

Writing Back in Time

Writing Fictional Diaries, Letters, and Reports of Historical People to Understand Events and Issues

Introduction

Students need to be able to use primary sources of information to broaden their historical thinking and understanding of past events and issues. What do primary historical documents look like? What was their purpose? What do they tell us? What can we learn from them? Will we all agree on how we interpret what is contained in the writing? What are the positives and negatives about using primary historical documents?

Project Explanation

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of the life and history of the mounted police by producing a fictional “historical document” from the perspective of a historical figure. They will write a diary, journal, letter home, or arrest report as if the people themselves wrote it. It will somehow tell the story of a major event in that person’s life, incorporating as many historical facts as possible. The writings will then be turned into aged looking documents, similar to documents the students have examined through their research.

Materials and Resources Needed

- [Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta](#)
- Lt.-Col. James Macleod’s Letters and Photographs (Glenbow Archives)
<https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/informationobject/browse?repos=586624&query=JAMES+MACLEOD>
- Journal of Sam Steele – 1874 – N.W.M.P. Trek West
https://www.ulethbridge.ca/lib/digitized_collections/ourheritage/steele_pages/Steele_Journal1.html#anchor688773
- The Diary of Henri Julien
https://www.ulethbridge.ca/lib/digitized_collections/ourheritage/julien_pages/Julien1.html
- James Finlayson's Diary of the March West
https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/canadian-west/052920/05292023_e.html
- North-West Mounted Police
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-mounted-police>
- Belongings of a Mountie - Uniforms and Equipment
<https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/uniforms-and-equipment>
- RCMP History
<https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/history-rcmp>

- Famous Cases, Events and People
<https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/famous-cases-events-and-people>
- Google Images - Search historical images of NWMP
<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=916&H=495#/DatumView&VBID=2R3BXZVJFP8H&PN=1&WS=PackagePres>

Procedures

Students will create a “historical document” that a Maverick or another Mountie may have written back in the nineteenth century. This might be a personal journal of their travels, an official arrest report, a letter to their family, or even a letter to the NWMP Commissioner telling about the outstanding job one of their Mounties did in the line of duty and why they deserve a promotion. Have students undertake some beginning research using the *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* website to learn about the Mounties and examine some of the events that would have taken place in their lives. Brainstorm some of the potential events that could be written about in the student’s historical documents.

Students then, either individually or in small groups, need to examine some of the primary documents, such as old letters and diaries, in order to gain an understanding of what they may have looked like, how they were written, and what the language sounded like. The *Journal of Sam Steele – 1874 – N.W.M.P. Trek West* and *The Diary of Henri Julien* provide some excellent examples to use. Research and information may also be found using the [Glenbow Library and Archives](#), other web resources, primary artifacts, historical documents and photographs, and local history books.

The *Historical Document-Based Learning Guide* provides a structured way to examine primary documents, offering possible questions to assist students in examining historical documents. This may be incorporated into the project if time allows. Questions may also be discussed that will push the students to look at documents as historians. How do we know the document is authentic? Will we all agree on how we interpret what is contained in the writing? What are the positives and negatives about using primary historical documents?

Students may also choose who they would like the writer to be. It could be the Maverick or Mountie themselves, their wife or husband, their child, mother or father, or even a commanding officer. Using the research students have conducted on the Mountie, they will begin to write a diary/journal/arrest report/letter that somehow chronicles as accurately as possible an event or

time period in that person's life. The students should try to include as much descriptive language as possible and to "fill in the gaps" with their imagination.

Students should try to provide a real "picture" of the time, including as many pieces of factual information as possible. What time of year is it? What was it like to live in the winter? Where are they? What is the land like? What is it like to live near the First Nations people? What do they live in? What equipment do they have? What is their horse like? What are the people around them like? How do they act? How does the commanding officer treat them? How do they feel? Happy? Miserable? Is it boring? Tough? Dangerous?

If they choose to create an "official arrest report," they will need to chronicle one of the Maverick's arrests. Include a description of the suspect, description of their crimes, dates, times, and places. Write a journal description of how the arrest took place, using their imagination to describe the chase, what was said, if they fought back, and what happened to them afterwards.

Once the research and their writing are complete, students will work to create an "aged" looking document. From their research, what makes a document look like it is from the 1800's? What would be included? What does the writing look like? How could the students make them look old? How are they different from how we would create them now?

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.
- Individually or in small groups, students might evaluate the work of two or three other students in order to gain insight into how their peers approached the project.
- 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

Ideas to Enrich this Project

- Students could add photographs they find from the [Glenbow Library and Archives Digital Collection](#) as well as [Google Images](#). A search of terms such as mounted police, James Macleod, Fred Bagley, and Jerry Potts will yield numerous historical photographs that could be used to enhance the documents.

Mavericks

AN INCORRIGIBLE HISTORY OF ALBERTA

- Students could also draw their own images or sketches within the documents. They could be of people, places, or events they have been part of. They should “date” and label their sketches.

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