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Talking Pictures: the power of visual sources to create curiosity and teach historical thinking

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Learning Intentions

I have a better understanding of

- the potential of visual primary sources for teaching and learning history
- the challenges to using visual sources
- ways to use them to teach historical thinking

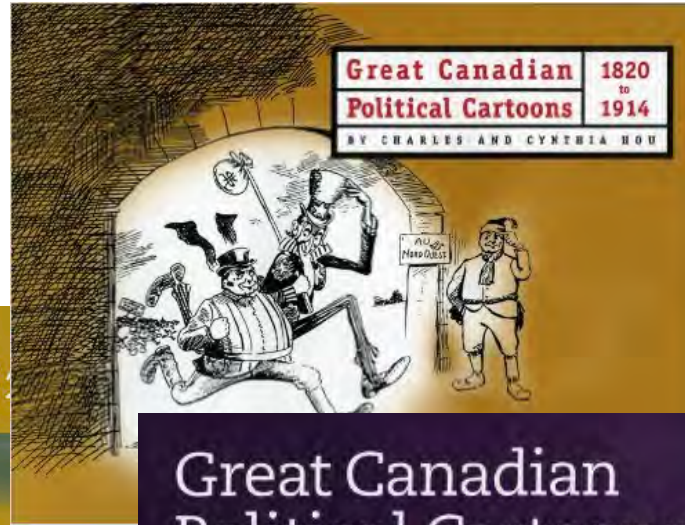


Teaching Approches

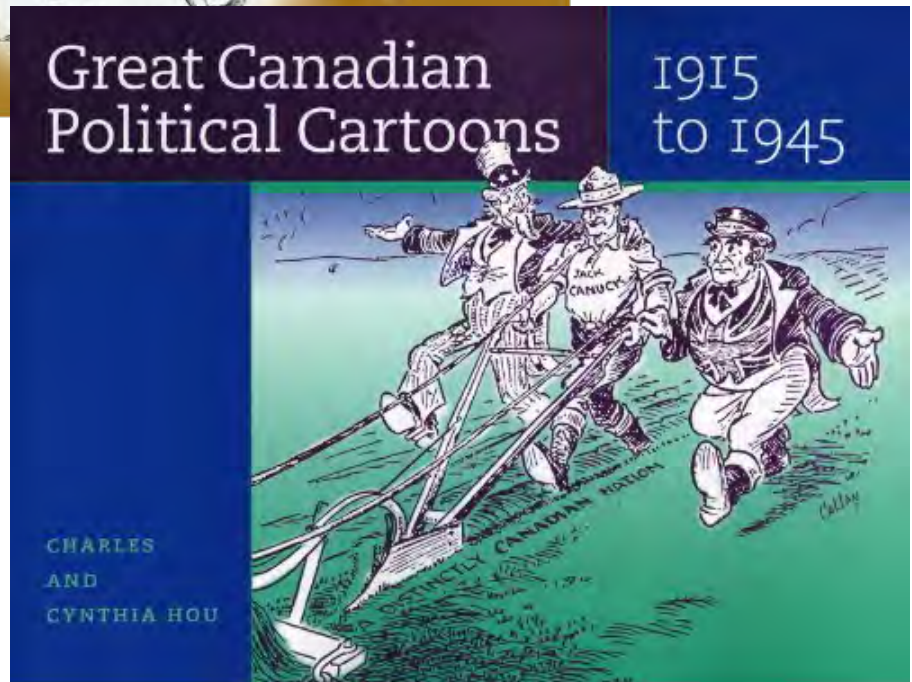
- Questioning
- Think aloud
- Student generated questions
- Sequencing/Timelines



Hommage to Charlie Hou



Great Canadian Political Cartoons 1946 to 1985





Benjamin West, *Death of Wolfe*, 1770. WikiCommons public domain.



Why use visual primary sources?

- Accessibility to people of the past who have often been on the margins
- Entry point for students: “warm them up” (Barton and Levstik)
- Engagement: emotional impact, curiosity
- Potential for citizenship: “We are up to our necks in messages telling us what to do and think. Without the ability to interrogate these messages, we are destined to sleep walk through our world” (Sam Wineburg)



Challenges

- *Easy access*: “Access is not synonymous with learning. What turns access into learning is time and strategic patience.” (Jennifer Roberts, “The Power of Patience”)
- *Reading beyond face value*: Both adults and students tend to read historical photographs as a clear window into the past and to see them as inherently truthful. They are not.

