

“Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes:”
A Journey of Ordinary – & Historically Significant –
Canadians, 1900-45 & 1945-99 © 2001 & 2016
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[Author's mother & grandparents, Kingston, ON, November 1914. Pte. Henry Herbert Goss was "killed in action" in the Ypres Salient, 24th June, 1916.]

My career as a secondary school history/civics teacher began at Huntsville High School the year after the Toronto Maple Leafs last won the Stanley Cup, and the year that *Trudeaumania* was sweeping across most of Canada! 1968 was also significant and controversial in Canadian history education. In that year, the National History Project in its publication, *What Culture?*

What Heritage? A Study of Civic Education in Canada, stated that “Canadian history in our schools is a bland consensus story, told without the controversy that is an inherent part of history ... a too-nice, straight forward, linear, dry-as-dust account of uninterrupted political and economic progress.”¹

To help address this perceived “bland consensus story” in history education – as well as in other subject areas – 1968 witnessed the publication in Ontario of the ideologically progressive Hall-Dennis Report, *Living and Learning*, that advocated reforming a largely teacher-centred and rote-learning model of education for a more student-centred, inquiry-based model.

“Peter Kear has come up with a brilliant approach to taking the ‘boredom’ out of teaching Canadian history and injection some of the real excitement that would have been felt by those who were actually there – and most assuredly not bored. His ‘time machine’ approach to teaching this subject deserves wider usage and a far wider audience.” (Roy MacGregor, prolific author of all-things-Canadian, journalist and columnist with *The Globe & Mail*, 31 July 2002)

“‘Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes’ – designed by Peter Kear – is an effective approach for the teaching of 20th century Canadian history and possesses the features to captivate the interest of young Canadians in both their national political history and local social history I recommend this unique approach to both secondary school teachers and instructors of Canadian history at faculties of education across Canada.” (Rudyard Griffiths, former Executive Director of the Dominion Institute, 21st May 2003)

“I was taking my History Specialist at Brock University a couple of years ago when I had the opportunity of hearing Peter speak about his approach. I have been using it for two years now and it has given the students and I results I could never imagine. The students and parents are constantly talking about it and it really makes the subject come alive for all of them.” (Michelle Galbraith, teacher, St. Mary’s High School, Woodstock, 17th Feb., 2004)

“History is no longer the most boring subject. It is now the most interesting and most talked about subject at home around the kitchen table! What the hell are you doing?” (An Applied-level Grade 10 student’s parent at a parent- teacher interview evening, Huntsville High School, March 1998)

“It was exciting to watch both of my teenaged daughters experience their grade ten Canadian history course when they used the ‘personal profiles’ approach. The ‘profiles’ allowed them to learn history from a distinct perspective – one that was much more personal. In an interactive way, they were given an opportunity to ‘live the part’ of their ‘profiles.’ They were excited to attend class!” (Mary Spring, parent, Huntsville, ON, 22 May 2003)

1 A. B. Hodgetts, Director of the National History Project, *What Culture? What Culture? A Study of Civic Education in Canada*, OISE, Curriculum Series/5, (1968), 24.

Within this historical and pedagogical context, the idea of an in-class experiential approach for the teaching/learning of 20th century Canadian history took root and came to fruition during my MEd program in curriculum design at Queen’s University in the late 1970s.

Since then, the content of *Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes: A Journey of Ordinary – & Historically Significant – Canadians, 1900-45 & 1945-99* has been extensively expanded and has embraced digital technology. It has been endorsed by students², parents, teachers, history educators, nationally-acclaimed historians and Canadian history advocates.

