

Historica Canada Education Portal

Memories of War

Overview

The teacher will ask the students to research how different groups of Canadians were affected by Canada's participation in the Second World War. Students will then create a journal that follows the life of a fictitious Canadian before, during and after the war. Although the students will be creating a piece of fiction, the journals they write must be historically accurate and make reference to historical events. The teacher will assign, or allow students to choose, their character from a list of brief character descriptions. To complete the task, students will have to research the relevant information, and then develop and record the plausible actions and thoughts of their historical character in a three-part journal. The journal will be written in first person and follow their character pre, post and during the Second World War. Finally, student journals will be presented in class and then bound and placed on display in the school library. By exploring many different experiences felt by Canadians during the war, students will develop a sense of historical empathy, and an appreciation of the diversity of perspective in Canada's history.

Students may choose one of the following characters. Once they have developed a persona for their character, they will conduct research to enable them to write a journal from the perspective of their character. The teacher may wish to add a local dimension to the following list. In addition, a student may wish to base her/his character's bio on the student's own heritage group. Both of these amendments will make the

project more meaningful to the students and their wider learning community. Suggested list of Canadians:

- Soldier in Europe
- Light Infantry
- Member of the Royal Canadian Air Force stationed in Britain
- Female nurse in Europe
- Soldier in Hong Kong
- A pacifist (religious reasons)
- The mother of a soldier in Europe
- War widow
- Japanese Canadian living in Vancouver
- Jewish Canadian
- Canadian of German heritage
- French Canadian conscripted
- Metis soldier
- Aboriginal soldier
- Woman working at a Canadian munitions factory
- Saskatchewan farmer conscripted
- A deserter from the army

Aims

Students will gain an understanding and empathy with the Canadian war experience by researching primary sources and then creating personal narratives.

Activities

Time Allowance: 4 – 5, 80-minute periods. This will include 2 research periods, 2 periods to write the journal entries and one period to present work to the class.

Procedures:

Preparatory Phase, Prior to Presenting the Scenario

1. Present the historical context. This may include a brief outline of the causes of the Second World War, the players involved, and a timeline highlighting Canada's military participation in the war, as well as significant battles and statistics. Students should also be introduced to the question of why Canada entered the war and the various aspects of that debate.
2. Students then explore the idea of how Canada's involvement in the war is remembered. This can be done through a series of photos that include battlefields, as well as Canadian memorial sites both in Europe and in Canada. The military-themed [Heritage Minutes](#) could also be used in this exploration of war and the Canadian memory.
3. Students may then reflect on memory in general, and consider their own memories of events in their own lifetime. For example, the teacher may ask them to write about their memory of the first day of school in as much detail as possible (how they felt, what they were wearing, describe the school, their friends, parents/guardian, teacher). Students will then share their memory with the class and discover that, although there are similarities, each one of them will have a unique perspective of this event in their lives. Would it be possible for them to agree on a common memory that could then be recorded in history books? What is the difference between personal memory and national memory? Whose

memory becomes national memory?

4. Present the scenario “Memories of the War:” *In commemoration of the Second World War, your school library would like to publish a collection of journal accounts written by Canadians involved in, or effected by, Canada’s participation in the war. However, because actual journals are hard to find, the school librarian has elicited the help of your class to write a historically accurate collection of journal entries that reflect the unique perspectives of a wide range of Canadian experiences during the Second World War. This “Memories of the War” collection will be showcased in the library – on the front counter – during the week of Remembrance Day.*

5. Hand out the assignment as outlined in the attachment below.

Required Materials:

Students will need paper on which to write their journals. They may wish to soak the paper in tea or carefully burn the edges in order to give the journal a more authentic old look.

Worksheet: [Memories of War Assignment](#)

Resources

Students may wish to use the following resources:

Class history text

‘Canada: A People’s History’ DVD and text series

[The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

[The Memory Project](#)

