

Canadian First Nations Studies: Poisoning of Grassy Narrows and The Oka Crisis Questions

Use the “Grassy Narrows (The Canadian Encyclopedia)” handout to answer these questions

1. What is Minamata disease?

2. Prolonged exposure to mercury can, according to Environment Canada, cause damage to the brain, spinal cord, kidneys, liver and developing fetus. Symptoms include impaired senses and balance, shaking, slurred speech, balance problems, numbness and tunnel vision. Severe, prolonged exposure can cause personality changes, stupor, coma and death. Why did the Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations peoples get Minamata disease?

3. How did the Ontario provincial government react to finding mercury pollution in the Wabigoon River?

4. How has the mercury pollution affected the everyday lives of these First Nations peoples?

5. The Ontario government put these signs up. How do you think a tourist fisher might react? A Native?



6. Why do you think alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, suicides and depression became all too common in the late 1970s among the Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations peoples?

7. Explain the compensation provided to the Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations peoples.

8. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, of which Canada is a signatory, states in Article 25, "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard." The people of Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong have suffered for over 50 years. Frustrated by the Canadian government's inaction on cleaning the river system, they have communicated to the United Nations that their rights have been violated. Do you think they are right? Explain.

**Use the “Oka Crisis (The Canadian Encyclopedia)” handout to answer these questions**

9. During what timeframe did the Oka Crisis occur?

10. What had the Mohawk peoples been pressing the Canadian government to recognize since the 18<sup>th</sup> century? What was the government’s response?

11. What was the main reason for the Mohawk peoples’ protests against the government in Oka?

12. What steps were taken by the Mohawk peoples in order to halt further development of the Pines?

13. Do you agree with the methods of protest used by the Mohawk peoples? Do you think that they could have adopted a more effective form of protest in order to generate a positive outcome? Explain.

14. How did the government respond to the protest?

15. What was the result of the brief gunfight that followed?

16. How do you think the government should have responded to the protest?

17. Describe the escalation of the Oka Crisis.

18. Why were the Canadian armed forces involved in an attempt to resolve the crisis?

19. What is the tone of this photograph (what emotions or feelings are evoked)? Write a caption from the point of view of the military soldier. Write a caption from the point of view of the Mohawk Warrior.



20. How did the crisis finally end?

21. What is the tone of this photograph (what emotions or feelings are evoked)? Identify the Mohawk woman and describe what happened to her.



22. Was the Mohawk peoples' land claims issue regarding the Pines ever resolved?

23. What was the impact of the crisis on relations between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government? Have there been any significant changes?

24. The incident at Oka had far-reaching effects across Canada and continues to influence government policy and practice even today. Can you think of reasons why this might be so? What important issues were at stake at Oka that other Aboriginal communities across Canada are dealing with as well? In what ways might governments be prompted to rethink their policies and practices as a result of the Oka Crisis?