

I Am Canadian

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Tips for Teaching Controversial Issues

The teaching of value-laden issues has generated much controversy. There is some basic consensus on the fundamental moral and ethical values in our society and that these values can be taught in a meaningful way.

It is assumed in Canadian Studies that there are fundamental values on which there is agreement. It is also assumed that there are many disagreements and that students need to learn to deal with controversy. The social studies and history curricula provide students with learning experiences that will help them identify some of the fundamental value positions of society and how these arose. This curriculum deals with controversy, even invites it. However, it does not suggest that any belief is as good as any other belief. Therefore, this curriculum makes no attempt to be objective in the sense of being value free.

Canadian Studies gives students opportunities to examine controversial issues. Debating these issues will provide students with the opportunity to apply concepts and higher order thinking skills in organizing, interpreting and communicating information meaningfully. In this process, students can begin to understand the role of values as the basis for making inferences, that values provide us with evaluative criteria, and that we depend upon the traditions of Canadian society to provide us with guidelines. These criteria include: human dignity, basic rights and responsibilities as defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and respect of, and tolerance for, individual differences.

There are many methods to teach controversial issues in the classroom. As these issues touch personal beliefs and trigger emotional reactions, these methods are sometimes difficult to conduct in an orderly fashion.

The following ideas may assist teachers:

- Recognize the general legitimacy of controversy as a part of society, and that students must learn to discuss the issues and problems presented.
- Establish ordered ways of proceeding: discussions, debates, take a stand, continuum, mediation, etc. Create and agree on effective rules.
- Concentrate on evidence and valid information.
- Represent the opposing positions accurately and fairly.
- Make sure to clarify the issue, so that everyone understands where there is a disagreement and where there is agreement (to avoid simultaneous monologues).
- Identify core issues.
- Avoid the use of slogans.
- Talk about concrete issues before raising the discussion to a level of abstraction.
- Allow the students to question your position.
- Admit doubts, difficulties, and weaknesses in your position.
- Teach understanding by re-stating the perspective of others. Have participants paraphrase what they hear to gain this skill.
- Demonstrate respect for all opinions.
- Establish means of closure: examine consequences and consider alternatives.

I Am Canadian

Discovering your National Pride in a Culturally Diverse Society

Lesson Overview:

This lesson will allow students to discover what it means to them, individually, to be part of the diverse cultural landscape that is Canada. They will experience examples of cultural pride from the perspectives of an Aboriginal Canadian writer and from the perspective of an average “Joe Canadian” before being allowed the opportunity to explore what being Canadian means to them, individually.

Format:

1. Introduce the lesson by having students offer ideas for what we, as Canadians, have to be proud of. Answers may range from our seeming global perception as “peaceful, fun-loving people who can get along with almost anyone” to the quality of our hockey players. When possible, encourage them to refer to circumstances in other parts of the world and to dwell not on the negative aspects of Canadian culture, but on the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious background of our country.
2. Hand out the essay “My Canada” by Tomson Highway (taken from Elements of English 11, pg. 47-49—copy attached) and offer it as an example of Canadian pride from the perspective of an Aboriginal Canadian (the author is from Manitoulin Island). After reading the essay (either aloud with the students or individually silent), have the students work through the accompanying question sheet (attached). Have the students complete the worksheet (both individually and in groups) and discuss the various responses before going on.
3. Offer the students another perspective of Canada by handing out the sheet “I Am Canadian” (attached) and listening to the accompanying .mp3 file (or video file) and having them complete the accompanying questions. Again, teacher may wish to discuss the responses with the students before continuing on with the lesson.
4. Have the students complete the task of writing their own version of “I Am Canadian”. Evaluate the writing task using the accompanying rubric (attached). As an extension of this assignment, you may ask the students to recite (in dramatic monologue fashion) their speech and evaluate it using a standard oral presentation rubric (attached).
5. As a possible extension of this lesson, the teacher may wish to have the students view a film depicting traditional Canadian mainstream culture (e.g., “Canadian Bacon”, “Men With Brooms”, etc.) as other examples, albeit somewhat stereotypical, of Canadian pride.

