Historica Canada Education Portal

Grant MacEwan

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Grant MacEwan biography from *The Canadians* series. MacEwan was a writer, historian, and politician. He wrote numerous books about agriculture and history, and he held several political positions including an appointment as the Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta.

Aims

Studying the life of Grant MacEwan will provide students with the opportunity to explore a variety of topics. Students will learn about sustainable development, land use, goal setting, and political leadership.

Background

Grant MacEwan was a leader in the truest sense of the word. He followed his heart and lived by his own rules regardless of what others thought or said about him. He was an author of 57 books, politician, educator, innovator, and environmental pioneer. Known for his eccentric behaviour, MacEwan often clashed with society's conventions of acceptability.

Some critics dismiss MacEwan as a strange individual with reckless abandon for societal rules. Although spontaneity was a trademark characteristic, MacEwan was nevertheless an important figure in Canadian political history. His devotion to the study of agriculture and advocation of its importance in sustaining the natural environment were unparalleled. MacEwan's drive and determination to succeed and improve people's lives was admirable. He clearly left his mark on Canadian society at the conclusion of the twentieth century.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

1. Have the class prepare a flow chart that documents the life of Grant MacEwan. A major aspect of this project is to create a timeline listing important dates and all of MacEwan's major accomplishments.

2. Grant MacEwan started with a dream of wanting to make a difference in people's lives and he achieved this goal through agriculture and politics. As a class, discuss the importance of having a dream and sticking with it. Then direct students to write down a goal or dream they wish to pursue in the future. Have them outline how they might reach that particular goal.

3. After living through the terrible conditions of the Great Depression in the 1930's, MacEwan promptly sought alternative agricultural practices to avoid future disaster. As a class, discuss the importance of sustainable development and have students research recent debates on the topic,

referring to specific examples.

4. Have students examine the environmental pursuits and interests of Grant MacEwan. They should create a table to organize MacEwan's accomplishments. In what ways can he be considered an environmental pioneer? Students should decide if each endeavour was a success or failure and briefly explain why they judged it that way.

5. Have students compare Grant MacEwan to other Canadian political figures, such as Pierre Trudeau, and discuss the qualities of a good leader. Students could start by making a chart that lists the individuals' position/title, their accomplishments, and years in office.

6. Throughout his lifetime, MacEwan encountered many issues involving the role of human beings and their affect on the natural environment. Many of MacEwan's goals were a direct result of this complex relationship. Organize a structured debate regarding a land dispute between an environmentalist group, urban developers, and members of the Canadian government. The urban developers want to convert arable farmland into subdivisions and shopping malls, while the environmentalists see this as a waste of valuable land and destruction of the environment. Furthermore, members of the Canadian government are split on the decision: they have an economic interest in the urban development plan, but they are also being swayed by public opinion.

7. Have students create a "Heritage Minute" based on the life of Grant MacEwan. Students will have to decide which information they believe is the most important to communicate in the one-minute timeframe and how they wish to convey this information. They will then be responsible for performing the piece and compiling a short paper explaining the significance of a Canadian Historica Minute on Grant MacEwan in the

wider context of Canadian history. Creativity with costume, music, and appropriate props are encouraged. If your school has the resources you could videotape the Minute.

8. Based on information in the video, and further reading from Web sites, students should decide whether Grant MacEwan was an extraordinary leader or an eccentric man who was fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time. Have them write two-page essays explaining their positions and supported by facts.

9. Have students write 500-word essays on whether they believe ordinary people, such as Grant MacEwan, have the power and/or ability to effect change on a large scale? Why or why not? They should explain their answers and cite specific examples.

Resources

Grant MacEwan Worksheet

Grant MacEwan - The Canadian Encyclopedia

Kilgour, David. *Uneasy Patriots – Western Canadians in Confederation.* Edmonton: Lone Pine Publishing, 1988.

Macdonald, R.H. *Grant MacEwan: No Ordinary Man.* Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979.

MacEwan, Grant. *Grant MacEwan's Journals.* Ed. Max Foran and Judy Dundas. Edmonton: Lone Pine Publishing, 1986.

Von Hauff, Donna. *Everyone's Grandfather: The Life & Times of Grant MacEwan.* Edmonton: Grant MacEwan Community College Foundation/Quon Editions, 1994.

The Honourable J.W. Grant MacEwan