*What's the Story?*

# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE


CANADA'S HISTORY

#OurStoriesOurVoices
#NosHistoiresNosVoix

Canada

Dear teacher,

*What's the Story?* is a special publication designed to support students who are undertaking an independent inquiry project. In contrast to an information-based research project, where students tend to recite accepted facts about a topic, an inquiry project encourages students to use critical thinking to develop a unique question and to come to their own conclusions.

An inquiry-based approach can feel a little daunting (for both students and teachers!) but it is also very rewarding. Dr. Lindsay Gibson and Dr. James Miles have identified five key benefits of inquiry-based learning in social studies:

- The subject is more **meaningful** to students
- Inquiry promotes a **deeper understanding** of their topic
- Students learn about the **discipline of history** and the **construction of historical knowledge**
- Students learn to assess information and evaluate opposing perspectives, which **strengthens citizenship competencies**
- The variety of possible topics and questions makes this approach more **flexible, rewarding, and interesting to teachers**[1]

*What's the Story?* guides students through the process of undertaking a historical inquiry project – choosing a topic, designing a good inquiry question, finding and assessing information, and deciding how, where and why to share their story.

The student examples you see in the publication come from the winning submissions in a national contest called #OurStoriesOurVoices, where students were asked to share the histories that mattered to them.

*What's the Story?* includes several prompts (called *Your Turn*) that encourage students to put what they've learned into practice. Your students can even follow the links to share their responses online and see what answers other students from across Canada have come up with.

This educator's guide provides teachers with suggested activities to accompany each prompt, so you and your students can get the most out of this publication.

We would like to thank Dr. Lindsay Gibson and Romy Cooper for their contributions to *What's the Story?* and this educator's guide. We are also grateful to the Department of Canadian Heritage and The Wilson Foundation for their support.

Canada's National History Society

[1] Lindsay Gibson and James Miles, "Inquiry Doesn't Just Happen," in *Learning to Inquire in History, Geography, and Social Studies: An Anthology for Secondary Teachers,* ed. Penney Clark and Roland Case (The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2020), 151-165.

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# Lesson 1: Helping Students Identify Inquiry Topics

*This lesson links to the section "Discover Your Story" found on pages 2 to 5 in* What's The Story?

### Background

Before students can create their own inquiry questions, they have to spend some time brainstorming possible topic ideas. This activity is designed to encourage students to make observations about the world around them. It corresponds to the prompt found on page 5 of *What's the Story?*

> ***On your way to school and your other activities, pay special attention to what you see. Come up with a list of things whose history you'd like to know more about — maybe it's a person, an event, a place, an object, an idea.***
> ***Visit CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStoryTopic to share your ideas.***

### Activity

After students prepare their lists, discuss their ideas further to inspire a direction or topic for their research project. Some discussion questions could be:

*Did any of the items on your list prompt you to investigate further?*

*What questions do you still have about any of the items on your list?*

*Are any of the items representative of or connected to an event in Canadian history?*

*Have you encountered something that matters to you?*

*Have you uncovered something that you think others should know about?*

After the discussion, choose one of the following tasks to encourage further exploration.

Option 1: Neighbourhood Walk

Tour the area around your school or a local area of interest to model discovering local histories. You can explore natural or human-made areas, such as buildings, parks or streets. Make observations and inferences about what you see and encourage students to share their own observations and inferences, such as "What can we assume based on the information on the plaque?" and "It would be interesting to know more about who designed this." Ask students to share evidence to support their inferences, by asking questions like "Why do you think that?" or "What do you see that makes you think that?"

Ask questions to evoke deeper thinking. For example:

*What is this? Who designed it? What is it called? Why was it built? Where exactly is it? Who uses this place now? When was it built? How has it changed? Why might that be?*

*Does this remind you of anything? Does it symbolize anything? Can you connect it to something else?*

*Have you noticed this before? Why or why not?*

*What positive impact might this place have on the people here? What negative impact might it have?*

*Does this place matter to you? Why or why not?*

Encourage students to ask themselves questions and to make careful observations on their way home or to their activities over the next few days to see what might inspire curiosity about their local history.

Option 2: Map Exploration

Choose a local map or a few different types of maps to share with the class. These could be topographical, tourist or cycling path maps, for example. Ask students to identify features they are familiar with and ones they have not noticed before. Invite students to speculate about when and why different features appeared in their local history. Ask students to identify which places matter to them or the people who live in the community and to explain why. Lead a discussion about how students' attitudes towards their local community may have changed or been reinforced by this process of exploring a map as if they were historians. Other possible discussion questions could be:

*How might the community be different without this feature or place?*

*Who benefits the most because of it? How might that have changed over time?*

*Are there any noticeable patterns or trends in the names or locations of places or features?*

Encourage students to ask questions and to make careful observations on their way home or to their activities over the next few days to see what might inspire curiosity about their local history. If they were intrigued by the exploration of a map, suggest that they visit some of the places that piqued their curiosity to make real-world observations.

