

OUR TOWN: PRESENTING PERSONAL RESEARCH & OBSERVATIONS

Cindy Hanson, Manitoba

INTENDED GRADE/SUBJECT AREA

Senior Level Canadian history, Native Studies

CONCEPTS

- Heritage, local history, research methods, archives, community mapping, institutions, culture, living history.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- explain how the heritage of our community affects our lives;
- understand the process and methods for gathering research about people and places;
- become personally involved in the process of writing history;
- develop skills in community-based research and mapping;
- understand the impact of our local heritage/history in shaping our own thoughts and behaviours;
- gather data about our local community;
- promote and distribute the collection of this historical material to the community outside of the school.

RECOMMENDED TIME FRAME

The time frame will vary depending on the availability of resources and skill level of students. Six activities are suggested in this plan, but the teacher may choose to combine them in a variety of ways to suit the individual needs and expertise of the students/teacher. Activity #5, for example, demands at least two weeks of research, data retrieval and writing. If this data is later written into a book with photos, the process demands an additional two weeks. Not all of this teaching idea should occur during class time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This teaching idea demands that the teacher be familiar with the history of the local community and that the teacher acts as a resource in informing the students about the heritage of local places through activities such as a historical walking tour. It also allows for considerable flexibility in terms of both the teacher and students deciding what to do with the data, which activities will be meaningful and productive, etc.

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Naming What We Already Know

Students brainstorm a list of things they already know about the history of their town/city/reserve. They also study the significance of the name of their town/community, its historical and cultural beginnings, etc.

Activity 2 — Institutions, Values, and Change

1) Using a guided discussion the teacher facilitates a discussion with students to define and identify institutions that exist in the community, for example, family, church, government, law, etc. Students are asked to name ways in which they have seen institutions change over time and try to identify what impact this may have on our lives.

2) Students sketch a map of their community creating symbols to represent different places. Students colour code the institutions and areas they visit on a regular basis. (Optional: written description to accompany the map.) In de-briefing, it is important to get students to identify why certain places of worship, gathering, feasting, protesting might be considered important to our own beliefs and values, and how these change over time.

3) In a written description (200 words or less), students write about the changes that have occurred to one institution in their community—they may make the reference to these changes as something physical or as a change resulting from an important event that occurred in that place and consequently gave it another meaning. Students should be able to use local resources to locate this information.

Activity 3 — A Closer Look At Local History

The teacher demonstrates old pictures of local places and people from the community. Then s/he asks the students to speculate, and research the following:

- a) What were some of the ways the first settlers arrived here?
- b) Who were the original inhabitants of this area?
- c) Why/how was this site chosen for this community/city?
- d) What were some of the sites that seemed prominent in earlier years? Why?
- e) Who were some of the people that had status in the community? What were the origins of these people?
- f) What were the roles of men/women?
- g) The responses to these questions can be discussed in groups or through written pieces of work.

Activity 4 — The Historical Walking Tour

The teacher leads the students in a walking tour of the core area of the town/city. As we visit different locations, students are asked to record significant times, places, persons or events. (*Optional: Students can record this information in a journal as though they are someone visiting that location for the first time.*)

Before the walk, the teacher reviews and delivers the following focus questions to the students:

1. Where did you begin the walk?
2. What did this tour and the mapping exercise teach you about the institutions in your town? What were the first institutions? Which institutions did you pass on the tour?
3. What important aspects of your town or city's history have been destroyed by "modernization?" Do you think the destruction/demolition of these places added to or deterred from the heritage/appearance of your town? Why were they removed?
4. What aspect of the walk/your history did you find particularly fascinating? Disturbing? Interesting?
 - i. How does the answer above relate to the history of other places in Canada?
5. When was your town/city incorporated?
6. What was the first area people lived in and why?
7. Was/is there segregation of people based on race or income? Has this issue affected the history of the town? If so, how?
8. What are some of the social issues in your community today? In the past?
9. Name four of the places that were the most interesting to you and state why.
10. Where there any disasters in your community? How did people respond? Did the disaster change the landscape of the city? Did it change people's attitudes?
11. Discuss one social movement that occurred in the history of your town/city. Who was involved? How is this event looked upon today? Were there any buildings, parks, or monuments erected to commemorate this movement?
12. Explain the changing face of transportation or communication in your city from the time of its incorporation to today. Discuss important discoveries, events, or geographic locations as they pertain to the topic.
13. Explain the impact of war (WWI, WWII or both) upon your community. How did it change attitudes, the use of a particular building, employment, housing, etc.?
14. Discuss a new building project that is taking place in your community. Predict how this will affect other places. How will the community be impacted?

