

Les grands mystères
de l'histoire canadienne



Great Unsolved Mysteries
in Canadian History

Teachers' Guide
to
Aurore! The Mystery of the Martyred Child

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1. Overview

The Big Idea

Everybody loves a mystery. Of all the historical situations researchers encounter nothing has quite the same impact as discovering men or women wrongly hanged, or the guilty going free. In the case of “Aurore!” students have a real mystery case to solve -- a case in which many will conclude that the sentences of the accused did not reflect their involvement in the crime. But the mystery is less about who did it – though that remains part of the question here. The greater mysteries are *why* parents would murder their child, and *how* it could have happened in such a small community where everyone knew everyone else’s business.

“Aurore!” is designed to engage students at different educational levels from junior high-school to graduate school in a detailed investigation of this murder. Taking full advantage of the non-linear and graphic features of World Wide Web, this educational site draws students into historical research through the use of newspaper clippings, photographs, sworn court testimonies, letters, and written narratives. Teachers can select the level of difficulty by the complexity of the questions they want answered. Exercises are provided on using primary documents that are applicable to all levels. In addition, one full unit is provided here, with lessons that are appropriate for grade 8 to grade 10. Although the lessons have been put together into a unified “unit,” individual lesson plans are readily adaptable for teachers who would like to take advantage of the content but who do not have the time to spend an entire unit on the website.

Aurore Gagnon in historical context

Aurore Gagnon is an icon of Quebec popular culture. Known universally in Quebec as ‘Aurore, l’enfant martyre’, she was a ten-year-old girl whose tragic death in February, 1920 became a *cause célèbre* in the province. Her father and stepmother faced murder charges for the neglect and abuse that ultimately killed her, leaving over fifty welts and scars on her body. The trials of her father, Téléphore Gagnon, and her stepmother, Marie-Anne Houde, made bold headlines across the province. In ensuing decades, these events were interpreted by theatre troupes, novelists, and the filmmaker Jean-Yves Bigras, whose 1952 melodrama *La petite Aurore l’enfant martyre* etched a version of this domestic tragedy in to the collective memory of a generation of *Québécois* and *Québécoises*.

The Aurore Gagnon affair was resolved by the courts in the spring of 1920. Téléphore Gagnon was convicted of manslaughter for his role in the abuse, which involved beatings with whips, axe handles, and other weapons. Although he did receive a life sentence, Gagnon was released after only five years in prison, apparently for good behaviour. A much harsher verdict, however, was rendered at the trial of Marie-Anne Houde. Excoriated in the press for her stepmotherly cruelty – she had bound, beaten, and even burned the child -- Houde was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang, although after pressure from a prisoners’ rights group, that sentence that was ultimately commuted to life in prison.

The courts rendered their verdicts in 1920. Yet the Aurore Gagnon story remains a reviving ‘who-done-it’ in several important respects. First, a Quebec City judge and jury were quick to convict Marie-Anne Houde of pre-meditated murder, while her husband, the child’s father, was treated almost as an unwitting accomplice. But was Houde’s share of the guilt really that much greater than Gagnon’s? Or did Houde’s gender and her position as Aurore’s stepmother influence a court and a public all too familiar with the wicked stepmother stereotype? Second, are there other actors in this drama that deserve a share of the blame? Was this a case where an observant neighbour, priest, or family member might have intervened earlier on to prevent the child’s ‘martyrdom’, rather than looking the other way out of misplaced respect for parental authority?

But although 'who' remains an intriguing question, the deeper unsolved mystery surrounding Aurore's story must be framed in terms of 'why'. Why, then, did this rural couple behave so brutally towards their daughter, a ten-year-old girl, in the first place? Why did Marie-Anne Houde in particular behave so viciously towards her? Was she mentally imbalanced, as her lawyers tried to argue at trial, or simply vicious and, perhaps, jealous of the bond between the girl and her father? But if that bond was close, then why did Téléphore Gagnon fail to protect his daughter, and even contribute his own assaults to the abuse that killed her? Why, moreover, was the public so willing to demonize the stepmother, while absolving her husband, the hapless, ineffectual patriarch of this dysfunctional family? And why, over the longer term, did the story of Aurore's 'martyrdom' – and the term is an interesting one – become a minor classic of Quebec popular culture, rather than fading into the distance, along with so many other individual tragedies, domestic and otherwise?

Beyond this, students confronted with the Aurore Gagnon story – including its many retellings in the eighty years since her death – will be invited to deal with a wide range of interpretive questions. How, for example, did this story evolve in all its tellings and retellings? And what does this tell us about the construction of collective memory? What, moreover, does this well-publicized case of child abuse say about more general notions of child rearing and how they may have been changing in early 20th-century Quebec? How does the public's excoriation of Marie-Anne Houde fit into popular constructions of 'motherhood' and 'womanhood' in the province? Where do remarriage and step-parenting fit into our ideas about families and family structure in rural Quebec, where bonds of kinship were important and where large 'traditional' families were pillars of society? Were stepchildren often victimized or was Aurore's story the exception that proves the rule, that is that most stepparents were generous caregivers and responsible providers, rather than the monsters of myth? How far did the state have to be pushed before it would intervene – through the police, the coroner's office, and the courts – in domestic conflict? And is it reasonable to conclude – as at least one historian has – that the *Québécois* people in these dark years prior to the Quiet Revolution were drawn to *l'enfant martyre* because they saw in Aurore Gagnon a symbol of their own political and economic oppression?

