

HERITAGE FAIRS GUIDE FOR TEACHERS



Sophia Faccin, presents at the Prince Edward Island Provincial Heritage Fair.

PEI Government; Evan Ceretti, photographer

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What are Heritage Fairs?

The Heritage Fair program encourages students to explore Canada's heritage and history in a fun and engaging learning environment. Teachers have a lot of flexibility in how they incorporate Heritage Fairs into the classroom and can use the program to support curricular and learning outcomes. Students select a topic, develop a key inquiry question, gather and analyze evidence, and summarize their findings in a format of their choice. Students present their research findings to classmates, families, and community members in a school- or community-based event.

The Heritage Fair program is one of Canada's most established and dynamic opportunities for youth and heritage. Since the first pilot Heritage Fair in 1993, more than 1 million students have participated in school-based, regional or provincial heritage fairs in their community. Since 2010, Canada's National History Society ("Canada's History") has been the national charitable organization that supports Heritage Fairs and the thousands of teachers, volunteers, and sponsors who come together annually to create a meaningful and transformational educational program for students throughout Canada.

Visit CanadasHistory.ca/HeritageFairs to learn more.

Why participate?

Heritage Fairs are an engaging and educational way to teach inquiry-based thinking and provide an avenue for students to demonstrate their knowledge and creativity. Students are excited to learn about Canadian history and heritage while developing their research and presentation skills. For many young students, the Heritage Fair program is their first experience of "doing" history and an opportunity to investigate family or personal histories, drawing on the resources of their local community.

In a 2023 national review of the Heritage Fair program conducted by Leger Marketing, teachers, students, coordinators, and education professors articulated the following benefits of Heritage Fairs:

- helps foster a deeper understanding of Canada's significance in the world.
- encourages inquiry-based thinking and learning.
- provides an opportunity for students to develop research, writing, and presentation skills.
- allows students a chance to engage with the history and culture around them.
- encourages collaboration among students.

- helps students develop self-confidence and a sense of pride in their work.
- highlights lesser-known stories and spotlights student voice and perspective.
- provides an innovative way to teach curriculum material.
- offers multi- and interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

“Heritage Fairs transformed my worldview and taught me to think about current day issues through a critical lens. I gained practical skills like research, public speaking, and time management. It also launched many further leadership opportunities.”

– Past Heritage Fair student

“From a broad curriculum perspective, the Fairs really bring out the core competencies with students: communication, thinking, and personal/social. Students really think about how their learning relates to their identity in the world.” – Heritage Fair teacher

Watch the video at CanadasHistory.ca/HeritageFairs to hear from other teachers like you about the benefits of Heritage Fairs.

Value of Historical Inquiry

An inquiry-based approach can feel a little daunting (for both students and teachers!) but it is also very rewarding. History and social studies educators, Dr. Lindsay Gibson and Dr. James Miles, have identified five key benefits of inquiry-based learning in social studies:

- Makes history more meaningful to students
- Promotes a deeper understanding of their topic
- Students learn about how historical knowledge is constructed
- Students learn to assess information and consider different perspectives, which strengthens citizenship competencies
- Is more flexible, rewarding, and interesting for teachers¹

¹Lindsay Gibson and James Miles, “Inquiry Doesn’t Just Happen,” in *Learning to Inquire in History, Geography, and Social Studies: An Anthology for Secondary Teachers*, ed. Penney Clark and Roland Case (The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2020), 151-165.

GUIDELINES FOR HERITAGE FAIRS

Key Components

Heritage Fairs take place in classrooms throughout the country and can be adapted to fit the needs and interests of students and teachers. Projects are usually completed by students individually or in pairs.

In general, Heritage Fair students:

- Choose a topic related to Canadian history or heritage.
- Create an inquiry question to guide their research.
- Analyze primary and secondary source evidence to answer their inquiry question.
- Create a final display or other creative product, along with a short oral presentation, to share their findings with others.
- Make a bibliography that lists the sources used in their research.

School Heritage Fairs

To host a Heritage Fair in your school, simply find a time and place for your students to share their work. You can set up displays in the gym and invite family members or other guests to visit. You may also wish to invite people working in the field of history and heritage – like museum professionals, historians, and professors – to interview students and assess their projects.

Regional and Provincial Events

Some regions and provinces/territories organize larger Heritage Fairs, where students with the best projects from school-based heritage fairs are invited to attend. These daylong events bring students together from different schools to present their projects and speak to judges or members of the public about their projects. There is often special programming, like workshops or museum tours, and some Regional/Provincial Heritage Fairs organize an awards ceremony to recognize and celebrate student achievements.

In most cases, regional events are supported by volunteer-led committees, so there are opportunities for teachers to get involved in planning regional events.

