

# Causes of the War of 1812

by Ernest Wasson

**Suggested grade level:** Junior/Intermediate

**Suggested time:** Two classes of 50 minutes

## Brief Description of the Task

In this lesson students will work toward understanding the nature of the causes of the War of 1812.

## Historical Thinking Concepts

- Cause and Consequence

## Learning Goals

Students will be able to:

1. Appreciate the multiple causation nature of the War of 1812
2. Recognize different types of causes
3. Identify significant causes
4. Distinguish immediate causes from underlying factors

## Materials

Photocopies of the Appendices.

## Prior Knowledge

It would be an asset for students to:

- have a basic introduction or overview of the War of 1812

## Assessment

- Causation Chart (Appendix)
- Graphic Organizer

## Detailed Lesson Plan

## Part 1

1. Introduce the concept of Cause and Consequence (see The Historical Thinking Project, [www.historicalthinking.ca/concepts/cause-and-consequence](http://www.historicalthinking.ca/concepts/cause-and-consequence)). Discuss with students the difference between immediate and underlying causes by using the following example.

All events have immediate causes. For example, a car accident might be caused by slippery roads, excess speed, or driver error. But beyond these very direct causes are found deeper, more fundamental causes like the failure to maintain roads or a pervasive culture of speed and recklessness. These explanatory concepts or underlying factors are often as important, or more important than, the more immediate causes [*Teaching About Historical Thinking*, 2006 (Editors Peter Seixas and Penney Clark), pg. 37].

## Part 2

1. Arrange the class into groups of four. Give each group one complete copy of **Appendix 1: Causes of the War of 1812**. Have students read through the list of causes of the war. Group members will work together to complete each section of the organizer (**Appendix 2**), considering the following:

- Was the cause an *immediate cause* (eg. the Orders in Council limiting American trade), an *underlying factor* (eg. the ongoing European conflict between Britain and France), or an *antecedent event* (an event that happened before but with little causal connection).
- Come up with a category or theme of each cause (economic, social, etc.)
- Rank the importance of each cause (one being the most important)

2. Using the previous information, have students create a graphic organizer/causation web explaining the interconnections between the causes. The organizer should include:

- circles of various sizes (the size of each circle should relate to the relative importance of each factor)
- the use of arrows

## War of 1812, Historical Thinking Project Lessons (Wasson), Lesson 24

- annotations that explain interconnection/relations
- an example

[Teaching About Historical Thinking, 2006 (Editors Peter Seixas and Penney Clark), pg. 41.)

3. Wrap-up by having each group present their causation webs to the class. Were there many similarities? Did groups agree on the major causes of the war? Why or why not?

### Teaching Tip:

**Additional information about the concept of Cause and Consequence can be found on the Historical Thinking Project website at [www.historicalthinking.ca](http://www.historicalthinking.ca)**

## Lesson 24, Appendices

### Appendix 1: Causes of the War of 1812

1. American northern expansionism – this would not be the first or last time that America looked aggressively north to Canada
2. Britain was engaged in a global conflict with Napoleon
3. Sailors' Rights/Impressment – the British navy's practice of removing sailors from American merchant ships.
4. Orders in Council/Free Trade – Britain was attempting a naval blockade to defeat Napoleon and American merchants tried to skirt this by using their neutrality status. The Orders in Council blocked this trade; these Orders were suspended in June 1812.
5. Many in Britain thought that presidents Jefferson and Madison were pro-French and anti-British.
6. Britain had been fighting France, more or less, since 1793.
7. National pride – the American perception that Britain did not recognise her as a fully independent nation. The War of 1812 has been called the "Second War of Independence."
8. American western/interior expansionism – brought America into conflict with many Native nations who felt the only way to protect their lands was by allying with the British, while Americans felt the British were supporting and even inciting the Natives against them.
9. An unwanted war in the colonies of Canada – Lower Canada had no great love for British rule but had secured language and religious rights; Upper Canada with its Loyalist and newer American settlers ended up supporting the British; and the maritime colonies were very closely connected to New England socially and economically and sought to minimize damages
10. The perceived ease of the conquest of the colonies of Canada – according to president Jefferson a "mere matter of marching."

## Appendix 2: Analyzing Causes of War of 1812

Cause	Immediate, Underlying, or Antecedent Event?	Type of Cause (economic, cultural, etc.)	Rank Order Causes (1 is most important)

**Lesson 24, Appendices**

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Immediate, Underlying, or Antecedent Event?</b>	<b>Type of Cause (economic, cultural, etc.)</b>	<b>Rank Order Causes (1 is most important)</b>

