

## *Putting Pen to Paper in the Trenches*

### **Personal Letters and Photographs Detailing the Experience of Living Through Wartime**

#### **Introduction**

Students need to gain an understanding of the people and the stories of Canada and their way of life during major events. Through the stories and personal histories of the Mavericks, history will be brought to life as students share information, values and attitudes about historical personalities and events. What was living in wartime like? How did it affect individuals and their families? What were some of the roles Alberta took on when Canada went to war? How did people communicate with their friends and family during these times?

#### **Project Explanation:**

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of the social history surrounding individuals living during wartime. Students will research a wartime Maverick and write a personal letter home from that person's individual perspective. They will also find and write about photographs that illustrate the experiences they are writing about.

### **Alberta Social Studies Curriculum Unit Connections**

#### **Grade Four - Alberta: The Land, Histories and Stories**

4.2 The Stories, Histories and People of Alberta

#### **Grade Five - Canada: The Land, Histories and Stories**

5.2 Histories and Stories of Ways of Life in Canada

### **Materials and Resources Needed**

- *Mavericks: An Incorrigeble History of Alberta* - Character Biographies and Online Artifacts  
<http://www.glenbow.org/mavericks>
- Glenbow – Library and Archives Search Menu  
<http://ww2.glenbow.org/lasearch/searmenu.htm>
- Lt.-Col. James Macleod's Letters and Photographs (Glenbow Archives)  
<http://www.glenbow.org/collections/search/findingAids/archhtm/macleod/letindex.htm#top>
- Online Collection of Letters and other Writing by Canadian Soldiers

<http://web.mala.bc.ca/davies/letters.images/collections.index.htm#WorldWarOne>

## Procedures

Students will create a personal letter home written from the perspective of one of the War and the Homefront Mavericks in *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta*. They will also include photographs as "snapshots" that will help the readers understand their situation and what they are going through.

Primary historical artifact letters may be used to introduce the project. The letters of Colonel James Farquharson Macleod to his wife Mary Macleod are contained in an online exhibit by the Glenbow Museum, and cover the years 1874 to 1894. The above site allows viewers to examine the original letters or read the transcripts. To view, open the drop-down menu and click on a year. They may then view the original or examine another letter by clicking the side arrows at the bottom of the page. These letters will provide examples for students about how letters were written in the past, how much we can learn from them, and how they can be even considered artistic in form.

In order to take on the role of one of the Mavericks, students must learn about and research the life of Samuel Steele, Fred McCall, Mary Dover or Gordon Nakayama. They will use the *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* site other web resources, or encyclopedias to find out about the person and what their life may have been like at a certain point in time during their war experience. They will also need to locate information on the specific battles or war that the Maverick was involved in.

Using the *ImagesCanada.ca* website, students will find and use appropriate photographs or "snapshots" of the Maverick to send home with their letter. The photographs may accompany the letter as an additional source of information, or the letter may specifically be about what is happening in the photo. Using the photos may help them to describe their clothing, where they are, the experience, their story, and even their thoughts and emotions.

Once they know their character, students will use the *ImagesCanada.ca* websites to search for primary photographs to assist and represent aspects of their letter. Some tips on using the Images Canada web site:

- Combine search terms to narrow results. The term "war" alone will yield 2461 matches but, for example, try "parade war" instead. This will provide 33 photos.
- Just the name can be used in a single search. Searching "samuel steele" yields 20 photos, "fred mccall" yields 49 photos, and "mary dover" yields 16 photos.
- Click on "more information" under each picture to find other subject terms to use in searching.
- Photos may be copied into another program like Word and then enlarged or printed in a landscape format if needed.

**Glenbow Museum**  
WHERE THE WORLD MEETS THE WEST

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

When writing the letter, students should try to stay in character and make the letter look like it would have been written in the time and place they intend. For example, the letters of Col. MacLeod were handwritten, as there were no computers yet. They will have to decide upon the recipient of the letter, whether it is to their family, wife or husband, children, a relative, or a friend. Students should think about where and when they are writing, what was happening around them, what they might be worried about, what happened during that day, what kind of small story they could tell, and even what they would say to their family to put their minds at ease? Students could even express their Maverick's attitude to war by writing a poem or a song about what they are experiencing.

## **Assessment and Evaluation**

- Students and their teacher should develop their own rubric by identifying evaluation criteria for the project that will match their own learner outcomes. This allows students to understand the expectations for their work and to have input into the ongoing evaluation process.
- 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 recreate their own photograph of a situation one of the mavericks participated in. They would have to plan, create costumes and the background, and pose for the photographs that illustrate some aspect of their life during the writing of the letter.
- The photos could be imported into a paint or draw program, such as Kidpix. The students could then "draw" in their own backgrounds or items such as a plane flying in the background.
- The students could read the letter and share the photos as the Maverick character themselves, reading it "in person" to their classmates.