

Historica Canada Education Portal

Angus Walters

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Angus Walters biography from [The Canadians](#) series. Walters built and raced the Bluenose schooner. Racing and preserving the Bluenose became a lifelong passion for Walters, and its image is one of Canada's enduring symbols.

Aims

Students will study the life and leadership of Angus Walters, as well as learning about the historical context and importance of the Bluenose. Students will also achieve a greater understanding of the issues involved with heritage pride and preservation.

Background

One of Canada's most enduring images is engraved on the Canadian dime. The Bluenose was Canada's pride and joy, a schooner that became an international racing legend, and the man behind the Bluenose was Angus Walters.

Angus was a man whose fame - eighteen years as Master of the

Bluenose - would overwhelm him and completely overshadow his personal life. His passions were all professional, and it was his family who paid the price.

He was born on 9 June 1881, in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, one of twelve children of a fisherman. By age thirteen he was working as a "throater" - the person who cuts the throat of the fish - on a six month voyage for his father. By fifteen he was a Doryman who'd weathered many voyages, confronted danger, and harbored a growing appetite for adventure.

Angus became Captain of his own vessel while he was still a teenager. He sailed the high seas of the North Atlantic and as far as the Caribbean. When he could, he'd let his vessel go "all out" and "race" the waves. He always tried to prove his ship was the fastest.

When he married at age 27, he was a seasoned skipper. Maggie Tanner, seven years younger, had no idea what she was getting into. She was lively, outgoing and spirited - and ready to face life's ups and downs - but in the end even Maggie couldn't compete with Angus's love for the sea. Twelve years after they married, Angus's love affair with the sea turned into an obsession.

It happened in 1920, when the first ever international sailing race - the Halifax Herald Trophy - was inaugurated. Angus raced so hard that his ship was destroyed. As he sat and watched the follow-up races, he realized what he had to do: build a newer, sleeker schooner with which to beat the Americans. Angus, now 39, was compelled to beat the Americans, and in this he had inadvertently tapped into the Canadian psyche. His quest would win him fame beyond imagining.

By 1921, Angus had built his Bluenose and defeated seven schooners in

the Halifax Herald races. Angus and Maggie had two sons, and Maggie had learned to weather his long absences. But as the Bluenose racked up win after win and emerged as the undisputed Champion of the Atlantic, the man Maggie married was gone forever.

Angus's boys were now thirteen and eight years old. Their father's exploits fascinated them, but he ignored them, except to discourage them from a life at sea. By 1933, the Bluenose was showcased at the Chicago World's Fair and had become famous internationally.

There was worldwide depression and bad times for the fishermen - but the Bluenose continued to ring up endorsements and Angus didn't look back. In 1935 he was invited to represent Canada at the Silver Jubilee celebrations of King George V and Queen Mary. Angus and his Bluenose had reached the height of fame and fortune.

Two years later Angus learned the price of his obsession when Maggie died after a lingering disease. His sons were men now, but he hardly knew them, and he was completely alone. When he later remarried a much younger woman, neither of his sons attended the wedding. The approaching world war meant an end to the huge trophy races. The Bluenose was now in debt with creditors demanding repayment for her engines. Angus spent every minute trying to raise money to keep the schooner afloat - as a tourist attraction. Finally, Walters had to sell.

The Bluenose spent the war years as a merchant ship in the Caribbean. In 1946 it struck a reef off Haiti and sank. Angus Walters, then an old man, was devastated. It is said that that was the moment his soul died.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

Context and Chronology

1. To adequately understand the life of an individual, it is necessary to put that person within an historical context. Conversely, the study of individuals is an excellent means to learn about larger historical categories and questions. Angus Walters can be studied by placing his life within the fascinating and unfolding history of cod fishing in Canada.

Divide students into groups and direct each group to create a timeline for a specific era of the cod industry in Canada. Begin with the Aboriginal Peoples of the East coast, John Cabot and go right up to the present day. Each timeline should include five key events or developments and illustrated with corresponding visuals (e.g. pictures, drawings, cartoons).

Instruct each student to create a timeline of Angus Walters's life from his birth in 1881 to his death in 1968. Have them include at least five key events or developments with corresponding visuals (e.g. pictures, drawings, cartoons).

Hang the cod timelines around the classroom in chronological order. Pose questions that challenge your students to think about why these events are important. Discuss how their individual timelines of Walters's life do or do not relate to the larger historical timeline. Emphasize that there is more than one answer and that all answers need to be supported with facts and well constructed arguments.