Pedagogical Overview: Critical thinking and the evaluation of evidence

It is important to note that the web-site is not designed as a "stand-alone" teaching tool. Most of the important learning happens when students analyze and discuss the web-site in a classroom or in a moderated Internet discussion. Students may be surprised to find that this site is not designed to provide absolute answers. Instead, it is designed to provoke questions about how we get to the truth, or truths, about the past. The evidence presented here about the guilt or innocence of the characters involved is equivocal, even though the site provides a very rich evidentiary base. We have more evidence with this case than with most micro or macro historical questions with which historians routinely deal. Despite this, there is not enough evidence to convict or exonerate anyone with 100% certainty. But there is enough here to give us more than reasonable doubt about the circumstances within which Aurore was murdered. These ambiguities are the site's greatest pedagogical strength. As far as the murders go, students are asked to argue for the explanation of events that they find the most convincing.

This is a compelling and riveting case study, but the material and subject matter could potentially be overwhelming to some students. The unit also invites the possibility of disclosure by students concerning abuse they have either experienced or witnessed. Teachers should alert their colleagues, particularly school administrators and counselors, to the fact that they are teaching this unit.

The site is designed to draw students in with the near universal attraction to the morbid and to injustice. But the murder mystery is mere bait to lure the unsuspecting into a much more complex understanding of the whole historical enterprise. It provides an initial introduction to archival research and

archival materials. The particular skills it teaches include critical reading, critical analysis/thinking, and the ability to think historically (i.e. to understand how people thought and behaved at different times in the past). If the instructor desires, it can also be used to teach students how history is constructed. It provides an opportunity for students to be exposed to, get excited about, and confront some of the major questions historians face in their work.

“Aurore! The Mystery of the Martyred Child” is a web site designed to be used in conjunction with classroom discussion or with a guided Internet discussion. It uses the desire on the part of students to solve a mystery, to draw them into the work of doing history and learning about questions of violence and dysfunctional families in Canadian history. Using the features of the Internet this web-site allows students to do history in a manner that has not been widely possible before this. The web allows the placement of a whole archives, often drawn from different archival repositories, at the disposal of students. Now students can wade through the documents, extracting order and meaning from the (nearly) raw material of history. It is the students who have to use their critical skills to construct a narrative and defend their conclusions against others. The site can be used to turn a critical eye on an era in Quebec history characterized by a strong rhetoric of “family values” and to reflect on the very nature of the discipline of history itself.

2. Pedagogical Orientation

This site is designed to simulate primary archival research. It is not written as a "story" with a beginning and end but rather is a collection of documents and images which relate to this particular crime, and to the social history of twentieth-century Quebec more generally. Students are required to build their own stories around the incident. More junior students will require more direction about where to look than others.

The site works on four main levels. The level to which instructors push their students will depend on the abilities of the group being taught. The first level two levels are accessible to grade school as well as junior university students. The third level is probably appropriate for university students at a junior and senior level. The final level is aimed at upper level undergraduates and graduate students.

Level One: Reading and Understanding Primary Documents

The first level is the most obvious. This site brings ready access to a wide variety of primary documents about early twentieth century Quebec. Obtaining these documents is usually a time-consuming and difficult process, even for skilled researchers with the time and resources to travel to several archival repositories. For students with little experience and limited access, the examination of primary documents is practically impossible. Yet, it is the personal and immediate nature of primary sources like letters, newspapers and court transcripts that bring the past alive for most of us. To assist students the documents have been transcribed. The first level at which the site works, therefore, is the exposure to a wide variety of the raw materials and some basic skills used by historians. Ideally it will excite interest in doing more historical research.

Level 2: Exploring the Social History of Canadian Society

At the next level, students acquire a basic understanding of some of the major elements of life in early twentieth-century Quebec society. Given the right questions and learning environments, this information come easily to students as they seek and weigh the evidence surrounding the trials of those accused of murdering Aurore Gagnon. In their attempt to solve the mystery of why she was murdered, students come to grips with the historical antecedents of current issues such as differing cultural values, social

violence, family relations, and even economic change. In solving the mystery, they examine the real lives of ordinary people who lived in the early twentieth century, down to the details of everyday life. The localized nature of this study brings the period to life in a way that is impossible when the scale of reference is larger. To consolidate this information, students can be presented with specific factual questions, or higher level interpretative questions which require them to use the site to find specific answers.

Level 3: Doing History

At the third level students are drawn into the work of doing history. The students go through a number of obvious stages as they learn about this practice. At first, the site seems novel and even amusing to student surfers. Quickly however, they are confronted with the complexities and difficulties of doing history. The students will encounter, probably for the first time, evidence that is not laid out in a linear/narrative form for them. They realize, painfully, that history is a process of creating their own narrative from complex and often contradictory bits of evidence, all of which must be evaluated according to particular standards and used in particular ways. Merely asking them to describe 'what happened' forces them to evaluate evidence and make choices about what they consider most reliable. At this level students are "doing" or "making" history: they are using their own critical skills to evaluate evidence and form an argument.

It is at this point that students can benefit most from the classroom discussion and workshops that are integral to using this site as a teaching tool. Barring this, an on-line discussion group moderated by an instructor could be used as a substitute. Students will be in a position to discuss the minutia of the case, and of the lives of many of the individuals associated with it. They can be asked to defend their interpretations and in so doing must reveal their strategies for discriminating among contradictory evidence. Instructors/moderators can, at this point, draw out the successful strategies and foreground them for those students who used them unconsciously or who did not have the skills to judge at all. Students can be encouraged to develop a schema for analyzing historical evidence and present that to their discussion group.