Low history literacy reader



« Looking Unto Jesus » (Tourne-toi vers Jésus). Cours d'écriture à l'école industrielle indienne de Red Deer (Alberta), v. 1914 ou 1919. Église unie du Canada, Archives, 93.049P/850N.

Stéphane Lévesque. "How Technology is Changing the way we Teach History."
Presentation at Canada's History Forum 2013.

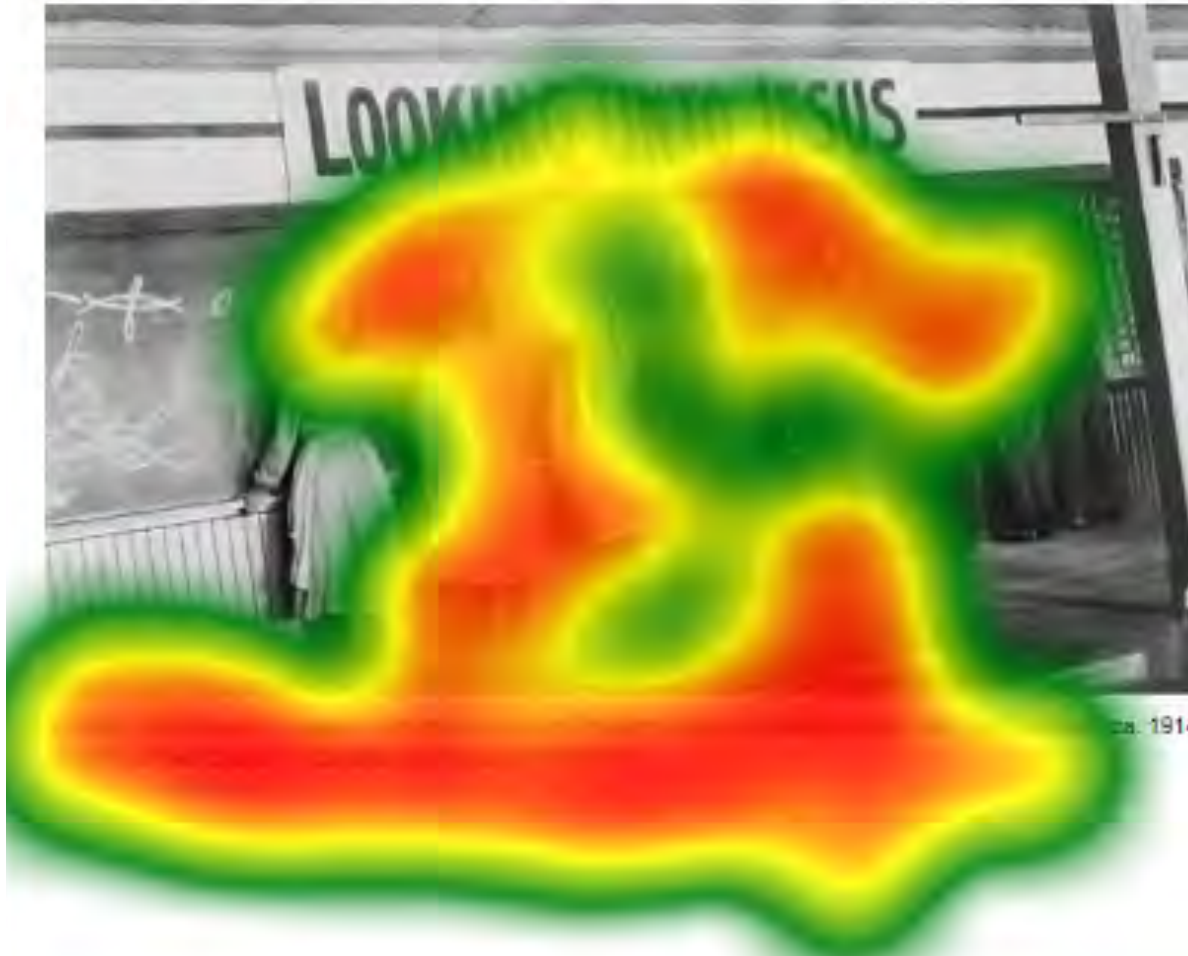
Low history literacy reader



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Stéphane Lévesque. "How Technology is Changing the way we Teach History."
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High historical literacy reader



