

# The Real Story of Arriving in Canada

Conducting Oral History Interviews to Tell the Story of Your Family's Immigration to Canada

## Introduction

Students need to understand how Canada is made up of a majority of immigrant families from all over the world. It is the stories of these people, their way of life over time, and their diversity of experience that make up the Canadian identity. Where did their family come from? How did they get here? Why did they leave their original country? Why did they come here? What was their life like in their new home?

## Project Explanation

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of the “social history” of Canada by looking at their family's history and demonstrate an understanding of the events and factors that have changed the way of life in Canada over time and appreciate the impact of these changes on the way we live. Students will gather details about a family story by interviewing one of their relatives, which will allow students to gain a greater understanding of their family and where they came from. The results will be used to write a narrative story that they will present as a storyteller in front of their class.

## Materials and Resources Needed

- [Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta](#)
- How to do Oral History  
<https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/genealogy/how-to-do-oral-history>
- History of Canada's Early Chinese Immigrants  
<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/early-chinese-canadians/Pages/history.aspx>
- Alberta Settlement - Laundry Owner  
[https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can\\_digital\\_collections/pasttopresent/settlement/chinese\\_laundry\\_owner.html](https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/pasttopresent/settlement/chinese_laundry_owner.html)

## Procedures

Gathering a family's history through the stories older relatives can share allows students to spend quality time with their family, but also have the time to ask questions about the past. Students will create tell an oral story from their family history after interviewing one of their

relatives for ideas. If they come from a First Nations background, they will try to find out details of how their family lived before Europeans came to North America or how their way of life changed in some way when numerous cultures came together. If their family immigrated to Canada from another country, they will try to find out details of how their family arrived in the province of Alberta, and some of the difficulties faced by people immigrating to Canada. Teachers can begin the project by sharing stories from their own family's past and modeling what the final projects will look like.

Students will begin by examining some of the stories of the "Newcomer" Mavericks that immigrated to Canada in the *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* site. This will allow them to look at what other families went through when they came to Canada, and what they faced once they got here. Students will then begin to brainstorm potential questions that they could ask a relative in order to find out information about their family. Where did they come from? How did they get here? Why did they leave their original country? What were some of the difficult things our family had to cope with? What was life like?

The students will need to search for an anecdotal story that shares a short span of one journey, event, experience, or milestone. It may be the actual trip to Canada, how a set of grandparents met, a difficult job, how the family made it once they were here, or even living through wartime. The students will not be sharing dates, times and locations, as they will be creating a narrative with their family members as the characters.

When ready, students will interview a family member in person, over the phone, or using the computer, and attempt to find an interesting story that relates to how their family came to Canada. They will try to get as much detail as possible, using questions to ask about who, what, where, when and why. They will want to know what the places looked like, what the people were like, how they acted, and how they may have felt at the time.

Once they have completed the interview, they will begin to write the story in the style of historical fiction, using the details they have gotten from the interview. If they do not know specific details that are needed, they may need to "fill in the blanks" with appropriate information. As they will be performing in the role of "storyteller" for their classmates, they will need to write the story so that it is "told" rather than "read." They will want to add emphasis to words, make it sound very personal, and express feeling and emotion when telling it.

To add to the telling of their story, students should bring in props to attract the attention of their audience. They may bring in one (or more) primary family artifacts or photographs that are from the time of their story (make sure they ask for permission). They may also create puppets, costumes, props, posters, illustrations, or maps that will help their audience understand the

story they tell. After practicing at home or school, the students will present in front of the class. Parents may be invited to watch if the teacher chooses.

## **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.
- A project journal may be used for information gathering as well as for reflective writing as the process is taking place. Students can pose questions, vent frustrations, synthesize their work, examine their process, and even wonder about what they are missing or what is still needed for their project. This may be completed as a group or individually.
- 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 may work on creating a “family tree” that will cover a few generations while conducting the interview.
- Students could take on the role of the main character, and actually act like they are their grandmother or grandfather as they tell the story to the class.