thirty seconds, you are expected to produce a profound and intelligent answer to an extremely complicated national issue.” Stanfield’s answers were thoughtful and honest, but his slow manner of speaking made him seem indecisive and weak.

On the eve of the election, June 24th, 1968, the St. Jean Baptiste parade was held in Montreal. Trudeau stood on the platform of City Hall with the event’s special guests. In the crowd were some radical separatists determined to demonstrate against Canadian federalism. The parade turned into a riot. Demonstrators began throwing rocks and bottles. Most of the guests on the platform dashed inside for safety, but Trudeau remained on the platform. The people of Canada, watching on television, saw their Prime Minister standing firm against the radical separatists.

Headlines the next day said, “Trudeau Defies Separatists”. Citizens read the headlines as they went to the polls to vote. Trudeau won a resounding majority in the election.

Comprehension Questions: Trudeaumania:

1. Why did Canadian consider Trudeau “the man of the hour” in the late 1960s?
2. How was Trudeau’s campaign style different from his contemporaries?
3. How was Trudeau different from Robert Stanfield, the leader of the Conservative Party?
4. How did the events of 24 June 1968 help Trudeau become Prime Minister?