

“Picturing” the Story of the Railway

Researching Aspects of the Creation of the Railway to Understand How It Linked Canada

Introduction

Students need to understand the role the building of the railway played in creating the Canadian identity and appreciate how this has changed our country, economically and socially, since the ground-breaking ceremony in 1875. The story of Alberta is intricately connected to the development of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Why was the CPR needed? What were some of the problems with creating such a huge project? What was the Pacific Scandal of 1873? Who worked on the construction of the transcontinental railway? How were the different workers treated? How did the CPR begin to unite Canada? How can we use primary resources like photographs to learn more about how they lived?

Project Explanation

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of the story of the building of the CPR, as well as the lifestyle of the managers and the workers who built the railway. Students will undertake a jigsaw style of research, sharing their results with others, in order to get a good picture of how the CPR was built. They will use the research to create a story about a real or fictional character that lived during this time. Using the [Glenbow Library and Archives Digital Collection](#) as well as [Google Images](#) websites, they will search for and find primary artifacts to add to and represent aspects of the story. The stories and research may then be presented in various different formats for their audience.

Materials and Resources Needed

- [Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta](#)
- Google Images
<https://www.google.ca/imghp?hl=en&tab=ri&authuser=0&ogbl>
- Glenbow Library and Archives Digital Collection
https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1&FR_ =1&W=947&H=499
- Canadian Heritage Minute: Nitro - "They say that there is one dead Chinese man for every mile of that track," the old Chinese man tells his granddaughters.
<https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/nitro>
- Railways in Canada – A Photo Essay
<http://imagescn.techno-science.ca/railways/index.cfm>
- Railway History in Canada

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/railway-history>

- CBC Archives: Chinese Immigration to Canada: A Tale of Perseverance
<https://www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/chinese-immigration-to-canada-a-tale-of-perseverance>
- CBC Archives: Chinese Immigrants not welcome anymore
<https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/chinese-immigration-not-welcome-anymore>
- The Ties That Bind - Chinese Railroad Workers
<https://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/ChineseRailWorkers.php>
- The Legacy of Chinese Railroad Workers
<https://www.coquitlamheritage.ca/blog-pages/2020/7/30/the-legacy-of-chinese-railroad-workers>
- Canadians of Chinese Descent
<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/asian-heritage-month/important-events.html#a1>
- Yee, Paul. Illustrated by Harvey Chan. *Ghost Train*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1996. *Ghost Train* is a story of how the Chinese are still haunted by the loss of railway workers' lives and the lack of credit during the building of the CPR.
- One or more picture books about Chinese Legends by Canadian author David Bouchard
 - *The Great Race*
 - *The Dragon New Year*
 - *The Mermaid's Muse*
 - *Buddha in the Garden*

Procedures

Students will conduct research for and create a historical fiction story about a real or imaginary character that was a part of the building of the CPR in the late 1800's. The project could be introduced by using the *Canadian Heritage Minute* online video of the old Chinese man telling his granddaughters -"They say that there is one dead Chinese man for every mile of that track." A novel by Paul Yee could also be appropriate, called *Ghost Train*, which is the story of how the Chinese are still haunted by the loss of railway workers' lives and the lack of credit during the building of the CPR.

The style David Bouchard used in his Chinese legend picture books could also be introduced to students. Mr. Bouchard wrote the story of a Chinese legend or folktale, but provided an informational text at the end of the book that goes into more depth about the subject the story is about and the research he had to conduct. As students work to write their historical fiction story, they could also be creating a section, similar to what Mr. Bouchard has done, to explain and discuss their research, the process they went through, and any thoughts, successes, frustrations or unanswered questions they have about their project.

Students will undertake a jigsaw style of research. Each student or small group could research one or more general topics below on the building of the CPR or one of the Maverick characters. They would then share their results with the others in the class, allowing each student to get a good picture of how the CPR was constructed. Possible topics may include:

- How were the railway, bridges, and tunnels built? Where did they get the raw materials? How were they constructed?
- What types of transportation were used in the construction? What were the trains like at the time?
- What was the life of a worker like? (What did they eat and drink? Where did they stay? How much were they paid? What kinds of jobs did they do?)
- How were the Chinese railway workers treated? How were they different than other workers? Why did many come to Canada?
- What challenges, hazards, and obstacles did the CPR face? How were they overcome?
- What was the Pacific Scandal of 1873? How did it affect the building of the CPR?
- What was the impact of the CPR on the land and its other natural resources (e.g. rivers, mountains, animals, birds)?

Research may be copied and pasted into one word processing document, and then shared with each person in the class.

Students will then begin to brainstorm original ideas for characters and stories or use some of the true examples from the characters in the *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* website. The main character could be one of the Mavericks themselves, a friend or relative, an enemy, an imaginary character, or even an ancestor of the writer's. Once they have chosen an idea, they will have to plan out the rest of the characters, setting, plot, major events and conclusion. Students should use a planning format they are used to or that is chosen by the teacher.

Once a story plan is developed, students will use the [Glenbow Library and Archives Digital Collection](#) and/or [Google Images](#). They will search for primary artifacts and photographs to assist and represent aspects of the story. (Another possibility is for the students to find one photograph they are interested in and tell the story behind that photograph.)

Students will then undertake the writing process for their stories. They should try to seamlessly include as much factual knowledge about the way ranchers lived as possible. This will assist the writers in giving the stories a true sense of realism and make them sound authentic to their audience.

When the writing is finished, the stories and research may then be presented and shared in various different formats with their audience. It may just be the written story itself, it may be turned into a picture book or poster with both photos and student art, they may be posted on the Internet, they could create a PowerPoint presentation or digital video, or it could even be turned into a play.

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.
- In groups or as a class, students may conference and debrief each other after they have presented their projects. Students should be encouraged to share their personal reflections about how it felt to speak in front of their audience.
- 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.
- 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.

Ideas to Enrich this Project

- Students could take on the personality and clothing of the character when they present or share their stories. (See also the “Becoming a Western Legend” student activity)
- Students could create a website for the class projects. This may provide a “real” audience to share their stories and research with. This project could even be done simultaneously with students from another school in Alberta and then shared with each other.
- All the stories and research could be put together as a class book and “published”.
- Students could use the real photographs from the [Glenbow Library and Archives Digital Collection](#) or [Google Images](#) to draw mechanical reproductions of their own. They could use charcoal or pencil to achieve the black and white style, or redraw the photo in colour.
- Students could print a photo in black and white and then use watercolour paints to add colour. They may “colourize” the whole photograph or only touch up small sections or parts for emphasis. An example is the little girl’s pink coat in the black and white movie *Schindler’s List*.