

Historica Canada Education Portal

Working With Evidence

Overview

An introduction to working with primary evidence including photos, graphs, and text from the time period. Most of the presentation is visual, with a minimum of text. Students work in small groups with each group assigned a different topic.

Depending on time available, the topics could be rotated if the content was important. But if it is used for teaching historical method only, then one activity should be adequate.

This particular lesson is the introduction, including a "practice activity" the entire class would do, probably in pairs. The questions for the following activity are the same as the "practice."

Aims

Students will learn to work with non-textbook historical information.

Students will discover that while life in 1920s Canada was different from twenty-first century Canada, people of each time period share common experiences.

Background

Working With Evidence: Historical Study

Often history is seen simply as a chronology of events that happened in the past. In fact, history is a discipline which focuses on the study of change over time and is most concerned with the question "why."

Without change, historians would have nothing to study, but because things do change, historians must gather evidence in order to understand why events occurred and the impact these events had on society.

History is not solely about political power-struggles and military campaigns. This approach ignores the vast majority of the people who make up the past as it focuses on those with wealth and power.

For a full picture of the past, history must also include studies of economic trends, technological change, artistic achievements, and the social fabric (the homes, clothing, food, entertainment, and music).

Social history must endeavour to reflect the lives of men and women from all classes, for the poor as well as the rich contribute to history. Much of historical study deals with evidence in a variety of forms. They include: statistics, diaries, eye-witness accounts, government records, photographs, and products and things used specifically in a time period studied.

In historical study, there are 2 types of evidence:

Primary: Written accounts recorded at the time or later by a person who was living at the time; objects created and/or used at the time including

visual material

Secondary: An explanation of the past based on the research, interpretation, and analysis. These are usually written some time after the actual period studied and the findings of the historian can be challenged.

Activities

Time Allowance: 2-3 hours

Procedures:

1. Teacher explains/demonstrates the concept of primary and secondary evidence. (Use the information provided in the Background section above.) Authentic materials to be displayed and passed around the class are best.
2. With students, teacher discusses the 4 steps: research, analysis, interpretation, and reconstruction.
3. Working in small groups to promote discussion, students do the "practice activity"
4. Class discusses their observations.
5. Students then move to groups to study their topics using the information and worksheet below.

Worksheet: [Working With Evidence](#)

Resources

The Canadian Scrapbook Series "The Confident Years: Canada in the 1920's." Bondy, Robert. J./Mattys, William C. Prentice-Hall 1978 ISBN 0-13-167551-6

[The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)