If you are interested in having students participate in a Regional/Provincial Heritage Fair it is important to review the specific requirements before starting your school based fair.

For a list of Regional Heritage Fairs, visit CanadasHistory.ca/RegionalHeritageFairs.

National Program

After participating at a regional or provincial Heritage Fair, students may be selected to advance to the national showcase, hosted online by Canada's History Society. For more information, visit CanadasHistory.ca/HFShowcase.

Timeline

School-based Heritage Fairs typically take place in the winter (January-March) and regional Heritage Fairs take place in the spring, usually in April or May.

Assessment

Broadly speaking, Heritage Fair projects are assessed on the areas below. Please see the sample assessment rubric on page 17 for more specific criteria.

1. Inquiry and Historical Thinking

Students are encouraged to go beyond strictly information-based projects and develop a strong inquiry question to guide their research. The Historical Thinking Concepts can help us ask good questions about the past. At its heart, the Heritage Fair program encourages students to consider the concept of Historical Significance and students should be able to "make the case" for their topic.

2. Research Process

Students should use a variety of primary and secondary sources to complete their research and analysis, considering their sources' original use, audience, and perspective. All sources must be clearly presented in a bibliography.

3. Visual Presentation

Students should present their project findings in a creative format that incorporates their primary sources and other interesting visuals that support their conclusion. Their visual presentation should engage audiences and present key points in a clear and organized way.

4. Oral Presentation and/or Interview

Students should prepare a short speech that shares their key findings and communicates the main ideas of their conclusion. Students should demonstrate a broad knowledge of their topic. Students should also be able to reflect on their process and explain their thinking to their audience.

Planning a Heritage Fair

A Heritage Fair can be as simple or elaborate as you like. Here are some key steps for planning a Heritage Fair with your students and supporting them in their projects.

4 months before

- Choose a date and location for your Heritage Fair.
- Decide on potential themes or topics; Heritage Fairs can accommodate many curricular outcomes.
- Prepare a student handout and rubric to outline expectations.
- Draft a parent letter, highlighting the project (include a "Save the Date" for the Heritage Fair!).
- Consider forming a small committee to help organize your Heritage Fair.
- Check to see if there is a Regional Heritage Fair in your community where you students can advance.

3 months before

- Heritage Fair kick-off! Host an assembly, visit a local museum or go on a community walk.
- Plan any extra activities for your Heritage Fair (e.g., workshops, entertainment, guest speakers, etc.).
- Students explore potential topics and do initial research
- If you plan on having external judges review the final projects, invite members of the community to attend your Heritage Fair to judge. Consider asking people from your local museum, archive, or historical society, as well as historians, professors, pre-service or retired teachers.

10 weeks before

- Practice making strong inquiry questions as a class.
- Explore the Historical Thinking Concepts.
- Help students create their own inquiry questions.

6 weeks before

- Students interpret and analyze their sources to answer their question.
- Students create a written outline, draft, and final version of their response.

2 weeks before

- Students create a visual element to showcase their work – a slideshow, video, skit, or poster.
- Students create a 2-minute oral presentation to answer their inquiry question.

Heritage Fair Day

- Students set up their displays.
- Host an opening ceremony with remarks from the principal or special guests.
- Schedule time for students to visit each other's displays and participate in any activities you've arranged.
- Invite teachers, administration, families, and guests to the Heritage Fair!
- Present each student with a certificate of participation for a job well done.

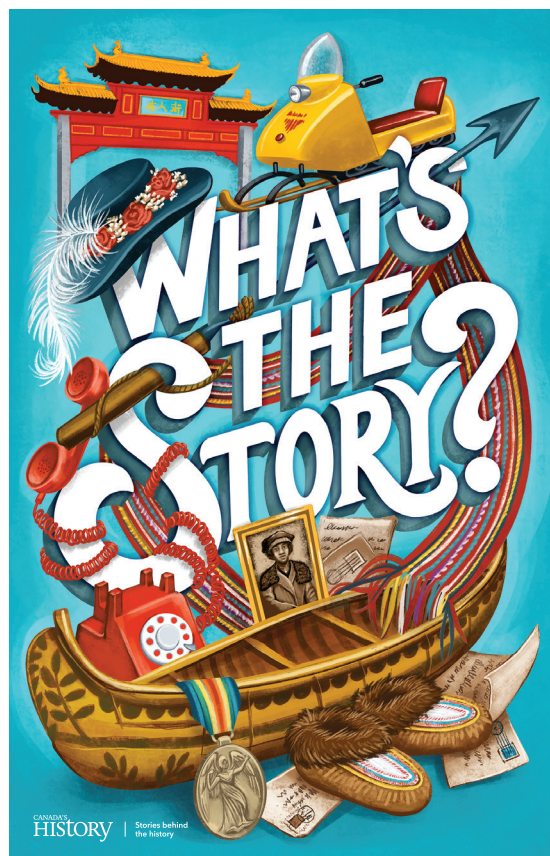
SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH HERITAGE FAIR: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

What's the Story?