For more on this research: Lévesque, S., Ng-A-Fook, N., & Corrigan, J. (2014). [What does the eye see? Reading online primary source photographs in history.](#)

Stéphane Lévesque. "How Technology is Changing the way we Teach History." Presentation at Canada's History Forum 2013.




READING PHOTOGRAPHS

Read

Read on for articles about this subject from the Royal BC Museum, research tips and links to other sites.


From the Royal BC Museum

→ [Thinking like a Historian: Reading Historical Photographs](#) 

Described are some of the thoughtful ways that historians read photographs.

→ [Gold Rush Photographer](#) 

Photographer Fredrick Dally's story is highlighted to give you more insight into his images.

→ [Tips for Teachers - Planning: Using Historical Photographs in the Classroom](#) 

PATHWAY SECTIONS



OVERVIEW



READ



WATCH



LOOK



MEET



When you think of the British Columbia Gold Rush, what image comes to your mind?

Type a few words about the people you imagine and what they are doing?

Do they look like this?



Prospecting for Alluvial Gold in British Columbia, 1864,
William Hind, Image PDP02612 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.



William Barker of Barkerville, 186- , Image A-01144 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

Or like this?

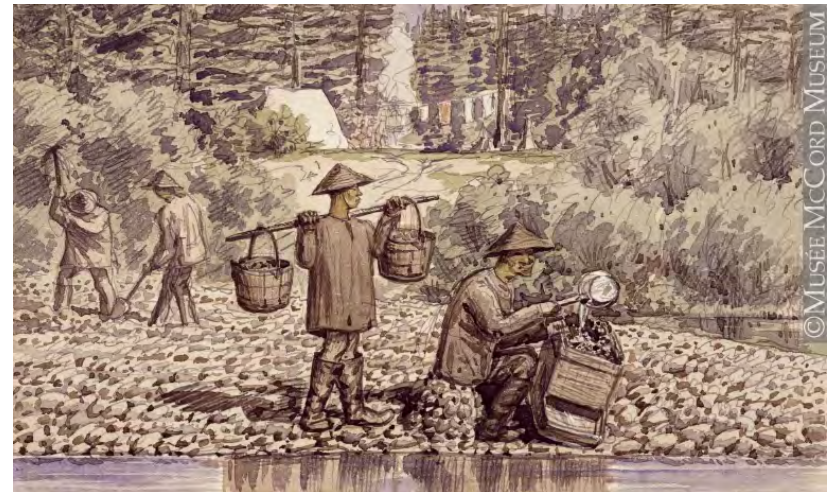


Nlaka'pumx or Sto:lo gold miners at the confluence of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, ca 1890, image D-06815 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

Chinese Gold Washers on the Fraser River, BC, William Hind, ca. 1864, McCord Museum M609.



The Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association, 1872, Image I-68892 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.





Inquiry: Beyond Billy Barker

What Gold Rush stories are worth telling?

How can photographs help us tell them?



Suggestions for Planning

- Decide on what historical thinking concepts you want to develop
- Choose an image with care (engaging, relevant to curriculum and to the disciplinary concept, and high resolution)
- Research the image
- Craft stimulating questions (both questions focussed on the task of interpretation and broad inquiry questions)



Elements of Concept of Evidence

History is **intepretation** based on **inferences**.

Asking good questions about a source can turn it into evidence.

Interpretation also involves **sourcing**: inferring the purpose and worldview of a source's creator.

A source should be analyzed in relation to its **context**.

Inferences should always be **corroborated**.

