

MY TOWN, MY CITY: RECORDING CHANGING TRENDS

David McAdam, Ontario

INTENDED GRADE LEVEL/SUBJECT AREA

Intermediate/Senior History, Geography, English, the Arts, Technology

CONCEPTS

- Demographics, migration push-factors, migration pull-factors, community traditions, cultural heritage, local government, social change and urbanization

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- work cooperatively to explore the background of their city or town;
- use basic knowledge of their community's past to gain insight into its present and future;
- describe and analyse various cultural, socio-political and economic factors which influence local development and change;
- critically examine significant changes in their community and the implications for different groups of people;
- appreciate more fully historical traditions, change factors and diversity in their community;
- collect, analyse and communicate data effectively in a historical document of value;
- develop skills in using various media.

RECOMMENDED TIME FRAME

Allow at least ten, seventy-minute periods for the activities in this plan, with homework time devoted to various segments, extensions or follow-up. Because of the nature of the work, periods should ideally be spread over the semester or school year, especially where preparation and execution involve individuals or organizations outside the classroom. Several aspects of this plan can be modified to suit resources, student needs and interests.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mainspring for this lesson is the perennial challenge to help students see connections between the past, present and future and to appreciate the relevance of history in general, and Canadian history in particular, to our lives.

The plan offers a broad project-based, problem-solving approach allowing interdisciplinary integration and technological application.

Students are exposed to a variety of resources and experiences. These include:

- a local trivia challenge;
- guest speaker presentation(s);
- field trip(s) to local art gallery/archives/archaeological dig;
- planting of a time capsule;
- development and recording of radio drama or creation of video storybook;
- research report, including journal of research and learning experience;
- *optional*: design of town flag, symbol, motto (if these are non-existent) or poetry writing about town or city.

The methodology may range from having the entire class complete each activity, to the use of specialty groups, here each groups is responsible for a specific activity. The teacher may limit the class to a particular period of the community's history. It is recommended that the teacher and students work cooperatively to create formal evaluation rubrics and that work samples are incorporated where available. It is also a good idea to photograph the progression of the lesson and to use such photos in school newsletters, class displays, etc.

ACTIVITIES

Part One — Trivia Challenge: Do You Know Your Community?

The teacher will use a trivia challenge to introduce the series of activities. The trivia challenge can be a written test, or the teacher can cover contents orally as part of an initial brainstorming session/overview-introduction to the lesson.

Sample Questions for Trivia Challenge:

1. In what year was your town/city founded?
2. How many times has the official name been changed?
3. What is the symbol of your town or city?
4. What is the current population?
5. List two main reasons why people have emigrated from your town or city.
6. State two reasons why people have immigrated to your town or city.
7. In what time period did the most dramatic demographic changes occur? Why?
8. Name the present political leader of your town/city.
9. Nationally, for what is your town/city known?
10. Name three annual local events.

Here the teacher will highlight that history is defined and driven by change. The teacher will also discuss the significance of studying history and will focus on related processes and methods of study. As well, the teacher will briefly describe the nature/scope of the lesson activities. It is important that historical concepts be infused or drawn out during all the discussions.

If specialty groups are being used, they should be organized at this time.

Part Two — Guest Speaker(s)

As part of data-gathering, students will host the Mayor, Reeve or a long-time resident (e.g., over 50 years) in the town or city who will speak on past and present developments and

speculate about the future. Political figure(s) will also address the role of municipal government in community planning and how inter-government relations impact on local affairs.

Students are required to take notes throughout this, and other similar activities. If arrangements for a guest speaker are a student-group task, members will be responsible for:

- initiating contact;
- composing invitation letter and thank you letter;
- working with guest(s) to determine format of presentation, identifying specific issues or questions to be covered;
- inviting local media;
- moderating question and answer period;
- introducing and thanking the guest (presenting token gift and card from the class).

Part Three — Field Trip

Class will visit the local library, art gallery or archives or will participate in possible local archaeological dig. Here students will interpret various primary documents and insights derived there. These will be incorporated into their research notes.

Where no local archive exists, students may work with municipal government to establish one. The process will include solicitation of donations through various media, and accurate labelling and description of each artifact or exhibit. This might be a long-term project where each new class helps to expand the archive collection.

Part Four — The Time Capsule

Students will work in concert with the local government to plant a time capsule that provides a representative “slice” of contemporary life in their town or city. This can ideally occur as part of a tree-planting ceremony with local officials and media present. As part of this activity, students will:

- create legal documents to protect the site, with volunteer support of community legal expert(s);
- develop criteria for inclusion of items (e.g., durability, size, significance);
- bequeath the capsule to the town or city specifying a minimum date of unearthing or retrieval.

