

NEW BRUNSWICK INTERNMENT CAMP: SURVIVING NATIONAL HYSTERIA

Ed Caissie, New Brunswick

INTENDED GRADE /SUBJECT AREA

Grades 7 to 9 History, Social Studies, Language Arts

CONCEPTS

- Using artifacts as tools for historical investigation.
- Demonstrating how the details of artifacts reveal much about the community that produced it.
- The significance of oral history.
- The application of skills and knowledge in the field.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- apply the skills needed to work and get along with other people;
- solve problems and make responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking;
- use a wide range of processes, techniques, tools, and materials to gather information, solve problems, create and evaluate products, and communicate results;
- describe the experiences of immigrants and refugees;
- describe significant events in the past and ways in which they have contributed to the development of Canada.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the World War II, there were twenty-six internment camps set up across Canada. One of those was located at Ripples, New Brunswick, 34 kilometres east of Fredericton. The camps were established to hold various types of prisoners thought to be dangerous to the security of the country.

The Ripples Camp housed 711 Jews from 1940-41. Most of these people had escaped from the Holocaust of Nazi Germany and fled to Great Britain. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill asked Canada and Australia to imprison these refugees, reasoning that there may be spies within the Jewish group.

I had just started developing alternative programs for at-risk students in grades 7 to 9 in the fall of 1992. There were between eight and 12 students who were identified as at-risk for various reasons. All of them had trouble dealing with school, classmates, authority, etc.

A team project was necessary so that these students could work together in preparation for re-integration into the regular classroom.

It was decided that students would be involved in an archaeological dig at the Ripples Internment Camp site in order to begin an historical research project involving the camp.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Background preparation included reading two books on the Ripples Camp: *Both Sides of the Wire, Volumes I & II* by Ted Jones.

I related the story of the camp to the students in my own words as several of the students had serious reading problems.

The students were then told that I wanted to create a class project involving the camp.

After much discussion, it was decided by the group that we would build a model of the camp, conduct research around it and go on an archaeological dig at the former site.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Each student worked about an hour/day individually or collectively on the project.

Student assignments for the building of the model were assigned according to each student's individual needs and strengths.

Some took on the task of the mathematical scaling of the camp, while others explored materials to be used, methods of producing the scaled camp, cost of the materials and research to establish authenticity of items.

It was not long into the project that we realized that to finish the model, we would need extra help.

Before the model and archaeological digs were completed, we had 60 extra students involved in one manner or another from the regular classrooms. This involved cooperation and teamwork from the staff, which was done willingly because they too were very interested in the project.

A mini-model was set so that students could experiment with working out problems before the final work on the model started.

Once items from the archaeological dig were put on display in the school, it peaked the interest of the community. A number of events resulted. First, stories about the camp began to emerge from the older generation, which prompted us to collect these stories on video. Members of the community, as well as people from across the province, began donating or loaning us items made by the Jews who were imprisoned at the camp.

We then had someone from the York Sunbury Museum teach us how to care for and catalogue artifacts (to date, we have over 300 artifacts—paintings, rings made of dimes and nickels, jewellery boxes, lamps, cigarette cases, lights, ships in bottles, etc.) All of these items were made by the prisoners and sold to the guards for money, cigarettes and soap.

CONCLUSION

Eight months after we started, the completed model and artifacts, including two life-size mannequins (one dressed as a prisoner and one as a guard) went on display at a heritage fair in Fredericton. Since that time, the model and artifacts have been to 15 locations and over 20,000 people have viewed them. All 71 participating students are listed inside the model along with the information about the camp.

This project left the students, community and the province with physical evidence of what they had accomplished and showed them how their knowledge and skills could be used in a practical manner.

Local history is a great way to hook kids on the fun and love of history. A project such as the New Brunswick Internment Camp can be accomplished in a regular class. All one needs is flexibility, creativity and support from administration and staff.

About the Educator

Ed Caissie taught at Minto Elementary/Junior High, New Brunswick. In order to motivate twelve at-risk students, he developed a local history unit called the New Brunswick Internment Camp Project that involved researching and documenting the camp's history. This project included three stages: creating a model of the Minto-Ripples Internment Camp; starting a museum with artifacts that had been buried at the site or donated from people in the community; and interviewing people who were connected with the camp.

Ed Caissie and his students have received provincial and national awards and grants for their work with the project.