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Canadians Need to Hit the Books! - Fewer than One in Five (18%) Canadians Score a Passing Grade in a Quiz About Their Country's History

Many Lack Familiarity Regarding the Achievements of Famous Canadians

Toronto, Ontario, October 2, 2024 — Many Canadians have a lot of homework to do to bring themselves up to speed on prominent events and people of our country's past, according to a new Ipsos poll conducted on behalf of Historica Canada. In fact, the vast majority of respondents – 82 per cent – scored a failing grade in a quiz about their country's history. That lack of knowledge is most pronounced among younger Canadians, as almost nine in 10 (88 per cent) failed the quiz. The highest pass rate – 23 per cent – was among Canadians 55 years of age or older, while 14 per cent of respondents aged 18-54 successfully completed the quiz. The quiz includes a total of 30 true/false questions about Canadian facts and history, with a passing grade defined as a score of 15 correct responses or higher out of 30. Fewer than one in five (18%) managed to pass the quiz, with just one percent (1%) qualifying for an "A" letter grade (24 or more correct responses, out of 30). On average, Canadians offer correct responses to a only 8.37 questions out of 30, IA majority admit to not knowing the correct response, as opposed to offering an incorrect response, at most of the questions.

Respondents fared best on five specific questions that dealt mostly with animals and outdoor issues. Three-fifths (60%) of Canadians correctly identify their country as home to the world's largest moose population, making this the highest proportion to answer any single question correctly. Majorities also correctly indicate that Canada houses many biomes, including tundra and rainforests (53%), the longest coastline (55%), the second longest national highway (53%), and the largest outdoor rodeo (57%) in the world. These five questions, out of a total of thirty, are the only ones in which a majority offered a correct response. The question that stumped the most Canadians – if Douglas McCurdy flew a hot air balloon across Canada (he did not) – was answered correctly by just six percent (6%) of Canadians, though four in five (79%) admit they aren't sure if he did this (or not).

Familiarity with the achievements of famous Canadians is low. Only about half (52%) report familiarity with the achievements of at least one of the Canadians asked about in the survey. The accomplishments of celebrated author Lucy Maud Montgomery (29% familiar with achievements) and to a slightly lesser extent, civil rights activist Viola Desmond (26%) are some of the most well-known. But even those figures still mean that fewer than three in 10 respondents responded correctly – underscoring a lack of understanding and connection with Canada's heritage.



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Perhaps not surprisingly, those living in Atlantic Canada are among the most likely to correctly acknowledge that it is true that every year Nova Scotia sends a Christmas tree to the city of Boston as an expression of gratitude for their help mitigating the aftereffects of the 1917 Halifax Explosion (73% vs. 43% across all other regions). Most Canadians are, not surprisingly, most familiar with history in their own province: 82% of Albertans knew Canada held the largest outdoor rodeo in the world compared to 52% in the rest of Canada. Residents of BC were most familiar with Canada's many biomes, correctly identifying that it contains both tundra and rainforests compared to the rest of Canada (76% vs. 53% rest of Canada).

Table 1: Quiz Results

Bold denotes correct response	%True	%False	%DK
Living up to the last name, comedian and actor John Candy was born on Halloween	12%	10%	78%
Alice Munro is the only Canadian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature	16%	11%	73%
The iconic Heritage Minute line "I smell burnt toast" was originally scripted as "I smell bacon and eggs"	9%	19%	73%
Canada's largest festival, the Calgary Stampede, also features the World's largest outdoor rodeo	57%	7%	36%
Indigenous architect Douglas Cardinal was inspired by the natural features of Canada's landscape for his design of the Canadian Museum of History	29%	5%	66%
One of Gordon Lightfoot's most famous songs started as a ballad about the Springfield mining disaster, but evolved into the nautically-themed Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald	26%	12%	62%
At over 200,000 km, Canada has the longest coastline of any country in the world	55%	8%	37%
Canada is home to many biomes, including tundra and rainforests	53%	16%	32%
At 7,821 km, the Trans-Canada highway is second longest national highway in the world	53%	7%	40%
The territorial arms of the Northwest Territories contains two narwals	27%	6%	67%
The Thousand Islands in Ontario were once a mountain range as tall as the rockies, until glaciers scraped and broke them down	25%	13%	62%
Before his 1909 Silver Dart flight in Baddeck Bay, Douglas McCurdy was the first person to fly a hot air balloon across Canada, taking 756 hours, or 31.5 days	15%	6%	79%
Canada has the largest moose population the world	60%	5%	35%
Between 1.4 million and 10,000 years ago, Canada was home to giant beavers, an extinct distant cousin of modern beavers	30%	16%	54%
Fireflies are active predators and use neurotoxins injected through their mandibles to immobilize prey	14%	21%	65%
The title character of The Littlest Hobo was actually played by 4 different shepherds, all related to one another	38%	7%	55%