As soon as possible after the walking tour, students should be placed in a group or with a partner to expand upon the questions above. These questions lead to lots of active discussion.

Activity 5 — Researching the People and Places of Our Community

For this exercise students choose one person and one place in their community/area that they would like to learn more about. Their choice of topics are approved by the

teacher who makes every effort to ensure that there is no repetition in topics chosen, there is equal gender representation and that efforts are made to represent the cultural diversity of the community. Students are told that they will gather research about that person and place and then synthesize the information in a short descriptive write-up of 300-400 words.

If the person is alive the student will find out as much as possible about them before arranging an interview. Students are encouraged to plan in advance and allow adequate time for interview scheduling. If a person is deceased, they are to use local archives, libraries, newspapers, and contact with family and co-workers who knew the person.

The place being researched can be a building, an institution, a park or a private dwelling with significant historical significance. Examples I used in Brandon included: the CP Station, Commonwealth Air Training Museum, the Brandon Mental Health Centre, Agriculture Research Station, First Baptist Church, the Brandon Friendship Centre and the Courthouse. I have students begin by asking, “Is it the building that makes this place special? Is it what happened here? Is it the people who live here or work here? How has this place changed? What role did this place play in our history?”

Activity 6 — Publishing a Booklet

The last time I used this activity the material was put into a booklet, so students were asked to format it a certain way and hand in the disk. Students were also encouraged to submit their write-ups by email. Aspects of doing research, including interviewing (primary research) are discussed before students get too wrapped up in the activity. Students are also encouraged to take photos or arrange for others in the class who have identified their skill in photography to take pictures. The photos can be scanned into the booklet. Four students took on the role of editing. They were therefore exempt from doing individual write-ups.

This activity involves work outside of the classroom and moves the students directly into the community they are researching. This requires mature judgement and parental approval. This was a lot of work, but left each student with material that will live on long after the course ends. In addition, the booklet was distributed to all people interviewed and to local institutions such as the public library, resource centres, the Brandon Sun, etc.

The booklet begins with this preamble:

In 1882, Brandon was incorporated as a city. Some of the places built then continue to stand today. Others have been destroyed. The collective memory of Brandon rests with these places and with the people and places of yesterday. This is a collection of a few stories about some of the people and places that have shaped and continue to shape our heritage. Responsibility for any errors, omissions, or plagiarism rests with the individual authors.

*Limited copies of this booklet are still available.

EVALUATION

Students involved in these activities were evaluated formally and informally. In some of the group activities/discussions grades were given for creativity, participation and effort. In Activity #5 students were edited and graded by their peers (editing committee) and then by me. Each story was given a grade for research and written communication skills, and then a grade was given for process—participation and effort. The editing committee collectively decided what grade each of them should be given based on the quantitative hours they had put into the activity and the final product. Photographers were given additional marks.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES

- Map of local community
- Books, pamphlets, resources about local history places and people
- Human resources, i.e., people to be interviewed
- Archives, libraries, resource centres
- Old newspapers
- Camera/budget for developing film if necessary

About the Educator

Cindy Hanson is a dynamic teacher who specializes in promoting cultural understanding and diversity through community and activity-based learning. Her Canadian history students can frequently be found interviewing people in the community, taking pictures of local places, touring neighbourhoods and creating role-play situations. Cindy has developed an array of original curriculum support material that incorporates First Nations and community-based content with local history and knowledge. The promotion of diversity and the elimination of racism are strong themes in her teachings. Students exchange information on personal experiences and develop the skills to challenge stereotypes.

Her award-winning project entitled “Diversity: An Integrated Curriculum Approach” features historical writing study, drama, community relations, and a critical analysis of jokes, cartoons, and advertising. Until June 1998 she taught at Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School. During her tenure, her students made a presentation to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs, produced an award-winning video and coordinated the first National Aboriginal lay event in Brandon. Her work in Native Studies has won her a CIDA Professional Award. Cindy currently is an Aboriginal Student Coordinator at Assiniboine Community College and continues to give in-services to teachers across Manitoba.