“Thanks for your material, which I liked very much. I can see how students could get inspired as they get caught up in their ‘life’ This is the first fresh approach to high school Canadian history I’ve seen in years, and a brilliant teaching method that captures and holds student interest.” (Canadian political and military historian, **Jack Granatstein**, author of *Who Killed Canadian History*, and former CEO of the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, 22nd November 2002, and 17th January 2011)

“Peter Kear’s ‘Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes’ is a splendid way to engage student interest in Canadian history while maintaining academic rigor ... ideal for integrating micro and macro history and for teasing out the relationships among economic, political, and social conditions in Canada’s complicated past.” (Canadian social historian, **Margaret Conrad**, 20th June 2003)

“Peter Kear’s interactive presentation, ‘Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes,’ was thoroughly enjoyed by pre-service teacher candidates for Intermediate-level History Although they had previously been exposed to role-playing exercises in history, they had not considered the importance of rooting such simulations in their own community, utilizing local situations and personalities. I heartily commend Mr. Kear on this simulation, and wish him every success in influencing the teaching of History in this way.” (Canadian social historian and curriculum professor, **Sharon Cook**, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, 8 December 2004)

In 2018, this experiential and student-engaging learning strategy is compliant with the strands, expectations, and the pedagogical focus of the mandatory Grade 10 History program as prescribed within the *2013 Revised Ontario Canadian and World Studies* curriculum document.

“History involves the study of diverse individuals, groups, and institutions as well as significant events, developments, and issues in the past ... Students learn that Canada has many stories and that each one is significant and requires thoughtful consideration In examining issues from various perspectives, students develop an understanding of and respect for different points of view ... also develop empathy as they analyse events and issues from the perspectives of people ... from different historical eras.”
(*2013 Revised Ontario Curriculum: Canadian and World Studies*, 11, 47)

Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes is a multi-perspective learning approach that takes history students on collective and individualized journeys through the impersonal *macro-events* (e.g. the so-called “Laurier boom years,” the First World War, the “Dirty Thirties,” the “Fabulous Fifties,” the “Rebellious Sixties”), which shaped the Canadian experience during the 20th century.

² This claim is based on anecdotal evidence, and the results of 21 end-of-semester class sets of anonymous students opinionnaires filled out between June of 1996 and January 2018.

At the beginning of the Grade 10 course, each student selects and assumes a *personal profile* that incorporates gender, ethnicity/ancestry, locality, and socioeconomic status. This *personal profile* provides each student with an unique *identity lens* that enables them to age and to vicariously experience the Canadian *macro-events* of the century. Students are “walking in the shoes” of their great-grandparents’ (1900-1945), and grandparents’ (1945-1999) generations.

“My group of *essential* students have found that ‘walking in the shoes’ of their grandparents and great-grandparents is an interesting way of studying issues and historical events, which are difficult to understand in our technologically-oriented world. Chance events (i.e. *dynamic situations*) add unpredictability to the curriculum and worked well with this level of student to make history fun.”
(**Jamie Honderich**, teacher, Huntsville High School, Huntsville, ON, 15th April 2004)

The student *personal profiles* fall into two categories: *ordinary* Canadians, and *historically significant* Canadians. Some examples of *ordinary* Canadians from the 1900s include a Japanese fish cannery worker from Steveston, BC; a Sikh sawmill worker from Golden, BC; a Welsh miner and former Methodist chapel preacher, who is a labour organizer in the coalfields of the Crow’s Nest Pass, BC/AB; a First Nations Dene student at the Sacred Heart Mission Residential School, Fort Providence, NWT, who has lost a younger sibling to tuberculosis while at the school; a German Mennonite immigrant from Czarist Russia, farming near Rosenfeld, MB; a First Nations Cree who hunts and traps in the James Bay lowlands; a recently-arrived Italian immigrant working in one of the largest tanneries in the British Empire, Huntsville, ON; an unemployed English abattoir worker from Peterborough, ON, who is severely depressed, the result of his recent experiences in the South African War; a terminally ill French-Canadian worker, who has contracted tuberculosis at a damp textile mill in Valleyfield, QC. Finally, an African Canadian, who is a coal-handler, toiling in the busy port of Halifax, NS.