Since students will follow different research strategies and so view different kinds of evidence they will inevitably come to different conclusions about what the issues in this murder "really" were. Either through role playing, class discussion or written assignments students will have to consolidate their understanding of the murder and its historical context in arguing for their interpretation. In this way, this telling of the Aurore Gagnon murder reverses the logic of standard texts and teaching formats. Too often a text, like a lecture, raises a topic and then attempts to invoke "rhetorical closure" by offering one interpretation as the most convincing and authoritative. By contrast, this format is open-ended, designed to provoke discussion about major questions such as family relations or justifiable violence in a specific historical and geographical situation, as students solve the mystery. Instead of answers, students are given the criteria by which they can make sense out of the past.

Level 4: What is history and how can we know it?

For more sophisticated students, the web site also operates at a fourth, or historiographical/epistemological level. Since students will have looked at the same information base, and much of the same basic evidence, and yet come to different conclusions, they can be introduced to questions about the status of historical knowledge and the interpretation of facts. If they come to a variety of conclusions, they can discuss the interpretative and tentative nature of "History" and the importance of understanding the location of the historian as the mediator. If instructors wish, they can introduce post-structuralist critiques of history and the rejoinders, using the documents about the Gagnon murder contained in this site. At this level, the web site allows students to explore some of the most important theoretical questions in the discipline.

3. Site Organization

First of all, rest assured that no one is expected to see the whole site, not even you. No one is expected to read every item in an archive before s/he starts to write a research paper and the same principal applies here. What you, as a teacher, need is an understanding of the construction of the site in order to guide your students.

The title page opens the site. By clicking on the appropriate icons, the user moves to the introduction. The Home Page provides a written description of the site. It also provides the first view of the title bars that demonstrate the overall site organization. The web site is split into a number of main sections, which can be seen at the top of this page. These headings are clickable, and provide you with the best way to navigate through each area. If you find yourself getting lost, simply glance up at the top bar and see which heading changes from red, to being highlighted in black. In the Home section, you can choose to go to "How to use this site," "Questions," "Teachers' Guide," (which lets you know how to obtain this Teachers' Guide), "Creators," "Feedback" and a button that will take you to the French translation of the page. Of most use to those wanting to use the site is the "How to Use This Website," which provides detailed directions about how to best navigate through the site.

Although full directions are available on the site, it is worth noting a couple of general points here. The main access to the site is through the horizontal toolbar across the top of each page in the site. We have already discussed the Home Page. The simplest way to explore what the site contains is to click on the Archives icon. Every document, text, and image that we have gathered together has its primary home in the archives. These are organized into record groups (newspapers, inquests, photographs, court documents etc.) and are listed in the left hand portion of the screen. By clicking on the "About this Source" icon that appears at the top of each primary document throughout the site, you can read a discussion of that particular kind of document – why does it exist? why do historians use it? or and how you might find it in a 'real' archive.

You can start with the Archives section, or end with it, but approaching the site through this avenue first is a little like starting a research project by reading every book in a library, starting with authors whose names begin with A and going through to Z. This is thorough, but inefficient, because there will be much in any library that does not relate to your research question.

Although all documents and images are in the Archives, you can also approach them as most professional researchers would, by narrowing your search to specific questions. A good place to start is in the Context section on the horizontal bar. After clicking on Context, you will see down the left hand column a list of subject guides pertaining to the historical contexts of the case. Clicking "Biographies" inside "Contexts" section provides you with a Cast of Characters, an area that describes something about all the major players and most of the bit players in this true historical drama. This is a useful way to orient yourself to the major players in this historical drama, and will orient you to both the particular individuals involved, and to the more general social context. The Chronology provides a quick overview of the major events, a "time line" of the case, while the Lexicon provides definitions for some of the more unusual words used in this case. "Beyond this Site" contains a list of books and articles in which other historians have interpreted the documents pertaining to the case of Aurore Gagnon, most of which appear on this site.

Moving beyond Context, you will find that "Strange Death", "Trials" and "Aftermath" sections along the horizontal toolbar. These sections conveniently organize the primary documents in the case into the three stages in which the events unfolded. "Strange Death" provides documents detailing the ways in which Aurore's death was transformed from being a tragic personal loss for the family, to being a matter of public

and then criminal interest. Documents from the ensuing trials are organized for you inside “Trials.” The “Aftermath” section contains documents that outline what happened to the major players after the conviction of the father and stepmother for the murder of their child. Within each of these three stages of the mystery, the primary documents are organized into subject areas in the vertical tool bar on the left hand side of the page. A final section of the website, as listed along the horizontal toolbar at the top of each section, is “Echoes.” This section contains a remarkable sampling of the ways in which the story of Aurore Gagnon has been preserved in public memory through films, plays, and novels over the past eight decades. These materials encourage students to understand why this story resonates so deeply in Quebec society, and it also challenges them to explore the ways that this story has, in the process, been changed over time.

“Interpretations” Section Password

Finally, the “Interpretations” section contains modern-day historians’ interpretations of the evidence. This section is password-protected. To see this password, log in to the Teachers’ Corner at: http://canadianmysteries.ca/teachers_corner/loginen.php.

4. Background to the Site

The Web site grew out of the original site in the Great Unsolved Mysteries of Canadian History series: “Who Killed William Robinson?” The original site was based on the doctoral work of Ruth Sandwell who discovered the murder of three Blacks in a short period on what had appeared to be bucolic Salt Spring Island. Her research showed that one of these, William Robinson, owned the most valuable land on the island, one of the few sites suitable not only for farming but also for a steamer dock. When she found that an aboriginal man was convicted of the murder she raised the case with John Lutz who was then finishing his doctoral work on aboriginal–non-aboriginal relations in the same period. Together they sought out all the evidence that they could find which informed the case and colonial society at the time.

