

Historica Canada Education Portal

Maurice "Rocket" Richard

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the ["Maurice "Rocket" Richard" Heritage Minute](#). Richard was a legendary hockey player for the Montréal Canadiens. He won numerous trophies, and set several records during his 18-year career.

Aims

Students will research changes in sports to understand historical change, and they will research and write biographies of their favourite sports stars.

Students will write sports stories; think critically about the idolization of sports stars; and analyze the role of hockey as Canada's national sport.

Activities

1. Changes in sport

Many students will have seen footage of hockey games of the past, when players did not wear helmets and goaltenders did not wear masks. The

game has changed quite a lot in the last forty years. Sports can be one way for students to understand processes of historical change.

- Have groups of students research the histories of particular sports: hockey, baseball, basketball, football, soccer, lacrosse, etc. Ask each group to list ten to fifteen significant events or changes, with dates, in the story of their sport. You might present them with some themes to watch for, like changes in equipment, changes in rules, important personalities, important contests, international developments, women's participation, etc.

- Have the students display their findings on a timeline. They may photocopy photos to illustrate many of the events or create their own illustrations. Display the complete work on butcher paper.

- Have each student in the group be responsible for one or more of the significant points on the timeline. Either in writing or as an oral report, they should present the facts of their "turning point," explaining why it is important, the change it caused, and the long-term effect it had on the sport.

2. Stars

Maurice Richard remains one of the most recognizable hockey stars. Young people are often fascinated with star athletes. Building on that interest is one way to encourage research, writing, and speaking skills.

- After watching the Heritage Minute, conduct a brainstorm of major sports, and the most famous players in each. (Students may need a little encouragement to broaden their thinking beyond one or two sports, so the teacher should be prepared with some others, like track and field,

swimming and diving, figure skating, skiing, etc.)

- Have students pick a favourite sport and, if possible, a favourite player. If students do not have a particular athlete in mind, direct them to a history of the sport for the story of some colourful personalities.

- Have students research their star athletes. With guidelines like "outstanding records," "great games," and "off the field (or court)," have them gather facts about the athletes.

- Have students write brief biographies of their star athletes, demonstrating what made them outstanding in their sports and any qualities they had that make them interesting personalities. They may include illustrations of the stars. You may choose to have students present their work to small groups or to the whole class as well.

3. Writing a sports story

Newspaper sports coverage has a great history of colourful writing. Before the advent of radio and television sport broadcasting, newspaper readers depended upon the sports journalist to do more than report scores and results. The sportswriter made the events of the game come alive with vivid and evocative language.

- Prepare students for the assignment by asking them to recall the most exciting sports events they remember, whether they were spectators, participants, or television viewers. If they can't recall any particular events themselves, have them ask family and friends for stories.

- In small groups, have each participant tell their story to others. They should have notes with the particulars of dates, places, and names to

help them frame their stories. If the facts are a little vague, they should feel free to make some up. This is an exercise in storytelling, not accurate journalism.

- Once they have shared their stories orally within their groups, have them write their stories. Have students concentrate on vivid language, with colourful adjectives and adverbs. The writing should also be concise and active, evoking the drama of the moment and capturing the excitement of the action. You may choose to provide students with examples of sports journalism.

- Be sure that each student gives his or her piece a colourful title.

- Collect the pieces into a "Great Moments in Sports" Anthology.

4. Sports idols

Maurice Richard had an heroic image, particularly in Montréal. In fact, fans rioted when Richard was suspended for attacking a linesman in 1955.

- Discuss the Heritage Minute's presentation of Maurice Richard. Present some additional facts about his career, his records, the adoration he received from Montréal fans, and also the story of the 1955 Richard riots.

Have the students brainstorm a list of other sports idols.

- Begin a discussion about why athletes are idolized. What is their appeal? Why do we sometimes put them on pedestals? Is the idolization of athletes a healthy expression of our ideals and aspirations?

- Generate a few pro and con arguments, then establish debating teams on the proposition, Resolved: Athletes are good role models for Canadian youth.

5. The national game

Canada is probably the only country that would create anything like a Heritage Minute about a hockey player. Hockey is part of our national identity. But what does the game contribute to our national myth? The topic might be of interest in a Social Studies class, especially during the Stanley Cup playoffs, or when Canada is involved in international competition.

- Discuss the attraction of hockey as a sport by comparing it to other sports. For example, compare its action to baseball's, its roughness to football's, its violence to basketball's, etc. Aim the discussion toward a description of hockey's uniqueness.

- Discuss whether hockey, the Canadian sport, expresses something about our national character.

- Does the appeal of the violent, fast-paced sport contradict other views that Canada has of itself as a moderate, caring, peace-keeping, even boring country?

- You might follow up the discussion with a short writing assignment on Canada's "Jekyll and Hyde" character, or even its "Clark Kent and Superman" nature.

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: Maurice Richard](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Rocket Richard](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Maurice Richard \(Obituary\)](#)