Historica Canada Education Portal

The ABC's of Canadian History

Overview

Students often experience difficulty in mastering the precise vocabulary used in social studies and history courses. Faced with this difficulty, they are sometimes reluctant to ask for clarification of the terms used. The result is a loss of learning opportunity. Here is a way of clarifying those concepts and literally keeping them in the forefront of the students' minds. It is based on one of our oldest educational learning tools... remember how you learned your ABC's.

Aims

Development and reinforcement of regularly-used vocabulary for Canadian history.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 class

Procedures:
Trigger event: As students enter the classroom, play a CD of small children singing the alphabet song (A,B,C,D...).

Turn off music and ask students to describe the physical classroom of the early elementary school. What was above the blackboard? (The answer is the alphabet). Why was this positioned there in this way? (To reinforce learning and keep it in front of students). Advise students that we will be preparing a similar product for our history class.

Covered content: Canadian history chosen concept: development and reinforcement of regularly-used vocabulary for Canadian history.

Teacher's role: Prepare a list of key terms for your history or social studies course, write these on small pieces of paper and drop into a paper bag. Have each student select one of these terms. The student may choose to pick another term if she or he does not like the first one, but they can only do this once. Distribute an index card to each student on which the final version of the definition is to be written.

Direct students to prepare a draft definition of the term they have selected. The writing must be clear enough for ALL the students to see from the back of the class. The definition must be limited to no more than 7 to 9 words and convey a clear understanding of the term. Direct students to write this draft on their index card and bring it to you for verification. Advise students that, because these will be publicly displayed, they must be error-free and of excellent quality. Spelling, grammar and clarity will be critical. Review each student's draft definition to ensure it is accurate and meets the above criteria. Once the draft definition has been approved, the student may begin work on the illustration part of the project. Advise students that the term, its definition and illustration must now be carefully inserted onto a large piece of paper (11 x 17). The index cards can be used by the teacher to compile a dictionary that will be distributed to all students.

Students' role: Select a term and research its definition using internet, dictionary, thesaurus, text book etc. Edit the definition to meet criteria. Illustrate the term visually to teach others.

Time required to complete the activity: 1 class for perfection of the definition. The completed assignment due 5 days later to allow for quality work.

Extension: Have students find a historical demonstration of their term in order to tie it in with course content.

Required Materials:
- index cards
- 11 x 17 sheets of paper
- markers, pencils

Worksheet: The ABC'S of Canadian History

Resources

The Canadian Encyclopedia

Dictionary.com

Thesaurus.com