Originally used in the classroom as a document set, the materials that comprised this site, with help from a 1995 small grant from the Teaching Innovation Fund of the provincial government of British Columbia, were converted to a Web site in 1997. The site was expanded, revamped and reoriented in the summer of 2000. The site now holds hundreds of documents and a hundred photographic or graphic images. In 2003, co-directors John Lutz and Ruth Sandwell received a grant from the Canadian Heritage Ministry’s Canadian Content Online Program to develop two new mysteries, launched in March 2004: this site, “We do Not Know His Name: Klatsassin and the Chilcotin War,” and “Aurore! The Mystery of the Martyred Child”, the tragic story from 1920s Quebec about a young girl murdered by her parents.

Students are often unfamiliar with and indeed sometimes uncomfortable with the unusual structure of this teaching tool. For many students, this is the first time they have looked at the “raw materials” of history, and it is usually the first time that they have been asked to decide for themselves what “really happened” in history. But once they learn some of the strategies of building a convincing argument from available evidence, students generally love the site. The fact that “Who Killed William Robinson” has won both the Naweab award for history (2002) and the MERLOT (2003) history prize (www.merlot.org), and the steady stream of requests for the *Teachers’ Guide* for that site, suggests that something is working for students and teachers alike!

5. Feedback

We hope this site will be available to teachers and students history for the foreseeable future and that it will improve over the course of time. We will continue to add items to the site and make modifications based on your suggestions.

If you use this site, please send us a brief appraisal telling us:
The course and level that you used the site for.
How many students used it.
Whether you will use it again and if not why not.
Any suggestions you have for improving the site.

Thanks for your help. We hope that you and your students have found the site rewarding.

6. Learning Outcomes of the Aurore site.

This website can be used as the foundation for a whole course or for a single class. The level of your students will determine how “deep” you ask them to go. Included in the sections that follows are some suggestions for single lessons that will introduce students at all levels to working with primary documents, and one full unit of lessons for secondary students. There are a number of lessons in the unit that can be used alone, if time is limited. A list of the specific courses across Canada for which this site would be a particularly useful have been included at the beginning of the unit. In general terms, this site will promote the following kinds of knowledge and skills: it will allow students to:

- ✓ identify and clarify a problem, an issue, an inquiry
- ✓ learn about the society and culture of early twentieth century Quebec
- ✓ develop a vocabulary that will allow them to analyse historical documents
- ✓ plan and conduct research using primary and secondary sources
- ✓ plan and conduct research using primary and secondary sources available on line
- ✓ generate and critique different interpretations of primary and secondary sources;
- ✓ assess and defend a variety of positions on controversial issues;
- ✓ construct a narrative from pieces of evidence that are non-sequential
- ✓ plan revise and deliver formal presentations that integrate a variety of media
- ✓ demonstrate leadership by planning, implementing, and assessing a variety of strategies to address the problem, issue, or inquiry initially identified
- ✓ develop their abilities to work independently or in group
- ✓ refine abilities to construct and defend and argument.

Please see the lesson and unit plans that follow to find more specific ways to introduce your students to the site, and for examples of instructional strategies that take full advantage of the pedagogical strengths of this site.

7. Scaffolding: Developing Skills for Using the Web sites

Most of us are not born with a natural ability to use primary documents skilfully and thoughtfully to build historical arguments. The kinds of skills and concepts that we need to make effective use of primary documents to investigate history need to be learned and then practiced. Teachers will probably

find that they can make more effective use of this site and of their students' time on the site by providing a structured introduction to reading historical documents. The following lessons have been developed, therefore, to give students from junior high school to fourth year university an introduction to the kinds of skills and concepts they will need when they are working with primary documents. Teachers, particularly those with younger students, might prefer to begin with the preparatory lesson included in the beginning of each of the Unit Plans, and use them in conjunction with the following lessons.

Scaffolding Lesson Plan 1 **Introducing Primary Documents: History vs. the Past**

Overview

Students bring certain beliefs about what history *is* into the classroom with them. Among the most common of the common sense beliefs about history in contemporary classrooms is that history is a fixed set of facts that is already known to historians, teachers, and/or textbook writers. This belief may help to explain why students are often so bored with history – why learn about what “the experts” already know so well? The belief that history is a bunch of known facts certainly inhibits students from critically examining the available evidence to build a convincing explanation – it prevents them, in other words, from “doing history.” This lesson is designed, therefore, to convince students that they have an active role to play in doing history. By asking students to examine the difference between history and the past, this lesson problematizes the common belief that history is comprised of fixed facts, and instead draws attention to the active and essential role of the historian in doing history – in finding, organizing and interpreting evidence (primary documents). The truth really is NOT out there! Historians need to enter into a dialogue with each other and with the evidence left over from the past if they are to create the reasoned interpretations that *really are* history.

Activities

1. Dividing students into groups of two or three, give the students about ten minutes to discuss the following question:

What are the differences between history and the past?

Students are asked to list at least two differences that they will discuss with the class.

2. As students respond, their answers are listed on the board. Early in the discussion, students are asked to consider that while the past is every single thing that happened or thought about or dreamt of – every event, thought, belief, atom moving, tree falling in the forest while no one was there -- that history is, alternatively, someone's attempt to bring order and meaning to that chaos of everything-ness.

The first and most important difference between history and the past, as I tell my students if they do not come up with it, is:

a) evidence, or a record, has to be created

Because students commonly resist the idea that history is not everything that ever happened, or everything that historians have already written about, and because it is almost impossible for them to understand history as a process of critical enquiry without this understanding, it is worth spending some time on the importance of evidence from the past. While historians tend to use written documents to understand the past, they are not limited to those kinds of records. No statement can be made about the past without evidence that has lasted through time, whether that evidence is written, pictorial, archaeological or spoken.

