

Historica Canada Education Portal

Judith Jasmin

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Judith Jasmin biography from [The Canadians](#) series. Despite being a journalist in a time when women were barred from the Washington Press Club, Jasmin gained respect as a serious journalist who covered complex political and social issues in an understandable way.

Aims

Students will examine a range of world events that Judith Jasmin lived through and commented on in her work. Students will also have the opportunity to study issues, like censorship, that relate to the field of journalism.

Background

Judith Jasmin began her career as a radio star and blossomed into the most passionate reporter on the TV airwaves. For four years in the early 1950s, she and fellow hotshot TV journalist René Lévesque were the perfect match on TV screens and off. It was the first of many ill-fated relationships for this intrepid traveller and non-conformist. She has been

called "the Barbara Frum of French Canada." Sadly, like Frum, Jasmin's career was cut short by cancer, but she left behind an unforgettable TV image that educated, touched, and inspired a generation.

Judith Jasmin started her life in Montréal in 1916, but soon after her family moved to Paris, France. Parents who were ardent socialists and feminists, and a liberal French education helped create the spirited, free-thinking Judith Jasmin. As a girl, she was intent on becoming a doctor or a great writer. The family moved back to Montréal months before the Great Depression hit, and it was her family's plunge into poverty without the means to pay for her education that propelled Jasmin into acting.

In radio plays, Jasmin found the perfect outlet for her creative side and by the mid 1930s her natural talent made her an immediate star. Soon she was also writing plays and producing arts shows, and in 1949, she became the female voice of Radio Canada International. With the introduction of TV in 1952, the woman who deemed herself ugly conquered her self-consciousness and became French CBC's most recognizable face. She interviewed greats like Josephine Baker, Jacques Cousteau, Gabrielle Roy and Haitian President François Duvalier. She made complex political situations understandable to audiences as she roved through Algeria, Haiti, Cuba and India, bringing back worlds of wonder to audiences who had never left their own province. She fought and won the battle to get controversial subjects like secular schooling, abortion, women's rights, and Québec Independence covered fairly in an era when the CBC preferred not to stir up controversy. Yet in spite of her accomplishments, she couldn't step into the Washington Press Club simply because she was a woman.

Using Judith Jasmin's own eloquent journals, beautifully shot home movies and pioneering TV stories, viewers of of

this *Canadians* documentary will discover a woman who not only reported on history, but one who helped shape it. At the same time, viewers will follow the personal story of a woman who paid a high price to be a brilliant, non-conformist in the 1940s and 50s.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

Themes that the video explores:

- News, Journalism, and Documentaries
- Catholic Education system vs. Secular Education
- Canadian Broadcasting Company and Radio
- Women in the twentieth century
- Styles of Journalism - "off the cuff," "man-on-the-street"
- Impact of TV and Communications Technology
- International and overseas investigation
- Censorship and objectivity
- FLQ and Québec independence issue
- Demonstrations and equality battles
- Biographical and personal information

Vocabulary that the class will need to be familiar with:

- Secularism
- Social Justice
- Women's Liberation Movement
- Censorship

- Atheism
- Objectivity
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)
- Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ)

Additional questions to answer before or during the video:

- What is the impact of television on the world today? Why is it an important medium for acquiring information? Is it as important today as it was through the middle of the twentieth century?
- Who is René Lévesque (1922-1987)? How did his role in the media prepare him for his political aspirations later in life?

1. Timeline Challenge

Gather important dates in Canadian History that span from 1916 to 1972. These were the years throughout which Jasmin lived. Draw a line on the black board with key dates written into the Timeline (such as the Depression, World Wars, inventions, and other interesting information). Offer students the opportunity to win prizes for naming events, people and places, etc. that correspond to these dates. Allow them to use their textbook.

2. Living through the Depression

Tell your students to imagine that they are a family living during the Depression. Randomly generate families using a name draw. Within each family of five, students will have to make decisions. The following questions will help them focus:

As a group:

- Who is each person in the group? e.g., Father, Mother, boy, girl, helping hand, midwife, grandparent,
- Do you live in the city, in a small village, or in a rural area?
- What does your family own? Do you have any of the new technology of the day?
- What is the role of women in your family?

Individually:

- What is your occupation?
- What role do you have in the family?
- How is your health? Do you have any realistic health problems?
- What do you own?
- What do you do on a daily basis? (At least 5 duties, jobs, or social responsibilities.)
- What are your life ambitions? Where do you see yourself in twenty years?

Each group will present a tableaux presentation and provide a written report. For the written report, each group member will do a one-page summary of who their character is that answers the group questions. They may write the report as a character profile sheet (like a driver's license with biographic information) or as a story. One cover page will be prepared by the whole group.