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Spirit Bears are actually black bears exhibiting an uncommon recessive trait that makes their fur white/gold	35%	10%	55%
The first viral internet cat sensation from 2006 was a Canadian cat named Mac N. Cheese, recorded jumping in and out of snow piles in his backyard in Brandon, Manitoba	16%	10%	74%
Every year Nova Scotia sends a Christmas tree to the city of Boston in thanks for their help after the Halifax Explosion. It is displayed on the Boston Common	45%	6%	49%
In 2022 a very well-preserved baby woolly mammoth was discovered near Dawson City, Yukon	41%	7%	53%
Bartholomew Roberts (known as Black Bart) was a pirate that terrorized Canada's East Coast - he essentially created our lasting image of pirates, wearing a red waistcoat, a large hat with a feather and gold chains around his neck	22%	11%	67%
In 1919 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes) was asked by journalists if he would consult on one of Canada's earliest unsolved mysteries - the disappearance of Ambrose Small	18%	7%	75%
As of 2024, 12 Canadians have been to space, including 9 trained astronauts, and 3 space tourists	32%	10%	57%
When Sir Sandford Fleming proposed a system of international standard time, he imagined 8 zones for Canada, including one unique to Prince Edward Island	26%	10%	64%
Inspired by the traditional practice of using a bouncing cradleboard to soothe babies, Olivia Poole patented her "Jolly Jumper" in Ontario in 1957	33%	5%	61%
Robert Foulis invented the first steam-operated fog alarm, installed at Partridge Island, NB. He never patented or profited from his invention	18%	7%	75%
Marcellus Gilmore Edson of Quebec received a patent in 1849 for the manufacturing of a peanut paste which he called "Peanut-Candy" - this is now acknowledged as a forerunner to peanut butter	21%	8%	71%
The first internet search engine, called Archie, was invented at McGill University in the late 1980s	22%	8%	70%
The first widely used military gas mask was invented by Colonel Cluny Macpherson of Newfoundland	26%	7%	67%
Invented in 1947 by Canadian James R. Zamboni, the Model A was the first successful ice resurfacing machine replacing a time consuming and labour-intensive manual process	45%	7%	47%

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Table 2: Familiarity with Canadian Achievements

	Very familiar with them and their achievements	Somewhat familiar with them and their achievements	Heard about them, but not sure what their achievements are	Not at all familiar with them	Top 2 Box
Viola Desmond	9%	17%	19%	55%	26%
Rosemary Brown	3%	9%	18%	71%	12%
Norman Bethune	6%	14%	18%	63%	20%
Tom Longboat	2%	8%	17%	73%	10%
Lucy Maud Montgomery	12%	17%	15%	56%	29%
Pierre Berton	11%	18%	14%	57%	29%
Edwin Baker	2%	5%	12%	80%	8%
Mary Ann Shadd	1%	7%	12%	80%	8%
Mary Two-Axe Earley	2%	4%	10%	83%	6%
Clement Ligoure	2%	6%	9%	83%	8%
Kenojuak Ashevak	2%	6%	8%	84%	7%
Chloe Cooley	2%	5%	11%	83%	7%

About Historica Canada

Historica Canada is a charitable organization that offers programs in both official languages that you can use to explore, learn, reflect on our history, and consider what it means to be Canadian.

We offer all our programs free of charge in both of our country's official languages. Our online programs and resources are accessed by more than 28 million users annually, and our educational tools have been distributed to more than 65,000 teachers from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

We believe that history is best taught and learned through providing a wide variety of voices and insights into our past. In doing so, we better understand the scale and scope of achievements by individuals and by our country overall - and also, those areas where we have failed in our actions and treatment of one another.

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About the Study

These are the findings of an Ipsos survey conducted on behalf of Historica Canada. Fieldwork was conducted between June 13 and 14, 2024. A total of n=1,001 Canadians aged 18+ participated in the survey which was fielded via the Ipsos' panel. Quotas and weighting were used to ensure the sample's composition reflects that of the Canadian population according to census parameters. This survey has a credibility interval of +/- 3.8 per cent 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had all Canadian adults 18+ been surveyed.

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