We simply cannot know about it if there is no trace left over. If students are still in doubt, ask them to give you an example of any exceptions to this rule.

b) evidence, or a record, has to be preserved

Not only does a record of an event, or thought, or belief have to be created, but it has to be preserved if people are going to know about it later. Ask students to consider what records they have already left behind that a historian, a hundred years from now, might use to understand them in his or her history of high school students in the twenty-first century (see Lesson 1) Students should note not only the narrowness of the records they are leaving behind, compared to the total of their lives, but also the fact that many of the records they are leaving – like their school notes, and perhaps family photographs, or emails – probably will not survive for a hundred years, or be in a place where a historian might find them. What view might a historian have of high schools if the only records that survive are the teachers' assessments of them?

c) the significance of the event /idea/ action has to be evaluated

A record about the past usually only exists because of a decision, conscious or not, that someone has made about what is important. Who determines what records are created, and what records are preserved? And then who determines, and on what basis, what historians might be interested in? The reasons why different kinds of records or evidence, like late slips, or counsellors' files documenting aberrant behaviour, or student emails, or students' notes, or personal diaries, are created and preserved (or not preserved) speak to very different ideas about what is significant about high school life. Historians differ among themselves about what is important when they come to write their histories. If a historian in the twenty-second century wanted to document a time of particular violence in society, for example, then he or she might be looking to the schools to find evidence that could provide examples of conflict. A historian interested in high schools as a community that prepared students for life might look instead for evidence that would document co-operation, or academic success as a precursor to a successful career.

d) interpretation

Urge the students to consider the possibility that the truth really is NOT out there. The past really is gone; it simply does not exist any more. The best that people can do is to make reasonable evaluations of the available evidence, examined in the context of what other people have thought about the event, or behaviour or belief. Even the first act of critical inquiry that defines historical research – the decision about what to write about – is an act of interpretation. Why write about high schools? Why not office workers, or prime ministers? The second act, that of selecting evidence about the topic is also interpretive: why use principals' records to try to understand high school life in the twenty-first century? Why not student diaries? Or census records discussing average family size of the student population? Or the gender and marital status of teachers? Each of those will give the historians of the future a slightly different interpretation of "what happened" in high schools in the twenty-first century. For every decision about what to look at, and why, reflects a decision on the part of the historian about what matters in society, past and present.

e) meaningful narrative

In order to make a useful interpretive statement about the evidence from the past, historians need to incorporate their interpretations in a meaningful narrative, one that makes sense of the evidence they have examined in a number of contexts. Historians need to make sense, in other words, not only in terms of other evidence from the past, but in terms of what other historians have said about that evidence. But they also often address the kinds of issues, and questions that people are interested in the present as well. The narrative, then, must demonstrate not only the reasonable-ness of the interpretation, but also its significance, past and present.

To summarize, here are the five points that, by highlighting the contingent and constructed nature of history-as-process, can provide students with a useful introduction to the examination of primary documents:

- there has to have been a record created (if only a memory)
- the record has to be preserved over time
- the record has to be found by someone, and considered significant (i.e. at the time that it is found)
- what is documented has to be interpreted and incorporated into a meaningful historical narrative

Scaffolding Lesson Plan 2

Learning to Read Historical Documents

Overview

Throughout this website, students will be exposed to a wide variety of primary sources – those documents written during, or close to, the time in which Aurore Gagnon died. Although students may find many of these documents interesting, they are not always sure how to approach, let alone evaluate and interpret, the information they contain. This exercise is designed to help students learn some of the skills that historians use to understand and evaluate the documentary evidence left to us from the past.

Activities

1. Ask students to define “primary document.” This definition should include:

- that primary documents were created at, or close to, the time and place that you are investigating, and
- almost every primary document was created by a person who was living in a particular time and place, i.e. in both a personal and a historical context.

Ask them to provide examples of primary documents they have created themselves that future historians might use. Ask them for examples of what other people might have created about them that historians might also use. Point out the differences that can occur depending on who is creating the document.

Explain that most historical “evidence” or primary documents have much more to tell us about the past than we might think. It even has more to tell us than the person who created the document, realized. Tell students that this lesson provides some tips on how to squeeze the most information possible from a primary source, by focusing on who created it and why.

Divide students into groups of three to six students. Give each group a copy of one historical document from the site. Either the teacher or the students can choose the document, but it must be short enough to be read and discussed in the time period.

Working in their small groups, students will begin by reading the document aloud to others in the group. Still working in small groups, students will discuss some or all of Question Sheet A (“Listening for the Voice of the Author”) and Question Sheet B (“Listening for Other Voices”).

The class will reconvene, and the teacher will go over each of the documents, and their answers to the questions.

Question Sheet A):

Listening for the Voice of the Author: the Document's Creators and Preservers

Every primary document was created and preserved by a person or people. Many of the documents appearing on this site were created by the Quebec government, and almost all were preserved by the Quebec Archives and/or the Public Archives of Canada. A detailed examination of the contexts within which the document was created and preserved can provide us with a deeper and broader understanding of what the document is telling us about the past.

Do you know who was responsible for creating this document? How?

Why was the document created? How do you know?

Who was the intended audience for this document – who was meant to read it?

How might new information about the writer of a letter, the owner of a newspaper, the person who transcribed a witness' testimony, or the creator of an historical website influence your evaluation of the information it contains about the past?

Who preserved this document? How did their goals influence the information the document contains?

What do you know about the people who created and preserved this document, their attitudes, and the society they lived in, from its contents?

Question Sheet B: Listening for other Voices

As Question Sheet A suggests, the specific goals and beliefs of those creating a document explicitly influence its creation and its preservation in many ways – content, form, tone and meaning. Many documents, however, also describe events, people, behaviours and beliefs in ways that may not have been intended by the document's creator. Questions in this section refer to the ways that historians can read beyond the intentions of the documents' creators, and out to the wider society in which the document appeared.