The Captain is a Leader

2. Are leaders necessary? When do we look to be led, and by whom? What personal qualities make good leaders and bad leaders? Describe a circumstance that you would seek leadership and identify the qualities you would look for in a leader. Everyone responds differently to styles of leadership, but it is possible to identify common personal qualities among the leaders we choose or are forced to live with. Instruct students to work cooperatively in small groups of three or four to create Mind Maps to illustrate the nature of Walters's leadership.

3. Imagine you are a member of Angus's crew that survived the August 1926 storm; remember that the storm did kill fifty fellow fishermen from your community. Write a journal, once you are safely back in Lunenburg, explaining the experience of surviving one of the worst storms to ever hit the Atlantic coast of Canada. Your entry should include a description of Angus Walters and your thoughts about his style of leadership.

Two loves - work and family

4. Life as a fisherman is physically and personally very demanding. Fishermen traditionally lived away from home and family working under harsh and dangerous conditions for as many as six months a year. As a captain, however, Angus took on the extra duties of being responsible to his creditors and his crew. These responsibilities and Angus's additional interest in racing complicated his commitment to family life. Angus repeatedly faced the dilemma of choosing between his love of fishing and racing and his love of family.

Challenge students to develop and perform a script of three or four tableaux that explore the nature of the dilemma Angus faced between

work and family. Organize students in groups of 4 to 6 and ask each group to list situations mentioned in the video when Angus had to choose between his family and his career. Explain to your students that...

...a tableaux is a dramatic form where actors freeze like statues for a moment in time (imagine a live photograph).

...each actor should create an interesting pose (remember to create a picture with depth - pay attention to space).

...actors should incorporate a minimum of one significant prop for each tableau.

...a narrator is needed to give a brief description for each frozen scene.

...a camera flash or hand clap can be used to start and end each new tableau.

...each student should be familiar with the relationship between all the roles in the scene.

Heritage, Pride, and Preservation

5. Angus Walters sacrificed money, family, and soul trying to preserve the Bluenose. He valued the Bluenose as a monument to a vanishing way of life from the East coast, which he believed had to be preserved for future generations. Discuss with students Angus's failed efforts to preserve the Bluenose. Consider such questions as:

- What did Angus hope to achieve by preserving the Bluenose?
- How did Angus stand to profit from his plan?
- What would Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, and Canada gain by protecting the Bluenose?
- Should governments have supported Angus and the Bluenose? Why, or why not?
- Does it matter that Angus failed, given that a replica was built in the

1960s as a testament to the Bluenose and the age of schooners?

6. The Canadian media frequently debates the merits and demerits of government support of heritage projects. Share potential resources for students to find information pertaining to controversies about heritage preservation in Canada (e.g. newspapers, magazines, Web sites). Direct students to write an editorial that expresses their opinion as formed through their research and their own experiences about funding heritage projects.

7. Organize a formal class debate on the question of funding national heritage projects. A possible resolution is: "Be it resolved that although Canadians should be encouraged to value their heritage, the federal government should not fund projects until it has addressed other more important issues, for example: job creation, health care, debt and deficit reduction, national unity, trade and commerce."

8. Encourage students to select one of the following forms of heritage commemoration and apply the form to Angus:

- Show the [Bluenose Heritage Minute](#). Do you think this Minute captures the story well enough? Discuss its strengths and weaknesses as a glimpse into the history of the Bluenose and the life of Angus Walters. Create your own storyboard for the story of Angus Walters. Compare your minute with the one you watched.
- Most communities have at least one plaque or monument. Take your students and study a few examples. Discuss how they are written and designed. Create a plaque or monument to Angus Walters and/or the Bluenose. Decide which of your plaques or monuments should be selected by The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

- Create a commemorative stamp of Angus Walters.
- Encourage your students to write and perform their own song about Angus Walters. Listen to Stan Roger's *Bluenose* and *Man With Blue Dolphin* for Maritime flavour and a wonderful example.
- Explore the many designs for coins employed in Canada and encourage students to create their own.

Resources

[The Canadians: Angus Walters](#)

[Heritage Minutes: Bluenose](#)

[Angus Walters - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Bluenose - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Blue: "I gave her the power to carry sail" - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

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[The Bluenose, A True Canadian Champion](#)