3. WWII Journalism

During the Second World War, Jasmin was in her 30s; her work as an international reporter positioned her well for activity as a journalist during the war. Discuss with your students how journalism today is different from

journalism in the mid-twentieth century. Today, there is little time to do thorough research or background research on every article because news is produced and made accessible by the minute. When Jasmin was reporting, she was producing well-researched reports as she travelled internationally. The following two-part activity will show why properly researched writing is important.

When your students enter the class, pretend that they have entered a newsroom. Prepare recipe cards for a number of different Second World War issues that would have been featured in the newspapers in 1945. On these cards briefly state an issue or event, the facts that the students are working with, the section of the paper that they are writing for, the purpose of the article (i.e., to persuade readers to protest against the war), and whether they are a male or female reporter. Have them look down and select from the list of that day's important topics to be covered. For the following day's class, they will have to write a newspaper article that covers the information on the recipe cards. Limit the number of sources that students are allowed to use in order to create the effect of having access to a finite amount of information. If the article is not completed, tell them that they have lost their job with your newspaper. Collect the articles, put them together and make class copies of the newspaper. Talk about the pressures of writing in a given period of time, with limited facts, and how they selected information for their article.

For the second part of this lesson, have your students research the important events of the Second World War in more depth. Ensure that they use a variety of sources including, newspaper articles and microfiche, textbooks, the internet, journals, museums, poetry and literature, oral or first hand accounts from veterans or grandparents, and film or television programs. Have your students write new articles, within a longer timeframe. Tell your students that this paper gives them more

time to research their stories because it is published weekly.

In summary, compare the newspapers. How are they different? Which one is better? Which one is easier to read? Do they appeal to different people? Make up a comparison chart listing the positives and negatives for both newspapers.

4. Staging a Protest

Students will be in charge of staging a mock protest. The protest will be set in the 1940s-50s to avoid the more sensitive issues of today. They will choose either the women's liberation movement, an anti-war stance, or an anti-racism demonstration. Students will be assigned a role to be drawn out of a hat. In the demonstration group, they may be the leader, a news-reporter, or a member of the persons being persecuted. They should answer the questions: *Who?*, *What?*, *When?*, *Where?*, *Why?*, and *How?*, for their roles. They must be prepared to justify why they are protesting, who they are, who they are protesting against, what objectives they have, and how they plan to reach these objectives (politically and socially). Each protestor must have a one-minute speech prepared, that bring the answers to these questions out. They may also choose to create an appropriate sign/banner/poster to support their speech. This may be a dramatic presentation, or a more formal press conference scenario.

5. Censorship and Objectivity

Students will be introduced and become familiar with marketing and business terminology. They will need to understand the concepts of advertising, marketing, selling a product, and consumerism.

In the first class, students will be broken into groups of four. In these groups they will attempt to define terms related to business and marketing. When these terms are defined, the groups will subdivide into pairs. They will then begin to create their own product. This can be an invention, a product that does not already exist but should, or it can simply be an upgrade on an existing product. Their product must be small enough to sell over the counter at a corner store and shouldn't exceed \$100 in real worth. When they have created a product, they will be instructed to devise a marketing strategy for it.

In the second class, give each student \$5 in false (e.g., Monopoly) money. Each of the groups will present their product to the class in a one-minute presentation. These can be presented as promotional seminars, or as TV commercials. Should the students have access to AV equipment, they might be given the option to record the commercial in advance. They will have to be convincing in order to sell their product to the class. Each product will cost \$1 regardless of what it is. When everyone has had a chance to present their ideas, the total number of products sold by each student will be calculated and a marketing winner declared. Encourage the students to have fun and be creative when they create their product. With experience making their own products they will understand the interpretive strategies that went into making a commercial. Likewise, they will become familiar with interpretive strategies that journalists use when they go beyond factual and objective reporting.

Select and show parts of Noam Chomsky's video *Manufacturing Consent*, and give the students the following questions: How does the media deceive its audience? How do they colour a story according to how they present it? What illusions does the media create?

Show them clips from the news, from advertisements, and from film. Ask them to watch the news and search other media to find examples of biased or slanted advertising and journalism. Have them bring in one advertisement from a magazine or newspaper that you will discuss as a class. Does the product match the pictures used to represent it? Using these ads, create a collage.

6. Québec Independence Issue

Prepare a debate on the issue of sovereignty in Canada. This may take different forms. You may have a formal classroom debate, a two-person televised debate with a mediator, a radio show phone-in, or an interview of René Lévesque or other prominent sovereignists.

Required Materials:

The fifth activity suggests showing the film *Manufacturing Consent*.

Resources

[Judith Jasmin Worksheet](#)

Beauchamp, Colette. *Judith Jasmin: De Feu et de Flame*. Montréal: Boreal, 1992.

Deborin, G. *Secrets of the Second World War*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971.

Jasmin, Judith. *Défense de la Liberté*. Montréal: Boreal, 1992.

Jutra, Hélène. *Québec is Killing Me*. The Golden Dog Press: Ottawa,

1965.

Lévesque, René. *An Option for Québec*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968.