Whose voices are being represented in this document? Do they all have names?

How would you characterize these voices? Happy? Sad? Impartial? Frightened? Authoritative?

Can you tell what and who is determining/directing what these voices say?

Can you tell if anything is being left out of the written text of verbatim accounts, if any are contained in the document? Can you speculate on what it might be?

What distinctions does the document make between people? (e.g. Gender? Race? Place of Birth? Age? Occupation? Religion?)

What can you infer about the different types of people represented in this document?

On what basis do you make these inferences?

What can you tell about the relations between the people represented in this document from the voices that we hear? Are they equal or unequal? Are they related, or friends? What gives you these impressions?

Can you reconstruct the physical setting in which the document was created? What value could such a reconstruction hold?

What can we learn about relationships among genders, classes or races from this document? How?

Scaffolding Lesson Plan 3

Criteria for Evaluating Significance and Meaning

Overview

As these documents suggest, the past is not easy to see or understand. Most people (very much like you) did not create documents that tell us about their experiences, and even if they did, these records seldom survived through the ages. How can we know what they thought or did? On the other hand, the documents that *are* left each reflect someone's particular point of view, so how can we tell what 'really' happened? How, when there are so many different points of view and so many voices silent, can we describe -- let alone understand -- the past? While most historians would agree that it is impossible to provide a definitive answer to the question "What happened in the past?," we can draw on knowledge and skills that can give us a better understanding of the people, events and relationships that we know about from the past. This section examines some concrete ways of evaluating the quality, meaning and significance of any particular historical document.

Activities

Ask the students to work in the same groups as the last class, with the same document.
Ask them to work through the document using the three steps outlined below.

Step 1: Evaluate the quality of your historical document

How do we measure the quality of an historical document? Its quality is dependent on three things: **its authenticity, its scope, and its suitability to our research agenda.** Here are some questions that can help you evaluate these elements:

Is the historical origin and archival location of the document identified? Why does this matter?
How do you know that your document is authentic, i.e. what it pretends to be?
Is the information that it contains complete, or are pieces of information missing? Are they illegible?
How could an incomplete document, or an incomplete series of documents, influence your research findings?
Does this document alone provide you with enough information to draw any reasonable conclusions about the past? What other documents on the same subject, time period or about the same person, should you read to get a better understanding?

Step 2: Assess the kind of information the document contains

Every historical document gives us a snapshot of the past that provides some kind of information. Before we can understand what, exactly, a snapshot is showing us, however, we need to know something about where, when, why and by whom it was taken. We need a context for understanding its existence before we can understand its meaning. Both a personal diary from 1891 and government statistics from the same date might, for example, contain information of great use to a researcher. The kind of information that they contain about the past is very different. To the extent that we know and understand the context in which a document was created, we can understand and evaluate the kind of information it is giving us about the past.

This exercise can help you to assess the kinds of information that different documents provide. Please answer the following questions:

2. Who created this document, and when?
3. Why was it created?

4. List three questions about the past that your document answers well.
5. List three questions about the past that document addresses poorly, or not at all

6. How would your opinion of this source change if you knew it was created by
 - a) a corrupt bureaucrat
 - b) a writer of historical fiction
 - c) an inmate of a lunatic asylum?

2. How would your opinion of this source change if you knew it was created for
 - a) an advertising campaign
 - b) a theatrical production
 - c) the government of Canada?

Step 3: Evaluate the significance of the document to your historical argument.

Even though a document is authentic, complete and well contextualized, it still might be useless for historical research. This is because the significance of any historical document is ultimately dependent on the skilful and appropriate use that the historian makes of it. The knowledge that researchers have of their general subject area helps them to frame questions about the past that are significant to current debates and interests. Their skill in thinking reasonably, logically, and creatively helps them to determine whether any particular source is a suitable one for answering familiar or new questions about the past.

The following questions provide some ways of evaluating the historical significance of your document:

- Is the subject of your document relevant to the subject you are studying?
- What makes this document particularly suitable to the research you are doing?
- Does the kind of information provided by your document answer the questions you are asking?
- Does the information contained in this document support or contradict the findings of other historians? How?
- If your research is on a new topic or unexplored area, how does it fit in with other research in a related geographical or subject area
- Do you need to consult more sources, more types of sources, or the findings of other historians to support the points you are making with this evidence?

Teaching Unit for
Intermediate and Secondary Students

Aurore!
The Mystery of the Martyred Child

Web site created by
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Fitting This Unit into Your Provincial Curriculum

Our Teachers' Guide team has done some research into provincial curricula across Canada. We have identified the following courses as ones in which this Unsolved Mystery about Aurore Gagnon could most easily fit into your provincial curriculum. This is not meant, however, to be an exhaustive list.

British Columbia: Social Studies 11

Alberta: Social Studies 9–IOP; Social Studies 10–Canada in the Modern World

Saskatchewan: Social Studies 8–The Individual and Society; Social Studies 9–The Roots of Society; Social Studies 10 (Unit 3);

Manitoba: Senior 1 Social Studies--Canada Today

Ontario: Grade 8--Compulsory History and Geography; History 10--Canadian History in the 20th Century; Civics 10–Compulsory

Quebec: History of Quebec and Canada, Secondary 4;¹

New Brunswick: Grade 9 – A Global Perspective Through Understanding;

Nova Scotia: Grade 7–Social Studies; Canadian History 11²;

Prince Edward Island: Grade 9 History 300 or Canadian Studies 401;

Newfoundland: Grade 9 – Canada: Our Land and Heritage;

Nunavut and the Northwest Territories Grade 9: The Growth of Canada

Yukon (see British Columbia).

