

Thinking historically with source documents

This reference guide identifies freely available video, print and online resources that explain historical thinking, suggest how to teach it and offer sources of historical documents and images on topics in Canadian history. Also indicated at the end of this guide are exemplary resources available for purchase.



Introducing historical thinking

Students are regularly expected to learn about history without being asked to think historically. Thinking historically requires attending to the kinds of questions that historians pose. These questions typically focus on six concepts:

- **Historical significance:** What and who should be remembered, researched and taught?
- **Evidence and interpretation:** Is the evidence credible and adequate to support the conclusions reached?
- **Continuity and change:** How are lives and conditions alike over time and how have they changed?
- **Cause and consequence:** Why did historical events happen the way they did and what are the consequences?
- **Historical perspective:** What does past look like when viewed through lenses of the time?
- **Ethical judgment:** Is what happened right and fair?

Explanations of the concepts

[The Historical Thinking Project](#) provides one-page descriptions of each historical thinking concept and offers a summary of key aspects and sample tasks for each concept:

- [Explanations of historical thinking concepts](#)
- [Six historical thinking concepts: Graphic organizer](#)



Videos for teachers

[The History Education Network](#) offers several videos of teachers in classrooms modeling the teaching of historical thinking concepts.



Videos for students

Six videos developed by [The Critical Thinking Consortium](#) introduce students in an engaging manner to the historical thinking concepts and the three or four key features of each concept:

1. [Historical significance](#)
2. [Evidence and interpretation](#)
3. [Continuity and change](#)
4. [Cause and consequence](#)
5. [Historical perspective](#)
6. [Ethical judgment](#)





Interactive game

[Pages from the Past](#) is an interactive game that focuses on historical perspective taking about the values, aspirations and life choices of four fictional Chinese individuals.



Accessing source documents

Learning to think historically requires that students engage with multiple primary sources and secondary accounts. The most challenging and time consuming aspect of teaching historical thinking is locating suitable primary and secondary sources.

Free sets of historical documents



[The Critical Thinking Consortium](#) has mounted searchable sets of free primary and secondary documents as part of its larger Source Docs collections. The free sets address the following themes:



Ukrainian immigration

1. [Reasons for Ukrainian immigration pre-1914](#)
2. [Conditions for early Ukrainian immigrants](#)

World War I interment

1. [Ukrainian life after internment 1920-1946](#)
2. [Daily Life in WW I internment camps](#)
3. [Effects of WW I internment for Ukrainians](#)
4. [WW I internment justified](#)
5. [Reasons for WW I internment](#)

Chinese Canadian experiences

1. [Causes of the 1907 anti-Asian riots](#)
2. [Government response to the 1907 anti-Asian riots](#)
3. [Chinese Canadian life on the railway](#)
4. [Consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act](#)
5. [Chinese Canadian teenagers 1910-1947](#)
6. [WWII involvement improved status for Chinese Canadians](#)
7. [Reasons for the Head Tax](#)
8. [Early Chinese contributions to BC](#)
9. [Chinese employment 1875-1945](#)
10. [Attitudes toward Chinese immigration](#)
11. [Reactions to the Exclusion Act](#)

[Great Unsolved Mysteries In Canadian History](#) has assembled hundreds of primary and secondary documents related to a dozen mysterious events that illuminate broader issues in Canadian history.



1. [Aurore: mystery of a martyred child](#)
2. [Where is Vinland?](#)
3. [Angélique and the burning of Montreal](#)
4. [Jerome: The mystery man of Baie Saint Marie](#)
5. [Klatsassin and the Chilcotin War](#)
6. [Who killed William Robinson?](#)
7. [Who discovered Klondike gold?](#)
8. [The Redpath Mansion mystery](#)
9. [The Tom Thomson mystery](#)
10. [The massacre of the 'Black' Donnellys](#)
11. [The death of Peter Verigan](#)
12. [The death of a diplomat: Herbert Norman](#)

Archives of primary sources

[The History Education Network](#) offers a collection of archives, websites and databases on significant topics in Canadian history



1. [Canadian history maps](#)
2. [Early European exploration in North America](#)
3. [Early settlement in North America](#)
4. [European-Aboriginal history](#)
5. [The fur trade](#)
6. [Transportation](#)
7. [Pioneers and immigration](#)
8. [Canadian conflicts: Internal and external](#)
9. [Politics and government](#)
10. [Canadian society](#)

Locating lesson plans

[Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey](#) explores issues related to the famous steamship whose South Asian passengers were denied entry into Canada in 1914. This incident came to symbolize the struggle of the South Asian community for full acceptance into Canadian society.