“In using this approach with the students, it grabs their interest and keeps them more in tune with the changes during the 20th century. They start to identify with whom they are, and find it neat getting married and having kids. Sometimes they are unhappy about being poor, experiencing discrimination, losing children etc. but they begin to personalize and understand better some of the trials that ordinary Canadians faced in the 20th century. There is a lot of talk between students in my class and other grade 10 History students who weren’t involved in this activity. Students from other classes would sometimes come and look at the personal profile cards that were up in my classroom and appeared interested and wished they could have been doing it themselves.” (**Mark Savage**, teacher, St. Francis Secondary School, St. Catharines, ON, 7th July 2002)

Some examples of *historically significant* Canadians from the 1900s include Sir Henry Pellatt, Agnes Macphail, R.B. Bennett, Tim Buck, Adrien Arcand, Sir Clifford Sifton, Duncan Campbell Scott, Billy Bishop, Lawren Harris, William Hubbard, Francis Pegahmagabow, Nellie McClung, Moses Coady, Tomekichi Homma, Henri Bourassa, Mackenzie King, Emily Murphy, Dr. Norman Bethune, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, Fanny “Bobbie” Rosenfeld, Sir Joseph Flavelle, Lionel Conacher, Thérèse Casgrain, Arthur “Slim” Evans, William “Bible Bill” Aberhart, Mary Pickford, Sir Sam Hughes, Filip Konowal, J.S. Woodsworth, Dr. James Naismith, Aimee Semple McPherson, Tom Longboat, and C.O. Shaw.

Over one hundred *personal profiles* represent a diverse cross-section of backgrounds, interests and “diverse perspectives” in Canadian society from the beginning of the last century. The often ignored and marginalized ‘voices’ of women, Indigenous peoples, non-British ethnicities, African Canadians, and working-class heroes are now included as *personal profiles*. When students assume the *identities* of their *personal profiles*, they become the imaginary daughters/sons, possible nieces/nephews, or in some cases the siblings of these *ordinary* and *historically significant* Canadians.

“Teachers can give students a variety of opportunities to learn about diversity and diverse perspectives. By drawing attention to the contributions of women, the perspectives of various ethnocultural, religious, and racial communities, and the beliefs and practices of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, teachers enable students from a wide range of backgrounds to see themselves reflected in the curriculum.” (2013 Ontario Curriculum, Social Studies, History and Geography, 45)

Students are confronted with specific *dynamic situations* within the historical context of the *macro-events* (e.g. the anti-Asiatic Vancouver riot of 1907 during the “Laurier boom years”), which impact their *personal profiles’* lives and those of their families. Significantly, these *dynamic situations* can “hook” teenagers at both the cognitive (critical and historical thinking³) and the affective levels of learning – so essential for sustained engaged learning.

“The personal profile approach makes it more hands on and exciting. It makes you feel you were there in history, and that you would feel the suspense that you would feel if you were there. It was easy to remember when I used this learning approach.”
(An Applied-level Grade 10 student at Huntsville High School, 27th June 2016)

“I find this approach draws students into Canadian history and increases their enjoyment of the subject; and that is a good thing in grade 10 Applied classes! Students often mention the roles they played in the simulation years later. What more could a history teacher ask of a simulation.” (Jim Fraser, teacher, Innisdale Secondary School, Barrie, ON, 22nd July 2002)

Further, the *dynamic situations* involve “diverse perspectives,” along with the elements of uncertainty and unpredictability; hence they are problematic and controversial in nature. Significantly, the *dynamic situations* foster feelings and emotions appropriate to the specific historical settings. For example, during the first couple of decades of the 20th century, the daughter/son of a Sir Henry Pellatt, a Henri Bourassa, a Sir Joseph Flavelle, a Sir Clifford Sifton, or even a Nellie McClung, would certainly view the world differently than the daughter/son of Jewish parents who had recently emigrated from Czarist Russia, now living in Winnipeg’s North

