

Social Studies 9 Skookum Story Project - Notes for parents/guardians:

“Skookum” comes from the Chinook Jargon - a trade language that developed in BC and the West Coast during the 1800s. It means “big” or “strong” and has crossed over to become a word in the English language. This project is about telling a strong story that draws on the student’s roots and culture. The story will be told to the class and will include a visual element such as a poster, pictures, objects, video, or slideshow.

First of all, “family” and “culture” can mean lots of things. For some, a family is simply an inner circle of trusted people. Similarly, culture can be about beliefs and values picked up from experience and society, and is not necessarily tied to ethnicity. Students will decide what family means and who to talk to start gathering information. Parents/guardians are encouraged to be actively involved in this project -- they often come to learn as much as the students do about their heritage. Every family has some interesting stories about settling in Canada, moving around the country, or building homes, jobs, traditions, and memories... Students are asked: what’s your story, what are some interesting beliefs that have been held in your family? Where did they originate? How about cultural activities? Food? Music? Special Skills? What can students find out about immigration stories, pioneering or homesteading, traditions, unusual jobs, war service, attitudes at the past, important events in your family or community, interesting connections to history

Were any members of your family connected to world events or the history of Canada? Wars, railroads, rebellions, settlements? What are some “ordinary” achievements in your family, like clearing land, building a business, raising livestock, or surviving the Depression? What kinds of stories do you know about that relate to immigration, pioneering or homesteading, old traditions, unusual jobs, war service, attitudes at the past, important events in your family or community, interesting connections to history? Sometimes students (or even their parents/guardians) do not feel connecting to any particular culture. These students often focus on cultural traditions that exists in the community around them, or look at how culture is developing around them, e.g. local history.

Parents/guardians can help students complete this project by pushing them a bit to talk to older relatives (such as grandparents) or other elders. This might also involve suggesting some interview questions. They can also help locate interesting artifacts, heirlooms, documents, and photos around the house and helping them dig into the stories behind them. They can also help students design “critical thinking” inquiry questions.

CONCEPTS	EXAMPLE OF CRITICAL THINKING
significance	what parts of the story are of an importance that goes beyond the immediate situation? what makes something “historically significant?”
evidence	objects and documents conceal as much as they reveal -- what’s going on with each source? what story does it tell? what kind of evidence is needed to tell the whole story?
patterns & change	hearing the old stories -- how are things different now and how are they the same? what are some the timeless patterns that seem to be in play?
cause & effect	did some of the interesting choices, local events, global trends, or random circumstances have serious consequences for the family?
perspectives	do different bits of evidence tell conflicting stories about events? what kinds of different points of view can be found in family stories and sources?
ethical dimensions	sometimes stories compel us to action, or highlight serious issues in history; are their any important lessons to be learned or judgements to be made from examining the past?

Students will complete these steps, although not necessarily in this order:

1. Find out more about your cultural heritage. This often starts by talking to the elders in your family
2. Decide what part of your “story” interests you for further inquiry.
3. Gather evidence and conduct research about either your family’s roots or your culture, with special attention to stories that have a connection to history, place, and ideas.
4. Design some inquiry questions to help guide your project.
5. Organize your evidence and response to questions into a project with spoken and visual elements.
6. Get some feedback from family, friends, and your teacher(s) before finalizing your story and presentation.

EXAMPLES

Here are some examples of Skookum Story elements that last semester's students uncovered through their research -- many of these stories were unknown to the students when they started -- some of them were even new for their parents or family members! The stuff in brackets is what students used as evidence.

1. Family left Ireland due to potato famine (journals). Scottish Immigration to Canada 1906 (ship passenger list). WWI vet - Canadian gunner (attestation papers, photo). Immigration from Utah to Alberta with a family connection to Alexander Galt, a father of Confederation (journals, photo). Impact of the death of a family member in Crimean War in the 1850s (journal)
2. Great x 5 Grandparents (Scottish) part of the Great Migration to Canada 1820s: ship to Quebec (37 days), steamboat up St. Lawrence, wagon to Upper Canada (interview, journals). G]Family migration to Alberta; worked on CNR, brothers went to WWI (journals, photos, interview)
3. Loyalist family, many buried by a New Brunswick church built in 1789 (interview). Family contains a WWI vet and many Caribou pioneers, goldminers, and rodeo pros (interviews, photos, 1875 voters' list). New-found connection to Shuswap Aboriginal Nation (interview)
4. Ontario Loyalists, later migrated to Prairies (interviews, family documents). Family departing Saskatchewan for BC upon Tommy Douglas' election (interview). Metis family stories, godfather was Gabriel Dumont, one member became policeman in 1930s but was discharged when a friend used his police vehicle in a bank robbery (interviews). Great-grandfather WWII captured at Dieppe raid, survived war but later went missing while goldpanning (interviews). Great-grandparents emigrated from Fukushima, Japan to Vancouver, interned in Tashme camp 1941, later left for beet farm in Alberta (map, government identification card issued to Japanese internees, photos, interview)
5. Swedish family legacy and immigration in 1870 (family tree). Descendent of Chief Gw'eh (Kwah) of Ft. St. James, bearer of a pre-contact metal knife (got through trade) and involved in story of early fur-trade, James Douglas, etc. (interview, memorial plaque, photo of knife from museum). interwoven stories of multiple Aboriginal relatives from different nations (interviews, family photos). Father is current hereditary chief of Beaver Clan; ancestors permitted to switch to this clan due to clan imbalance caused by Spanish Flu of 1918 (interviews). Horrific stories about family members and others at Lejac residential school at Fraser Lake, and uncles and aunts taken in the "Sixties Scoop" (interviews, photos)
6. Immigration from India to California in 1908 by steamship (interview). Great x2 Grandfather a founding member and of building sponsor of a Sikh temple in California, also made bombs in the 1920s for the Indian Freedom Fighters back in India (interview, photos)
7. Three different WWII vets in family, involvements with shipbuilding, Battle of the Bulge, and liberation of Italy (photos, interview). Family member who helped construct beach features at local provincial park (photo, interview). Great-uncle, a jockey, who rode Secretariat and was later thrown from a horse and paralyzed in 1978 (interview, photo)
8. Two stories of marriages between German and Dutch family members that were rejected by family in 1800s (journals). Homesteading activities in the early 1900s, including use of home remedies still in use by family today (interview, direct observation). Attempts to learn more about push factors for Dutch immigration to Canada met multiple dead ends - story was known but family members didn't want to talk about it 150 years later (interview)
9. Great x2 Grandfather who fought and died at the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel; his will was made 7 days prior, his grave was later shelled in 1918 (multiple military records kept both by family and available online)

SUPPORT

Parents/guardians that have questions about this project or any other aspect of their child's progress in Social Studies can contact the teacher at gtrhielmann@sd57.bc.ca. As well the teacher has a website at <http://thielmann.ca> -- this included notes about the project under "Resources" and other info for students and parents.