(Seixas and Morton, [*The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*](#))

Inferences





Suggestions for Teaching

- Guide students to observe closely
- Connect to context (but maybe only a little at first)
- Cultivate curiosity
- Consider the photographer's purpose
- Generate or pose question(s)
- Have students write hypotheses
- Dig deeper, corroborate
- Revisit the image and revise hypotheses
- Reflect on the process



Men Posed On Flume, William's Creek; T.R. Pattullo Standing In Centre. Photographer: Frederick Dally, ca. 1868. Image F-08564 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.



Excerpt of *Men Posed On Flume, William's Creek; T.R. Pattullo Standing In Centre*. Photographer: Frederick Dally, ca. 1868. Image F-08564 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.



Questions

Close observation:

- What do you see? Can anyone find...?

Inferencing (from simple to advanced depending on students):

- Where was this photo taken?
- What are the people in the photo doing?
- Why is Pattullo in the centre?
- And why do you think so?



With some context:

- What will the flume be used for?
- What else might happen as a result of building this flume?
- What does "Men posed on a flume" suggest about how gold was mined? About the life of a miner? About the effect of mining on the environment?
- And why do you think so?
- What does this photo not tell us?

Face Value vs. Inference



Every picture tells a story, but whose story? How can a single picture of the past tell us a story about what happened long ago? To answer these questions, historians have developed some thoughtful ways to read photographs.



Asking good questions

$$\text{CQ} + \text{PQ} > \text{IQ}$$



Steps to generate questions 1 (AKA: QFT or Brainstorming)

- Ask as many questions as you can.
- Do not stop to discuss, judge, or answer the questions.
- Write down every question exactly as it is stated.
- Change any statement into a question.

(Rothstein and Santana, *Make Just One Change*)



Question Generation 2: Brainstorming with Prompts

Brainstorm a list of at least 6 questions about the topic, the time period or the source.

Possible question-starters :

Why...?

How...?

How is this connected to...?

What might happen as a result of...?

Men Posed On Flume, William's Creek; T.R. Pattullo Standing In Centre. Photographer: Frederick Dally, ca. 1868. BC Archives F-08564.



Ways to Support Students:

- Brainstorm questions based on guidelines
- Supply prompts or question stems
- Look at exemplars, e.g.,
www.bcheritagefairs.ca
- Integrate diverse knowledge and sources
- Give or create criteria
- Plan for feedback and revision
- Honour student choice, e.g., starting point for the next lesson, inclusion on test



Criteria for Good Inquiry Questions:

- Do-able – involve “Goldilocks tasks”, differentiated questions
- Purposeful – point to big ideas in history
- Engaging – spark discussion and debate; generate new questions
- Connected – link to the lives of students or present day issues



What next?

Students

- pose first hypothesis and reflect on certainty and possible sources of evidence
- explore further evidence
- refine hypothesis and so on as time and interest permit
- present to an audience
- reflect on the way

Corroboration



Nlaka'pumx or Sto:lo gold miners at the confluence of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, ca 1890, image D-06815 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

Chinese Gold Washers on the Fraser River, BC, William Hind, ca. 1864, McCord Museum M609.



The Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association, 1872, Image I-68892 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.





Sourcing

Sourcing is the touchstone that distinguishes expert from novice....

(Sam Wineburg and Abby Riesman,
[“Disciplinary Literacy in History”](#).)

Sourcing Questions:

