

Section 1: Historical Thinking Concept

Chosen Concept: Historical Perspectives

Student Explanation for Learners

Historical perspective allows us to grasp the past by seeing events through the same social and political lens that people back then used. Historians use political perspectives to analyze evidence and figure out what people in the past could have believed, valued, and desired. This matters because social, cultural, and historical circumstances are constantly changing in our world. Choices made by people in the past may not make sense to us in our modern context, but when we put ourselves in their shoes, we can better understand their decision-making process. When you use historical perspective, you are not pretending to be someone from the past. Instead, you are asking what their world was like and how that world impacted the way they thought. Looking at these different viewpoints helps us understand history more deeply and fairly.

Section 2: Curricular Alignment

Grade Level: Grade 10 CHC2D Canadian History Since World War I

Ontario Curriculum Overall Expectation

C3. Identity, Citizenship, and Heritage: Explain how various individuals, groups, and events, including some major international events, contributed to the development of identities, citizenship, and heritage in Canada between 1929 and 1945.

Teacher Facing Curricular Note

Using a historical perspective supports this expectation by helping students learn beyond simple facts and dates; it also encourages them to delve deeper into the lived experiences of people from that time. Instead of merely reciting dates and important figures, students examine how different people may have experienced an event. Through conceptual reasoning, they move past recalling events to analyze how decisions were shaped by cultural attitudes, the political climate, and economic conditions during WW2. For example, when studying Canada's response to Jewish refugees during WW2, students consider how prejudice and national priorities influenced events such as the refusal of entry to the MS St. Louis. This approach helps students recognize that perspectives from the past are often linked to how culture is perceived today, and that definitions of citizenship and inclusion were contested. By engaging with multiple viewpoints, students develop a richer appreciation and understanding of how Canada's identity and heritage were shaped.

Section 3: Primary Source & Worked Example

Primary Source Selection

The Sources selected include an image of rescued Holocaust survivors on their way to Canada, and a video interview of a survivor who was on the boat.

Context for Learners

During WW2, hundreds of Jewish men, women and children came towards Canada seeking refuge and homes. One specific group was aboard the MS St. Louis, 937 were aboard this ship which was denied access by Canada, the US and Cuba and were sent back to Europe. During their time in Europe some made it to safe countries however, 254 died in the Holocaust. An official apology has since been made by Canada.

Modelled historical thinking

Guided Questions:

In what ways did the rejection of the Jewish people reflect ideologies in Canada?

What reasons/perspectives would have led to the Jewish people being denied access into Canada?

Why would an apology from the Canadian government be worse or better received by certain people?

Teacher Note

Within Strand C, a central focus of the curriculum is examining how identity and citizenship have shaped Canadian history, particularly through government responses to refugees and immigrants. This document provides a powerful example of a period when Canada failed to uphold inclusive and humanitarian values, revealing the exclusionary attitudes that influenced national policy. It exposes the real consequences of these decisions for marginalized groups and challenges the often-idealized narrative of Canada as consistently just and welcoming. By engaging with this source, students can critically explore questions such as “Was Canada always the good guy?” and “How did Canada treat Jewish people?” While gaining a deeper understanding of the political climate of the time and how competing perspectives shaped government actions and historical outcomes.

Section 4: Visual Accompaniment to the Primary Source

Type of Visual or Organizer:

Prior to Watching

What do you think is happening in this photo?

Based on the short description of events how did this impact Jewish Immigrants?

What does this tell you about Canadian ideologies and politics during this Period?

After Watching Video:

Now that you have watched the video, how has your perspective of the image changed?

How did some Jewish survivors on the boat react to being denied?

Do you think the apology was enough for the aftereffects of them denying the Jewish refugees?

Description of the Tool

This tool will be used to have students use their own thinking to infer what happened after the boat was denied and how this impacted Canadian politics. By having students interpret the image before receiving additional context, they can develop stronger observational and critical thinking skills, paying close attention to details such as expressions, setting, and symbols within the visual. This process encourages them to ask questions about who is represented, whose perspectives may be missing, and what messages the image is conveying. It also supports students in forming initial interpretations and hypotheses that they can later confirm, revise, or challenge as they learn more. In doing so, students deepen their understanding of the implications of this event and how it connects to broader themes in Canadian immigration policy, including exclusion, identity, and the role of government decision-making during this period.

Pedagogical Purpose

This visual tool supports historical thinking by providing students with the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills by inferring understanding of primary sources before being given additional information. This helps them to develop their historical thinking skills as they can begin to understand how perspectives changed decisions in the past and how these significant events have created continuity and change within the history of Canada as a whole. By having students think deeply about what they are seeing and then providing them with further

information, they can interpret more about historical sources and use the previous knowledge they already have on the subject to strengthen their understanding. This tool can help students to strengthen these thinking concepts and make them pull more from further primary sources they look at as they find more than surface level information and what they see.

Section 5: Scholarly Rationale or Pedagogical Design

Using primary sources such as images and first-hand testimonies encourages critical historical thinking by immersing students in the past, allowing them to put themselves into past actors' shoes and experience their historical perspectives directly rather than through abstracted summaries. Seixas and Morton emphasize concepts like historical perspective to facilitate student inferencing of actors' beliefs and motivations from evidence. This line of investigation bridges the gaps between modern values and past contexts. This lesson design mirrors Seixas and Morton's historical thinking framework by prompting perspective based historical inferencing from the MS St. Louis image. This is done prior to showing video context and encourages students to revisit original hypotheses once more information is obtained (Seixas & Morton, Chapter 5, 2013). This approach aligns with research on effective history pedagogy, such as on page 298 of *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age*, which advocates for primary documents to build interpretive skills in social studies (Rose & Meyer, 2002, p. 298). By creating a framework where students observe, hypothesize, question, and reflect, students actively construct an understanding of Canada's WWII-era decision making and policies. This reveals how sociopolitical lenses shaped citizenship and heritage in Canada. It not only deepens engagement with Ontario's CHC2D expectations but also steers the students away from presentism, helping them appreciate the complexity of Canada's national identity and how it came to be.

Citations

- Seixas, M. (2013). *The Big Six, Historical Thinking Concepts*.
- Sandwell, R. (2008). *Using Primary Documents in Social Studies and History*

Section 6: Primary Resources



CBC News: The National. (2025). *MS St. Louis Holocaust survivor on Canada's apology*.

Youtu.be. <https://youtu.be/nEpwxHD08g>

Canada and the Holocaust | *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. (2019). thecanadianencyclopedia.ca.

<https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/holocaust>