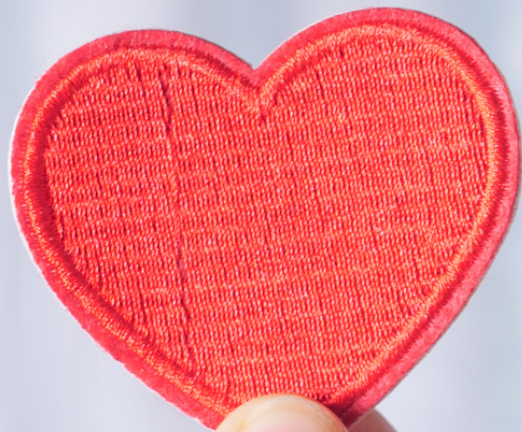


Historical Empathy

A Collection of Resources for Teachers



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A Note on Using this Guide

This guide was created to support teaching and learning in ways that foster historical empathy within the history classroom. It brings together 12 lesson plans and resources across some of the most popular websites used by history teachers in Canada (Canada's History, Defining Moments Canada, Historica Canada, and The Critical Thinking Consortium), all of which are accessible online using the provided links. The lessons span a variety of grade levels and topics, but educators are encouraged to consider ways to adapt each one to their own grade level, course themes, and teaching contexts.

Together, these lessons and resources can assist students in developing a range of skills and competencies related to historical empathy, including examining primary source evidence, considering historical contexts, accounting for multiple and diverse perspectives, drawing informed judgments, and caring about others in the past and present. Many of the lessons also build students' social-emotional competencies through a focus on listening to others, identifying and reflecting on emotions, and developing the vocabulary to express feelings that may arise in the history classroom.

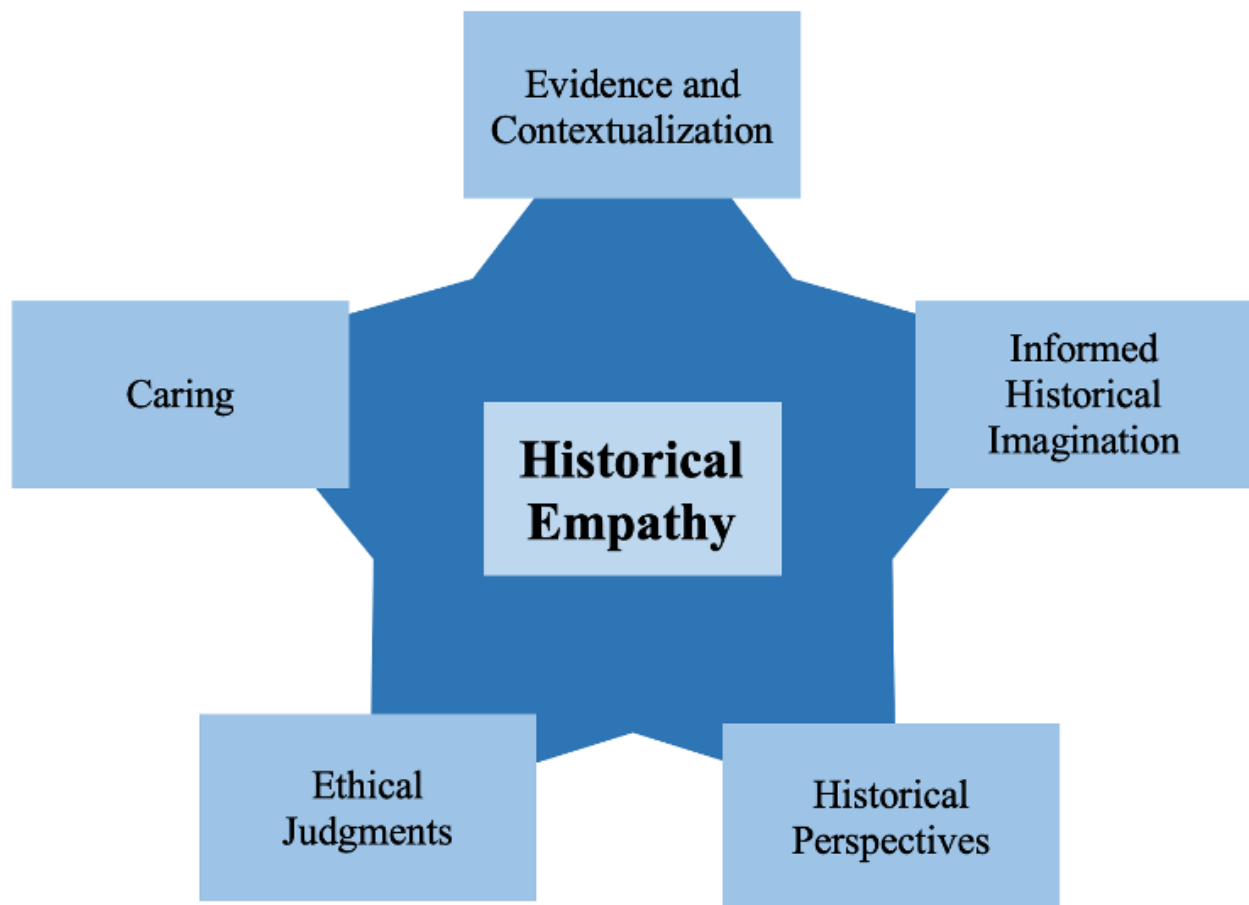
Through my conversations with history teachers about their pedagogical approaches to historical empathy, I learned that they often felt they did not have enough resources, especially when it came to dealing with emotions and feelings in the history classroom. My hope is that this collection of resources will offer support for teaching and learning history with empathy.

