



THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

Packing a Trunk

Note: This lesson plan has been adapted and modified from one posted by Sue Glenz at [The Wisconsin Historical Society](#) Web Site.

OVERVIEW:

Being an immigrant to Canada in the early part of the twentieth century required that the traveler plan for the journey, which included packing and making difficult decisions. In the past, people who traveled here from many countries created trunks or other containers to hold their belongings. Often the physical size of the container limited the number of personal possessions, mementos, and material goods brought from home to begin their new lives.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To help students experience and relate to an important aspect of early immigration to Canada.
2. To create opportunities for students to discuss moving and immigration with their family.
3. To investigate online materials that tell about the past in order to develop for each student a realistic view of the problems and decisions early travelers to Canada faced.
4. To create a model traveler's trunk to demonstrate their learning and understanding of this aspect of "the immigration experience"

RESOURCES / MATERIALS:

- Computer or computer lab with internet access
- Cardboard boxes or cardboard materials to make a model of an immigrant's trunk

PROCEDURE:

Important Background Information

Early twentieth-century immigrants gave up everything from their original homes to come to Canada. Passengers brought very little with them because the shipping lines charged them for every parcel brought on board. Immigrants often bought or made trunks in which to pack their belongings.

1. Discuss with students: Have you ever moved? What problems did you encounter? How long did it take to pack up all of your items? How did you decide what to take with you and what to throw away (what was the most important)? Were you happy with your choice(s)?
2. Evaluate students' current knowledge of immigration. Ask if they know the difference between an immigrant and a refugee. Discuss whether immigrants and refugees still come to Saskatchewan, or any other area in Canada.
3. Brainstorm with students what the contents of a typical immigrant to Canada's trunk might contain, then discuss what individuals today would pack if they were moving and had limited space. Discuss the criteria that might be used in choosing what to bring. Suggest that students consider the following criteria:





THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

Packing a Trunk

- to remind someone of home the home they are leaving and of family
 - to provide entertainment while traveling
 - to be useful for personal care and for survival
 - to tell other people about who you are.
4. Ask students to discuss with their family members the items that each would take if the family moved. If any students and their families have moved recently, have them share the difficult decisions their family made.
 5. Using the school's computer lab and the internet, or the local public library, have students research pictures of early twentieth century immigrants possessions using the site [The Last Best West, Immigrant's Possessions](#). Then ask students to generate two written lists – the first, a list of the items that immigrants might have brought with them and the second, a description of the many kinds of containers they may have used. The [Pier 21 Site](#) is an additional resource as it is a collection of letters from people describing their voyages, the advice they received, and some descriptions of the things they brought with them.
 6. Have students create a personal trunk. Several samples of typical immigrant's trunk can be found in the [Treasure's Gallery](#) – Transportation and distribution site. Additional designs from other countries can be found at: [Immigrant's Trunk, Student Page](#).

This activity could be done as individuals, in pairs of students, or as teams. Try to have students standardize the sizes of their traveling trunk to be as close to 66 by 46 by 41 centimeters high as possible.

7. Students, alone or in their groups, must decide the items to place in it: - clothes, blankets, toys, kitchen utensils, books, photos, keepsakes, food, and other items. Use real things when possible, but simulate those that may be too difficult to use. Decide to make the box look old or new. Have students decorate the box to look like a trunk.
8. Have students present and display the trunks, instructing them to show and explain each item chosen as well as the difficulties they encountered in the choices they made.

EVALUATION:

The two written lists of what immigrants brought along and the description of the containers or trunks they used will form the basis for evaluation.

In addition each group of student's model trunks will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Practicality of items chosen to include in the trunk.
- Effort made to make the trunk look as realistic as possible.

