

TOP 10s IN CANADA

Nick Brune, Ontario

INTENDED GRADE/SUBJECT AREA

Secondary (but adaptable for primary grades) in any subject area

CONCEPTS & SKILLS

- The great person in history, research, detecting bias, evaluation, organizing, establishment of criteria, active listening, articulating and arguing, ranking and ordering.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- briefly examine major individuals and events of Canadian history;
- prioritise those individuals and events (and also establish criteria for ranking);
- listen, argue, and discuss their own rankings with those of other students;
- establish a class consensus of the Top 10 Lists;
- examine and analyze the process of creating the Top 10 Lists;
- write an analytical paper on why such lists are popular, why they have been asked to compile these lists at the beginning of their history class, identify and briefly explain the problems and challenges in creating the lists, and finally, identify and explain the biases that appear in the lists.

RECOMMENDED TIME FRAME

Three to four days

Although this lesson or series of lessons can be used anywhere throughout a course, it is recommended that it is ideally used at the beginning of the course (or perhaps unit). It is a useful “ice-breaker” activity in that it gets students meeting and talking with their peers. It also pools their knowledge. It serves as both an effective introduction and overview.

ACTIVITY

The steps to this activity are as follows:

1. Decide what Top 10 lists will be done. Typically they would be selected from the following: Top 10 Canadians, Top 10 Events, Top 10 Written “Words” (in the large sense – books, speeches, documents, expressions, etc.), Top 10 Politicians, Top 10 Artists (again in the fullest sense of the term), Top 10 Women, Top 10 Successes, Top 10 Failures.
2. Make a three-column chart – rank, person/event/etc., and reason. The reason column should be the largest. Run them off and distribute them.
3. Explain to the students the entire activity so that they can get a sense of it.
4. The initial ranking will be an individual/personal one. This should be done by the student him/herself, in rough in their notes, either done or not done with

research, depending on the discretion of the teacher. This is usually most effectively assigned as homework.

5. The second ranking is conducted in groups of three wherein students must, within twenty or thirty minutes, create a group consensus of their own Top 10. They can approach that process in whatever way they think optimal.
6. After the second group consensus is completed, a class consensus is obtained by going around and having each group record their results. The teacher simply stands at the board and records the results. Every time a group ranks someone or something as #1, it receives 10 points, #2 – 9 points, etc. Then simply tally up the results.
7. Record the Class Consensus list. Depending on how much time the teacher wishes to spend, a brief thumbnail explanation of the people and events recorded can either be offered by the teacher or by the students.
8. The first writing assignment emerges in having told students to think about the process as they're going through it. It would be a four paragraph discussion of An Analysis of Compiling the Top 10 Lists. In the opening paragraph, they would examine and explain why Top 10 lists are so popular (Letterman, music, movies, best dressed, etc.) and then segue that into the utility of doing those kinds of lists in a history class (sharing knowledge, ice-breaker, creating criteria, introduction, and overview).

The second paragraph is their identification and brief explanation of some of the difficulties in compiling such lists (limited knowledge, specialized knowledge, establishing criteria*, comparing “apples to oranges” (can you compare the impact of scientist to that of a politician to that of writer, etc.)

The fourth paragraph is perhaps the last of the difficulties identified in the third paragraph – that of biases. In this fourth paragraph, they have an opportunity to identify and briefly explain some of the biases that emerge in their own lists, their group lists, and the class consensus lists. Typically, some of these biases include: masculine bias, contemporary biases, political bias, “cliché” bias (people, such as for example Laura Secord, are quite commonly included but their actual impact is more questionable), and perhaps regional bias.

** The criteria that is offered is “the greatest impact on the greatest number of people for the greatest time.”*

EVALUATION

This is entirely up to the teacher’s discretion. It could be a major assignment or on the other hand, since quite commonly it is done right at the beginning of a course, the evaluation could be less intense and more informal. Students should definitely be evaluated on the Writing Assignment. They may also be assessed on their contribution to group and/or class discussions. They may also be evaluated for their research efforts in that component of the activity.

About the Educator

Nick Brune has written history textbooks, videos, teaching packages and articles. He has given workshops and presentations throughout Canada. He has been the educational writer for the award-winning CBC-TV *News in Review* that reaches over two million students across Canada. His passion for the discipline and study of history is both evident and contagious. The integrity of history, he believes, demands that students discover not only what happened and why, but its importance and how it speaks to their own lives.