

# Historica Canada Education Portal

## The Last Round-Up: Wilf Carter

### Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Wilf Carter biography from [The Canadians](#) series. It explores the long and successful career of Carter, who was one of the founders of Canadian country music. He was born in Nova Scotia, but he got his start yodeling for tourists in Banff and Lake Louise, Alberta.

### Aims

Students will examine Wilf Carter's life and consider the connections between the lives of individuals and historic events. Students will also have the opportunity to discuss Western Canadian identity, and debate the importance of musicians as historical figures.

### Background

Wilf Carter was born in Port Hilford, Nova Scotia, on December 18, 1904. It was a long way from the seaboard to the mountains and flatlands of Alberta, but by his twentieth birthday he had scraped together enough money to buy a train ticket to Calgary. He took his guitar with him. The career of one of the founders of Canadian country music was about to be

launched.

Carter found work on harvest crews, as a horse wrangler, and then a trail guide in the Rocky Mountains. Banff and Lake Louise had become destinations for the jet set of the roaring twenties. The young guide would sing and yodel to the rich and famous from around the world as they gathered around the campfire. Before long he was playing his music over the airwaves on CFCN, a Calgary radio station, one of the first in the country. As word of his work spread, he was offered a recording contract in Montreal with RCA Victor. In 1932, he recorded "The Ballad of Albert Johnson" and "My Swiss Moonlight Lullaby," and never looked back.

Carter's radio shows on CBC, CBS, and NBC were big hits and he began to be known as "Montana Slim." In 1940 he was seriously hurt in a car crash and was unable to perform again until 1949. But the roadshows he took across the country in the 1950's became one of Canada's most popular attractions. He settled down in Calgary and helped build the multi-billion dollar country music industry of today.

In 1994, two years before his death, he gathered what was left of his band, and toured the prairies in his old silver Cadillac convertible. The tour became known as "The Last Roundup" and passed into legend. From small town to small town, Montana Slim was saying good-bye, singing of the Blue Canadian Rockies one last time. Wilf Carter had achieved his ultimate dream. He had become the idolized singing cowboy.

## **Activities**

**Time Allowance:** 1 - 2 hours

## **Procedures:**

### Introduction

As the students enter the room, have a recording of Wilf Carter's song playing and pictures of Lake Louise and the Banff area on the front board. Ask your students to listen to words and look at the pictures and remember any names of places they hear or see that are familiar to them or what the song and pictures make them think of. The concept of Western Canadian Identity can be discussed at this point.

After the song is finished discuss as a class their observations and why they thought of the things that they did as they listened to the song and looked at the pictures. Have your students do a discuss their ideas in small groups about when they think the song was written and a rationale for why they think it was written at that time.

### Lesson

Give some background information on *The Canadians* series. Give your students some background information on Wilf Carter. Ask your students how important music is in their lives. Go on to ask them if they think musicians should be considered important historical figures. Why or why not? In this discussion the importance of culture and Canadian identity should be brought out.

Have the students draw an arrow across a blank sheet of paper . Ask them to put the year 1904 on the left end of the arrow and 1996 on the right end of the arrow. Tell them that this is the time span that Wilf Carter lived. Have the students fill in important historical events that happened in Canada during Wilf Carter's life. Record the answers that the class gives

on the front chalkboard on a timeline.

Tell the students that they are going to watch a video on the life of Wilf Carter and that they are responsible for recording how important Canadian historical events affected Wilf Carter or vice versa. The video is divided into five segments. Stop the video after each segment so each pair can discuss this information

After the students have seen the whole video ask each pair to join another pair to form a group of four. Have them discuss their information - from their timeline and from the video - in these groups of four. Ask each group of four to choose through consensus what they consider to be the two most important events in Canadian history that affected Wilf Carter. They must provide a rationale for their answers.

Have each group record their answers on chart paper and present them to the rest of the class. Ask each student to record in his or her notebooks the information that is presented.

## Conclusion

Have each student write down three words they think most appropriately describe Wilf Carter and his life as a Canadian. They must also write why they chose these three words. Have each student hand this in to you before they leave the class. Mark it out of five and return it the next class.

## Homework Assignment

Using information that they recorded throughout the class ask each student to create at least one verse of a song about Wilf Carter and his

life. A verse should be at least four sentences long. Have each student share their verse with the rest of the class. All of the verses can be displayed on a bulletin board that commemorates the life of Wilf Carter.

### Extension Activities

1. Have each student create a title for each segment of the video. They should also have a rationale for why they chose the title they did. In groups of four have them discuss the titles they each chose. Are they similar? Why or why not?
2. Ask each student to record the three most important sentences from each segment of the video. Students should have a rationale for why they chose the sentences that they did. Have each student put these sentences together in five different verses to create an "Ode to Wilf Carter" that they can share with their classmates.
3. Have students investigate why Wilf Carter went to Western Canada. What were some of the things that drew him to the West? Ask your students if at that time in history they think they would have wanted to go out West. Why or why not? Why do people choose to go out West today?
4. Have your students interview a grandparent or senior citizen and ask them about their knowledge of Wilf Carter or other influential musicians of their time. These influential people could be Canadians or people from other cultures. Have them record this information and write a short biography about this influential person. Each student will then present this information to the rest of the class.

### Required Materials:

This lesson would be enhanced by having some recordings of Wilf

Carter's music.

## **Resources**

[Wilf Carter Worksheet](#)

Carter, Wilf. *Wilf Carter's Own Book of Cowboy Songs With Yodels*.  
Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson, 1935.

[Wilf Carter - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Wilfred Carter - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)