

Skookum Stories - BC Social Studies 9 Project - Teacher Guide

PROJECT WEBSITE most of this guide can be found as pdfs at <http://www.thielmann.ca/skookum-stories.html>

PROJECT OVERVIEW -- THE VALUE OF DOING HERITAGE INQUIRY

Students set out to find out more about their cultural heritage. This often starts by settling on what "family" could mean and to make an inventory of the people in their life they could talk to and what evidence they might have about the past. Next student decide what parts of their "story" as they know it interests them for further inquiry and then make the effort to talk to elders, preferably two or more generations back, but just one if that is not possible.

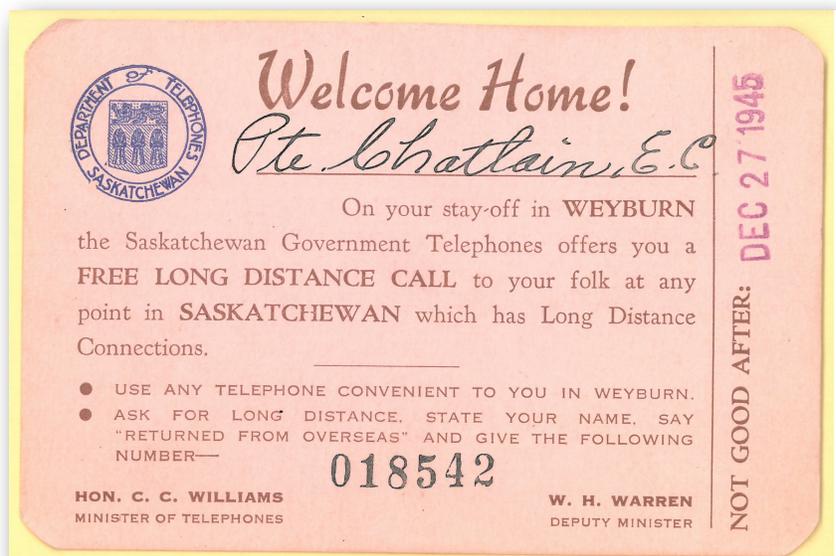
Students gather evidence and conduct research about either their family's roots or their culture, with special attention to stories that have a connection to history, place, and ideas. Students for whom "family" is a real challenge are often led towards local history & community research, or broader sources that deal more with culture than family. Along the way, students design inquiry questions to help guide their work, and organize their evidence and response to their questions. As the project progresses, they build in spoken and visual elements and get feedback from friends, family, and teacher(s) before finalizing the story and presentation. Finally, they share their story collection with class, share the visual elements (usually artifacts or sources), and wrap up with a contribution to a Skookum feast.

The inquiry cycle leading up to the presentations typically happens off and on for about two months during the second half of the course), with some class time devoted specifically to research techniques and project work. The presentation cycle takes about two weeks (13 hours) for a class of 25, with another class devoted to sharing of food.

Specific outcomes for this project include: 1) Working with "competencies" -- the historical thinking concepts that are now embedded in the BC Social Studies curriculum, 2) Making personal connections with history, specifically themes and events from the Social Studies 9 curriculum, and 3) developing Research, Inquiry, and Communication skills. Unofficially, two of the most important outcomes are to become confident as individuals who have important stories to tell, and to keep alive the evidence of the past that too often go the graves of the people who have gathered it or were witnesses to history."

EXAMPLE OF A STUDENT-DERIVED SOURCE

The source came from a students' family collection of "stuff." The private who owned this card is a student's great-grandfather. What makes the item special is that is both a personal connection to history and also primary source evidence of shared or collective history, in this case a link to WWII. This source could be used to ask or answer questions about who went to war? what was it like coming home? what did communities do for returning soldiers?, and so on.



THE FOLLOWING IS THE CONTENT FROM THE STUDENT PROJECT GUIDE

“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 your own 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.

Steps (not necessarily in order -- feel free to move around):

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.¹
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.²
4. Design some inquiry questions to help guide your project.³
5. Organize your evidence and response to questions into a project with spoken and visual elements.⁴
6. Get some feedback from family, friends, and your teacher(s) before finalizing your story and presentation.

Ideas for gathering stories:

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.

Every family has some interesting stories about settling in Canada, moving around the country, or building homes, jobs, traditions, and memories... 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?