Unit Rationale

First, this unit uses the Great Unsolved Mysteries of Canadian History Web site “Aurore! The Mystery of the Martyred Child” to introduce students to some of the issues relating to families and social change in Canada. Secondly, it is designed to introduce students to primary documents in history and social studies. It particularly aims to facilitate students' critical awareness of author's perspective in historical documents, to teach them to evaluate opposing evidence, to understand the utility of documents from a partial perspective, and to encourage students to adopt a broader and more critical perspective when reading historical evidence and narratives. Thirdly, this unit contains a variety of suggestions to turn this unit into an interdisciplinary, or integrated, unit by providing suggestions for lessons that integrate social studies with other curriculum subjects.

Unit Overview

Extreme cases of child abuse and neglect which result in the death of young victims make headlines in Canadian newspapers and justly so. In recent years such stories have disturbed people, raising troubling questions about how severe abuse could have gone on unnoticed. Often, pundits and editorialists lay blame at the feet of our hectic urban lifestyles, our tendency to insulate ourselves from our neighbours, and widely accepted attitudes that it is not our business to interfere in the lives of others. Concerned citizens reflect back to simpler times when people lived in small rural villages, intimately aware of the lives of their fellow citizens, where children were free to live an idyllic, innocent childhood. Surely there, at that time, such abuse and cruelty would not go unchecked. But is this really the case?

¹ This unit is geared principally for the developmental level of 15 and 16 year old students in a college or university preparation stream. Teachers in the province of Quebec, British Columbia and Nova Scotia may still wish to teach this material but may be better served drawing from instructional strategies on the [Klatsassin and the Chilcotin War website](#).

² See above.

Aurore Gagnon was ten years old when she died in February of 1920, in the small rural community of Fortierville, Quebec. The coroner's inquest ruled her death a homicide; her father and stepmother were charged with murder after the authorities discovered that her body was covered with over fifty welts and scars, the result of beatings with axe handles, whips and sticks. The inhabitants of Quebec were deeply troubled by what they read in the daily news coverage of the trial. How could this have happened? Was the stepmother (who inflicted most of the abuse) solely to blame? What about the father, who inflicted his own beatings and who turned a blind eye? Why did relatives, the doctor or the priest in town not intervene? Or were more widespread cultural attitudes about respect for the parental authority and acceptance of the use of corporal punishment responsible? Aurore Gagnon's story spread throughout Quebec, and was told and re-told over the next seventy years in plays, novels and films. Aurore Gagnon became widely known as "Aurore, l'enfant martyre," and she became an icon of popular culture in Quebec.

In this fascinating and challenging unit, students will work through a series of tasks designed to tease out clues as to what happened, why Aurore was abused and how attitudes and expectations towards the parent-child relationship were changing in 1920s Quebec. They will have the opportunity to study first hand primary source documents from the coroner's inquest, the preliminary inquiry and the trials, using this 'evidence' to build their own interpretation of the troubling events in Fortierville, Quebec. In order to better understand Aurore and the world in which she lived, students will be drawn into a broader study of 1920s life and culture, including French/English relations in the post WW1 world. In the culminating activity, students will conduct panel discussions on the degree of the stepmother's culpability, the appropriateness of the clemency shown the father, and the possible explanations behind the assaults on the girl in the first place.

WARNING/CAUTION

This is a compelling and riveting case study, but the material and subject matter could potentially be overwhelming to some students. The unit also invites the possibility of disclosure by students concerning abuse they have either experienced or witnessed. Teachers should alert their colleagues, particularly school administrators and counselors, to the fact that they are teaching this unit.

Unit Themes

- Develop sensitivity to the differing points of view concerning appropriate parent-child relations in early 20th century Quebec in comparison with the present day
- Acquire an understanding of the broader social and historical contexts of post World War 1 Canada
- Acquire an understanding of the challenges and issues facing people living in rural, primarily agricultural villages in early 20th century Quebec,
- Confront evidentiary challenges, including incompleteness and interpretive errors; differentiate the quality of evidence and observe inconsistencies in testimony,
- Evaluate the quality and fairness of newspaper coverage of the trial.

Unit Objectives, Skills and Attitudes

- Identify and clarify a problem, an issue, an inquiry;
- Develop a vocabulary for the analysis of historical documents,
- Plan and conduct research using primary and secondary sources & electronic sources,
- Generate and critique different interpretations of primary and secondary sources,
- Assess and defend a variety of positions on controversial issues,
- Construct a narrative from pieces of evidence that are non-sequential,
- Plan, revise, and deliver formal presentations using a variety of media,

Demonstrate leadership by planning, implementing, and assessing a variety of strategies to address the problem, issue, or inquiry initially defined,

Refine abilities to construct and defend an argument.

Synopsis

Key Question: What does the case of Aurore Gagnon reveal about changing attitudes towards parent-child relationships in 1920s rural Quebec?		
Lesson Title	Time Needed	OVERVIEW
Preparatory Lesson	1 class lesson (75 minutes)	In this introduction to historical documents, the class comes up with a list of the kinds of documents (primary sources) that historians of the future might use to make inferences about “our” lives hundreds of years from now. Students then select the three primary sources that they think will best describe their own lives for future historians, and use a data chart to explain why.
Lesson 1: What Happened to Aurore Gagnon? Determining the Facts of the Case	2 classes	Students are introduced to the details of the murder of Aurore Gagnon by her parents in 1920s Quebec.. In the first day of the two-class lesson, the teacher encourages students to think of two kinds of questions -- questions about the particular circumstances and questions about the general contexts in which the events occurred -- that they would need answered in order to understand why this murder occurred. In the second class of this lesson, students narrow their focus and work through detailed worksheets to answer two questions: How do we know what happened to Aurore Gagnon? What evidence is there that her parents should be charged with murder in the case of her death?
Lesson 2: Historical Contexts—Learning more about Aurore Gagnon’s world	3 classes	In this three-class lesson, students work in groups to explore one of six areas that provides a broader context for understanding the crime: Global issues, Federal Issues, Quebec Issues, Other Province’s Issues; Daily Living, and Life in Quebec. They create a poster that represents their research, and present it to the class.
Lesson 3: Learning to Read Historical Documents – Changing Attitudes Towards Children and Standards of Care	1 class	Students begin the class with a discussion of contemporary expectations of behavior and feelings within families. Students then explore a series of documents, noting the inferences that they can make about attitudes that parents had toward their children, and children toward their parents from the evidence they contain.
Lesson 4: Who Should We Believe? Evaluating the Credibility of Evidence	1 class	The lesson is designed to help students develop criteria for judgement about this case by inviting students to read some of the documents on the site, and collectively create a set of criteria for evaluating the credibility of evidence.

