

## Discovering Your Place in History.

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### Abstract

The Historica Foundation of Canada has a mandate to provide or support programs and resources for the teaching of Canadian history in Canadian schools. This paper outlines how Historica discovered what was needed and the programs and resources they developed to fulfill their mandate.

The Historica Foundation of Canada is a charitable foundation whose mandate is to provide or support programs and resources that inspire Canadians to explore their history. Historica is committed to working in all provinces and territories, in both French and English, and with organizations and individuals of all origins. Its educational programs are developed to help teachers meet the challenges of teaching history in a constantly changing world.

The Historica Foundation is a charitable organization dedicated to helping Canadians discover the fascinating stories that make our country unique. Through our education programs and authoritative resources we connect Canadians to our many histories. We invite you to discover your place in history at [www.historica.ca](http://www.historica.ca). (Historica, 2006).

Looking to improve the quality of its resources, Historica commissioned two separate investigations of the teaching of Canadian history in Canadian schools in 2002/2003. One was by Patricia Shields and Doug Ramsey (Shields, 2002) and dealt with English-language schools, and the other was by Jean-Pierre Charland and Sabrina Moisan (Charland, 2003) and dealt with French-language schools. Their research examined the treatment of Canadian history in the curricula of the provinces and territories and the resources in use at the time. Both investigative teams interviewed teachers to determine their viewpoints on the state of Canadian history in their province or territory. In January of 2004, Ken Osborne, Professor Emeritus of Education University of Manitoba, summarized the findings of both groups for Historica. In his words, the report's intent was "simply to map the terrain of history education, not to prescribe any particular journey or destination (Osborne 2004, p. 3)

To determine the journey it needed to follow to provide teachers with what they needed Historica, in June of 2004 conducted an extensive on-line survey of teachers across the country to find out what type of resources teachers felt were needed to fill the gaps of resources currently out there. This research was followed up by interviewing teachers participating in the Historica Summer Institute in July of 2004. Then, in September of this same year, researcher MaryRose O'Neill, studied the earlier findings and survey and interview results and prepared a final report on the gaps in resources available to deliver history and social studies curricula in Canada. The Historica Foundation, has undertaken to fill the gaps suggested in this final report by concentrating its efforts in three main areas: school programs, learning resources and professional development.

Historica has two school major programs - the Historica Fairs program and YouthLinks. The first program, the National Fairs Program for grades four to nine, begins in the classroom with the preparation of research based projects and culminates with a public exhibition for the "sharing of the stories" discovered by the students. The Fairs program supports existing curricula in all provinces and territories and Historica is constantly enhancing its delivery and broadening its catchment area. Even isolated communities can participate by publishing their projects using the five easy steps provided on the online showcase hosted on the Historica site.

Making the Historica Fairs program an integral part of the social studies, history and geography programs is an excellent way to ensure that the students ...

acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to carry out increasingly complex investigations (Ontario Social Studies Grade 1-6, History and Geography, 2004, p.14)

The research/inquiry/problem solving process is an integral part of the Historica Fairs program and provides students with a chance to reinforce their understanding of the knowledge and skills taught in the classroom. Oral, written and visual communication skills as well as numeracy skills are at the forefront during the preparation and communication of culminating projects. Students practice these skills constantly while discussing their topics, collecting their research data, sorting, organizing and choosing their story messages and in the telling of their stories.

Concept maps, anticipation guides, word walls, question matrixes are only a few of the literacy and planning skills that are key components of the planning stages of the research process. Any of these techniques can be used to focus the students' research. Students utilize jot notes, information retrieval charts, and KWL charts as organizational tools to collect and organize their research findings. Once their research is completed, students use processing skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation to make decisions about what data is relevant and pertinent to the message they are trying to convey. Numeracy skills are reinforced, in many cases, as well, as students collect and analyse graphs, charts and diagrams as part of their research data.

