

Making History: A Canadian Project
Topic: Making History: A Canadian Project
Target Age: 11 to 14
Planning Framework: Romantic
Unit Length: single lesson
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Description

History is the story of people, places and events in our past that shapes the way we live in the world today. But who tells the story? For this project, your students will be the storytellers.

Unit Outline

PLOs

plan and conduct research using primary and secondary sources
describe contributions made by Aboriginal people, the French, and the British to the development of Canada
identify major historical events in the development of Canada

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Cognitive Tools Used:

Narrative, Association with Heroes, Humanizing of Meaning, Extremes and Limits, Collection and Hobbies, Change of Context,

Finding a Narrative:

1. What “heroic” qualities or values are central to the topic? What makes the characters in this story full of wonder? What image captures the heroic qualities of the topic?

The quality of foresight stands out in this project. Foresight means looking forward, perceiving that current events and actions will have an impact and significance in the future. As keen, young historians, students enjoy the benefits of hindsight while they set out to prove that their chosen characters displayed the quality of foresight. The Latin word for foresight is *providere*, which became the English word ‘to provide.’ This points to prudence as part of foresight, using resources wisely, showing discretion, good judgment and common sense when making decisions. Ask students to look for signs of foresight together with prudence as they begin to search for historical figures.

As an entry point into this project, invite your class to visualize the horizon, that imaginary line that forms an apparent boundary between land or sea and sky. The horizon exists in the eyes of an observer and changes as we travel and shift positions. Our brains need the horizon to orient our bodies in space, for we quickly become disoriented when the horizon vanishes from view. Encourage students to

imagine their characters gazing into the distance, wondering what lies just beyond the horizon.

Note that horizons (usually plural) is also used to describe the scope, the limits of a person's interests, perceptions and understanding. Discuss how learning by reading, traveling and meeting new people helps to expand one's horizons. As they research, have students collect information about factors that may have shaped (or limited) their characters perceptions and experiences in early Canada.

2. Organizing the content into a story form: What "heroic narrative" will allow us to integrate the content we wish to cover?

The story of exploration shapes all writing of history in Canada, with Christopher Columbus as the prototype, for better and for worse. The pattern of the heroic journey, as outlined by Joseph Campbell and others shapes to a large degree the stories we tell our children. From early signs of promise, then a call to adventure, setting out on a perilous journey, meeting allies and enemies, facing tests and trials, finding strength to overcome a great challenge, surviving (hopefully) and leaving a legacy to inspire others ... this familiar framework will structure our students' work. The hope is that as true life stories swerve and deviate from this pattern, probing questions will arise.

Developing Cognitive Tools:

3. Exploring Human Strengths and Emotions: How can students understand the human hopes, fears, passions or struggles that shape our knowledge of this topic? Several binary oppositions work as focal points in each life story. Your students may find it helpful to consider some of these:

Historical legacy hero/villain - success/failure - powerful/weak - smart/stupid - right/wrong - creative/destructive

Character timid/bold - modest/ arrogant - perfect/flawed - kind/cruel - ingenious/unimaginative ... etc.

4. What extremes of reality are related to the topic – biggest, hottest, oldest, richest? Students are sure to find strong examples of the first and foremost in their fields as they research the lives of "great" figures from early Canada such as Joseph Brant, John Redpath, Tecumseh, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Josiah Henson ... and many more.

5. Collecting and Organizing: What parts of the topic can students best explore in exhaustive detail? How can students present their knowledge in some systematic form?

Everyone will role-play one person from the past, so each student will be the expert on one life and legacy. After choosing one historical figure from the master list, students will find out more about the person through background research using textbooks, the Internet and other resources. Each student will then use this information to give classmates a clear picture of their character, as they bring them to life at the heritage party.

Provide your students with instructions such as these:

1. Using at least 3 sources, record information and document the source on information organizers (this information must be in your own words).

2. Now for the “analyzing” process. Examine the information and colour code it. Decide if it is useful, repetitive, and clear.
3. Then comes the creative “synthesizing” process. Organize the information so you can complete the character’s report card. Follow the format for the report outlined in class.

Looking Forward and Concluding

6. Towards Further Understanding: How can the unit develop embryonic forms of Philosophic and Ironic understanding? What cognitive tools characteristic of other forms of understanding can be introduced here?