Option 3: Visualization Exercise

Invite students to close their eyes and to picture themselves preparing to leave the school at the end of the day. Guide students through a visualization activity, taking into account different modes of transportation, weather, routes, features of interest and points of reference. Have them use their senses to recreate their whole journey. Proceed slowly and suggest to students that they imagine details if they cannot remember them.

After they "reach" their destination, invite students to share their visualized observations with a partner. Ask students to describe what they remembered and what they could not remember and speculate why that might be. A further discussion could lead to questions about what features help to characterize a place or develop a sense of place in the people who live there. This may include questions such as:

> *Which prompts, details or features helped you recognize and visualize different places on your journey?*
>
> *Which prompts, details or features gave you a sense of belonging or familiarity?*
>
> *Which points of reference matter most to you when you leave school every day?*
>
> *What aspects of your journey are you wondering about after closely imagining them?*
>
> *How do you feel about your everyday journey? What does living here mean to you?*
>
> *What do you think your school like in the past? What would your journey home have looked like? What did your community mean to the people who lived here before you?*

Encourage students to ask themselves questions and to make careful observations on their way home or to their activities over the next few days to see what might inspire curiosity about their local history. Remind them to be especially observant of parts of their journey that they struggled to visualize in class.

## Response and Reflection

After students complete one of the activities, ask them to revisit the prompt found on page 5 of *What's the Story?* Of all the people, places and subjects they explored, ask students to choose three to share online. Encourage students to describe what it is that interests them about these topics. Responses can be shared at ***CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStoryTopic***

Invite students to read the submissions from other students across Canada. Encourage discussion and reflection by asking questions such as:

> *Did other students have similar topic ideas? Were there any new ideas that you were interested in? Did anything surprise you about the responses you read?*
>
> *Did you notice any trends in the types of topics students were interested in? What were some of the similarities and/or differences you noted? Try to find a response from a student in a different province or territory — how was their response similar to or different from yours?*

# Lesson 2: Crafting Big Questions

*This lesson links to the section "Question Your Story" found on pages 6 to 13 in* What's The Story?

### Background

It can take time and practice for students to develop a good, open-ended, critical thinking question (we call it a Big Question). This lesson supports students in designing their own inquiry question. It corresponds to the prompt found on page 13:

> ***Think of a topic you are interested in and try making your own big question. Keep in mind the tips on page 6. Go to CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStoryQuestions to share your Big Question and see what questions other kids in Canada have!***

A good inquiry question should be:

- meaningful to the student
- manageable in scope (not too narrow or too broad)
- have more than one possible answer
- require the student to make a judgment and come up with their own response after looking at lots of different sources

### Activity

Students may need time to select a topic of interest. It can help to ask students to start by coming up with more than one. For example, ask students to create a list of three potential topics. Invite them to discuss their choices with you and classmates to help them discover which topics best fuel their curiosity, interest or passion.

If students are stuck, suggest these strategies:

- read the local news and try to uncover which past issues are relevant in current news stories
- interview family members about the past to discover events, people, places, objects or developments that may matter to your family or community
- identify the important events, people, places, objects or developments in the history of your personal passion (playing hockey, protecting the environment, celebrating LGBTQ+ rights and community, reading science fiction novels, etc)

Even once they've identified an area of interest, students may struggle to craft the "perfect" Big Question. Of course, there's no one perfect question. It may help to remind students that there are many potential interesting and worthwhile questions. Students will benefit from brainstorming sessions and question-writing sessions in small groups or with the support of the class.

Possible approaches include:

- using mini whiteboards for each small group of students to draft their questions collaboratively
- working with a partner to take turns helping each other with revisions or generating ideas
- providing a variety of sample questions on the board that students could use as "frames" or models to build their own questions

Students may find it helpful to frame their questions using the historical thinking concepts. For example, many questions that relate to the concept of historical significance can be framed as "Why should Canadians learn about X?" or "Why does X matter today?" Students can refer to the question bank on page 13 to see other examples of questions that use the historical thinking concepts.

Once students have generated several questions, ask them to sort them from narrow to broad questions or from big to little questions. Circulate and offer feedback.

Refer students back to *What's the Story?* to evaluate their potential Big Questions and to help them select one that best meets the criteria found on page 6. Reassure students that they may re-evaluate their questions as they do their research and may end up revising their questions as they learn more about their topic.

### Response and Reflection

Once students have come up with a Big Question, have them share their questions at ***CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStoryQuestions***

Invite students to read some of the Big Questions provided by other students. Encourage discussion by providing questions such as:

> *Are there any Big Questions that stand out to you? Are there Big Questions that meet all the criteria found on page 6?*
>
> *Can you match any Big Questions to the historical thinking concepts (historical significance, primary source evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives and ethical dimensions)?*
>
> *After reading what other students have come up with, do you have any new ideas of Big Questions you can create for your topic?*

# Lesson 3: Finding and Assessing Sources

*This lesson links to the section "Explore Your Story" found on pages 14 to 21 in* What's The Story?

### Background

It is important for students to consult a wide variety of sources as they do their research. This lesson will encourage students to brainstorm different types of sources they can use to answer their Big Question. This activity corresponds to the prompt found on page 21:

> **What types of sources could you use to answer your big question? Choose three and share them at CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStorySources. Include book titles, website urls, museum names, and other specific details. That way other kids across Canada can use your great sources!**

### Activity

Pre-research

Before students begin their research, have them brainstorm in small groups as many examples as possible of sources they could use in a history project.

