

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.

Materials and Resources Needed

- [Mavericks: An Incorrigible 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>
- Lt.-Col. James Macleod's Letters and Photographs (Glenbow Archives)
<https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/james-f-macleod-family-fonds>
- The Canadian Letters and Images Project - WWI
<https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/468>

Procedures

Students will create a personal letter home written from the perspective of one of the "War and the Homefront" Mavericks in *Mavericks: An Incorrigible 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. A collection of 265 letters available on [The Canadian Letters and Images Project](#) website are an excellent example. These letters were published in *The Cobourg World*, a local newspaper published in Cobourg, Ontario during World War I, and are written to either friends and family or directly to the newspaper by men in the trenches.

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 Ryutaro (Gordon) Nakagama. They will use the *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* site, other web resources, or encyclopaedias 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 [Glenbow Library and Archives Digital Collection](#) as well as [Google Images](#), 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.

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 written for or by Samuel Steele 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. 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.