

Historica Canada Education Portal

Frontier College

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Heritage Minute, "Frontier College."](#) Frontier College was Canada's first organization to work towards equal education. Since the College's beginnings in Ontario in 1899, thousands of volunteer teachers have educated students of different ages, professions, and levels of wealth in various locations across Canada.

Aims

Students will briefly describe the history and importance of Frontier College and distinguish between a teacher in the 1900's and a teacher today.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of how Frontier College contributed to an improvement in the lives of working people, and especially immigrants, in the early 1900's. They will research the changing nature of education in Canada and some of the key people behind the founding and development of Frontier College.

Activities

1. After viewing the "Frontier College" Minute, ask students questions about it. The questions can be about the jobs of the students, the time period, and about the teacher.

2. Using information from the Minute and from the [Frontier College](#) Web site, have students answer the following questions:

- If you were looking for Frontier College, where might you find it?
- Who attended Frontier College? What were the 3 types of workers?
- Who were the teachers?
- Why was it created?

After these questions have been answered, lead the students in a discussion about the differences between the learning environment of an adult labourer learning to read and write in the 1900s and a Canadian student learning to read today.

3. Divide the class into groups and give each group poster board or a large piece of paper. Ask students to think about the resources that a Frontier College teacher had in 1900 to teach people how to read, and the resources for a teacher today. Students should draw a line down the centre of the poster paper and label one side 1900 and the other "today". Have them write the lists of the resources on the poster paper to make a comparison. Of course, the modern teacher's list will be much longer. The students should then evaluate how the 1900s teacher compensated and maximized the use of their limited resources.

This activity will give students a sense that literacy can be developed without the gadgets and fads of modern day. Students will present their lists to the other groups.

After this activity, lead the students in a discussion of the challenges that faced teachers in the 1900s versus the challenges facing teachers today.

4. Students Become Frontier College Teachers

- Students will watch the Heritage Minute “Frontier College,” and record significant information in their notebooks/logs (Where, When, Who is involved, What is happening).
- After this initial viewing, the teacher will ask what the students’ initial impressions were, and what they thought was the most important message from the Minute. The teacher will then ask what they noticed about fashion, housing, type of reading material, language, names, type of work being done, atmosphere, etc.
- The students will watch the Minute a second time to look for details they may have missed the first time.
- After the Minute is completed, have the students work in pairs to combine the information they have gathered for their notes/logs.
- Discuss with students the difficulties immigrants faced in the workforce (i.e. language, skills, literacy, etc.), and how education may have helped improve their ability to work safely and effectively.
- After this discussion, students will take on the role of a Frontier College teacher. For the remainder of the period (and possibly the next class), have students work in groups in the library researching one of the following topics (or a topic of your choice): Norman Bethune, the Evolution of Education, Immigration in the early 1900's, or Alfred Fitzpatrick.
- The students will be responsible for presenting their topic to the class, but to make it more interesting, instruct the students to ‘teach’ their topic in the style of a Frontier College teacher as seen in the Heritage Minute.

- They will use the details from the video and from information they have researched to simulate the atmosphere of a typical classroom in the early 1900s; this could include fashion, types of questions/examples, class atmosphere, lighting, writing utensils, etc.

5. Education: Then and Now - Ask students to brainstorm in pairs to make a chart in their books comparing education THEN to education TODAY, and to outline how education helped improve the status of life for many workers. Be sure to include a discussion of women's contributions to the College. Discuss how the role of women in education has changed since the beginning of the 1900s.

- After the discussion of these issues is completed, give students the testimonials of Frontier College students throughout Canadian history, found on the Frontier College website. Have students take turn reading these aloud in class, discussing how the College helped improve the status of life for immigrants and Canadians at work.
- After these have been read and discussed, have students work individually or in pairs to write a reflection of their own from either the perspective of a student or teacher at Frontier College. Remind students to be specific to the time period, including the type of work being done, language barriers, and how the skills helped them improve their work.

6. Possible Extensions/Additional Activities

- Instead of having students teach a lesson, they could perform a skit based on the Heritage Minute, representing a day in the life of a Frontier College Student.

- Frontier College is a national volunteer-based organization constantly looking for volunteers. Since some students have to fulfil volunteer requirement for graduation, this could provide an excellent opportunity since Frontier College has organizations in hundreds of cities throughout Canada, and they stress the idea that everyone has something they can teach to someone else; students need not have an outstanding academic record to apply.
- Depending on how often Heritage Minutes are viewed in class, the Frontier College Minute could serve as an addition to a 'Heritage Minutes Log' or journal in which students record their thoughts/opinions about the Heritage Minutes.
- Take a field trip to one of the Frontier College locations, e.g., a university campus or a classroom. Students can talk to one of the Regional Coordinators or volunteer teachers and collect materials, literature, and posters.
- Invite a Frontier College volunteer to the class. Divide students into groups to discuss whether they would like to become volunteer teachers. Ask each group to come to a consensus and have them present their arguments for being volunteer teachers or not.
- Ask students to imagine they have been recruited as Frontier College volunteer teachers. Ask them to volunteer for one of the following programs: Labourer-Teacher Program, Tutoring Adults, English as a Second Language, Working with Children, Working with Teens, Working with Street Youth, or Working with Inmates.
- Form students into groups according to their choices. Have the groups discuss why they want to volunteer for that particular program, and which teaching methods they think are useful for helping the students in that program. Groups can present their rationale to the class.

The study of Frontier College complements many history courses, since it

provides an interesting focus on immigration, early education, and the shaping of Canadian identity. This study can also serve as an introduction to key Canadian figures such as Norman Bethune and Alfred Fitzpatrick.

Resources

[Heritage Minutes: Frontier College](#)

[Frontier College](#)