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?

Maybe “family” is not the right approach for everyone, maybe you want to look into the cultural traditions of the general group of people you consider as part of your heritage. Many students feel a strong connection to “adopted” cultures and traditions. Sometimes these things come more from the community than the family.

Sometimes the best way to gather information for this project is with an interview. How to do that?

Pick someone in your family, or an elderly person you know, who can share some knowledge of the past. You can start with these questions, or make your own. Think carefully about how you will ask your questions, how you will record the responses, and how you will present the results. Be a good listener, and give the interview subject a chance to expand on their comments. Sometime it helps to say “can you tell me more about that?”

¹ If you have a diverse background, you could pick one aspect or many. Students who can’t connect to the culture/heritage angle can look at how culture is developing around them, e.g. local history.

² Examples: immigration stories, pioneering or homesteading, unusual jobs, war service, attitudes at the time, important events in your family (of the world), connections to ideas that come up in Social Studies.

³ We’ll spend more time with this. The questions will relate to significance, evidence, then-and-now, different perspectives, and sense of place.

⁴ Each student will be given about 10-15 minutes of presentation time in class. We will also have a feast — and opportunity to share some food that is special to your family or comes from your culture

Sample questions (pick some and make some of your own):

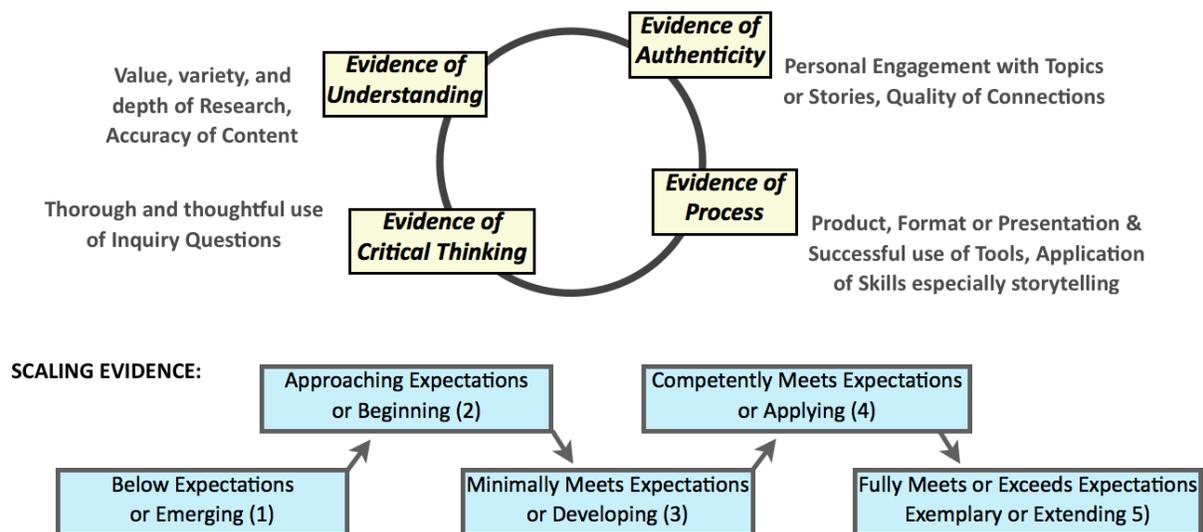
1. Where/when were you born? Describe your home, street, or town at the time.
2. When you were growing up, what were your favourite tv or radio programs?
3. What were your favourite activities or pastimes as a youth?
4. What was your family like? (jobs, personalities, skills, challenges)
5. How did your family come to live in Canada (or at least the town you grew up in)?
6. What did you and other boys and girls wear? drive?
7. What were some events (local or global) that you remember from your childhood?
8. Did you or anyone in your family have a connection to any important local, national, or global events?
9. How did you meet your spouse?
10. How was the world different then or now?
11. Are there any special heirlooms that have been passed down in your family?
12. Anything else, an interesting story?

To start, just come up with a list of people you could interview and start picking out or writing down the questions you might ask them. Later, schedule a time for the actual interview.

What else can you include, or do to gather information for this project?