My name is _____ . . . and I Am Canadian!

The following is the transcript from the popular “I Am Canadian” commercial which ran on Canadian television in the early 2000’s.

Read (and/or listen/watch the clip) and answer the questions that follow:

Hey.

I'm not a lumberjack, or a fur trader, and I don't live in an igloo or eat blubber, or own a dog sled, and I don't know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada, although I'm certain they're really, really nice.

I have a Prime Minister, not a President. I speak English and French, not American, and I pronounce it "about", not "aboot".

I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation; and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.

A tuque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch, and it is pronounced "zed"; not "zee"—"zed"!

Canada is the second largest land mass! The first nation of hockey! And the best part of North America!

My name is Joe! And I am Canadian!

... Thank you.

List reasons why Joe is proud to be Canadian? What are some of the things Joe is proud are not Canadian?

What are YOU proud of? Either by yourself or with a partner, write your own version of “I Am Canadian”, outlining some of the things you identified as reasons for Canadian diversity and pride. Your work will be evaluated using the accompanying rubric.

Also, practice reciting your monologue as you may be called upon to read it to the class.



Joe Canada - I Am Canadian!! (audio).mp3

Dramatic Monologue Rubric

Criteria and Expectations	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Communication	- understood and portrayed the character with limited effectiveness	- understood and portrayed the character with moderate effectiveness	- understood and portrayed the character with considerable effectiveness	- understood and portrayed the character with thorough effectiveness
Application	- voice used with limited effectiveness	- voice used with moderate effectiveness	- voice used with considerable effectiveness	- voice used with thorough effectiveness
Clarity	- communicated with purpose and limited clarity	- communicated with purpose and moderate clarity	- communicated with purpose and considerable clarity	- communicated with purpose and high degree of clarity
Memorization	- limited script memorization	- moderate script memorization	- considerable script memorization	- thorough script memorization

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Writing Task Evaluation

CRITERIA	< 1	1	2	3	4	Mark
Student demonstrates an understanding of Canadian identity by writing an appropriate piece which attempts a central effect based on the task at hand						10
Student shows ability to use appropriate concrete and figurative language to make the writing vivid and interesting						10
Student has considered mechanical aspects of writing (spelling, grammar, diction, sentence structure)						5

TOTAL MARK = /25

My Canada

Tomson Highway

*“My eyes lit up, my heart gave a heave,
and I felt a pang of homesickness
so acute I actually almost hurt.”*

Before Reading:

In a small group, brainstorm characteristics on which a designation of “Number One Country in the World” should be based. Be prepared to discuss your ideas with the class.

Three summers back, a friend and I were being hurtled by bus through the heart of Australia, the desert flashing pink and red before our disbelieving eyes. It never seemed to end, this desert, so flat, so dry. For days, we saw kangaroos hopping off into the distance across the parched earth. The landscape was very unlike ours—scrub growth with some exotic species of cactuses, no lakes, no rivers, just sand and rock and sand and rock for ever. Beautiful in its own special way, haunting even—what the surface of the moon must look like, I thought to myself as I sat there in the dusk in that almost empty bus.

I turned my head to look out of the front of the bus and was suddenly taken completely by surprise. Screaming out at me in great black lettering were the words “Canada Number One Country in the World”. My eyes lit up, my heart gave a heave, and I felt a pang of homesickness so acute I actually almost hurt. I was so excited that it was all I could do to keep myself from leaping out of my seat and grabbing the newspaper from its owner.

As I learned within minutes (I did indeed beg to borrow the paper from the Dutchman who was reading it), this pronouncement was based on information collected by the United Nations from

studies comparing standards of living for every nation in the world. Some people may have doubted the finding (what about Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and even Australia or New Zealand?), but I didn’t, not for an instant.

