

Held Accountable by the Media...

Writing News Articles to Understand How Governments & Politics Affect Their Citizens

Introduction

Students need to understand how individuals and groups can impact the decision making of local and provincial governments, including ways that leaders are held accountable to their constituents. They will also begin to recognize the diverse political history that Alberta has, from different political parties to the rise of many political Mavericks. What is the history of Alberta politics? Why is politics important to every citizen in a democratic country? Why is the media important in the political arena?

Project Explanation

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of the power of the press in holding politicians accountable to their constituencies. Students will research and write historical news articles about political mavericks from Alberta and discuss why a free media is needed for a democracy to function properly.

Alberta Social Studies Curriculum Unit Connections

Grade Five - Canada: The Land, Histories and Stories

5.3 Canada: Shaping an Identity

Grade Six - Democracy: Action and Participation

6.1 Citizens Participating in Decision Making

Grade Seven - Canada: Origins, Histories and Movement of People

7.2 Following Confederation: Canadian Expansions

Materials and Resources Needed

- *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* - Character Biographies and Online Artifacts
<http://www.glenbow.org/mavericks>
- Images Canada
<http://www.imagescanada.ca/>
- CBC Archives: Electing Dynasties: Alberta Campaigns 1935 to 2001

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-73-1472/politics_economy/alberta_elections/

Procedures

The media is one way politicians are held accountable to the people they represent in their electorate. Students will research and write a news article based on one of the Mavericks included in the Politics section of the *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* site. The students will act as journalists who will report on one of the major events from the political career of one of the Maverick politicians (it could even be on a Maverick from another section). Students will work individually or in small groups to research and gather information as reporters from the Mavericks site. They will then work on their own to write the actual article.

To introduce the project, have the students collect and read politics-related news stories from the newspaper. Have them examine the style, tone and layout of the writing, as well as the important parts each article includes. Are any of these events important enough that students in 2105 will read about them? What events that have taken place in their lifetime do they think students in 2105 will know about or study?

Review the main parts of a news article with the students, including the main "W" questions, which include:

- Who or what is the news?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Who was involved?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?

Explain to the students that they'll be writing news articles about historic Alberta political events, and that the articles must answer these five questions.

Have the students or groups choose one of the Mavericks to research. As they learn about that person, they will need to pick a specific event to research and write about. Students can use textbooks, encyclopedias, and other websites, in addition to Mavericks, if they feel they need more information. Groups should make sure all members have all information before breaking up to individually write their own articles.

Once their article is developed, the students may use the *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* and *ImagesCanada.ca* websites to find photographs to accompany their writing. Some tips on using the Images Canada web site:

- Just the name can be used in a single search. Searching "frederick haultain" yields 18 photos, "henrietta muir edwards" yields 16 photos, "bob edwards" yields 24 photos, and "william aberhart" yields 85 photos.

- Click on “more information” under each picture to find other subject terms to use in searching. For example, “social credit” will yield 208 photos.
- Photos may be copied into another program like Word and then enlarged or printed in a landscape format if needed.

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<http://www.imagescanada.ca/r1-230-e.html>

After all students are done their news articles, they can examine the question of “Why is a free media needed for a democracy to function properly?” The news has been full of articles about ADSCAM and the Gomery Inquiry. How does the media affect the importance of these political events?

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 use their rubric as a guide for writing a self-assessment of their project work. They will determine their level for each of the categories and use the criteria specified in their rubric to justify them.
- After completing the project, students may talk or journal about what they felt they did very positively, what they had difficulty with, and how they would change how they would approach a similar project in the future.

Ideas to Enrich this Project

- Students could work in groups to put their articles and photos together to make the front page of a political newspaper. They could come up with a creative name for their paper and work together to create a layout.