

SMALL GROUP ACTING: ENLIVENING CANADIAN HISTORY

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INTENDED AGE/SUBJECT AREAS

Grade 10/ Drama, History, Language Arts, Music

RECOMMENDED TIME FRAME

One to four periods, for any or all units throughout the course.

BACKGROUND

Small Group Acting (SGA) attempts to re-live, portray, analyze and role-play the events of Canada's history. They work best when the actors make a real commitment to bring the events and facts to life with costumes, music and documents. SGA can be set up to work throughout the year. We use them each unit, often as a review exercise of the main people and events of the unit under study. We will often set groups at the beginning of the year, allowing students to work with a certain group of students that they might not work with otherwise. SGA at its best brings the actors and the audience into a virtual time machine, transporting the class back into history.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of the elements of Canadian identity;**
- demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which outside forces and events have shaped Canada's policies;**
- ask questions, identify problems, and effectively use historical research methods to investigate topics and issues in history;**
- use a variety of information sources effectively when researching historical topics or issues, accurately record relevant information, and then organize this information in a meaningful way;**
- analyse and evaluate information when researching historical topics or issues;**
- communicate effectively the results of research in presentations, and demonstrate an ability to apply insights from history to other situations;**
- make reasoned generalizations or appropriate predictions based on research;**
- demonstrate competence in research and writing (e.g., gathering information, building an argument, supporting the argument with evidence, writing clearly, editing);**
- express ideas and arguments in a coherent manner during discussions and debates, or in graphic displays;**
- demonstrate, after participating in dramatizations of historical events, insights into historical figures' situations and decisions.**

ACTIVITY

Usually in the first unit, the concept of Small Group Acting is introduced. The teacher should explain the importance of storyboarding and making a good script. Basic drama techniques are useful here, and you might want to bring in a drama teacher to discuss acting, blocking and costume considerations.

Groups of 4-6 are established and assigned a number. For the rest of the year minimal instructions will be required as all you will need to do is assign topics (e.g.: Group 3 is doing the Battle of Normandy, the students will know exactly what they need to do to present the Battle of Normandy).

Students are given a set amount of time to prepare the skit. Normally we introduce the topics and give students two to three 75-minute periods to prepare their skits. It is useful to start on a Wednesday, giving students Thursday, Friday and the weekend to improve the final product.

In the allotted time they must:

- brainstorm ideas (identify the main ideas and how they want to perform the skit)
- develop a script (they cannot read from a paper during their performance)
- establish what types of media they will be using
- develop a costume list and who will bring what
- practice the skit (the performance should be professional)
- perform the skit for the class

Often near the end of the course when students are comfortable with SGA you can do SGA speed rounds, where you hand out topics and have students improvise on the spot as a review activity. The time allotted depends on teacher expectations, time constraints and the students' involvement.

SGA is a great stepping stone for Heritage Minutes, short film productions, etc. Enriched or Accelerated students can establish a "Canadian History Film Club" where they develop a movie about an area of Canadian history over the course of the term.

MATERIALS / RESOURCES

Make sure that students list what they will need, typically:

- CD player or stereo
- Overhead projector (useful for creating backgrounds)
- Costumes if available

The initial SGA will require the following handouts:

- Instructions: <http://www.markville.ss.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/history/history/cansga.html>
- Storyboarding: http://www.histori.ca/historica/eng_site/minutes/make2.html
- Blank Storyboard:
<http://www.markville.ss.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/history/history/cansgastoryboard.html>

Students will be assessed at all stages through observation, questioning and teacher suggestions for improvement, ideas and energy. They should be given a copy of:

- **SGA Role Play Assessment Rubric**

http://www.markville.ss.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/history/history/can_sgarubric.html

- **Group Evaluation Rubric**

http://www.markville.ss.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/history/history/can_sgaprocessrubric.html

About the Educators

Adrienne Chong and Mark Melnyk have developed teaching and assessment strategies that breathe life into their Canadian history classes. Role play, heritage albums, heritage fairs as well as course packs of primary documents provide students of varying aptitudes and interests strong conduits for learning. Their *History Classroom of the Future* activity involves the construction of websites that are used at Markville Secondary and by educators across Canada.