Vocabulary

*Before reading, translate these words.*

Prime minister

Controversial

Beloved

Tenure

Honorable mention

Communism

Socialism

Marxism

Anarchism

Align (political)

Parliament

Attorney General

Act (law)

Contraception

Breathalyzer

Referendum

Notable

Adoption

Infringe

Eccentric

biography

Trudeau’s name might look familiar if you know Canadian politics. Canada’s current prime minister is Justin Trudeau, Pierre Elliot’s son. Pierre Elliot Trudeau was one of Canada’s most beloved prime ministers as well as one of its most controversial. He was the Canadian prime minster for 15 years, the third longest tenure in Canadian history.

Trudeau was born in Montreal, Quebec on October 18th, 1919. He was a great student and won hundreds of prizes and honorable mentions during his time in college. He graduated from College Jean-de-Brebeuf in 1940. After that, he pursued politics and law at Universite de Montreal. It is said that Trudeau missed the second world war because he was too concerned with studying. In 1944, he began his master’s in political economy at Harvard. It was only at this time that he discovered the historic importance of the second world war. He studied Marxism, anarchism, communism and socialism.

I want to jump to 1965, when Trudeau joined the Liberal party. He was more politically aligned with the NDP, but Trudeau thought they would never achieve power. He was appointed as the parliamentary secretary in Lester B. Pearson’s government. Lester B. Pearson is also considered one of Canada’s greatest prime ministers. Trudeau spent a lot of time travelling abroad for his job. In 1967, he was appointed as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

While he was Minister of Justice, Trudeau was responsible for introducing the Criminal Law Amendment Act. This law was controversial because it allowed for homosexuality, legalized contraception, abortion, and lotteries. It also made buying a gun more difficult and allowed police to use a breathalyzer on suspected drunk drivers. He believed that the government should stay out of people’s private lives.

By the end of 1967, Trudeau became the leader of the Liberal party and therefore the Prime Minister of Canada. Trudeau was very popular with young people in Canada. And in 1968, he won the national election.

During this time, there was a lot of problems with Quebec, Canada’s French province. First, Trudeau passed the Official Languages Act which made French and English equal. Both of them are now official languages. But, in 1970, Trudeau faced the October Crisis. October Crisis is the name given to a French terrorist group (FLQ) that kidnapped politicians. They killed one politician and threatened to kill the other. He responded to the crisis by using the War Measures Act to give police more powers. It was a controversial decision because some people thought it was too extreme. Trudeau was able to stop the October Crisis, but many people from Quebec remained upset with the rest of Canada.

Trudeau lost the national election in 1979, but another election was called in 1980 in which Trudeau won. The issues in Quebec were only getting worse and in 1980 the province had a referendum to see if Quebec should separate from Canada. Trudeau used his political power to try to keep Quebec in Canada. Trudeau was born in Quebec, so of course he wanted it to remain in Canada. He promised that Quebec would have more power if the voted to stay in Canada. Sixty percent of Quebecers voted to stay in Canada. Trudeau said that he, “had never been so proud to be a Quebecer and a Canadian.”

Perhaps Trudeau biggest accomplishment as Prime Minister came in 1982 when he passed the Constitution Act. This was an amendment to the Canadian Constitution. The most notable part of the Constitution Act was the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter was a major advancement for human rights in Canada. Since it is the highest law in Canada, no other law can infringe on these rights and freedoms. There are four freedoms which can never be taken away. The Charter also protects against discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, or disability. The Charter is very popular in Canada.

As with most things Trudeau did, there was a lot of controversy over the Constitution Act. The biggest issue is that he excluded Quebec from discussing the new constitution. It divided the country made Quebecers feel like they are not part of Canada. These feeling lasted for many years and eventual led to the 1995 Quebec referendum. Only 50.5% of Quebecers voted to stay in Canada.

Trudeau was known for his eccentric personality and socialist views. He did a lot of good for the country despite being a controversial figure. Now, Canda is being led by his son, Justin Trudeau.

Questions

1. Where was Trudeau born?
2. Who is his son?
3. What did he study in university?
4. Which political party was he a part of?
5. What happened in the October Crisis?
6. Why did Trudeau say that he, “had never been so proud to be a Quebecer and a Canadian?”
7. What is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?
8. Research the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What freedoms do Canadians have?
9. Why was Quebec angry after the 1982 Constitution Act?