

"Them's Fightin' Words"

Using Persuasive Reasoning or Debate to Investigate how Our Western Heritage has Shaped Modern Points of View

Introduction

Students need to understand how issues around Alberta's heritage still impact our society today. Concepts of land ownership, use of resources, treatment of animals, and the image of Albertans have gone through major changes over the past 100 years. How have our ideas and visions of our western heritage changed? How have the viewpoints of early Alberta ranchers defined our present attitudes? Are they outdated? Are they still a part of who we are as Albertans?

Project Explanation

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of characteristics and viewpoints from Alberta's past reflect people's current attitudes toward issues connected to our interaction with the land, natural resources, animals, and the First Nations peoples. Students will create a persuasive argument and then either engage in class debate or represent their case in a visual format. They will have to conduct research in order to find and validate their reasoning and justifications for their argument. The persuasive arguments may then be presented in an oppositional debate format, or students may create persuasive documents in order to sway others to their viewpoint. Debate helps students to learn research, thinking, communication and listening skills, as well as logical organization, teamwork, and respect for viewpoints that are different from their own.

Alberta Social Studies Curriculum Unit Connections

Grade Four - Alberta: The Land, Histories and Stories

- 4.1 Alberta: A Sense of the Land
- 4.2 The Stories, Histories and People of Alberta
- 4.3 Alberta: Celebrations and Challenges

Grade Five - Canada: The Land, Histories and Stories

- 5.1 Physical Geography of Canada
- 5.2 Histories and Stories of Ways of Life in Canada

Grade Six - Democracy: Action and Participation

- 6.1 Citizens Participating in Decision Making

Materials and Resources Needed

- *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* - Character Biographies and Online Artifacts
<http://www.glenbow.org/mavericks>
- Appropriate research materials, web sites, books and experts on the specific issues chosen by students
- CBC Archives: Calgary Stampede: Celebrating Canada's Western Heritage
http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-69-750/life_society/stampede/
- AFAC – free resource materials for teachers on Farm Animal Care
<http://afac.ab.ca/Education.htm>
- Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals – Facts About Our Food - Beef
<http://www.humanefood.ca/docs/FactSheets/Beef2004.pdf>
- Applying Brands – information on the history, types of branding, and why branding is done
http://www.lis-alberta.com/applying_brands/history.html
- The History of Cattle Brands
<http://www.barbwiremuseum.com/cattlebrandhistory.htm>

Procedures

At some point, we have all debated or used persuasive speech to convince others to see our own point of view. It may have been in order to have a later bedtime or about a significant issue. Students will work to persuade others to accept and agree to their own point of view on an issue that is related to Alberta's early history.

The idea of persuasive writing may be introduced by having students brainstorm times they have had to try to persuade others to accept their arguments.

Students could then begin to develop questions and issues that would arise out of Alberta's past, including issues over land ownership and use, animal rights, rodeo and the western image, First Nation people's land claims and the historical viewpoints of early Alberta figures. Possible questions might include:

- Can human beings really own the land?
- Is a specific Maverick an important part of Alberta's history?
- Was a specific Maverick a good representative of Alberta?
- Is the cowboy stereotype or tradition a positive and accurate representation of Alberta?
- Is the Calgary Stampede an accurate representation of Alberta or does it merely perpetuate the "Alberta" stereotype?
- Are animals treated fairly and humanely in an event like the Calgary Stampede? Are there modifications needed or should we respect our western heritage?

Glenbow Museum
WHERE THE WORLD MEETS THE WEST

- Were animals treated fairly and humanely in Alberta's early ranching history?
- Are animals treated fairly and humanely in Alberta's ranching sector currently?
- Should domesticated animals act as a food sources for human beings?
- Should branding be outlawed? Is there a better way to identify animals?
- Should predatory animals that prey on cattle or wander into urban settings be destroyed?
- Should ranchers have been allowed to settle on traditional First Nations lands?

It should be decided on the framework for the presentation of student learning and persuasive arguments. One option is that the whole class may be broken down into small groups for formal debates on a single or multiple issues. Another possible form of representation may be used by individuals or small groups, depending on how they would like to attempt to persuade their audience. These might include posters, pamphlets, essays, plays, speeches, PowerPoint presentations, digital videos, commercials or websites.

Students will then need to research and collect information and arguments to support the viewpoint on an issue that either they have chosen or that was given to them by their teacher (whether or not it conforms to their own personal viewpoint or not). Sources of information may include the *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* site, other web sites, library books, information and pamphlets from organizations such as Alberta Farm Animal Care Association (AFAC) or the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and even experts such as ranchers, rodeo cowboys, or First Nations leaders.

As the students research their issue, they can use the following questions as a guide:

- What is the issue?
- What are the various viewpoints for and against the resolution?
- What is my position regarding the issue?
- What are the three main arguments for my point of view?
- What supporting evidence will I use for each argument?
- What arguments will the opposing viewpoints use?
- What arguments and evidence will I use to contradict these challenging viewpoints?

The students will then work on creating their presentations using the information they have gathered in order to convince their classmates to adopt that viewpoint. They will need to consider their audience, making sure they use strong statements, quotations, or powerful statistics. They should make their position very clear and provide reasons and evidence to support it. Their conclusion should reinforce their position in a convincing manner.

They will then need to practice their presentation until they can deliver it smoothly and with confidence. Diagrams, graphs, props, or even costumes may be used to add to their presentation.

Assessment and Evaluation

- After the teacher and students collaboratively create a rubric, students should use it as a guide for their learning as they are working through the process, regularly checking that all the needed elements are included in their work and revising as needed. The rubric can then be used as a formal evaluative tool when they have completed their project.
- Students may evaluate themselves and their peers using their project rubric, examining each other's project for historical accuracy, detail, and creativity.
- Students should use their journal to reflect upon their group dynamics, how the problem solving process worked, their solutions to the problem, what could have been done differently or better, and any successes or frustrations they felt when working with their group.
- The final student presentations may be videotaped in order to be shared, re-examined, and evaluated. These may also be shared or evaluated along with their parents or be presented at student-led conferences.

Ideas to Enrich this Project

- Students could take responsibility for inviting special guests or experts on their question to come into the classroom and act as guest judges.
- Mathematical procedures in data collection and analysis could be used to determine if the presentations have had an effect on their own personal viewpoints about the issue being debated.