In the Historica Fairs program, students are encouraged to communicate their research results using a wide variety of presentation methods. Drama and theatre, computer presentations, traditional videos and animations, dance and musical performances join the more traditional written write-ups as presentation choices at fairs. Students use their creativity and problem solving skills, as well as their special strengths and talents, as they choose, "just the right

technique" to make their story come alive for their audience. The interview process built into the adjudication process at the fairs reinforces the learning process as students review, rehearse and demonstrate their learning by responding to the questions of the judges and visitors.

Students' attitudes towards social studies, history, and geography can have a significant effect on their achievement of expectations. Teaching methods and learning activities that encourage students to recognize the value and relevance of what they are learning will go a long way towards motivating students to work and learn effectively. (Ontario Social Studies Grade 1-6, History and Geography, 2004, p.14)

Involvement in the Fairs program encourages students to recognize the value and relevance of what they are learning. Students not only produce and display projects celebrating their local, provincial and national history and culture but at some fairs they have the opportunity to participate in workshops offered by local museum groups, witness new citizens being sworn in at an emotional Citizenship Court and learn more about other Canadian stories by interacting and sharing the stories produced by their peers.

In 2005, Historica was able to help share the stories of 228,000 students in more than 1,000 communities from all parts of Canada. We are a nation of stories, and each Fairs student has an incredible story to tell. Each Fairs participant, each volunteer, each family member that provides advice, each visitor to a Fair, and each donor, plays an essential role in fulfilling Historica's mission to share Canada's many histories - remembering forgotten heroes, celebrating our diversity, discovering the richness of our heritage. (Historica 2006)

The second of Historica's school programs, YouthLinks, brings high school students from across Canada together in an online learning atmosphere. It allows high school students to connect on global issues and Canadian history. Learning modules are developed that allow teachers to guide their students through historically significant events that are still relevant in today's world. The Immigration Experience, Human Security, Peace and Conflict and Voices — Getting the Vote are some of the modules currently available for teachers on the Historica website.

O'Neill reported that "over and over again in the responses to the Historica survey, teachers spoke of the prohibitive amount of time it took to prepare their own teaching and learning activities". (O'Neill p.27) Lesson plans, assessment tools and resource links are provided in the YouthLink modules so that teachers spend only a limited amount of time on preparation. Technical and logistical support is available from Historica staff if required. The project also addresses teachers' needs for educational resources that link subject matter and technology outcomes. Students work in an interactive, collaborative environment that provides them with opportunities to network and dialogue with their peers from other provinces and territories.

The project facilitators recognize the technology limitations of some Canadian schools and therefore have made sure that accessibility is not a barrier to participation. The content and technology is accessible to schools that have dial-up or high-speed connections. The YouthLinks section of the Historica website facilitates teacher and student participation in the program by providing step by step instruction on how to sign up, how to participate in online discussion forums, how to submit articles for publication on the site and how to and participate in a one on one debate with another classroom. Once a year, six students and a

teacher from a participating class from each province and territory are brought together on a Canadian university campus to participate in a YouthLinks summit where they can listen to experts and then discuss and debate an issue in person. This year the summit is at the Faculty of Education, Queen's University and the topic of discussion is "Canadian Citizenship".

The survey and interview responses offer strong evidence that teachers are looking for many different kinds of teaching and learning resources and specific qualities in those resources. (O'Neill, 2004). Historica's mission is to provide the type of resources teachers called for through its website and online resources such as *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and *The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* and interactive games such as the Canucklehead Quiz, through its seventy-four Historica Minutes that have brought the Underground Railroad and the Laura Secord into living rooms and movie theatres across Canada, its one-hundred Footprints that capture our greatest sporting moments, its one-hundred-and-two Radio Minutes. Historica has a number of tools available to help bring Canada's histories to life. The Historica website at [www.histori.ca](http://www.histori.ca) is the gateway to all Historica's programs and resources. Quick links on the opening page quickly leads to each of the individual initiatives.

