

Portail de l'éducation de Historica Canada

Marconi

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Heritage Minute, "Marconi." On December 12, 1901, Guglielmo Marconi proved that wireless communication was possible when he sent a radio wave from England to Newfoundland.

Aims

Marconi's experiment led to the development of radio. Students will speculate about the impact that radio and other communications technologies have had on the modern world.

Since Marconi's experiment in communications, there have been huge advances in mass media. This activity is designed to give students a sense of the scope of mass communications that permeate their lives.

Activities

Looking back on the future

In the Heritage Minute, some St. John's schoolchildren spy on Marconi and his assistants as they complete their historical experiment. In fact, one of the children who watched the actual incident was Ned Pratt, remembered now as E.J. Pratt, one of Canada's most distinguished poets. The children in the Minute learn that they are watching the future change right in front of their eyes. Marconi's experiment led to the development of radio, one of the inventions that has shaped the modern world.

Discuss what radio must have brought to the lives of these young people that their parents did not have. What must it have meant to their understanding of the world? What new kinds of entertainment and information did it bring? Did it make them different people than their parents? How?

Generate a list of other changes in communications that happened during the lifetimes of the children on Signal Hill. List the inventions and advances, then discuss the changes that came with each of them. Television, for instance, made some big differences in the ways that families spent time together. Computer games have changed the ways that children play.

Now ask the students to imagine that they are one of the children who witnessed Marconi's experiment in 1901, but as she or he is today, at over 100 years old. Have students write a memoir about that day in St. John's and about the changes in communications that have happened during their lifetime. Urge students to write as though they are the old person and to include interesting observations about the amazing changes that she or he has seen.

Our electronic environment:

Communications has evolved from Marconi's crude electromagnetic signal into complex signals of mass media. This activity will help students become aware of the media that are part of their daily lives.

Use these questions as guides for creating a class survey about the various media in students' lives.

- List all of the home entertainment items in your house (tablets, cell phones, radios, TV's, video games, computers and computer games, VCRs, CD players, tape players, phonographs, etc.)
- List the newspapers and magazines in your household.
- How many hours per week do you: Spend on your phone, Watch TV, listen to the radio, listen to music, play video games, read, go to movies, watch videos?
- TV viewing habits: how often do you change channels each half hour? Who controls the remote control? Do families watch television together? Do you watch sports on TV? How often do you watch music videos? Do you watch TV news? List your favourite programs.
- In your out-of-class, non-sleeping time, how many hours a week do you stay away from ALL electronic media?

Share the findings and discuss the survey. Were there many similarities within the class? Surprising differences? What conclusions do the students reach about the effects of mass media on their ideas and behaviour?