Sara Karn

What is Historical Empathy?

Historical empathy is a process of attempting to understand the thoughts, feelings, experiences, decisions, and actions of people from the past within their specific historical contexts. It involves both cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) dimensions—in other words, as students develop their historical inquiry skills, a range of feelings, emotions, and connections are also likely to be present.

Historical empathy can support the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to prescribed learning outcomes (e.g., the curriculum) and a student's everyday life. A powerful pedagogical approach to historical empathy includes these five elements:



(Karn, 2023)

Preparing for Difficult Conversations

POSTED/CREATED BY

Canada's History (Jacqueline Cleave)
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades K-12

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson engages students in difficult conversations about Indigenous histories, particularly as they relate to residential schools and the discovery of children's unmarked graves. Students learn about these issues by reading age-appropriate stories and consulting primary sources. Throughout the lesson, students are encouraged to openly express their emotional reactions to learning about the legacy of residential schools. They create an art piece that integrates these emotions to display in the school or community, and then identify ways to take action towards reconciliation.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students consider the **perspectives** of others (survivors, government officials, etc.) as they learn about residential schools and the news of unmarked graves.
- Students read and listen to age-appropriate literature and other sources to provide **context** on residential schools.
- Through storytelling, this lesson may foster a sense of **care** and desire to take action towards reconciliation.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students examine various historical actors' feelings about residential schools, as well as present day responses to the unmarked graves.
- Students' emotions are engaged while reflecting on how they feel when having difficult conversations about residential schools.
- Teachers are prompted to consider how students' identities and backgrounds shape emotional responses.

Paying Attention to Emotions When Learning

POSTED/CREATED BY

The Critical Thinking Consortium
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 11-12

LESSON SUMMARY

In this lesson students are engaged in identifying and responding to emotions that may arise when learning about historical experiences and events. This lesson could be applied in relation to any content area dealing with difficult histories. Students develop the ability to identify emotions when they arise and tools for addressing them, and understand the effects that emotions can have on learning. Students participate in discussions, sharing circles, and reflection tasks. They apply strategies for dealing with emotions in relation to learning about residential schools.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students reflect on feelings and emotions that arise when examining **evidence**.
- Students **imagine** how different situations or scenarios might make them feel.
- Students consider their emotional reactions to various historical **perspectives** and experiences.
- Emotional reactions to learning may indicate a sense of **care**.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- The lesson is centred around the inquiry question: How can we thoughtfully respond to our emotions when learning about challenging experiences or events?
- Students learn emotions vocabulary.
- Students learn strategies that can help them continue learning about a topic or situation (e.g., breathing exercises, talking to a friend or adult).

Sharing Knowledge Through Stories

POSTED/CREATED BY

Canada's History (Meredith Rusk)
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades K-12

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson explores the ways that Indigenous peoples share knowledge through stories. Students learn about protocols regarding the sharing of Indigenous stories and better understand the concept of appropriation. They also learn the importance of listening when stories are shared. Students engage in discussions with peers, tell their own stories, and read or listen to Indigenous stories that have been publicly shared.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students learn about the past through **evidence** in the form of stories.
- Storytelling is featured as a way of gaining insight into others' **perspectives** and experiences, in this case Indigenous perspectives. Students learn to listen to and respect various perspectives.
- The focus on listening fosters **caring** about and for other people in the past and present.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- While learning about the appropriation of stories, students share their own stories and then reflect on how they might feel if someone else started to tell this story without first getting permission.
- Students make affective connections through encountering others' stories and sharing their own.