Part Five — Radio Drama/Video Storybook

Members of the class will create either a radio drama or video storybook that chronicles significant developments in their town or community. This could be in the form of ten 5-minute segments for the radio show or a ten to fifteen minute video. In either case, students will be responsible for securing consultant(s) researching, scripting, recording and editing the production. *Optional: Students will make appropriate arrangements to have their piece aired or televised where possible.*

Part Six — Research Report

Using information gathered from class activities and additional independent research, students will write a formal report with the following components:

- a) Brief introduction including physical map(s)
- b) Short History of Origins—settlement and development (including demographic table, push/pull factors, community traditions, government, work and industry); comparison charts, maps, etc., are encouraged.
- c) Labelled photos of historic sites, main attractions, education, political and religious institutions.
- d) A Personalities Page—this will contain a student’s pick of (10-20) “Who’s Who” in the area: celebrated residents, local heroes, and community leaders (posthumous and living). Students will note major accomplishments of each person and present biographical sketches for five personalities on their list.
- e) Optional: Interview someone living in the community 50 years or more about community changes. Students are required to:
 - provide a script of the interview, summarizing highlights or excerpts of interview
 - include 7 to 10 thoughtful questions
 - avoid questions with yes or no answers—questions must include at least five different starting words.
- f) Conclusion: Informed speculation on trends, changes and government forecasts.
- g) Summary data sheet suitable for entry as a website page. This aspect of the assignment provides exciting, far-reaching prospects. For example, the teacher may work with local officials to select the best web page from the class each year, and have this posted as part of the town’s or city’s official website.
- h) References
- i) Appendix containing notes from previous activities, rough work, and journal of personal research and learning experience.

Note: Teachers should specify required length of text for each section of the report. Feature extracts may be submitted to local newspapers for publication.

Part Seven — Display, Presentation and Follow-up

The teacher and student representatives will select an appropriate forum for sharing the product(s) of the students’ efforts with the wider community. For example, exhibits may be showcased in the school or local library, town or city hall, local shopping centres, History department display case or as part of the school’s open house.

The class will hold discussions on learning activities. Students will share personal highlights of their experiences including excerpts from their journals. The teacher will underscore the superiority or richness of a historical account when a variety of perspectives or viewpoints is presented. Finally, in reinforcing or solidifying the students’ learning, the teacher may re-administer (orally or in writing) the series of questions from

the first activity. This new trivia challenge, as an extension of the previous one, should allow students opportunity for informed speculation as well. Additional sample items could include:

- How will your town/city likely change over the next ten years? Give two reasons why.
- In what ways might the ethnic composition of the community be different?
- In your thinking, which section of the population will be most affected by current changes in your city or town? Why?

EVALUATION

The teacher will incorporate as many forms of assessment as are possible and practical. Student learning, growth and achievement can be evaluated from the following:

1. anecdotal notes on quality of participation in discussion on fieldwork;
2. thoroughness of note-taking submitted in report appendix;
3. peer evaluation such as “buddy editing” throughout the writing process;
4. formal evaluation of the research report—using such criteria as;
 - a. clarity and accuracy of data
 - b. sufficient content in each section
 - c. title page complete, quality reference page
 - d. pages numbered, appropriate citation of references
 - e. tables/charts labelled, referenced and briefly addressed in text
 - f. work is publishable, readable, free of errors
 - g. creativity/originality/attractiveness;
5. student self evaluation;
6. formal class test or exam.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Library items, including CD-ROM and journals
- Artifacts, remnants or primary documents related to local settlement and development
- Oral history and expertise shared by guest presenter(s) and local personalities
- Audio/video recorder
- Computers for word processing and Internet access

About the Educator

David McAdam strives to help his students be “informed, proactive citizens who continue to develop the optimism to resolve and manage conflict, to celebrate success and to make positive, worthwhile contributions to their community.” To David, Canadian history is more than events, dates, names and policies: It is the understanding of cause and effect and the application of processes to contemporary life where we, as members of a global community are making History.

David’s teaching has been far-reaching. He created an elementary school reading program that is staffed by high school volunteers. He has developed an extensive

multimedia approach to the examination of Canadian culture and history, racism and multiculturalism, nationhood, the history of First Nations and European colonization of the New World. To promote inquiry and exchange partnerships, he is organizing an international computer network for history students. In addition to this, David has co-developed an Integrated Arts approach to Canadian cultural accomplishments for de-streamed grade 9 students and serves as a member of the York Region OBL Focus group, revising outcomes for Canadian history that will be implemented across the board.