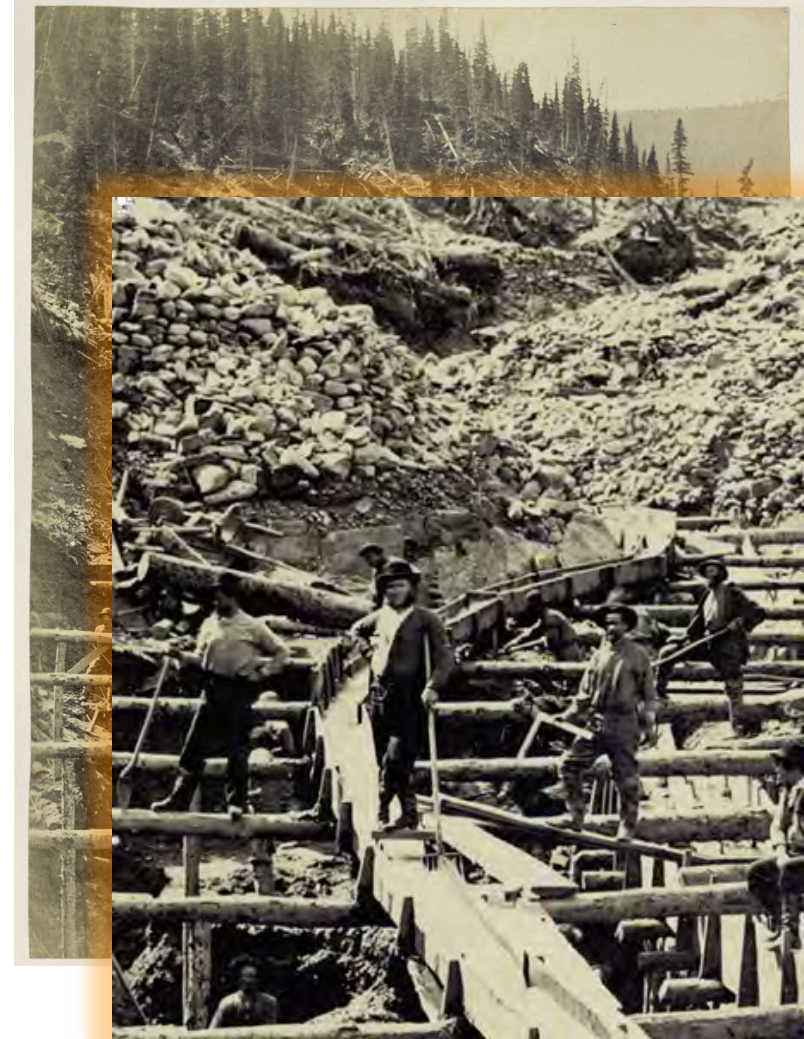
- What kind of a photo is this? (e.g., snapshot, formal portrait, advertisement, news, documentary...)
- Who would have been the audience for this photo?
- Why was it taken?
- What leads you to think so?



Men Posed On Flume, William's Creek; T.R. Pattullo Standing In Centre. Photographer: Frederick Dally, ca. 1868. BC Archives F-08564.

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Heritage Fair students using evidence:

Warrior/In Tune with Nature



The photographer of this photograph chose to pose the First Nation naked because he wanted to make in look like the First Nation is connected to the nature that surrounds him.

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Stereotypes
There are many stereotypes shown in photographs of First Nations. These include:

