



Roughing It in the Backwoods

A Lesson for Use with the National Library of Canada's *Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* Website

This activity offers students the opportunity to practice research and essay-writing skills using primary and secondary source materials, and learn about aspects of early settlers' lives in the backwoods of Upper Canada.

Subject/Age

Social Studies (History) and Language Arts/Ages 15+

Learning Outcomes (WCP) Objectives (QC) Learning Outcomes (APEF) Expectations (ON)

Social Studies Outcomes for this activity (History):

In completing these activities, students will:

- Analyze, synthesize, and evaluate historical information
- Analyze the principal characteristics of the Moodie and Traill families' pioneer experience in Upper Canada

Language Arts Outcomes for this activity:

(R) Reading

- Read and demonstrate an understanding of non-fiction materials (primary and secondary sources) from different periods, with an emphasis on analyzing and assessing information, ideas and themes

(W) Writing

- Select and use appropriate writing forms with a focus on essays
- Revise and edit their work, independently and collaboratively

(O/V) Oral and Visual Communication

- Use listening techniques and oral communication skills to participate in classroom discussions

These Language Arts Outcomes correspond to:

- WCP GO - **R**: 3.2; **W**: 4; **O/V**: 5.1
- Quebec objectives - 2 (**Reading**); 1, 2 (**Writing**); 1 (**Oral**)
- APEF CGO - **R**: 4; **W**: 10; **O/V**: 2.1

Student Demonstration of Learning

Students will brainstorm to compare differences between mid-19th-century backwoods life in Upper Canada and their lives in Canada today. They will then write an essay on a related theme, using the resources at the National Library of Canada's *Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* site.

**Materials/Resources
Required**

Computers with access to the Internet **or**
Printed versions of documents
Student Handout
Assessment Criteria

Web Links

The National Library of Canada's *Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* website
URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/

Other sources:

Early Canadiana Online (has many digitized versions of the works of Traill and Moodie)

URL: www.canadiana.org/

The Canadian Encyclopedia Online

URL: <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/>

Essay-Writing Sources:

About: Writing: Essays, Paragraphs and Papers

URL: <http://7-12educators.tqn.com/education/7-12educators/msub57litsourcesessays.htm>

Bowdoin College History Department

URL: <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>

Capital Community College

URL: <http://webster.commnet.edu/mla.htm>

URL: <http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

Instructional Procedures

Enhancing Students' Interest

Watch a video depicting pioneer life in Canada in the mid-19th century.

Small-Group Work

- In groups, brainstorm differences in the lives of people living in their part of Canada today and those living in mid-19th century backwoods Canada. Students create a table of positive and negative things about living in each period.

Large-Group Work

Discuss/debate:

- Which period they would have preferred to live in, based on their knowledge of the period.
- Preconceptions about life in different periods: where such ideas come from and how preconceptions can be tested.

Read the introductory text on primary and secondary resources on the Student Handout. Introduce students to the National Library's *Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* site. Navigate the various sections: Biographies, Life in England, Emigration and Bush Life, etc., and show students the Letters Index. Discuss which are primary and which are secondary sources.

Examine one of the letters referenced on the worksheet (URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/t1-116-e.php?uid=23&uidc=ID&anchor=t1-6020-e.html) and discuss the advantages of primary versus secondary sources. (See the chart on the Student Handout.)

Key questions:

- Is this letter a primary or a secondary source?
- Does this make it more or less valuable as a source? Why?
- What are some of the problems with sources like this? (bias, reliability, omitted information)
- What are some of the problems with secondary sources? (bias, distance from the original events)

Consider the class of immigrant that the Moodies and Traills represented:

- Members of the gentility.
- Impoverished but with some resources (had servants, could buy their land).
- Relatively comfortable compared to many other pioneers.

Bias might include: gender (women's or men's experience), religion (attitudes towards Catholics), class, nationality (comments about the Irish), politics (loyalist versus reform).

Individual Work

Introduce students to the essay assignment. They are to develop a thesis and use sources from the site to support their arguments.

Educators may choose to have the class develop a rubric based on the Assessment Criteria, or other criteria.

Discuss how - or whether - their impressions of 19th-century life in the backwoods might have changed as a result of their research.

Possible Extension

Students could create an inventory of items that an emigrant to a backwoods farm in Upper or Lower Canada would need, first from their own brainstorming session, and then from other sources. They could then research the price of these items or determine their equivalent price in today's terms to gain an understanding of the costs of emigration. Finally, they could make a chart of the benefits of life as an emigrant in the backwoods versus life in an older, established country.

Notes on Enriching This Activity