Listening and Learning from Elders

POSTED/CREATED BY

The Critical Thinking Consortium
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 7-10

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson is focused on listening to Elders when learning about community history. Students read stories to consider the meanings and nuances of storytelling. They have opportunities to practice using different strategies for listening before, during, and after a storytelling opportunity (e.g., listening to a podcast or story recording). Then, students apply these listening strategies to learn about local histories with an open mind and heart.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- The lesson values oral histories and storytelling as a valid form of **evidence** about the past.
- Students learn to uncover **perspectives**, and respect and honour the stories being told.
- Through sharing and listening to stories, students are invited to **care** about others and what they have to say, and nurture relationships with Elders.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students may experience emotional responses to the stories being shared.
- There are discussion prompts, such as “What do I feel and think about this topic or situation that might help me listen and learn?”
- Students consider why they might feel uncomfortable or agitated when listening to a story.

Making Reconciliation Real

POSTED/CREATED BY

Canada's History (Lynn Rainboth & Danielle Fontaine)
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 7-10

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson explores what it means to be an ally by considering the history of residential schools, with a focus on Indigenous perspectives, and identifying ways that students can move towards reconciliation. Students learn about the history of residential schools by organizing a timeline, and consider the significance and impact of colonial actions for Indigenous peoples. They investigate various events in Canadian history from different points of view. After learning about allyship, students construct a plan of action towards reconciliation.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- When creating timelines and conducting research, students refer to a wide range of primary source **evidence**.
- Historical events and circumstances are examined through Indigenous and non-Indigenous **perspectives**.
- Students make **ethical judgments** when answering the inquiry question: "Assess to what extent residential schools were a form of genocide."

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students may have a range of emotional reactions to learning about residential schools.
- Emotions and feelings that arise may be motivating factors for students taking action as allies for reconciliation.
- Teachers may adapt the inquiry questions and handouts to draw attention to the emotions and feelings of students and historical actors.

Selecting Actions to Strengthen Relationships

POSTED/CREATED BY

The Critical Thinking Consortium
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 7-10

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson engages students in identifying and developing actions that may strengthen relationships and contribute to reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Students learn how historical events and circumstances have affected relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, consider how new understandings can build stronger relationships, and apply criteria to identify actions that may enhance those relationships. One of the provided criteria is “demonstrates empathy and kindness.”

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Historical **context** is provided to demonstrate for students why taking action to strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is important and necessary.
- The historical and present day **perspectives** of Indigenous people are centred.
- The lesson supports **caring** to make a difference in the present based on learning about history.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students reflect on the question “What have you discovered that might change how you see, feel, or think about residential schools?”
- Emotional responses to learning may be motivations for students to identify and implement appropriate actions.
- Empathy is translated from the past to the present by centring emotions.

Unpacking Identity Through Etuaptmumk

POSTED/CREATED BY

Defining Moments Canada
(Sarah Diamond)
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades K-12

LESSON SUMMARY

In this lesson students think critically about their own identity and their relationships with community. Students learn about Two-Eyed Seeing, or holding space for both Indigenous and Western perspectives in our approaches to learning. Students engage in group discussions to build listening competencies, and watch videos to learn about the significance of the medicine wheel. Guiding questions focus on storytelling, identity, community, reciprocity, and relationships. The lesson could be adapted across different grade levels and course topics.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- **Evidence** is conceptualized from Indigenous perspectives, through an emphasis on storytelling.
- Through a focus on identity, the lesson engages personal **contexts** alongside historical contexts.
- Students listen to and learn from others' **perspectives** while sharing about their identities.
- Students need to show respect and **care** for one another while sharing.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- When learning about the medicine wheel, students consider the interconnected nature of mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional dimensions of identity and self.
- Students may feel vulnerable when sharing openly about their identities, and therefore various emotions may arise.

Identifying Important Voices

POSTED/CREATED BY

The Critical Thinking Consortium
[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 7-10

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson has students identify voices and perspectives that should be considered when learning about a historically important person, event, place, or idea related to local history. Students examine scenarios and then use criteria to rate the potential usefulness of various voices and perspectives on a particular topic. They apply this learning to a historical commemoration, and consider whose voices and perspectives are needed for a complete or fair account of the individual being commemorated. This activity may be taken up in relation to different historical topics.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students learn that **evidence** should represent multiple and diverse perspectives on a given issue or topic.
- Students consider whose voices and **perspectives** are included and excluded.
- Students learn to account for multiple **perspectives** before making a decision or **judgment**.
- Through a focus on local history, students may be more willing to listen to and **care** about various perspectives.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students may experience emotional responses to diverse perspectives on local commemorations.
- Students may gain insight into the emotional responses of diverse people and groups by considering their voices and perspectives.

