

## THE ECHO PROJECT

B.C. Social Studies 11 • Heritage/Cultural Inquiry-based learning • Students making connections between the living past and critical themes in Canadian Identity

### **Project background:**

The students I have been teaching throughout my career belong to the “Millennial” or “Echo Generation” -- children of the Baby Boomers and more recently of the Gen Xers. This demographic cohort is one whose grandparents, great-grandparents or other elderly people they know were born before the end of WWII and have lived through and remember some of the most significant events from 1930-1970, as well as their own ordinary and extraordinary stories. The Echo Generation is the last group of students that will have a living connection to those who served in and endured World War II. An echo is also a great metaphor for the act of learning valuable lessons from the past and carrying them on for one’s own benefit and the benefit of those that follow. I designed this project in order for students see what they could learn about Canadian Identity by reaching back at least two generations for interview subjects and primary sources. While this project has many spin-off outcomes, including the development of thinking and research skills, the direct goal is to help students understand the personal challenges and significances for Canada of events from the mid 20th Century and the WWI era in particular.

### **Why do this project with students?**

As this project has evolved over the last six years, I have been gobsmacked by the kinds of meaningful connections students have made and the stories they have revived. Social Studies 11 is a busy course -- it covers most of Canada’s history and identity in the 20th century, a unit on human geography focusing on global population and development, plus a civics unit focusing on government and politics. Finding the time for any kind of project-based learning is difficult, but well worth it. The reason is that learning sticks when student identity is engaged. My students remember their interviews and their project work long after they have forgotten about my lessons on this or that. They come to realize they are agents in their own history because they bear a responsibility for intergenerational knowledge.

I’ve posted additional thoughts about this project at <http://thielmann.blogspot.ca/2012/06/echo-project.html>

### **Advice for Teachers**

Take some time to read through the student guide to the Echo Project at <http://thielmann.ca/echo-project.html>. This site contains more or less the same info as the student handout which is linked alongside some student examples.

It is important not to lay out the whole project for students all at once. Spend some time talking about ideas like learning from the past, the value in interviewing the elderly, and soliciting stories about the student's ancestors that might form the basis of a project. In fact, I use these kinds of discussions to begin the course and get to know the students. Showing past student exemplars is also useful if you have access to some.

Like other forms of inquiry or project-based learning, the Echo Project rolls out in steps and should centre around an essential question. Have a few check-in benchmarks so that students do not get mired in the process. Having a focus such as WWII or the Depression is one way to simplify this project. I have included many other potential topics and paths, though, because it suggests that students should sometimes go with the stories they uncover and relate it to events later rather than pick a topic and try to find meaningful primary sources and interview subjects after.

## **Assessment**

The student handout contains a rubric of sorts for assessment. There are four criteria that we use to guide the project:

- Evidence of Understanding
- Evidence of Critical Thinking
- Evidence of Authenticity
- Evidence of Process

Each of these can be scored using a progressive scale, e.g. 1 = basic, 2 = developing, 3 = emerging, 4 = proficient, and 5 = mastery. The total out of 20 can stand as a project mark or the scaled criteria can be used to inform other assessment regimes, student "competencies," or portfolio contributions. You can also apply your own descriptive rubric to the project criteria.

I would suggest that students self-assess using this rubric (perhaps without numbers attached) plus a chance to comment on what they learned. The <http://thielmann.ca/echo-project.html> has a link to sample assessment templates. I use the same form to jot down notes during the presentation and make a copy for students. It is up to you as to how to blend the student and teacher assessment. I typically use the student assessment to inform my own and confirm whether I am seeing the same sort of work as they are. It is unfortunate that we feel obligated to attach marks to the Echo Project at all, because the students derive such meaning from the inquiry, even the ones whose projects may not be polished or fully developed.

## **Follow-up**

I have been a part of a collective of Social Studies educators since 2010 called the Pacific Slope Consortium. Together we share projects and encourage dialogue about critical thinking. You might see "Pacific Slope" on many of my document footers along with the creative commons symbol which means share with acknowledgement. If you would like to share your experience with using this project, see more exemplars, share or gain feedback on one of your own projects, let us know. My contact info is posted at <http://thielmann.ca>.