Throughout this teacher's guide, you will find references to our student resource called *What's the Story?* With project examples from students from across Canada, this publication will guide students through the process of undertaking a historical inquiry project – from sparking curiosity, designing a good inquiry question, and deciding how, where, and why to share their story. We recommend having students use this magazine step-by-step as they work on their Heritage Fair projects. You can find a digital version at CanadasHistory.ca/WhatsTheStoryTeachers.

Additional Resources

For more information and resources, visit CanadasHistory.ca/HeritageFairs.



IDENTIFYING A TOPIC AND INQUIRY QUESTION

Background

One of the first steps for students participating in Heritage Fairs is to choose a topic. You can help refine the themes or topic areas or keep it open ended for your students. It is important to give your students some choice to explore their own interests within the parameters you establish. Below are some options for choosing topics:

- Select a time-period, geographic location, or theme and provide a list of topics and/or invite students to choose their own topic within the parameters you established.
- Provide a list of topics or a broad theme that they can explore that is connected to the curriculum or subject matter you are currently studying.

Once your students have identified a topic, they will need to develop an inquiry question to drive their research and analysis. The strongest Heritage Fair projects go beyond asking research questions to asking inquiry questions. A good inquiry question should be:

- meaningful to the student
- manageable in scope (not too narrow nor too broad)
- have more than one possible answer
- require the student to make a judgment and come up with their own response

The Historical Thinking Concepts can help frame inquiry questions about topics. The Historical Thinking Project has created templates to help students think about the six different concepts in relation to their topic. Students can complete a worksheet on one (or more) of the concepts and use one of the inquiry questions provided, or develop their own. Visit [HistoricalThinking.ca](https://www.historicalthinking.ca)

Developing a strong inquiry question will take time (and practice). Students might need to do some initial research on their topic before developing a strong inquiry question.. This process will require students to generate multiple questions, refine and improve those questions, and identify one main question that they will try to answer.

Throughout the Heritage Fair process, remind students that they will be doing their best to answer their big inquiry question based on the information they find. Often there is not a single “right” answer to their question, but rather, the goal is for students to use the evidence they have found to come up with a reasonable answer and their own interpretation.

Please see page 5 of the Student Guide for suggested activities to practice building strong inquiry questions.

Activity

Have students work through the “Identifying a Topic” and “Creating a Strong Inquiry Question” worksheets in their planner.

If students need additional ideas or examples, they can refer to pages 6 to 13 in *What’s The Story?*

GATHERING AND ANALYZING EVIDENCE

Background

Students should use a variety of types of sources to help answer their inquiry questions. Sometimes sources provide context and background information, while other times they provide evidence to answer the main inquiry question. Students will need to consider each source's perspective, audience, and intent.

Review the following terms and definitions with your students as needed:

- Primary Source – provides first-hand information or knowledge about a topic. A primary source is usually created close to the time of the event or topic.
- Secondary Source – provides second-hand information about an event or topic. A secondary source provides an interpretation of what happened after the event occurred.
- Trace – a physical clue of the past, like a photograph, tool or letter. Traces are not created for the purpose of describing or explaining what happened.
- Account – a deliberate telling of something that happened, like a TV news broadcast, diary entry, or biography.

It might help to brainstorm in small groups or as a class some examples of possible types of sources they could use, such as books, images, maps, newspaper articles, and interviews with someone with personal experience. Visits to local libraries, museums, and archives can also be helpful for students conducting research and trying to find relevant sources.

Another important factor in gathering research is properly sourcing the evidence. Students should learn how to write proper citations (or a modified version depending on age) in preparation for putting together a bibliography. Students can refer to the Bibliography Worksheet for templates on citing sources using the MLA format.

Activity

For each source that your students use, have them fill out a "Research Organizer" page in their planner.

Students can read pages 14-21 of *What's the Story?* to learn more about historical evidence and interpretation.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Background

Once students have conducted their research, they will need to analyze the evidence and come up with an answer to their inquiry question.

Sometimes it can be difficult for students to pull together everything they have learned and come up with a clear answer. You may want to use a mind map, flow chart, Venn diagram, or other visual organizer to help students organize their thoughts and synthesize evidence.

You may want to ask students some of the following questions to help them analyze their evidence:

- How did the evidence help you answer your inquiry question?
- Were there any gaps in the historical evidence?
- What is similar among your sources?
- How did certain sources lead you to certain conclusions?
- Do any of your sources confirm what the other says? Do any disagree?
- Did any of the sources change your initial thinking?