Where else in the world can you travel by bus, automobile or train (and the odd ferry) for 10, 12 or 14 days straight and see a landscape that changes so dramatically, so spectacularly. The Newfoundland coast with its white foam and roar; the red sand beaches of Prince Edward Island; the graceful curves and slopes of Cape Breton’s Cabot Trail; the rolling dairy land of south shore Quebec; the peerless, uncountable maple-bordered lakes of Ontario; the haunting north shore of Lake Superior; the wheat fields of Manitoba and Saskatchewan; the ranch land of Alberta; the mountain ranges, valleys and lush rainforests of the West Coast. The list could go on for 10 pages, and still only cover the southern section of the country, a sliver of land compared with the North, whose immensity is almost unimaginable.

Have you ever seen the barrens of Nunavut? Have you ever laid eyes on northern bodies of freshwater vaster than some inland seas, titans like Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes? Have you ever

seen the icebergs and whales of Hudson Bay, the gold sand eskers of northern Saskatchewan, northern Manitoba's rivers, rapids, waterfalls and 10,000 lakes, all with water so clean you can dip your hand over the side of your canoe and drink it? Have you ever had the privilege of getting off a plane on a January day at a remote settlement in the Yukon and having the air hit your lungs with a wallop so sharp you gasp quite audibly—air so clean, so crisp you swear you see it sparkle pastel pink, purple and blue in the midmorning light?

It has been six years in a row now that the United Nations has designated Canada the number one country in which to live. We are so fortunate. We are water wealthy and forest rich. Minerals, fertile land, wild animals, plant life, the rhythm of four distinct, undeniable seasons, the North—we have it all.

Of course Canada has its problems. We'd like to lower our crime rate, but it is under relative control, and the fact is, we live in a safe country. We struggle with our health-care system, trying to find a balance between universality and affordability. But no person in this country is denied medical care for lack of money, no child need go without a vaccination. Oh yes, we have our concerns, but in the global scheme of things we are so well off. Have you ever stopped to look at the oranges and apples piled high as mountains in supermarkets from Sicamous, B.C., to Twillingate, Nfld.? Have you paused to think about the choice of meat, fish, vegetables, cheese, bread, cereals, cookies, chips, dips and pop we have? Or even about the number of banks, clothing stores and restaurants?

And think of our history. For the greater part, the pain and violence, tragedy, horror and evil that have scarred for ever the history of too many countries are largely absent from our past. There's no denying we've had our trials and times of

shame, but dark though they may have been, they pale by comparison with events that have shaped many other nations.

Our cities, too, are gems. Take Toronto, where I have chosen to live. My adopted city never fails to thrill me with its racial, linguistic, cultural—not to mention lifestyle—diversity. On any ordinary day on the city's streets and subway, in stores and restaurants, I can hear the muted ebb and flow—the sweet chorus—of 20 different tongues. At any time of day, I can feast on food from six different continents, from Greek souvlakia to Thai mango salad, from Italian prosciutto to French bouillabaisse, from Ecuadorian empanada to Jamaican jerk chicken, from Indian lamb curry to Chinese lobster in ginger and green onion (with a side order of greens in oyster sauce). Indeed, one could probably eat in restaurants every week for a year and never have to eat of the same cuisine twice.

And do all these people get along? Well, they all live in a situation of relative harmony, cooperation and peace. They certainly aren't terrorizing, torturing and massacring one another. They're not igniting pubs, cars and schools with explosives that blind, cripple and maim. And they're not killing children with machetes, cleavers and axes. Dislike—rancour—may exist in pockets here and there, but not, I believe, hatred on the scale of such blistering intensity that we see elsewhere. Is Canada a successful experiment in racial harmony and peaceful coexistence? Yes, I would say so, proudly.

Much as I often love and admire the countries I visit and their people, I can't help but notice when I go abroad that most people in France look French, most in Italy, Italian. In Sweden they look Swedish and in Japan they look Japanese. Beautiful, absolutely beautiful.

But where's the variety? I ask myself.
Where's the mix, the spice, the funk?

Well, it's here, right here in Canada—my
Canada. When I, as an aboriginal citizen
of this country, find myself thinking about
all the people we've received into this
homeland of mine, this beautiful country,

when I think of the millions of people
we've given safe haven to, following
agony, terror, hunger and great sadness
in their own home countries, well, my little
Cree heart just puffs up with pride. And I
walk the streets of Toronto, the streets of
Canada, the streets of my home, feeling
tall as a maple.