³ This multi-perspective approach has been designed to facilitate and nurture the six curriculum-mandated concepts of historical thinking (historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives, and the ethical dimension) within an historically-conditioned affective context. It is described and endorsed in Peter Seixas/Tom Morton, *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (2013), 160-162. The *personal profiles* of the historically significant Canadians within the approach provide ample opportunities to explore the concept of historical significance. The numerous *dynamic situations* (there are 47 possibilities covering the years from 1900 to 1945, & 101 covering the years from 1945 to 1999) provide opportunities to incorporate the other concepts associated with historical thinking, including evidence – how do we know what we know about the past. In addition, the concepts of political thinking can be introduced into *dynamic situations* that deal with historically significant federal elections (e.g. 1911, 1917, 1921, 1935).

End – or an orphaned Barnardo “home child” from the slums of East End London, now working as an indentured farm-hand or as a domestic in out-of-sight rural Ontario!

Nine examples of these historically-referenced *dynamic situations* from the 1900s, 1920s and the 1930s to illustrate the problematic and controversial nature of the *dynamic situations*:

- With the **1902 workplace dynamic situation**, an industrial accident results in the death of a father/the bread-winner; his family may plunge down the social pyramid depending on the socioeconomic status and ethnicity/ancestry of the family – the dark side of the “Laurier boom years,” (Historical thinking focus: historical perspectives, continuity and change, evidence),
- With the **1907 Anti-Asian Vancouver riot dynamic situation**, a father of British ancestry, living in BC, joins the Asiatic Exclusion League, and a family of Asian ancestry living in BC is refused housing during a year of economic recession within the “Laurier boom years.” Ethnicity/ancestry, socioeconomic status, and locality are all complicating factors embedded within this divisive *dynamic situation*! (Focus: continuity and change, ethical dimension, evidence),
- With the **1909 economic growth dynamic situation**, some families, depending on ethnicity/ancestry and socioeconomic status, may prosper and climb the social ladder during the “Laurier boom years,” (Focus: continuity and change, evidence),
- With the **1911 federal election dynamic situation**, students through the identity lens of their *personal profile* experience, make a political decision during the pivotal “tin-pot navy/free trade” federal election campaign; ethnicity/ancestry, socioeconomic status, and gender are all complicating factors embedded within this divisive *dynamic situation* as the “Laurier boom years” come to an end (Focus: historical and political significance, ethical dimension, evidence),
- With the **1919 consequences-of-war dynamic situation**, some “returned soldiers” from the Great War – “the war to end war” – are physically and psychologically disabled; the resulting chronic health problems will affect their chances for stable employment. Depending on socioeconomic status, it may plunge their family down the social ladder during the so-called “roaring twenties” (Focus: cause and consequence, evidence),
- With the **1919 Winnipeg General Strike dynamic situation**, students through the identify lens of their *personal profile* experience, craft a letter-to-the-editor of their local newspaper on their position concerning the labour dispute unfolding in Winnipeg – and elsewhere in Canada: is there evidence of a Bolshevik-type ‘soviet’ trying to take power from lawfully constituted officials, or is it more a case of frustrated Winnipeggers struggling to realize a degree of social, economic justice after the Great War during which the cost of living had doubled? (Focus: historical perspectives, political perspective, evidence),
- With the **1927 xenophobic dynamic situation**, some student families, depending on ethnicity/ancestry or socioeconomic status, experience xenophobic-based discrimination in the realms of housing and employment. A series of events, including the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike – and the resulting “Red Scare” – the passage of the 1923 federal Chinese Exclusion Act, and the rise of the KKK in certain regions of the country, have created and reflect an atmosphere of fear and intolerance in Canada during the “roaring twenties” (Focus: historical perspectives, continuity and change, the ethical dimension, evidence),
- With the **1935 “New Deal” federal election dynamic situation** during the Great Depression, students through the identity lens of their *personal profile* experiences, make a political decision on the diverse variety of traditional and “protest” political parties (From the Communist Party on the extreme-left to the Quebec-based *Parti National Social Chrétien* on the extreme-right supporting both federal Conservative and Reconstruction Party candidates. For some ethnic and racial minorities – and the women of Quebec –

there are still significant restrictions on voting rights (Focus: historical and political significance, political stability and change, the ethical dimension, evidence),