The site offers downloadable [lesson plans](#) that engage students in examining an array of historical materials about issues affecting South Asians in Canada:

- Exploring the history context of the Komagata Maru incident
- Decoding media representations of South Asians
- Judging the turning points in South Asian history
- Judging the appropriate response to the injustices
- Historical perspective taking about the Komagata Maru

[Mystery Quests](#) are the lesson plans that support student use of the historical documents in the Great Unsolved Mysteries collection. Arranged by ages (11-14; 14-16; 16-18), the lessons are suitable for self-directed online student use or in whole class instruction.

Many lessons focus on broad historical issues such as:

- slavery in New France
- women in New France
- religious conflict
- family violence
- the impact of the gold rush
- media bias in the 19th century



[The Governor's Letters](#) offers lesson plans involving the dispatches sent between the colonies in British Columbia and the Colonial Office in London from 1846 to 1971.

The lessons draw upon source documents to examine

- The real reasons for creating the Colony of British Columbia
- The fairness of the Douglas Treaties and the Numbered Treaties
- Daily life in Victoria before and after the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush
- Governor James Douglas's legacy

Other lessons develop students' ability to analyze historical documents:

- [Reading around a document](#)
- [Exploring the author's mindset](#)
- [Judging the credibility of primary accounts](#)

[The Historical Thinking Project](#) has assembled a searchable database of over 50 lesson plans developed by Canadian teachers that integrate the historical thinking concepts

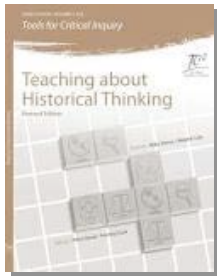
The lessons touch upon historical issues such as:

- small town Canada
- Aboriginal rights
- fur trade
- Canadian Identity and autonomy
- residential schools
- women's rights

Looking for more?

Additional materials to further support and integrate historical thinking into your teaching practice are available for purchase.

Understanding historical thinking



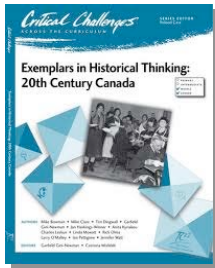
[Teaching about Historical Thinking](#) Identifies the key attributes of each historical thinking concept and offers teaching ideas and sample activities on how they might be explained to students and embedded in any topic.



[The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts](#) offers thorough overviews of the six historical thinking concepts with teaching strategies and model activities. Each chapter discusses how a prominent Canadian author has engaged one of the six concepts while writing a work of popular history or historical fiction.



Teaching resources to support historical inquiry



[Exemplars in Historical Thinking: 20th Century Canada](#) presents a collection of 9 critical challenges to engage students in thinking historically about a wide range of events and people in 20th Century Canada.



[Investigating Images](#) offers nine activities to help students interpret the explicit content of images, read behind images and challenge images to better understand historical and contemporary times and places.



[Investigating Realistic Stories](#) helps bring the study of history alive with eight strategies for using contemporary and historic fiction as an information source. The package includes access to an extensive online bibliography of historical novels designated by reading level.





[Tools for Thought](#) is a searchable online collection of lesson plans, in digital and interactive whiteboard formats that introduce and explain over 50 different critical thinking tools including:

- Drawing inferences
- Detecting propaganda
- Identifying the implicit message in an image
- Analyzing cartoons



Collections of primary documents



Great Canadian Political Cartoons is a set of three print publications each containing hundreds of cartoons on the social, economic and political history of Canada covering three periods:

- [1820 to 1914](#)
- [1915 to 1945](#)
- [1946 to 1982](#)



[Source Docs](#) contains two searchable collections with carefully selected sets of documents and images organized around a range of historical and contemporary topics, including the following



History Docs

New France and Acadia
Immigration to Canada
Confederation
Aboriginal history
World War I and II
Canada and Quebec

Picture Sets

Ancient Egypt
Ancient Greece
Ancient Rome
Children's right
Global development
India

Looking to add other voices to the study of Canada?



[Pivotal Voices](#) offers access to free videos, interactive games and timelines, source documents, and lesson plans to teach about important but often underrepresented groups and events in Canadian history:

- **Ukrainian Canadian** experiences including First World War interment and pioneer life
- **Chinese Canadian** experiences including railway camps, anti-Asian riots, the Head Tax and the Exclusion Act
- **South Asian Canadian** experiences including the Komogata Maru



This reference guide was developed by The Critical Thinking Consortium, a non-profit association of schools, districts, teacher associations and other educational organizations dedicated to infusing critical thinking into the teaching of every subject area.