

THE LOYALIST LIFE: CREATING A LIVING MUSEUM

Janet McKinney & Linda Dodge, New Brunswick

INTENDED GRADE/SUBJECT LEVEL

Grade 5 & 6 History, Arts & Crafts

CONCEPTS

- early history of Saint John, NB from the time of the First Nation to the Loyalist era; creation of public displays; life in the 1700s.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- develop an interest in and an enthusiasm for their local history by experiencing life as it was in the past;
- develop a pride in our city and the accomplishments of our ancestors.

BACKGROUND

Although this history unit features the history of Saint John, NB, it could be easily adapted to fit the history of any Canadian region. We have information and instruction sheets for most of our activities and would be happy to share them with any teachers wishing to use them.

This unit covers a time period of about three months, during which history is the main focus of most aspects of our daily class life. History is taught not only in history class, but incorporated into science, health, math, reading, creative writing, recess and noon hour activities, even the Christmas concert.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

This unit is introduced to the students through formal teaching about the people who first lived in our area, The Mi'kmaq and Maliseets, the arrival of the French fur traders and the fascinating story of Madame La Tour, and the Loyalists (who they were, why they came, how they came and the hardships facing their survival here) through the use of materials listed above.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

In order to teach the everyday lifestyle of the Loyalists, we all became Loyalists with no homes or household goods. Each day a new concept of Loyalist life is introduced and the students learn how to survive without modern conveniences. To do this, we have developed many activities that demonstrate to the students the concepts being taught.

To introduce each activity, a lesson begins with an oral presentation with explanations, discussions and demonstrations of an aspect of Loyalist life. This is

followed by research by the students. They then role-play the situation with a hands-on activity and draw conclusions about it.

All topic and concepts of Loyalist life are covered in the above manner and the students become very involved with how people lived in the 1700s. When all concepts have been taught, the students have developed a deep understanding and appreciation of the hardships of Loyalist living. They are now ready to convey to others their knowledge of Loyalist life and begin to prepare for the “Living Loyalist Museum.”

A few of our many activities are:

- building a life size Mi'kmaq wigwam and Indian crafts (hatchets, cradle board, axes, walking sticks, bow and arrows, baking corn bread and bannock);
- cooking (stew, Johnny Cake, gingerbread, drying apples, jelly-making);
- dyeing cloth from natural materials (bark, berries, leaves, roots, flowers);
- making a quilt from the dyed material;
- making furniture (stools, cradle, gun racks);
- whittling (spoons, pegs, whistles);
- sewing (embroidery, candle wicking, making pin cushions);
- dying Easter eggs the German Loyalist way;
- fire building and wood chopping;
- butter churning;
- rope making;
- weaving;
- rug braiding;
- toy making;
- dancing;
- making taffy;
- making apple cider;
- soap making;
- broom making;
- candle dipping;
- making Christmas decorations;
- making medicines;
- making canvas floor cloths;
- making dandelion coffee;
- making ice cream.

The Museum is the culmination of our project and is the highlight of the year for our children.

1. Several weeks before the Museum, about 15 to 20 parents are recruited and trained to supervise some of the activities that are dangerous for children to handle alone (candle dipping, soap making, etc.). They are given recipes and instruction as to how to proceed with their station. Techniques are explained so they can go home and try the procedure. The parents are encouraged to dress for the occasion as well. This helps the parents to become actively involved in the child's education. Several parents have assisted at the Museum for many years enjoying it over and over again as each of their children take part.
2. The children research Loyalist clothing and design their own costumes for the Museum. We discourage purchasing or renting costumes and stress that the children make do with what they find at home such as the Loyalists would have had to do. For example, a boy's costume might consist of a white ruffled blouse borrowed from his mother, sister's knickers, vest and knee socks.
3. Well in advance, invitations are hand lettered on special paper made by the students (instructions available) and are sent out to special guests and invited classes.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITIES

The Museum takes place in front of our school, in our large lobby, gym and kitchen. In front of the school the children erect a clothesline with rope they make themselves. An outdoor cooking fire is built and boys demonstrate wood chopping and fire building techniques. They also cook bannock over the fire and serve it with homemade jelly to the visitors. Outside also, Loyalist children pitch horseshoes and roll hoops. A sundial is set up outside and the children explain how to tell time on it.

Just inside the front door is a welcome station where all visitors are greeted by Loyalist children and sign our guest book. It is here that our special guests are met by our Town Crier to have their arrival announced.

In the lobby there are many display areas such as First Nation and Loyalist crafts, early medicines, reference books, letters and reports written by our students. A pot of dandelion coffee awaits the visitors for sampling. A life-size birch bark wigwam, built by the children over several weeks, dominates the back of the lobby.

A clothes washing station is also in the lobby where the children demonstrate washing clothes in large tubs with scrub boards and home made soap. When the clothes are clean they are hung up outside with clothes pins made by the children. The children make stew and bake Johnny Cake in the kitchen. Visitors can view these activities in the kitchen through the serving window in the gym.

The gym is the hub of the Museum. All other activities are demonstrated there. Loyalist children dance at the far end and activity stations are set up around the perimeter of the room and in the centre of the floor. Each activity station is run by two or three children who demonstrate the activity, give explanations, answer questions and pass out samples.

The stage in the gym is set up by the children as a one room log cabin at Christmas time, complete with hand made decorations and toys, fireplace, bed and tables. This area is furnished with antique items brought in by many of the students and as a result, our log cabin is different every year. Toy making and apple drying are demonstrated there and a student “living” in this cabin talks with visitors about the many items on display there. If a visitor peeks behind the chairs covered with quilts in the corner, s/he may glimpse a Loyalist lad having his Saturday night bath.

Our Museum always ends with a special treat—a Loyalist lunch for our students and parents. It consists of stew, freshly baked Johnny Cake topped with newly churned butter, followed by homemade ice cream, all made by the children.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES

- history texts
- reference books
- filmstrips
- maps
- historical fiction
- story telling
- materials for activities

EVALUATION

Evaluation of what was learned in our history unit is done in a variety of ways. Formal testing, report writing, research, discussion, art work, letter writing, keeping an organized notebook, creative writing, poetry writing and the making of crafts are all used in the evaluation process.

The hands-on activities are largely judged by the amount of effort and interest a child shows. Of course, the finished product is an obvious measure of what the child has learned. We do not, however, expect a finely finished craft. We do expect an honest effort, keeping in mind the capabilities of the individual child. Sometimes a child has learned the most after spending hours trying to produce something the Loyalist way and ending up with a mess. Living in Loyalist time and having to do everything for yourself was not easy.

About the Educators

Janet McKinney and Linda Dodge teach grades 5 and 6. They created and implemented this unit involving over 60 students who learn about Natives, explorers, Acadians and Loyalists through role-playing and experiencing everyday life in the late 1700s. Candle, rope, and soap making; weaving; apple drying; wood carving and baking are but a few of the heritage life skills learned by the students. Janet and Linda have received an award for their innovative teaching approach.