Reading the Evidence: Diaries, notices, photos and numbers

CHC2D, Unit 1: Thinking Like a Historian, Lesson 4. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Different kinds of evidence answer different questions. A diary tells us how it felt, a notice tells us what officials did, a photo shows a moment and numbers show a pattern. Putting them together gives the fullest picture.

What students do: Students learn strategies for reading photographs, cartoons and statistics, then investigate an original source set about the 1918 influenza in an invented Ontario town: a diary, a public notice, a photograph description and a weekly data table. They corroborate the sources and write a conclusion supported by evidence.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
A1.4	interpret and analyse evidence and information relevant to their investigations, using various tools, strategies, and approaches appropriate for historical inquiry
A1.3	assess the credibility of sources and information relevant to their investigations
A1.6	evaluate and synthesize their findings to formulate conclusions and/or make informed judgements or predictions about the issues, events, and/or developments they are investigating

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Canadian and World Studies (2018), Canadian History since World War I, Grade 10, Academic (CHC2D). A = Historical Inquiry and Skill Development; B = Canada, 1914–1929; C = Canada, 1929–1945; D = Canada, 1945–1982; E = Canada, 1982 to the Present.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning to read different kinds of evidence. • We are learning to combine sources to reach a conclusion.	• I can use See, Think, Wonder on an image. • I can read a data table and describe a trend. • I can corroborate two sources. • I can write a conclusion supported by evidence.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Reading the Evidence deck.
- **Handouts:** Cedar Falls, 1918 (page 1, sources), Evidence to Conclusion (page 2).
- **Optional:** A real 1918 photograph from Library and Archives Canada or a provincial archive, if you want to use one in place of the photo description.

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Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–10	**Hook**	Same event, four sources.	Predict.	
10–25	**Strategies**	Photos, cartoons, statistics.	Note.	
25–45	**Source set**	Read Cedar Falls sources.	Analyse (page 1).	Uses strategies.
45–55	**Model**	Corroboration paragraph.	Follow.	
55–70	**Conclusion**	Conference.	Write (page 2).	Claim, evidence, limits.
70–75	**Exit**	Exit ticket.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Highlight key words in the diary; give a sentence frame for the conclusion.
- **ELL:** Start with the data table and photo description, which need less reading.
- **Challenge:** Explain what extra source would most change your conclusion.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Evidence to Conclusion	Interprets and analyses evidence (A1.4); evaluates and synthesizes findings (A1.6)

Cedar Falls answers

- **Trend:** Cases rose quickly from 12 to a peak of 310 (week of Oct. 19), then fell. Deaths peaked a week later (21, week of Oct. 26). Total: 839 cases and 55 deaths reported.
- **Corroboration:** The diary and the notice agree that schools, churches and the theatre closed in October 1918. The photo description shows the community responding with volunteers and emergency hospitals.
- **Limits:** All sources come from one town. We hear from officials and one child, not from doctors, nurses or people who were ill. Reported numbers may be lower than real cases. No Indigenous or immigrant voices.
- **A strong conclusion:** In Cedar Falls, the 1918 influenza spread fast in October, closing public life for weeks. Families faced hard choices, like the diarist's father, who kept working because the family needed his pay.

Teacher notes

- Cedar Falls is an invented town and the sources are original practice sources, but they match real patterns: in the fall of 1918, many Canadian towns closed schools, churches and theatres; volunteers ran emergency hospitals; and cases peaked in mid to late October. About 50,000 people in Canada died in the pandemic.

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- Indigenous communities were hit especially hard in 1918 because of crowding, poverty and poor access to care. Mention this when students discuss what's missing from the source set.
- Students should notice that deaths peak a week after cases: a lag that makes sense because people died some days after falling ill.

Coming up

Lesson 5, Historians at Work.

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