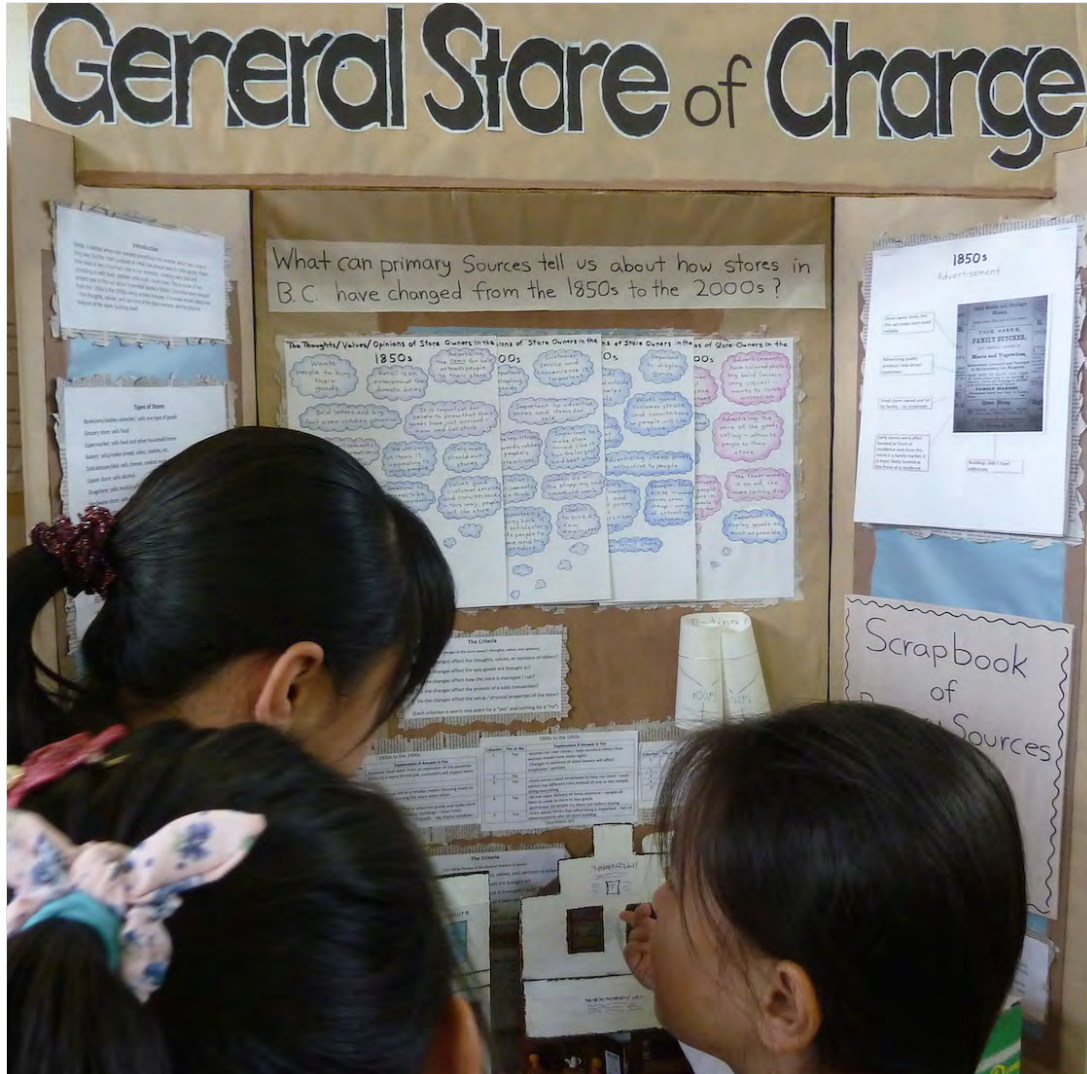
In Tune with Nature:
The belief that all First Nations are deeply connected to nature. That they are friends with the animals and spirits of the earth. Non-First Nations often see this as a stereotype.

Uncivilized:
The belief that First Nations lived a nasty life and were hard to communicate and get around in. Europeans thought First Nations were primitive, childlike, and needed help from them.

Dying Race:
The belief that First Nations are dying out. Some artists wanted to preserve First Nations on canvas and created pictures based on this belief. In some of these images, First Nations are shown with stereotypical clothing that does not always reflect their culture.

Noble Savage:
The belief that First Nations are bold and brave, but dangerous and unreliable. They had pride and would protect their land. This belief simplified First Nations.

Warrior:
The belief that First Nations were warriors and did a lot of fighting.





Visual sources and other historical thinking concepts

Historical Significance

Continuity and change

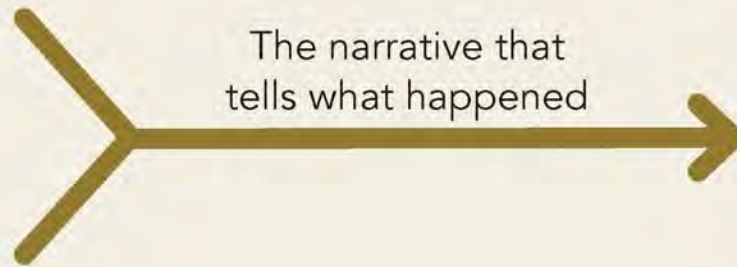
Historical perspective taking



How to decide if an event, trend or person is historical significant?

Did it result
in change?

Did it reveal
something?



HISTORICAL
SIGNIFICANCE
ESTABLISHED

Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Nelson, 2013)



What storyline is suggested by this image?

"Wait for me Daddy"
Photographer:
C.P. Detloff, *Vancouver Daily Province*
Date: Oct. 1, 1940
City of Vancouver Archives 371-3183



Image: City of New Westminster

Why did it become so famous?



What might have been the story behind this photo in the months before and after it was taken?