- With the **1939 Jewish refugees fleeing the Third Reich *dynamic situation***, students through the identity lens of their *personal profile* experience, write a letter to their member of parliament expressing their support for – or opposition to – the federal government granting sanctuary to the Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany aboard the ocean liner, *S.S. St. Louis*. Again, there remain significant restrictions on voting rights (Focus: historical perspectives, political perspective, the ethical dimension, evidence).

“Seeing historical events through your own eyes as they ‘happen’ to you makes them that much more memorable. I still remember things like my wife dying of the Spanish flu in 1918 and my [Japanese Canadian] friend being shipped off to New Denver in 1942.” (An **Academic-level Grade 10 student**, General Panet High School, Petawawa, ON, 17th June 2004)

“Students investigate injustices and inequalities, but not simply through the lens of victimization. Rather, they examine ways in which various people act or have acted as **agents of change** and can serve as **role models for active citizenship**.” (2013 Revised Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, History & Geography, 46; social justice definition, 210)

“Your program ‘Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes’ was very popular with my pre-service teacher candidates this year. They loved the idea of biography as a window on history, and because of your judicious selection of historical persons they were introduced to a way of including a discussion of gender and social class as well as regional differences in the grade 10 History course.” (Myra Novogrodsky, curriculum professor, Faculty of Education, York University, 9th April 2007)

“This approach allows students to take ownership over their own learning and view history in the context of their own daily lives. Student participation is maximized not simply for one or two class periods but potentially throughout the entire course. I cannot think of a better way to promote the study of history amongst grade 10 students I would recommend ‘Come Walk Awhile’ to all Canadian history teachers as a teaching and learning approach to enliven and enrich the history class.” (Marianne Larsen, Canadian social historian and curriculum professor, Faculty of Education, Trent University, 25th January 2004)

Today, as in 1968, the crucial question remains: how can teachers in the present, authentically invite and capture the minds *and hearts* of adolescents – future citizens of our democratic society – in a critical, yet a reflective study of Canada’s past that is both informative, and exciting?

“Yes, I did indeed do ‘the walk’ and we had a blast. ‘The walk’ has made such an impression on me, I’d rather teach history than English!” (Ron Jewer, General Penat High School, Petawawa, ON, 14th June 2004)

These *personal profiles* and *dynamic situations* (now nearly 150 *dynamic situations* covering the years 1900-99 to choose from) provide a wealth of opportunities to incorporate the 2013 curriculum concepts of critical and historical thinking, empathy, social justice, “diverse perspectives,” and examples of significant “agents of change” within the overarching national and mainly Eurocentric Canadian narrative.

“*Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes* is a wonderful approach to history. It blends the traditional content with the new social reality of reaching the student of the 21st century!” (**Robert Boal**, curriculum instructor, Schulich School of Education, Nipissing University, and teacher at Chippewa Secondary School, North Bay, ON, 18th February 2011)

“I would like to offer a strong letter of support for the work of Peter Kear has done in his *Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes* program, or might I say, ‘experience.’ Experience is what my students – 58 teacher candidates had in my history methods course at OISE/UT. They, and I would very much like to see Peter’s work expanded and supported.” (Comment by **John Myers**, curriculum instructor, OISE/UT, 5th April 2004)



If you wish a more detailed description of this learning strategy, or have comments, questions, contact Peter at: **petekear@vianet.on.ca**, or **pkear@tyndale.ca**, or 705-789-9112, and check out his history/civics education **Facebook** page at:

https://www.facebook.com/peter.kear/media_set?set=a.1200928502666.31040.1212164016&type=3