Remind students that their conclusions should come from the evidence that they have found. It's not always about finding a single "right" answer - students asking the same question might even come to different conclusions depending on which sources they looked at. It's about using evidence to draw conclusions, staying curious and raising ongoing questions, and considering the roles of evidence and interpretation in doing history.

Activity

Have students fill out the "Drawing Conclusions" pages in their planner. This provides space for them to summarize their research, make an analysis, and reflect on their inquiry.

CREATING A DISPLAY

Background

The final component of a Heritage Fair project is for students to share what they have learned with others. This usually takes place during a classroom or school-wide showcase. Students should choose a project format that fits their topic and shares their findings in a fun and creative way. Some examples include 3D displays, multimedia presentations, creative writing, and performance. The final project typically includes written, visual, and oral components.

One way for students to strengthen their final projects is to identify the key message that they want to share - this should be the answer to their big inquiry question. Students should identify the key research that led them to that conclusion and use it to craft a story that they will tell. Remind your students that they will likely have limited time with visitors to share their work, so having a key message and story will help them communicate their ideas clearly and effectively.

When preparing their final project, students will want to consider what information they should include. Encourage them to think about the primary source material that they have collected - are there good visuals that they can include or other materials to capture visitors' attention? What other ways can they engage viewers? How are they going to identify their big inquiry question and findings? What is the story they want to tell?

Activity

Have students review the "Sharing Your Work" page in their planner and fill out the "Heritage Fair Project Planner." This will guide them in mapping out their final projects.

Students can read pages 22-23 of *What's the Story?* for ideas of different formats they could use.

PRESENTING THE PROJECT

At the public showcase, a panel of judges usually assesses student presentations. Sometimes students are asked to give a short speech about their work, while other times they are asked questions in an interview style – sometimes it is a mix of both. Students should be prepared for an oral presentation and an interview.

Remind students that their oral presentation should be based on the story that they have developed in response to their inquiry question. They should be able to provide some contextual information on their topic, the answer to their inquiry and the supporting evidence they used to come to that conclusion. Any visuals they used or creative pieces they have developed can be used to help tell that story. Ideally, students are not reading from a script, but they may have some notecards that they reference.

For the interview, students should be prepared to answer questions about their research process. Common questions include:

- Why did you choose this topic?
- How did you develop your inquiry question?
- What type of evidence did you use to come to your conclusion?
- Which of your sources were the most helpful?
- Did any sources contradict each other? What did you do when they disagreed?
- How did your research change your thinking about this topic?
- Why do you think others should know more about this topic?
- Why is this topic historically significant?
- What new questions about this topic would you like to explore?
- What skills did you learn as you worked on this project?

Activity

Have students prepare a short speech to go along with their presentation. The “Heritage Fair Project Planner” will give them the building blocks they need to craft their oral presentation.. For the day of the Heritage Fair, students can write bullet point notes on cue cards if they want to have something to reference.

In pairs or small groups, have students practice delivering their speech to each other. Students can take turns being the interviewer and interviewee to practice answering questions.

ASSESSMENT

There are many opportunities throughout the Heritage Fair process to evaluate student work, growth, and knowledge. We have included a Heritage Fair Assessment Rubric table that you can use as-is or adapt to meet the learning goals of your classroom.

STUDENT REFLECTION

Background

After completing their Heritage Fair project, a self-assessment can help students evaluate their progress, consider their work as a whole, and reflect on the inquiry process.

Activity

Have students fill out the “Heritage Fair Assessment Rubric” form in their planner. Invite students to gather in small groups to share some of the comments from their self-reflection.

HERITAGE FAIR ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Student Name: _____

Project Title: _____

Teacher/Reviewer's Name: _____

Assessment Scale			
Needs development	Approaching expectations	Meets expectations	Exceeds expectations

Criteria	Comments
<p>Topic and Inquiry Question</p> <p>The topic selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is historically significant • includes an effective inquiry question that requires thinking and judgment 	
<p>Evidence</p> <p>Evidence is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • varied and represents different perspectives • relevant to the inquiry question • sourced in a bibliography that records key information (name, title, url, publisher, date, etc). 	
<p>Product</p> <p>The final product is impactful and engages the audience</p> <p>It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key points about the topic • a response to the inquiry question • information that is accurate, relevant, and organized in a logical manner • a balance of text and visuals 	
<p>Communication</p> <p>The student communicates key information about their topic and responds to the inquiry question.</p> <p>Through the interview process, they can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain why their topic is historically significant • reflect on their process, identifying challenges, successes, and/or potential next steps • share insights on what they've learned about the process of doing historical work 	