Additional sources to continue the inquiry.

Winter at Tashme internment camp, Sedai: the Japanese Canadian Legacy Project,



Japanese boy with pet at Tashme Camp, photograph, [between 1940 and 1949?], JCPC_ 08_027, Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections.





Continuity and Change

“Come on, Bart. History can be fun. It’s like an amusement park except instead of rides, you get to memorize dates.”

—Marge Simpson in “Margical History Tour,” an episode of *The Simpsons* that aired on December 22, 2004



Chronological Fluency and Timelines

“As soon as (the teacher) put up the timeline..., a striking phenomenon took place: whenever she mentioned a date, in any context, students’ heads would swing toward the timeline—they were using it to *find out what the date meant*, to see for themselves how people dressed and what kind of machines they had in 1910 or 1940 or whatever.”

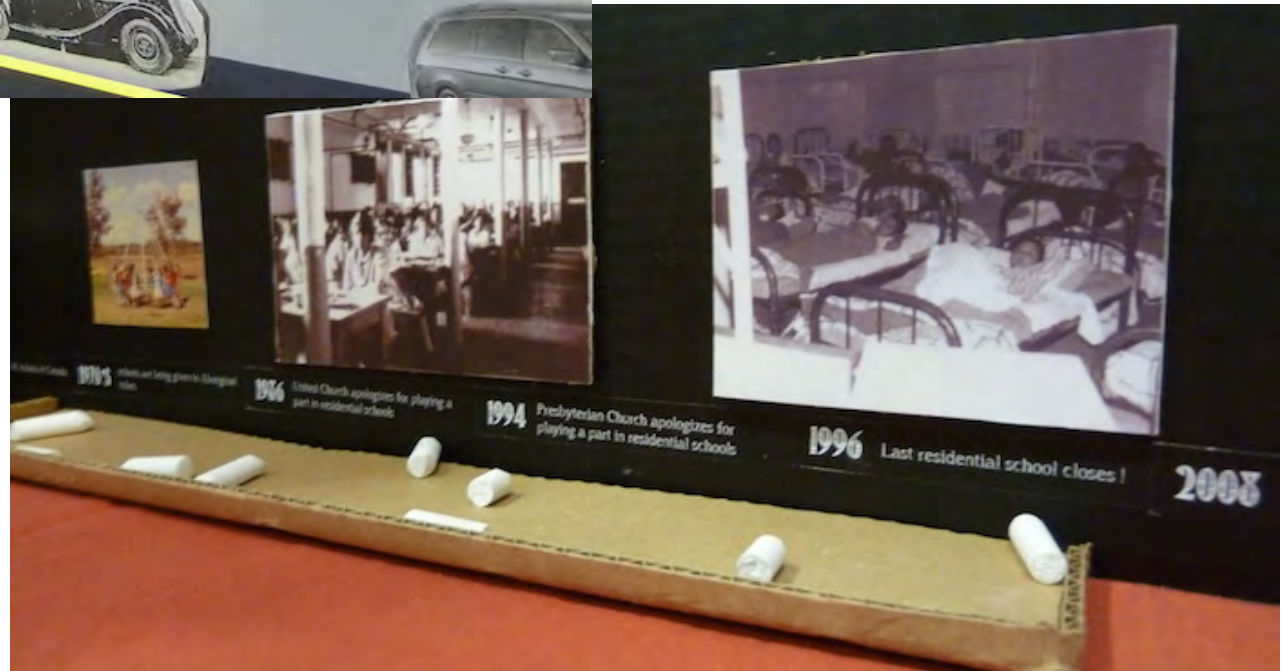
(Levstik and Barton, *Doing History: investigating with children in elementary and middle schools*)



Timeline suspended
from classroom ceiling



Heritage Fairs
projects with
visual timelines



HOW DID GRANVILLE ISLAND CHANGE

OVER TIME?

1000 BC – 1900s:
First Nation settlements in False Creek
area. Two sandbars located in False
Creek.

1859:
False Creek discovered by Captain
George Richards.

1877:
Government allotted Indian Reserves in
False Creek and Kitsilano area.

1886:
CPR bought 6000 acres of Granville
to extend CPR's line to English Bay.

