

RE-WRITING HISTORY CLASS

The internment of Italian Canadians during World War II remains a little-known historical fact among the general population – even within the Italian Canadian community. Even though it occurred in the recent past – less than 75 years ago – and it is a significant historical event, it is not part of Canada's official history. Today, thanks to CHRP funding, important projects dedicated to this subject will help to educate the public.

WHY TEACH ABOUT THE ITALIAN CANADIAN INTERNMENT?

Currently, in Ontario, the subject of Italian Canadian internment is taught only at the university level. Let's aim to change that. It is important to introduce the subject as early as the elementary level. Many know about the Japanese Canadian internment, which is covered in school textbooks. Let's include the Italian Canadian internment experience in the school curriculum.

Whether our Canadian realities are hyphenated or not, we should embrace the opportunity to learn about these historical events. Projects like ours aim to inform the public about an aspect of Canadian history which has been overlooked. We can lend credence to the old adage: by studying the past, we can avoid the mistakes of those who went before us. Let's teach our children that lesson.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson plans are provided to help teachers implement the teaching of Italian Canadian World War II history within the classroom.

EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITY: WRITING LETTERS AND POSTCARDS

"First two letters I wrote, I wrote him in Italian. He wrote me back, 'Don't do that no more,' ... it was all cut up because they were scrutinizing all the mail he was getting."

Aldo Bacci, son of internee Ruggiero Bacci,
video interview, Columbus Centre Collection

"Now all of his letters to her and vice versa were all like in code. And he couldn't tell her [my mother] anything about the camp at all. If he said anything, you can see where they had, you know, erased it."

Grace Tomasicchio, daughter of internee, Giuseppe Tomasicchio,
video interview, Columbus Centre Collection



Internees were allowed to correspond with their families via mail. However, the letters and postcards were reviewed and censored by the Canadian government. Furthermore, letters written by internees could not exceed a specific word count.

This activity will encourage students to re-enact the activity of writing letters and postcards as the internees did many years ago.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- To acquire knowledge about the Italian Canadian internment experience during World War II
- To learn how civil rights were stripped under the *War Measures Act*
- To appreciate and accept ethnic diversity

PROCEDURE:

1. Examples of postcards and letters exchanged by the internees and their families will be handed out to the students.
2. Students will assume the identity of an internee and will be challenged to write a letter or postcard to the family. They must adhere to a word limit. The teacher will point out those letters/postcards which exceed the word limit and those that would have been censored due to content.
3. Students can rewrite their letters/postcards if they wish. By so doing, they will be made to feel the frustration that internees might have felt in having to adhere to the rules of mail correspondence. A discussion of civil rights will conclude the activity.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY:

The letters and postcards created by the students will be submitted to the teacher with a journal entry.

To view and download full lesson plans, visit us online and go to "Expand your Knowledge."

Contact us to book a visit or research trip.