- ▶ family history, family tree — more for the stories than the names and dates
- ▶ scrapbooks and photo albums — look for interesting images with stories behind them
- ▶ objects of interest heirlooms, and artifacts — what story do they tell?
- ▶ letters, documents, old journals — while often limited in perspective, these are valuable sources
- ▶ maps, print or online — “place” is a very important aspect of all stories
- ▶ library print sources — great for understanding the context of your family or culture
- ▶ online sources — specific to your heritage or more generally about your culture

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA



HERITAGE INQUIRY AND STORYTELLING DISCUSSION PROMPTS

These prompts work well as a:

- a) take-home activity (prepare for the discussion by digging around at home and asking questions)
- b) handout to individual students who are having troubles getting started on the project
- c) group or class activity

For the group activity:

Groups of 4 or 5 -- each person chooses a prompt -- think and share -- ask what is it, and what's the story behind it -- for classes over 20, duplicate Groups -- can involve a share-out of highlights -- can lead to discussion of significance, evidence, patterns, causality, perspectives, judgement -- can be used to inform discussion on heritage or could launch a broader heritage inquiry or project -- can be done more than once by switching

Group A:

- ▶ the oldest object in your house (e.g. heirloom)
- ▶ three objects from your home that represent your culture or heritage
- ▶ how your family (any branch) came to live where they do (e.g. city, province, country)
- ▶ besides Canadian, another nation or culture with which you identify and what this looks like
- ▶ a historical event (any level of significance) to which your family is connected

Group B:

- ▶ something in your home with no monetary value but has sentimental value
- ▶ an old photo from your home with a story behind it
- ▶ one or two values or beliefs that characterize your family
- ▶ a family story that, if told to strangers, would hold their attention
- ▶ the oldest connection (e.g. to an ancestor) you can make in your family for which you know some details

Group C:

- ▶ something interesting in your home from the past that you have displayed or put up somewhere
- ▶ two objects in your room that could be used to explain Canadian (or your) culture to a foreigner
- ▶ an experience from the past that seems to be shared again and again in your family (e.g. over multiple generations)
- ▶ a tradition that has some roots in your family (e.g. goes way back)
- ▶ what you ask if you could interview a deceased member of your family

Group D:

- ▶ an object in your house that was once an everyday object but is no longer used (e.g. tool, implement)
- ▶ an object or heirloom that you would pass on to a grandchild (assuming you have one)
- ▶ a way of knowing, acting, or doing something that might be unique (or at least important) to your family
- ▶ something about your heritage or culture for which you are proud
- ▶ something sad or funny that happened in your family's past that you can share

INTERVIEW TIPS

Students will typically interview an elder (such as a grandparent) to orient their project and get a sense of what stories linger in their background.

A guide for conducting interviews is posted at http://www.thielmann.ca/uploads/2/4/2/6/24266342/interview_tips.pdf.

Aside from using the “Heritage Inquiry and Storytelling Prompts” as a basis for interview questions, here are some sample questions that can be used to get things going:

1. Where/when were you born? Describe your home, street, or town at the time.
2. When you were growing up, what were your favourite tv or radio programs?
3. As a young person which Canadian musician, artist, or writer did you admire most?
4. What were your favourite activities or pastimes as a youth?
5. What was your family like? (jobs, personalities, skills, challenges)
6. How did your family come to live in Canada (or at least the town you grew up in)?
7. What did you and other boys and girls wear? drive?
8. What were some events (local or global) that you remember from your childhood?
9. Did you or anyone in your family have a connection to any important local, national, or global events?
10. How did you meet your spouse?
11. How was the world different then or now?
12. Are there any special heirlooms, keepsakes, or objects that have been passed down in your family?
13. What is the story behind them? Does anyone else know about these stories?
14. Do you or anyone in the family have a connection to the military or war service?
15. Do you or anyone in the family have a connection to well-known people or events of significance?
16. What other stories or traditions have been passed down that I should know about?

APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING CONCEPTS (Benchmarks of Historical Thinking)

How do students apply critical thinking concepts to the Skookum Stories project? How can they use them to make inquiry questions that will guide their projects? Have students develop a question for each of the concepts, and suggest what kinds of evidence or research they'd like to do go answer the question.

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?

A template for developing inquiry questions based on the critical thinking concepts is posted at: http://www.thielmann.ca/uploads/2/4/2/6/24266342/critical_thinking_steps.pdf.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

Here are some examples of Skookum Story elements that one 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)