Come Walk Awhile in Our Shoes

POSTED/CREATED BY

Historica Canada
(Peter Kear)

[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 9-12

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson takes history students on collective and individualized journeys through events that shaped Canada and Canadians during the twentieth century. Students select and assume a “personal profile” (based on a real and/or fictional historical actor) that reflects gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic diversity. They use this unique identity lens when learning about historical events, or “dynamic situations,” that may have impacted their profiles’ lives and those of their family. Students learn to think historically, develop empathy, consider issues of social justice, and become agents of change.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- By “assuming” the identity of their profile, students are engaging the **imagination** alongside the use of **evidence** and **context**.
- The profiles reflect diverse historical **perspectives**, including those of ordinary people.
- “Dynamic situations” involve controversial events, requiring students to form **judgments** while keeping in mind their profile’s perspectives.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- The “dynamic situations” require students to account for the feelings and emotions their profile may have experienced.
- Students may experience affective connections while working through the dynamic situations. Their emotions and feelings may be similar or different to their profile’s.
- Affective connections are developed over time, throughout an entire course.

Dr. Peter Bryce

POSTED/CREATED BY

Defining Moments Canada
(Letitia Nadler)

[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 7-12

LESSON SUMMARY

In this series of lessons, students learn about the history of residential schools in Canada from the perspective of Dr. Peter Bryce. Students examine evidence related to the Bryce Report (written documents, photographs), which detailed poor health conditions of children in residential schools. They discuss whether Dr. Bryce may be considered an outstanding historical figure. In the final lesson, students craft a writing project in the form of a letter to Dr. Bryce.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students examine a variety of **evidence** to construct the socio-historical **context** of the Bryce Report.
- Students **imagine** what they would write if they could give Dr. Bryce a letter.
- Students make **ethical judgments** when considering whether Dr. Bryce is an outstanding historical figure.
- Students may demonstrate **care** while viewing photographs.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students examine the emotional expressions of people depicted in photographs, and consider how their own emotional responses may play a role in their photographic analysis.
- Within the writing activity, students are prompted to consider facts, opinions, and feelings they will convey.

Black Canadian Involvement in the Wars

POSTED/CREATED BY

Defining Moments Canada
(Coleen & Greg Birkett)

[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 7-12

LESSON SUMMARY

This learning guide examines key themes surrounding Black Canadian involvement in Canada's war efforts, with a focus on the Korean War. Students learn about experiences and perspectives that are often left out of historical narratives, reflect on their own identities, and consider ways to ensure that more inclusive Canadian narratives are presented during Remembrance Day commemorations. The guide includes discussion questions, handouts, and activity ideas. Some activities include: reading stories, conducting research projects, listening to podcasts, and curating the contents of a time capsule.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students access authentic voices through **evidence**, including Black Canadian war veterans speaking about their experiences.
- Students **imagine** what artefacts they might show a racialized soldier in the future, as evidence of changes and continuities in their treatment.
- Students gain insight into the motivations, **perspectives**, and experiences of Black Canadians involved in military efforts.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- In the hook activity, students are prompted to reflect on how they have felt when they were excluded from something. The intention is to develop an affective connection to how Black Canadians today may feel about being excluded from historical narratives.
- Students from diverse backgrounds may experience a range of emotions and feelings in response to the content and activities.

A Child Evacuee

POSTED/CREATED BY

Canada's History (Jennifer Janzen)

[Lesson Plan Link](#)

GRADE(S)

Grades 3-8

LESSON SUMMARY

This lesson engages students in considering the perspectives of child evacuees from England to Canada during the Second World War. By examining primary source evidence, students learn about the life of a child evacuee living on the prairies, take part in class discussions, and examine maps. Then, they have a choice of writing a letter from the perspective of a child evacuee or creating an arts-based response to learning about the child's life. An extension activity engages students in learning about and reflecting on other immigration stories in contemporary times.

HISTORICAL EMPATHY CONNECTIONS

- Students are engaged in attempting to understand children's wartime experiences and **perspectives**.
- Students use a combination of **evidence** and **imagination** to write a letter from the perspective of a child evacuee.
- Through a focus on young people, this lesson may foster a sense of **care** for refugees and immigrants in the past and present.

ENGAGING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

- Students examine sources from child evacuees that discuss their emotions and feelings, and the general sentiments in society, at various points during the war.
- Students' emotions are engaged when teachers ask them to reflect on how they feel when spending time away from home. They may also have personal experience with war and immigration that elicits emotional responses.

Other Resources & Links

Historical Empathy: A Primer for History and Social Studies Educators

Sara Karn

[Link to Resource](#)

Pedagogical Triangle for Historical and Civic Understanding

*Facing History &
Ourselves*

[Link to Resource](#)

Embracing Historical Empathy

*Sara Karn,
CHA Teaching |
Learning Blog*

[Link to Resource](#)

History, Social Studies, and SEL in the Classroom

*Center for
Responsive Schools*

[Link to Resource](#)

Historical Empathy

*Samantha Cutrara,
Imagining a New
“We” Video Series*

[Link to Resource](#)

Historical Empathy Through Virtual Reality

*Timothy Patterson,
Visions of Education
Podcast*

[Link to Resource](#)