The online Canadian Encyclopedia is an excellent research tool for students and teachers. The content is uniquely Canadian and includes over 40,000 articles, 6,000 photographs, maps and graphs and reliable links to other related resources on the Internet. Primary documents and artwork supplement the secondary sources on the site. The Canadian Encyclopedia and the newly added Encyclopedia of Music are free, bilingual and easy to use. These resources are continuously updated to provide the latest information available. Many of the articles are provided in both the standard edition plus a junior edition that enables students of lower grades and abilities to participate in the systematic research approach. A bilingual CD of the Encyclopedia is also available for classrooms and students without internet access.

The Encyclopedia is not all about research. Its educational activities are fun to play while introducing students to new knowledge about the geography, arts, sciences and history of their country. Interactive maps, quizzes, games, videos sound clips and animations engage students in learning about what makes Canada unique.

O'Neill reported the finding that "teachers are also very interested in resources from other than the print media. They want visuals and films; and they want help in using the vast resources of the Internet". (O'Neill p. 4) Arranged by themes and with links to related lesson plans and articles in the Canadian Encyclopedia, the Historica minutes, available on DVD and also found online at [www.histori.ca](http://www.histori.ca), provide opportunities for the development of critical thinking skills as well as stimulation of interest for further research. When people ask the question, "What is Historica?" the staff at Historica often starts with the Historica minutes. Because of their exposure on television and in film theatres, they are often a good starting point to help people understand Historica's commitment to telling the many stories of Canada. Not only do such productions provide knowledge of Canadian history and its people but they also furnish an example for students interested in producing their own multi-media productions. After generating a heritage minute or a documentary of their own, students seldom forget the story they have told.

Recently, Historica has added to its media collection. The 100 Footprints tell of the stories of Canada's athletes and our sporting traditions. Its Radio Minutes explore 100 of Canada's most inspiring, innovative and challenging moments. The past year to commemorate the Year of the Veteran, Historica, with the help of CN, produced fourteen military minutes and two teacher guides to help students remember and celebrate the efforts of the Canadian military.

The new guides join the other lessons plans on the website to help teachers use media resources more effectively.

Professional development is the third goal of Historica's mission to improve the teaching of social studies and history in Canadian classrooms. In his report, Osborne reports that the Shields/Ramsey and Charland/Moisan data is clear. "There is at the moment very little professional development in history." (Osborne, page 39) Historica is committed to doing its part to change this. The professional development section of the website is constantly refreshed with up-to-date resources to help teachers. Some of the lesson plans for both the elementary and secondary levels have been created by teachers commissioned by Historica. The majority of lesson plans on the site, however, are provided by teachers from across the country. Teachers share an idea that has worked in their classroom on the website so that others can benefit from their experience. The Historica website arranges the lessons by themes for easy access by teachers looking for new and unique ideas.

A second component of Historica's professional development is the Historica Teacher Institutes which annually in July brings together teachers from all parts of Canada for a week of sharing ideas and learning from educational experts. In 2006, two such institutes will be held - one in Montreal for teachers of grades 4 to 8 and the other in Winnipeg for secondary school teachers.

The website also promotes professional development by listing conferences across the country that teachers might be interested in and often hosts current articles of experts in the educational field. An interactive Teacher Talk forum allows teachers to make queries or responses about teaching ideology or teaching strategies for specific Canadian curricula and resources. A recent addition to the website is the Black History portal that provides information, links to curricula guidelines, a timeline of Black history in Canada and links to other reliable internet sources. The website is updated regularly and its producers take all suggestions seriously and are constantly exploring new ways to make the site more useful in the teaching of Canadian history.

Anything that will foster enjoyment and excitement in Canadian history is worth the effort it takes to find. Romeo LeBlanc, past Governor General of Canada, in a speech to teachers at the award ceremony at Rideau Hall for the Governor General's Awards for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History stated, "Canadian history is not dead; it is just undernourished..." (LeBlanc, 1998) The Historica Foundation of Canada is doing its part to provide the nourishment that will make history viable and alive. By constantly revisiting and revising its current educational programs, its multi-media resources and professional development opportunities, it constantly strives to provide teachers with what they need to foster a love of Canadian history and help all Canadians "find their place in history"

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