

Historica Canada Education Portal

Stratford

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Historica Minute, "Stratford."](#) In 1953, entrepreneur Tom Patterson and artistic director Tyrone Guthrie transformed Stratford, Ontario, from a small railroad town into the Canadian home of Shakespearean drama. The Stratford Festival attracted international recognition and served as the prototype for dozens of other Canadian festivals.

Aims

Students will understand the development of the Stratford Festival and its impact on the Arts in Canada by designing a theatre. They will also design a program for a Shakespearean play at the Stratford Festival. Students will research and present information about other Arts festivals in Canada.

Activities

1. Students will watch the Heritage Minute "Stratford Festival," and record significant information in their notebooks/logs (Where, When, Who is involved, What is happening).

After this initial viewing, ask what the students' initial impressions were, and what they thought was the most important message from the Minute.

The students will watch the Minute a second time to look for details they may have missed the first time. Then discuss with the students what they have seen. Ask them about their experiences with theatre; what plays they have seen, what they have enjoyed, where they have gone, etc.

2. Give students a brief overview of the Stratford Theatre, explaining how the theatre was formed, and what types of plays are performed there.

3. If possible, read a story to your class from a book that recounts Shakespeare's plays for young children. A good book is *Shakespeare for Kids: His Life and Times* by Margie Blumberg and Colleen Aagesen. Discuss the story you have chosen with your students and talk about how the play could be performed. Ask students what the ideal theatre would look like. Jot some of these ideas down on the board. (Ideas like big stage, large buildings, and large windows). Encourage students to be creative (their ideas need not be practical).

After discussing the ideal theatre, put students into groups of 3 or 4 people. Give each group a large piece of poster paper and instruct them to create their own theatre on this paper. Advise them to be creative, to include a title for their theatre, and a design for both the inside and outside. They can be very detailed depending on the time allotment. Tell them to think of everything, including the area surrounding the theatre (nature etc.), parking lots, and building structure. Allow students a couple of days to work on this in class.

After completing the posters, students will present their 'theatres' to other

groups. If necessary, the teacher can provide pictures of other theatres to guide students.

4. Show students a collection of theatre programs, or show theatre programs from local theatres the students might be familiar with. Discuss with students why a theatre program is made, what details it includes (Cast, director, Act and scene numbers, pictures, actors bios, etc).

Instruct students that they will be making a program for a Shakespeare play. If possible, show the students a program from the Stratford Festival. (During their festival season, a model program can be seen on the Festival's Web site.)

Have students choose one Shakespeare play, and research the players, and cast needed. They will need to know scene references, and character names, as well as an overview of the stories. Have students research prominent Shakespearean actors in Canada for the cast list. Have them start by looking at the Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia.

Note: If this lesson accompanies the study of a Shakespeare play, read the first Act of the play before doing this activity to give students a foundation for the theatre and the plays presented. If this lesson accompanies a historical study of the Stratford Festival or the History of Theatre, provide time for students to research the history of theatres in Canada.

5. In groups of 3 or 4, have students research Arts Festivals in Canada. Depending on the community, students could choose to study a local festival, or a festival like the Blues Festival in Montréal. Students should look at how these festivals help contribute to the Arts in Canada.

Students should make a visual display on their topic, including pictures, location, season for the festival, samples of work (where possible), advertisements, etc.

In addition to the visual display, students presenting their topic should perform an event that would be seen at their festival. For example, if they choose to study the Shaw Festival, they could perform one scene from one of Shaw's plays. If they choose to study the Busker's Festival, they could juggle, or do an act to get the other students involved. This will make the presentations more interesting, and likely more memorable. Use the attached evaluation rubric to grade the performance.

Besides their performance, students could do a written report on one of the topics.

Resources

[Heritage Minutes: Stratford](#)

[Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia](#)

[The Stratford Festival](#)

[The Canadian Encyclopedia: Stratford Shakespeare Festival](#)