1889:
CPR built wooden planks underneath
Granville Bridge

1913:
Government bought out the False
Creek and Kitsilano reserves from
First Nations

1915:
Reclamation Project converted the
wooden pilings and sandbar
underneath Granville Bridge into
"Industrial Island"

1920s:
Industrial Boom in Granville Island

1930s:
Great Depression caused many
factory closures in Granville Island

1936:
Remaining Granville Island
businesses received tax breaks

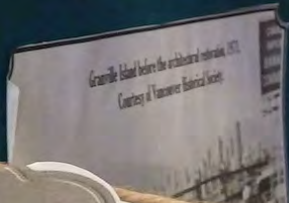
1939:
WWII brought industrial boom in
Granville Island

1950s:
Plans to drain False Creek failed.
Granville Island filled in, converted
from an island into a peninsula.

1970s:
Architectural makeover from an
industrial island into a cultural,
recreational, and industrial village.

Today:
Granville Island successfully recycled
old factories into an artistic village.

Future:
Emily Carr University will leave by
1977. Future beach is unknown.



Trestle Bridges built by CPR on where Granville Island is now, 1889.
Courtesy of Vancouver Archives.



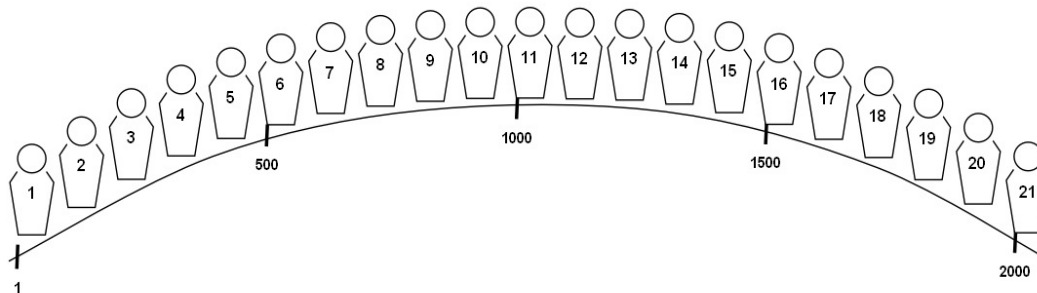
Factories on Granville Island, 1926.
Courtesy of Gourley, "Island in the Creek"





Sequencing with a Human Timeline

- Begin with events, then add dates, people and time periods. Ask them how they will represent periods or events that stretch over time such as residential schools.
- Use cards, posters or tabards of visual images.
- If you have one big timeline, have students stand in a slight crescent so everyone can see everyone else. A straight line doesn't work for visibility.
- Try two timelines face to face so students can compare.





Historical Perspective Taking

"Any good history begins in strangeness. The past should not be comfortable. The past should not be a familiar echo of the present...The past should be so strange you wonder how you and the people you know and love could come from such as time..."

Richard Wright, *Remembering Ahanagan*



Boy in Baltimore, Maryland, January 1, 1898

Idea based on Austin, H.M. and Thompson, K. *Examining the Evidence: seven strategies for teaching with primary sources*. North Mankato, Minnesota: Maupin House, 2015.

Translation: The Eskimos from Labrador
From C. Hagenbeck's Animal
Park in Hamburg
After an original sketch of J.
Bungarz



What were Labrador Eskimos (Inuit) doing in a Hamburg zoo?



Image courtesy of Dr. Hans Rollmann, Memorial University of Newfoundland



Much depends upon knowledge

The more students read on the same topic, the more likely they are to move from novice to expert ways of thinking.

Alexander, Kulikowich, Schulze. (1994) “The Influence of Topic Knowledge, Domain Knowledge, and Interest on the Comprehension of Scientific Exposition”



and reflection

We do not learn from experience.... We learn from reflecting on experience.

John Dewey

Even simple things are useful. What did you do?
How did it go? If given the chance, what would you change?

Monica Martinez and Dennis McGrath



and persistence

Experts do those things, but only because their mental toolbox enables them to do so. The only path to expertise as far as anyone knows involves long, focused practice.

Daniel Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School?*



Your suggestions, questions, critical
comments...