

Historica Canada Education Portal

Images Reflecting Complex Relationships

Overview

In April 2001 and again in February 2007 a storm of controversy erupted in the press of the province British Columbia. This lesson reflects on that controversy and encourages students to engage with the information in different ways.

"By studying historic artifacts of all people, the important and the unimportant alike citizens have a stronger foundation for understanding how and why the past tells us a great deal about the present and the future. All history is selective and emphasizes some stories and some events more than others. History is really about making people think, ask questions, and demand answers"

- (Olson-Raymer, 2005)

"Around the world people confront monuments that celebrate historical origins, movements, heroes, and triumphs no longer seen as worthy of celebration. That Voertrekker's monument in South Africa, the southern American high schools named for Confederate heroes, and the statues of imperial conquerors were erected to pay homage, to teach young people desirable character traits, and to provide a positive sense of heritage and identity for a citizenry defined to exclude blacks, natives, women, colonials, and others. What is to be done with these artifacts of earlier power configurations, outdated modes of understanding, bygone

identities? Destroy them? Maintain them but strip them of their monumental status? Erect alternative monuments to celebrate those who were excluded?”

- (Seixas & Clark, 2004, p. 146)

Sites of memory "become particularly interesting at the moment when they inspire debate and contention. These moments potentially offer an opportunity to examine how people are thinking about their collective pasts, and thus, how they seek to position themselves for the future. Contemporary historical consciousness is uncovered, not so much by an interpretation of the” site of memory “itself as by the analysis of its reception. Such analysis, moreover, can tell us about the tools that people have—and need—in order to construct meanings of the past in a conflict-ridden present. Recent controversies around a mural series located in the central rotunda of the British Columbia Parliament Buildings offer a prime example of these debates.”

- (Seixas & Clark, 2004, p. 147)

Aims

Students will learn to understand, interpret, analyze, assess, and argue the merits of visual historical evidence.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

After completing this lesson students will be able to:

- Identify and clarify a problem, an issue, or an inquiry.
- Select and summarize information from primary non-print sources.

- Interpret and evaluate primary sources.
- Generate and critique different interpretations of primary sources.
- Assess and defend a position on a controversial issue after considering a variety of perspectives.
- Plan, revise, and deliver written and oral presentations.
- Write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
- Co-operatively plan and implement a course of action that addresses the problem, issue, or inquiry identified.
- Recognize and use visual historical evidence as a form of communication.
- Understand the process of analyzing historic works of art.
- Observe, describe, explain, and interpret the elements or qualities of one a particular work of public art (primary evidence).
- Look closely at and analyze art using guidance tools such as important icons, symbols, historical figures, color usage, perspective, organization, and other artistic characteristics.
- Analyze the characteristics and meaning a particular work of public art.
- Assess the value of the work of public art.
- Use criteria or standards to make judgments about the strengths and weaknesses of a position related to the significance of a particular work of public art.
- Read, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference and technological sources.
- Use information to produce a quality product in an appropriate format.
- Demonstrate skills and attitudes of active citizenship, including ethical behaviour, open-mindedness, respect for diversity, and collaboration.

Activities

Time Allowance: Dependent on Learner Profile

Procedures:

To meet the varied backgrounds and learning styles of the students in their class teachers may select from the following (or allow students to select from the following):

Assignment 1: Letter to the editor

Read about the controversy about the way Aboriginal peoples are portrayed in four paintings found in the Legislative buildings in Victoria, BC. Complete the [Key Analysis Questions](#) for one of the murals. Consider the titles of the paintings and identify the elements that likely caused the controversy. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper supporting either the retention of the murals, the removal of the paintings, or suggesting some way to resolve the problem.

Assignment 2: Debate or Oral Presentation

Learners will be divided into groups with each group selecting one mural. After completing the [Key Analysis Questions](#) provided in this lesson each group will debate for either the retention, removal, or for some other method to resolve the problem presented by these murals.

Assignment 3: Collage

Learners will be divided into groups with each group creating a collage (mural) that communicates their own ideas of one the following themes related to early Canadian history: Courage, Enterprise, Labour, Justice. Using the analysis format provided in this lesson, additional Internet and print resources. Determine what your mural should represent. Each group will present their mural to the class introducing the major themes and pointing out specifics which support their conclusions. Each group must be prepared to defend their selection of images and how they reflect

Canada's history.

Assignment 4: Journal entry

As part of an ongoing journal exercise where students explain at least one point that provokes their interest from each unit studied in their course they should provide an entry based on the following: How has the reading and analysis of these murals broadened your understanding about the relationships between historic works of public art and contemporary attitudes and values? What do you think is the most interesting aspect (or pressing problem) in the realm of public art? Journals will be reviewed periodically, and students will turn them in at the end of the course as part of their exit requirements.

Resources

[Images of the murals can be found here.](#)

Articles About the Mural Controversy

['Degrading' B.C. murals removed](#)

[Culturally sensitive coverup at B.C. legislature](#)

[B.C. government listening to Summit's concerns](#)

[Art historians divided on how to deal with artwork depicting natives](#)

Students can be encouraged to find further evidence.