Gather the students' suggestions of possible sources and list them in a column on the left side of the board or screen.

Share these definitions with students:

***Primary Source*** *– provides first-hand information or knowledge about a topic. A primary source is usually created close to the time of the event or topic.*

***Secondary Source*** *– provides second-hand information about an event or topic. A secondary source provides an interpretation of what happened in the past.*

***Trace*** *– a physical clue of the past, like a photograph, tool or letter. Traces are not created for the purpose of documenting history.*

***Account*** *– a deliberate telling of something that happened, like a TV news broadcast, diary entry, or biography.*

Add these terms across the top of the remaining section of the screen or board.

Invite students to identify whether each source is a trace or account and whether it is a primary source or secondary source. Keep a record of the brainstorm to return to later.

Example:

| Source | Account | Trace | Primary Source | Secondary Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A school newsletter from 1950 | | x | x | |
| A recent book about schooling in Canada in the 1950s | x | | | x |

This activity works best when students have identified specific evidence and sources, such as interviews with individuals, actual documents or artifacts, etc. Also, sources can often be either a primary source or a secondary source, depending on what question you ask. (For example, a history textbook from the 1950s can be a secondary source because it provides an account of things that have happened in the past. However, if you are researching the types of topics that students learned in the 1950s, the textbook becomes a primary source).

Mid-research

To check the variety of sources being used by the students, ask students to take turns standing to name one source that they used (for example, an interview with an expert). If anyone else used the same or similar source, they would stand and say, "Me too." The last student to suggest a source that has not yet been mentioned yet gets a round of applause.

Return to the list of sources you created as a group at the pre-research stage. Suggest to students that they review it if they have realized their research would benefit if they used a wider variety of sources.

At this stage, students can make a list of sources to share online at ***CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStorySources***. Encourage them to read responses left by other students and identify any sources they can add to their research.

Post-research

After the students have completed their research, play a quick game of Source Bingo. Print and distribute the bingo cards found on the next page. Randomly call out the items on the squares and have students check off the sources you call if they used them. The student who covers the most squares gets a small prize or round of applause.

| B | I | N | G | O |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Historic site, building or natural area | Historical newspaper article | Diary | Government record | Museum exhibit (in-person) |
| Museum exhibit (online) | Interview with an expert | Visit to an archive | Photograph | Artifact or object |
| Map | Book | Website | Magazine article | Video |
| Podcast | Social Media | Comic or graphic novel | Speech | Historical film |
| Recent newspaper article | Database | Interview with someone who has personal experience (oral history) | Monument or plaque | Painting or art |

## Response and Reflection

After their research, encourage students to return to ***CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStorySources*** to view the student-generated list of sources. Encourage your students to add any sources to the list that they have used that have not already been shared.

Invite students to read the submissions from other students across Canada. Encourage discussion and reflection by asking questions such as:

*Which sources were the most beneficial for your research?*

*Are there sources listed that you would like to try to use in future projects?*

*What kinds of evidence do you think you will leave behind for future historians?*

# Lesson 4: Reflecting on Historical Inquiry

### Background

After students have completed their inquiry project, an oral or written reflection can help them evaluate their progress and celebrate their learning. Teachers can also use reflection as part of their assessment.

This lesson will help students reflect on what they have learned throughout their inquiry project. It will also encourage them to reflect on larger concepts related to the study of history and its importance and relevance to society.

### Activity

In small groups, have your students discuss some of the following questions:

*What have you learned?*

*Were you successful in your project?*

*What would you have done differently? What would you do the same?*

*What new skills did you acquire in completing your project?*

*How has this project changed your thinking on the topic?*

*What has the project prompted you do to next?*

Divide the following questions amongst small groups. Have each group pick a spokesperson, who will summarize the group discussion and present it to the class. Divide your board into seven sections to represent each question. Write down each group's responses to each question and add any comments from students in other groups.

*What is the difference between research and inquiry?*

*What are some of the ways you can share your research to let others know more about your project?*

*Given what you have learned about doing a historical inquiry project, what advice would you give your past self at the start of your project?*

*Whose history should be taught? Why is it important to include multiple perspectives on history?*

*Why should we study history? What does history teach us?*

*What's the difference between history and the past?*

*How are you connected to history?*

Display the "Canada's History Youth Forum: Reflecting On What We've Learned" poster. Have your students look at their answers to the reflection questions and compare them to the answers on the poster. Ask them to consider: What answers are the same? What answers are different? What would you add? What other questions should we ask?

**Response and Reflection**

Have your students write a short paragraph summarizing what they have learned through their historical inquiry project, both about their project topic, and also about history in general, as well as the historical inquiry process. Ask them to include how *What's The Story?* helped them in their project. Submit these paragraphs at ***CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStoryTestimonials.***

**You are also encouraged to submit testimonials about using *What's The Story?* and these complementary teaching materials in your classroom. Your feedback is helpful in guiding our youth and educational programs.**