

The French and Indian War

In North America, the French and Indian War changed the future of the continent. It was a war to answer this question: which would be the stronger power in North America—England or France? France, the French colonists, and France’s Indian allies fought against England, the English colonists, and England’s Indian allies.

Part 1: British and French fight over land

The war began with conflicts about land. France and England had real arguments over the same pieces of land. French explorers—Marquette, Joliet, La Salle, and others—had been the first Europeans in the regions around the Great Lakes, and also in the lands drained by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. France had sent traders and trappers to these territories, and had set up trading posts as well.

England claimed the same land. In the original English charters, the king granted land from coast to coast – even though no one had any idea where the West Coast was. Now that land along the East Coast was filling up, English-speaking settlers had begun pushing west. British settlers wanted to farm the rich soil there. Indian hunting grounds were disappearing as the whites moved in. Indians were alarmed, and they were willing to fight to preserve their land.

France was more interested in the fur trade – and the money it brought – than in settling people on the land. So when English traders began buying furs from the Native Americans and paying high prices for those furs, it made France angry. It hurt their fur business.

Part 2: Native Americans Take Sides

The English had signed treaties and bought land from many of the Indian nations. However, sometimes the treaties were signed without the Indians understanding the details. Indians thought the earth belonged to everyone. One Indian said selling land was like selling the sea, or the sky. Yet, though Indians never owned land individually, Indian tribes did claim the right to use an area of land. It was those rights they signed over to the English.

When the English colonists signed treaties with the Indian people, the people who signed the treaties usually meant to honor them. The trouble was that the people who actually signed the treaties weren’t the ones who lived on the frontier near the Indians. Those frontier people were often rough and rowdy. They wanted land, and sometimes they didn’t mind killing for it.

The French were the best friends the Indians had in North America. Mostly they were trappers, traders, and fishermen, like the Native Americans. They understood and respected the land in a way the English never learned. Therefore, most Native American tribes allied with the French. However, the Iroquois tribe didn’t care, they didn’t like the French. The Iroquois had been enemies of the French ever since Frenchmen Samuel de Champlain sided against them in a battle with the Huron tribe in 1609. That was too bad for the French, for the Iroquois led a strong league of six Indian Nations. They were the most powerful Indians in Eastern America, and would become powerful allies for the English in the war.

Part 3: The Battles in the French and Indian War

At first the British lost many battles in the war. The British thought they knew how to capture enemy forts. They had been trained in Europe, on great open battlefields, where armies lined up facing each other and shot long, clumsy guns called “muskets.” Those European armies seemed awesome. The English assumed that these European methods would work in America. However, the French and their Indian allies wouldn’t fight the kind of war the English wanted to fight. The British soldiers’ bright red uniforms helped make them easy targets. The Native Americans and French wouldn’t stand in a straight line and let the English shoot at them, like the ways European wars were fought. They hid in the woods. They wore skins to camouflage themselves. The Indians screamed blood-chilling war whoops. They shot at the British troops from the woods. The British panicked. They “broke and ran as sheep pursued by dogs,” wrote George Washington.



However, things changed. The British sent over more troops to fight the French and Indians, and spent more money on weapons and supplies. Additionally, William Johnson, who was a trader who spoke the language of the Mohawk Indians, and was married to a Mohawk woman, convinced the Iroquois to join the English in fighting the French. The colonists and Native Americans adjusted their fighting tactics to surprise and camouflage. By 1759, the tide had turned in favor of the British, and the British troops captured the French city of Quebec in Canada. By 1760, the French had lost control of Canada, and the war was over.

Part 4: Proclamation of 1763

What did the Indians gain from the war? Nothing. For a while there were thanks and treaties and some respect. That didn’t last long. Now that France was no longer a threat on the continent, the English didn’t need Indians as Allies. England now had to manage almost 2 million people in the 13 colonies, and had to take control of 60,000 French speaking people in Canada, as well as having to keep the English colonists and the Native Americans from killing each other.

After the French and Indian war, many English settlers moved west. They built homes on the land that England had won from the French. Native Americans feared that this movement of people would destroy their way of life. Some Native Americans tried to drive the settlers away by attacking their homes and forts. By the time England stopped this fighting between Indians and colonists, nearly 2,000 settlers, soldiers, and traders had died.

To stop the attacks and to protect the colonists, Great Britain announced a law called the Proclamation of 1763. This proclamation declared that Native Americans would have much of the land west of the Appalachian Mountains. It also said the colonists could not move to those areas. The colonists disliked this law. They did not like the way in which England was trying to control the colonies. Many colonists simply ignored the law and moved west.

Name: _____

Exit Ticket # ____ : The French and Indian War

1. In two or more sentences, explain what caused the French and Indian War:

2. Why did most Native Americans fight on the French side?

3. In three or more sentences, summarize how England's success changed over the course of the French and Indian War. (2 points)

4. What was the purpose of the Proclamation of 1763?

Score: ____/5