

Public lands: Hidden histories

http://www.ccge.org/resources/learning_centre/classroom_activities/public_lands_history.asp

Time

Two to three class periods

Materials

- Internet access
- Print resources about the history of public lands
- Art materials

Overview

In Canada there are millions of hectares of public land that belong to all Canadians. This includes parks, historic sites, wildlife sanctuaries, wilderness areas, underground mineral reserves, marine parks, historic and scenic trails, forests, and almost every bit of waterfront. Each of these public lands has its own story to tell: about wildlife, cultures, governments, and people who have lived on, enjoyed, protected, or influenced them. Some of these stories are well known and others are 'hidden histories'. Throughout this lesson, students will explore and share with others the 'hidden histories' of some of Canada's public lands.

Objectives

Students will:

- Identify the economic, scientific, recreational, and spiritual values of public lands
- Interpret First Nations quotes that demonstrate the unique relationship between First Nations and the land
- Identify important historic facts about select public lands
- Develop a creative way to share information with others about a select public land

Geographic Skills

- Asking Geographic Questions
- Acquiring Geographic Information
- Organizing Geographic Information
- Analyzing Geographic Information

Suggested Procedure

Opening

Introduce to students the concept of public lands from the overview above. Have them guess the amount of land they 'own'. Do students have a sense of the benefits of public lands? Can they also think of benefits that are economic, scientific, recreational, and spiritual? Do they recall a public land near them or one that they have visited? There's at least one public land in every province and territory. Share with students that in this lesson they will learn some 'hidden histories' of these public lands.

Development

Part One: Lessons learned from First Nations

If there are any First Nations in the class or if any students are familiar with First Nations cultures, ask them to share what they know about the traditional relationship between First Nations and the land.

Many public lands were once the home of First Nations tribes, which had a unique relationship with the land. Land ownership in the European sense was an unfamiliar concept to them. They were taught to respect the Earth as they would respect a loved one. If they respected the

land, they could obtain food, clothing, and shelter and grow spiritually. For example, when they used an animal for food, they offered something back to the land such as a song or a prayer so that the balance was not upset. They rarely wasted natural items and took only what they needed, so there could be gifts of life for the future.

Ask students how this view of the land compares with their own. Do they view the land in such a spiritual way? Individually or in groups, have students interpret a quote about the land from a First Nations source. Have students share their interpretations with the class. Are they similar or different? How? Discuss the lessons we can learn from First Nations and how our lives might be different if all Canadians viewed the Earth this way.

Part Two: Hidden Histories

The histories of public lands are much like the history of Canada: filled with battles, victories, hopes, injustices, and stories of bravery. Every public land has a story to tell. Some are told by First Nations legends, others by historical documents, still other by artifacts or artwork.

In this part of the lesson, students will have a chance to learn about other hidden histories of public lands.

Divide students into groups of three or four.

Have each group select a public land to research, choosing from some of the many public lands in your province (A good place to look is in your provincial government web site, or Parks Canada)

Challenge each group to try to find the following information about its public land:

- Its geographic location
- Its first human inhabitants and/or first wildlife
- Its history, including when, why, and how it became a public land
- Its economic, scientific, recreational, or spiritual benefits
- Three things that make it special or unique

Once students have gathered this information, have them produce a creative way to tell the story of their public lands to others. They might want to develop a storybook or colouring book for younger students; act out a skit, song, rap, or poem; or prepare a memory book of photographs and artwork. They can share their stories with other classes, younger students, or as part of a parent night.

Closing

Ask the students what they learned about public lands through their research and the presentations of their classmates. How did finding out this information alter their opinions about preserving public lands?

Suggested Student Assessment

After producing and watching the presentations, students should be able to generate a list of characteristics that all public lands share.

Extending the Lesson

Have students create a travel brochure to describe and persuade others to visit their public lands.

Choose one public land to research as a class and create a timeline covering the history of its designation as a public land.