This activity encourages philosophical thinking about what it means to ‘make history.’ Do heroes make history or do historians make heroes, in response to the needs of their own society? It is possible that the reputation of a figure from one era will be revised in light of current understandings. Or figures neglected in the past will now be celebrated. The 19th century was obsessed with heroes and heroic ideals, from George Hegel’s “world-historical individuals” who embodied the spirit of their age, to Thomas Carlyle’s views of “Great Men” such as Napoleon, who seize the popular imagination and make themselves the heroes of history. But of course, many people, known and unknown, worked with Napoleon to change France and Europe. The belief that great men can save society led to horrific disasters in the 20th century. Decide how keen are your 21st century learners to plunge into debates about whether one person can change history ... or not.

Encourage students to raise questions about their role models and attitudes to hero-worship. Do world-famous individuals make good role models for us today? Do we admire cultural heroes, even though they are not ‘saints’? Has celebrity status replaced respect for true heroism?

Every life story contains contradictions that are sure to spark ironic realizations. Most of us are kind and cruel, wise and foolish, foresighted and short-sighted ... at the same time. Our children will face these puzzling truths as they examine past lives and their own.

7. A Celebratory Ending: What is the best way of resolving the dramatic tension inherent in the unit? What communal project or activity will enable the students to experience and share this resolution?

Direct your students to follow these instructions:

Using articles found at home, create a costume to represent this historical character. It should reflect your person’s time, their role and their status in society. Be resourceful! Here you can “demonstrate” your understanding of the person. Then imagine what the person would say if they were alive today. You will arrive in character at a party where you will meet other important people from Canada’s past. You will interact appropriately with the others, introduce yourself, exchange greetings, recall past events and determine whether “your” contributions have lasted the test of time. Consider how to respond to those who question and criticize your efforts. Explore the worthiness of your person as warranting inclusion in the list of three in the new textbook. This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your imaginative understanding.

8. Assessment: How can one know whether the topic has been understood, its importance grasped and the content learned?

Evaluate engagement with and learning of material for this project by having students complete a report card for their chosen character. Offer these guidelines to organize their work.

You will rate and assign grades to your character based on these heroic qualities by writing a report card and defending your mark of A, B ... F. This report card will be shared in a discussion later to determine which three characters you think every Canadian should know. The report card must assess the worthiness of the individual you researched using these heroic qualities: innovation, perseverance, instrument for change, courage, power, hard work, and charity. Provide evidence and brief explanations as you synthesize and explain your understanding.

9. Student and Teacher Reflections:

How can one know that the content has engaged and stimulated students' imaginations? How can a teacher recognize and respond to varied levels of learning in the class? What activities will help consolidate and advance understanding beyond these lessons?

Before students leave the party, have them write one paragraph on the back of their report card listing the three people they have chosen and giving one good reason for each. These comments will show how closely they have been listening to each other, and how clearly they are judging how people make a name for themselves in history. Ask students to return to a key question for this course, "Who tells the story?" (or who makes history?). Listen for signs of growing awareness of the significance and complexity of the process of recording and writing history.

As teachers, reflect on class dynamics. Are students engaging with the topic and with each other in learning conversations as informed, intelligent, collaborative and imaginative participants? What forms of intervention from the teacher will prove most helpful to encourage and improve future interactions?

Resources

Websites:

Find the Dictionary of Canadian Biography online at this site:

<http://www.biographi.ca/index-e.html>

Many links for Grade 7 history are listed here:

<http://www.linktolearning.com/grade7history.htm>

Notes: Attached find criteria for evaluating student learning.

How People Make History

Grade Seven Social Science Project

Evaluation by Project Stages: Name _____ Form ____

Research

(Thinking) * Interview with Teacher (prior to heritage party)

appropriate number and variety of sources

all information accurate and relevant to research

information recorded in own words

raised several thoughtful questions
used information organizers appropriately, effectively /10

Report Card * Information

(Knowledge)

essential facts identified

facts accurate and complete

some evidence of foresight provided /20

(Application)

*Shaped our lives today /Conclusion:

3 chosen people with supporting evidence /3

(Communication)

*Accurate grammar, spelling on report card /2

Costume:

(Thinking)

*Appropriate for historical figure

*Appearance believable and authentic

*Resourcefulness in creation /5

Presentation:

(Communication)

*Most important data articulated

*Strong public speaking skills used

*Creative and authentic (no cue cards)

*Able to field questions without hesitation

* Interacted with others appropriately /10

TOTAL: / 50