**Climate and culture**

Fun activities for thinking about the influence of climate on Canadian identity

A Grade 6 teaching resource prepared by [www.rinkwatch.org](http://www.rinkwatch.org/)

This resource contains suggested activities for use in Grade 6 social sciences class to:

- think about the effects of climate change

- learn about Canadian identity and how climate and nature affects identity formation

- combine this knowledge to discuss how climate change may affect Canadian culture

This package includes:

- A teacher’s guide

These activities are designed to correspond with specific objectives in the Ontario grade 6 social sciences curriculum, but are suitable for general classroom use.

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**Teacher’s Guide**

Curriculum objectives

Ontario’s grade 6 social sciences curriculum expects students to be able to:

- Assess contributions to Canadian identity

- Demonstrate an understanding of significant experiences of, and major changes and aspects of life in, various historical and contemporary contexts

- The impact of environmental change on the community

This module and the attached exercise sheets will help students practice the skills listed above, and to provide the teacher with evidence and marks for when it comes time to write report cards.

Context

The natural environment has important influences on the cultural traditions that are acquired by communities of people. For Canadians (and people residing in northern US states), many well-known traditions are based around winter and incorporate activities and events that make active use snow and ice. The following activities focus on how winter is integrated into Canadian cultural identity and practices.

The following activities also consider the fact that we are currently living in the midst of an important historical event – the rapid changing of the Earth’s climate as a result of human activities. Climate change is already having significant physical impacts in Canada, such as the melting of snow, ice, and permafrost in Canada’s north; the loss of forests in western Canada to pest outbreaks; and, winters are in many regions becoming shorter, milder, and less snowy than in the past. Will the physical impacts of climate change affect important cultural events and activities? Will our culture be forced to adapt to changing winters, and if so, what will be the long term implications for Canadian identity and culture?

Instructions for teachers

This teaching resource is designed to be used in a single class to facilitate discussion and interaction among students on the subject of the cultural implications of climate change, using the example of how changes in winter climate conditions may affect popular events and activities that are widely celebrated in Canadian culture.

Following are the suggested activities…

**Watch ‘The Hockey Sweater’**

Launch this activity by having the class watch ‘The Hockey Sweater’, the famous National Film Board animated short video based on the children’s book by Quebec author Roch Carrier. In the video, Carrier recounts growing up in rural Quebec in the 1940s, and the important role of the community hockey rink. He also makes reference to other important cultural institutions, including the church, the mail order catalogue, and the rivalry between Montreal and Toronto. The video also hints at other, underlying aspects of how culture is formed and transmitted, such as language (consider the author’s mother’s relationship with “Mr Eaton”) and the desire to belong and to conform with other community members (all the kids in the same village wear the same hockey sweater). The video is ten minutes in length and can be played directly from the NFB film site free of charge: <https://www.nfb.ca/film/sweater/>

After watching the video, have the class discuss it. Some students may have questions, especially those who do not play hockey or whose families are not originally from Canada. In the age of online shopping, students may also need help understanding the idea of a mail order catalogue. Here are some suggested questions to get the class discussion going:

- Do you think it was fair that the boy was teased for wearing a different coloured hockey sweater to the rink? Have you ever experienced something like this yourself?

- Why are there no girls at the hockey rink in the video?

- In your opinion, what does the boy’s mother think about hockey?

- Do you think that boys in Toronto would have acted in the same way? Or do you think this story could only have happened in rural Quebec?

- This children’s book on which this video is based is very famous; so famous, in fact, the opening sentences from the story once appeared on the Canadian five dollar bill (“The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places – the school, the church and the skating rink – but our real life was on the skating rink.”). Why do you think this story became so popular?

**Breakout groups**

In the next part of the activity, organize the class into groups of four or five, and have students discuss and record answers to a set of questions about the importance of cultural activities, such as skating, and how climate change may affect our culture as Canadians. Suggested questions are listed below.

After the groups have had 10-15 minutes to brainstorm, share and record answers, reconvene the class and have a spokesperson for each group share the answers. Then, have a class-wide conversation about the interaction between nature and culture in Canada. You might also use examples such as the Quebec Winter Carnival or the Winter Olympics) as examples of how to keep the discussion going.

Choose from the following suggested questions, or create your own:

1. What activities do you do that involve nature or some natural element?
2. What winter activities do you do that take place outside?
3. What are some key aspects of Canadian identity?
4. Do you think that nature is a key part of Canadian Culture? How? List some activities or events that are part of Canadian culture that involved nature.
5. Do you think that winter is a key part of Canadian Culture? How? List some activities or events that are part of Canadian Culture and take place in the winter.
6. What part of Canadian Culture do you think ice rinks play now? Do you think winter sports were important when Europeans were first coming over to Canada?
7. What are some winter festivals and sports or activities that Indigenous people do to celebrate winter?
8. If winter were shorter, warmer, or non-existent in Canada, how do you think this would affect Canadian culture?

**Action activity**

The third part of this module is an activity students can do in their groups or as a whole class, but probably works best in groups. Assign each group at random one of the following ‘problems’ to discuss and try to determine a fair resolution.

*Problem #1***:** Imagine with each passing winter the temperature is getting warmer and warmer. Outdoor rinks are not staying frozen for as long and rivers and ponds are not freezing over. Will people lose their interest in skating? If so, what should you do?

*Problem #2:* At the local rink, one of the boys doesn’t want any girls to join the hockey game. He says things like “hockey is for boys” and “girls aren’t good enough to play hockey”. What should you do?

*Problem #3:* A newcomer to Canada has their first day of school on Monday, which happens to be the day the class is going to the local skating rink. This new student has never skated before! How would you help the new student feel included?  
  
*Problem #4:* Imagine you have a pen-pal in another country where it is always hot year-round. How would you describe winter to her?

*Problem #5:* Invent a brand new game or sport that could be played on snow or ice.

*Problem #6:* Besides hockey, what other winter activities do Canadians like to do? Which one do you think is most popular, and why?

**Bigger project**

If you wish to assign a take-home assignment or larger individual project for students’ to work on, here’s a suggestion. Have the students identify an outdoor activity, other than hockey, that is important to Canadian identity and takes place in the winter. Have the students research and answer the following questions:

1. History of the event/activity
   1. Where did it come from, who invented the activity or started the event
2. Why is it an important part of Canadian identity?
   1. Think about bringing people together and how this event or activity relates to core Canadian values
3. Will it be affected by climate change? If so, how do we maintain this activity/event or adapt it to fit the changing climate?
4. What are some ways we can make the event/activity more sustainable so that we do not use as many resources?

**Additional resources**

Examples of cultural events and activities take place in the winter:

* Ice skating
* Hockey
* Snowshoeing
* Winter carnivals
* Snowmobiling
* Olympics
* Maple syrup festivals
* Dog sled races
* Ice fishing
* Skiing

Helpful links

<https://www.canadianbucketlist.com/canadas-top-10-winter-festivals/>

<http://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/the-feed/8-fun-and-frosty-canadian-winter-festivals>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/2883000/how-climate-change-will-affect-canadians/>

<http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/warm-winters-scorching-summers-new-maps-project-impact-of-climate-change>

<https://www.theweathernetwork.com/news/articles/canada-summers-turn-tropical-with-climate-change/83814>

Example of Canadian 5-dollar bill; the quote from “The Hockey Sweater” is behind the letter S in ‘specimen’.

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