

Canadian Identity:
The Use and Misuse of Nationalist Imagery Online

Grade 10: CHC2D – Canadian History Since World War I

Units:

- E: Canada, 1982 to the Present

Grade 10: CHV2O – Civics and Citizenship

Units :

- B: Civic Awareness

DESCRIPTION: The use of historical images and the iconography of Canadiana by the far right in online spaces is frequent and on the rise. Calls to action regarding immigration, Indigenous people, and LGBTQ+ rights, among other issues, are often couched within an imagined historical framework. This lesson plan can serve as an introduction to a larger discussion about Canadian inclusion and identity, and can strengthen skills in historical thinking and media literacy.

TIME: One 60–90 minute class period for the slideshow and discussion.

OBJECTIVES:

- Motivate self-aware reflection about the construction of national identities
- Inspire civic awareness about societal inclusion and exclusion
- Encourage critical thinking about visual representations of history
- Facilitate historical thinking about objectivity and perspective
- Situate media literacy within a broader awareness of historical positionality

MATERIALS:

- PowerPoint Slideshow
- Instructor's Slideshow Guide

Instructor's Slideshow Guide

Introducing National Symbols

Slides 2: After defining some very basic terms, have the class brainstorm Canadian symbols and write their suggestions on the board. Once they have come up with an initial list, or if the class has trouble starting the suggestion process, click on the slideshow to reveal the illustrations. Discuss what the illustrator chose as Canadian symbols.

Slide 3: With reference to the class list of symbols, ask the two questions on the slide. Based on the students' answers, create a list of terms on the board that pertain to Canadian values and characteristics.

Reading National Symbols in Historical Images

Slide 4: Get the students to describe the iconography they identify as having been used by the artist. For example, in this poster, Canada's natural landscape is foregrounded.

Slide 5: In this example, the students might identify how the natural environment here is framed as being richly agricultural. Also, the nuclear family has given way to a lone masculine figure who, as he rolls up his sleeves, is defined by his industry.

Slide 6: In regards to this image, the students may identify how natural beauty is combined with a figure of rugged masculinity whose upright posture mirrors his upright morals.

Transitioning Into the Abuse of National Symbols

Slide 7: Use the same procedure here as for the previous images. In this case, masculinity is used as a conduit not for industry or morality, but bracing outdoor sports.

Slide 8: With the image returned to its original context, ask the students to collectively decode the text in relation to the image. The students should come to the conclusion that the poster is making an exclusionary statement about Canadian identity, in essence that Canadian identity is historically and actually white.

Historical Claims and Coded Language in Social Media

Slide 9: Discuss the top and bottom images separately, emphasizing what version of history is being presented in the top image. Students should be able to identify that themes being presented in the top image include religious faith, community, the nuclear family, traditional gender roles, heterosexuality, and, above all, whiteness. The students should also be able to identify that the juxtaposition of the idyllic "historical" illustration with the dystopic contemporary photograph is meant to imply societal degeneration via a decrease in whiteness.

Slide 10: Returning the image to the context of the original post will make explicit the students' assumptions about implicit racism.

Slide 11: By reading this image within the context that the students' have been acquiring to this point in the slideshow, they should be able to identify that "western" is being used instead of "white", and "multicultural" is being used instead of "not white".

Slide 12: Similarly, at this point in the discussion, students should be able to identify that "European" means "white".

Race and the Appeal to History

Slide 13: As a summative distillation of what the students have learned over the course of the class, make them think through exactly what constitutes the “good old days” so often politically evoked.

Slide 14: Here at the end of the slideshow, the students should be able to identify the way in which appeals to a particularly constructed Canadian past are implicitly racist.

Triangular Hate: digital memory, disinformation, and transnational traffic between Germany, the US, and Canada
Carleton University
<https://carleton.ca/populistpublics>