

GeoNarratives

Cross-curricular Project-based Learning about People and Places



Each of us has rich stories in our past, stories that woven together with places. For some, it is the tale of our ancestors as they endured challenges that we can only imagine. For others, the places and stories are more immediate, still present within our lives. In all cases there is direct and indirect evidence hiding in language, food, and song, and written into physical and cultural landscapes.

This project will require building a “geography” and creating a “narrative;” specifically:

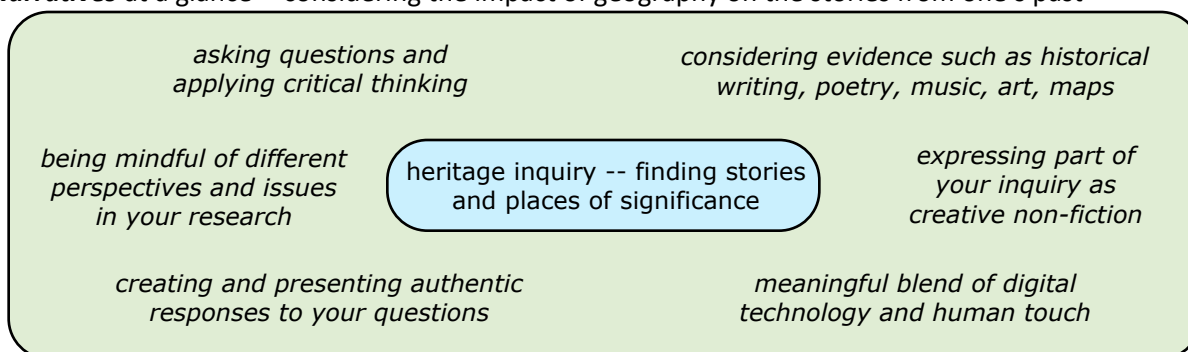
- heritage inquiry: taking the stories from your personal and cultural background and examining patterns, geographic relationships, and significance -- applying critical geographic thinking to an authentic context
- creative non-fiction¹: writing and creating narratives based on research -- perhaps there is some small cross-over into historical fiction and personal myth-making, but at its heart is the telling of a story that connects to your heritage
- embodiment: putting your senses, your artistic side, your physical presence into your research and presentation -- creative expressions of the parts of your research that you find most compelling

Aside from the critical thinking and creativity involved, some specific skills will be developed:

- careful use of technology: placing a digital stamp on this project -- use of an online portfolio, use of technology for research and/or expression, experimenting with something new
- literature review and wordtake: surveying the reading and media that relates to your inquiry and using some of it to explore Self and Other, or global issues that impacted your own backstory

This is a broad framework created by your teacher, but it is important that you design the questions that will allow this to be meaningful to you. As your teacher, I can provide as much structure as you think you need to be successful with this project, including narrowing down your topics, suggesting courses of action, and helping you embed “benchmarks of geographic inquiry.”² With all this in mind you are free to take this project in new directions, as long as we consider certain learning outcomes that are basic to English Language Arts and Geography, including a high standard for writing.

GeoNarratives at a glance -- considering the impact of geography on the stories from one’s past



The final presentation of your GeoNarrative will take in three parts:

1. sharing the part of your portfolio that shows your heritage research, literature review, and critical analysis
2. sharing some or all of the creative non-fiction (or historical fiction) that you have built around your research
3. sharing a performative piece that you made to express or symbolize the deep part of your learning during this project -- something that shows your unique abilities
4. use of at least one effective of digital technology in the process of project creation or presentation

¹ creative non-fiction combines the literary techniques commonly found in fiction with the writer’s perspective and factual information based on research... creativity plus inquiry plus personal narrative

² <http://thielmann.blogspot.ca/2012/10/benchmarks-of-geographic-thinking.html>

Project Steps (not always in this sequence)³:

1. look at and assess example of creative non-fiction, heritage inquiry, and “geographies”
2. develop questions and designs for your project
3. accumulate primary and secondary evidence and conduct a variety of research
4. co-develop aspects of your project and evaluation criteria with student groups and the teacher
5. create the pieces that make up your project
6. prepare the pieces for sharing, including presentation
7. share and present your project
8. reflection, celebration, and evaluation

Key words: authenticity causes change culture evidence family geography heritage history identity judgment language literature patterns people perspectives place relevance significance story symbolism time

Examples of stories that would work well as GeoNarratives:

- immigration experiences, so different depending on location and time period
- wartime from civilian or a soldier’s perspective
- grandma’s garden, grandpa’s workshop; practicing bygone skills and trades
- working on the land; pioneering and homesteading
- outdoor lifestyles, a tradition of hunting or fishing
- managing a farm and family, homemaking in the past

Examples of global issues that may be examined within your project:

- a study of racism/tolerance, language acquisition, or labour market among new immigrants
- evolving role and treatment of women in various places, cultures, and time periods
- aboriginal ways of knowing and relationship between First Nations and the broader society
- the power of wealth: studies of “class” and differences between rich and poor
- citizenship, rights and democracy: how much freedom or “agency” did historic groups really have
- the idea of sustainability and the relationship that different peoples have with the environment
- grief and hope: how did historic groups cope with challenges (could tie in to religious studies)

Examples of evidence that would support a GeoNarrative:

- non-fiction, documentaries, history books and websites, academic studies
- novels, short stories, works of fiction and poetry from the time period and place that you are examining
- artwork or crafts such as paintings, architecture, sketches, sculptures, carvings, jewelry, tools, heirlooms
- primary evidence, journals, memoirs, recollections, artifacts, photographs, recipes, travelogues, interviews
- genealogical websites, graveyards, government records, family history books
- existing “human geography” connected to your topics (studies that parallel your inquiry)

Examples of creative non-fiction:

- a documentary-style composition that synthesizes your research and uses powerful, polished, writing
- story that combines elements of your research, perhaps following the life of a family that is lodged in time and place... maybe it is written in the first person from one particular perspective
- a long poem, perhaps “epic” in nature, or a play, that recounts the story and locale of your research

Examples of a performative piece -- “embodied learning”:

- ➡ musical creation (e.g. write a song), series of short poems, interpretive dance, historical re-enactment, water colour painting, original poetry, food creation, a model or diorama, puppet show, simulation, class activity or demonstration, video reflection, group skit, narrated slideshow, interactive display, build something

Examples of a digital stamp:

- use of QR codes to link to key evidence, like a reader’s guide for someone to understand your work
- creating an attractive space in your digital portfolio to display some of your work (lots of apps to try)
- using video or computer animation for part of your project
- conducting interviews via Skype and archiving part of it as portfolio evidence
- use of social media for “curating” (assessing and organizing) research or telling/sharing a story

³ What is project-based learning? Here is an example: <http://www.thinkinginmind.com/cigar-box-project/>