

Historica Canada Education Portal

Battles of the First World War: Research Project

Overview

Though our nation came together in 1867 due to numerous factors, both internal and external, many have argued that Canada floated along without a truly recognizable identity until the First World War. It was during this period in history and through blood and sacrifice at home and overseas that Canada forged itself into the nation we identify with today. The knowledge of our contributions throughout the course of the First World War is essential to the understanding of our national 'genetic code'. This lesson is designed to allow students to investigate, criticize, and present one aspect/battle of significance for Canadians overseas. Students will be presenting their battle from the standpoint that Canada's national memorial should stand on the ground they researched.

Aims

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 politics;
- demonstrate an understanding of Canada's participation in war, peace, and security;

- explain how Canada's international status and foreign policy have changed since 1914;
- ask questions, identify problems, and effectively use historical research methods to investigate topics and issues in history;
- analyze and evaluate information when researching historical topics or issues;
- communicate effectively the results of research in presentations.

Students will:

- demonstrate knowledge of Canada's military contributions in World War I;
- evaluate Canada's role in the Allied victories of World War I;
- use terms related to historical inquiry correctly;
- use computer-stored information and the Internet to effectively research Canadian history topics;
- express ideas in a coherent manner during presentations or discussions.

Activities

Time Allowance: About one week

Procedures:

1. Class Discussion: Lead a discussion on the purposes of graves, markers, and monuments.

- Why do they exist?
- What are they supposed to remind us of or get us to think about?

- Are they there for the people who are gone or for those of us who are alive to see them?
- What emotions can they evoke?
- What is the purpose of a national memorial i.e. War Memorial in Ottawa?
- Should they exist?

2. Group Work: Break students up into research groups and explain that each group will be researching a specific battle that Canadians played a specific role in during the First World War. They will be presenting their findings to the class using written information and visual aids. The premise of their research and presentation is to explain what Canadians accomplished (or did not) and why this location is the most ideal location for a national monument which serves our collective memory. Battles chosen will depend on class and group size – one can be as general as Vimy, Sommes, Ypres etc. or can look more specifically at certain campaigns/days within the context of greater battles.

3. Information Gathering: Have students research the battles in your school library and computer lab. Each group should consult at least five sources, some of which should be primary in nature.

4. Organizing/Analyzing/Synthesizing Information: Have students organize their information to provide a chronological presentation of their battle sequence. It is important that students are also maintaining a bibliography as well. The inclusion of war diary excerpts will enhance their presentation of the event.

5. The Visuals: Students will be required to show the layout of their battle, including troop movements. This can be accomplished using a variety of methods:

- diagrams
- drawing on board/overhead
- creating a 3D image using computer technology
- creating a model (i.e. clay, paper mache)
- creating a model using food (cake works well as icing can be dyed to create many different landscapes and the bonus is that it is fun to eat afterwards.)

6. Presentations: Students are to present using a method of their choice (re-enactment/slide show/news broadcast etc.) They should place the battle in context, teach the facts, and various interpretations about the outcomes. They should also provide a one-page summary for the class. Finally, they are to make their case for the placement of a national memorial at their battlefield. *Why is it that the efforts here should be recognized as Canada's crowning military achievement during World War One? What does this demonstrate about our nation?* Note: It is essential that all group members participate in the presentation aspect of this project.

Critical Thinking Questions:

Some of these were introduced as part of the Group Discussion in the beginning. Revisit these questions throughout the process and at the conclusion. Also, this assignment leads to greater questions about involvement in international affairs and conflicts and can spark many other discussions within the framework of your course. Many of these questions lead to, or can form part of, a final exam question or essay.

Evaluation:

Provinces and Territories have their own evaluation standards. While some have categories that must be evaluated, others insist upon methods such as rubrics. Individual accountability forms can be used to mark individual efforts. You can evaluate the research/inquiry process with a “guiding questions” sheet. Have each group member submit a research paper or summary, including a bibliography, for evaluation and mark each individual for their contribution to the presentation and visual displays.

Resources

In addition to relying on class textbooks and doing research at the school or public libraries, the following Web sites contain useful information.

[Library and Archives Canada - Canada and the First World War](#)

[Veterans Affairs Canada: Canada and the First World War](#)

[Canada at War](#)

[First World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[The Memory Project](#)

[First World War Timeline – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Canadian Expeditionary Force – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Battle of the Somme – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[First World War Collection – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)