# Portail de l'éducation de Historica Canada

## Local Heroes Documentary

### Overview

The purpose of this lesson plan is to encourage students to research and produce short television documentaries concerning local individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the community or to the country. The goal for the project is to have students establish a deeper and more immediate connection to their own heritage, and to history in general.

### Aims

The principal aim of the project is to develop a deeper understanding of the complex heritage and history we share as Canadians. In researching, shooting, writing, and producing stories about local heroes students will gain a deeper appreciation for the value of history and find a sense of connection to a shared past. Secondarily, students will develop a number of important research skills and be exposed to the production side of filmmaking.

### Background

This project requires the support of the high school teacher, mentors (university/college film students or others with film experience), the staff of a local museum and/or archives for research, and potentially of a local tv station.

**Activities**

**Time Allowance:** 3-6 months

**Procedures:**

*The Production Team*

For this pilot project, students in grades 10-12 will form three teams of three. Each of these production teams will be paired with one or more mentors, called producers. Each producer should be a 3rd or 4th year student of media arts, or another adult with film experience.

*Who Does What?*

The students will, individually and together, perform the functions of researchers, production assistants, directors, sound recordists, and camerapersons. They will do this under the supervision of the teacher and museum/archives staff as well as with the hands-on assistance of the mentors or producers. Just as in the world of documentary production, the producers will make sure the project comes in on target, on budget and on schedule. In this case on target means that each team's work meets the expectations of the teacher and resource people, satisfies the mandate of the project, and meets with the approval of all involved.

*Stages of Production*

*Preparatory*

Week 1-2: Discussions and meetings with the students, teacher, and mentors to review the process, materials, answer questions, etc.

*Selecting subjects*

Weeks 3-4: With guidance from your local museum/archives, and by canvassing the community, the students will seek out suitable documentary subjects. These should be deceased local figures of significance to the community and possibly with provincial, national, or international significance. There are a number of reasons for excluding living subjects who otherwise fit the criterion. We assume, for instance, that living notables and interesting and creative characters are getting (or should be getting) recognition from local television broadcasters and cable operators. The teacher and museum official can help with the final selection of the subjects.

*Researching and writing the treatment and the script*

Weeks 5-8: Perhaps the longest single step! This is where the historical research is done and where it has to be married with visual storytelling. With the hands-on help from the mentors and assistance from the museum and archives, the teams will begin to gather the materials and resources needed to make their documentaries. The gathering of resources and the writing of the treatment are carried out in tandem. The treatment will discuss the story, its various elements, and the resources needed to make it work. Once some preliminary research has been carried out the teams will add details converting that rudimentary idea

into a plan of how to get down on tape the images and sounds they need to tell their story. This is the shooting script. Changes to the shooting script will point to the need for particular resources (visual or human, archival, or original footage). The presence or absence of particular resources will suggest possibilities in, or the need for changes to, the script. The shooting script will be a simple affair. The page is divided into 2 columns titled “picture” and “sound.” Annotations on the “picture” side of the column will indicate whether the image in question is archival, original footage, an interview, etc. Further annotations will indicate how it will be shot, where it is to be found etc. The “sound” column will indicate the kinds of things the interviewee is expected to say, the narration that will be needed, the sound effects, etc.

*Shooting the documentary*

Weeks 9-12: Shooting the material on 3-chip mini-digital video will guarantee a minimally adequate way of acquiring images. Adequate sound will require the use of lavaliere or boom microphones for interviews, etc. All shooting will be supervised to guarantee that it will meet broadcast quality; this may mean that at times the students will not be shooting but that it will be done by experts. This will be especially true of moves on stills, which may be shot by experienced camera people, by a rostrum cameraperson for whom we will arrange, or they may be scanned in. Each team will be supplied with releases for individuals, locations, and photographs. The still photos must be cleared for broadcast. The producers will be informed about what kind of releases are necessary and will make sure they are collected. It is estimated that each team will need about 3 shooting days.

*Editing*

Week 13: Each team will make up a log sheet for its material and then with the help of its mentors will turn the shooting script into the outline for a papercut. Editing will take place in the school if it has adequate facilities or in another designated facility. The roughcut of the documentary will go to designated persons for comments. Based on these comments, the material will be recut or proceed to a finecut. At the same time the shooting script will be revised as a narration script. The finecut and script will again be circulated for notes and when ready it will be locked. Once it is locked the picture will be onlined and sound edited.

*Music*

Week 14: Only cleared music may be used. We will either supply a small library of cleared cues or we will arrange for a composer to write the music we need. This last option is most interesting because it means the students will have the experience of working with a composer to enhance their documentary.

*Narration recording, mix, layback and packaging*

Week 15: The music and any narration will be recorded and mixed with the sound effects and interviews. All of this will be laidback onto the master tape. At this point, or earlier, the film will be colour-corrected and any necessary text elements and graphics added. After that dubs will be prepared. End credits will be added.

*Feedback*

Week 16: All participants will be asked through a questionnaire and brief interview to explain what they did and did not like about this project.

## Resources

Film production and editing equipment is required but the project can be completed with a basic video camera, iMovie or similar editing package and appropriate production support. The project requires leadership or significant assistance from an adult(s) with film production experience and significant knowledge/experience of how to turn raw film footage into a meaningful and insightful story. Student teams will require camera and sound equipment, access to research archives and time out of class to complete many of the tasks associated with the project (recommendation: at least 6 out-of-school days, as well as evenings and weekends).