Lesson 5: Developing Criteria for Evaluating the Parent-Child Relationship	1 class	In this lesson, students develop criteria for evaluating the parent-child relationship in the present and in 1920s Quebec, and discuss these issues in relation to the Aurore Gagnon case.
Lesson 6, “Differences in Perspective I: Reading the News”	2 classes	In this lesson, students are introduced to some of the factors that shape newspaper reporting. Students begin by examining a newspaper account of one of the trials, and writing a critical assessment of it. In the second class, students work in groups with those who read an account in a different newspaper, comparing different accounts of the same events in the sensational Gagnon trials. The lesson concludes with a class discussion to explain the discrepancies.
Lesson 7, Differences in Perspective II: Personal Experience	1 class	This lesson allows students to explore in more detail some of the interpretive frameworks for understanding unacceptable violence and conflict. Students explore differing explanations of the violence against Aurore Gagnon, and are asked to examine it in terms of current psychological theories.
Lesson 8: Is this event significant? The Textbook Test	1 class	In this class, students examine their textbook to explore the kinds of issues covered by school history. Using the textbook and other kinds of historical writing, students then debate whether or not this is an historically significant event.
Lesson 9: Should Marie-Anne Houde have been executed for her crime?	2 classes	After discussing Canada’s contemporary policy regarding capital punishment, students read some of the arguments for and against Madame Houde’s execution. Students are given a position for or against capital punishment which they must support in a debate that takes place in the second class of this lesson.
Lesson 10: Writing Biographies	2-3 classes	In this lesson, students write a 400-500 word biography of one of the three main actors in the Gagnon Case.
Lesson 11: Culminating Event: Point of View panel discussion (a one period event)	1 class	In this lesson, students take on the persona of either a present day observer of this trial (as a historian or journalist) or of one of the key historical characters in the case. In this persona, students will participate in one of two panel discussion of key questions about this case

Key Question³

What does the case of Aurore Gagnon reveal about changing attitudes towards parent-child relationships in 1920s rural Quebec?

Recommended Time Frame

Allow 17 periods for this unit in an advanced or university-preparation level course if you intend to include all instructional strategies. Adjust as appropriate to meet the needs of different learners and instructional time limitations. Many of the tasks also stand independently and can be pulled out and used as single lessons if required.

³ Note: Key questions make great essay style exam questions.

Instructional Strategies

Need for Computer Lab Time:

While this entire unit is fully integrated with the Aurore Gagnon website, most tasks can be completed if the requisite documents are printed off ahead of time and handed out to students. In this way, classes with limited access to computer lab time can still complete the unit.

Assessment & Evaluation:

Because assessment and evaluation standards vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, only generalized guidelines have been included here. Instructors may wish to assign process marks for completion of the various tasks, or not, if their students are sufficiently mature to recognize that the successful completion of the various tasks is crucial to successful completion of the culminating activity.

The following skills and habits of mind are ones that should be carefully assessed in the process of evaluating the critical thinking needed to work effectively with this site.

Documents and sources are read and interpreted in-depth,
Issues are analyzed seriously and thoughtfully,
Presentations and talks are given carefully, with materials well-prepared and organized, and points well thought out,
Results are expressed cautiously and are supported with reference to appropriate evidence,
Opinions are reasoned,
Reports and narratives are written discerningly, reflecting the above and with care, attention and evident pride in quality work.⁴

Preparatory Exercises

If students have not worked critically with primary source documents before, it is **STRONGLY** recommended that students do at least one of the following exercises before undertaking this unit of study. See Section 7 “Scaffolding: Developing Skills for Using the Web sites” for other introductory lessons.

Interpreting Primary Documents: Seeing Myself in the Future’s Past

Overview

In this introduction to historical documents, the class comes up with a list of the kinds of documents (primary sources) that historians of the future might use to understand “our” world hundreds of years from now. Students then choose five primary sources that they think will best describe their own lives for future historians

Activities

Students are given the following scenario:

A historian of the twenty third century, feeling that teenagers have been misunderstood through time, wants to write a history of teenagers, beginning in early twenty-first century Canada. The historian wants to know about all aspects of teenage life, from

⁴ From Roland Case and Ian Wright, “Taking Seriously the Teaching of Critical Thinking,” in *The Canadian Anthology of Social Studies: Issues and Strategies for Teachers*, Roland Case and Penney Clark, editors. (Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press).

work, family life and formal education to leisure activities, social conditions and personal issues of concern to the twenty-first century teenager.

The teacher asks the students: How do historians learn about the past? Explain that while historians read a lot of things written by other historians, the books and articles they write are based on their own research into evidence created in the past -- called primary documents -- which have been preserved into the present. Historians use these documents to make INFERENCES about life in the past.

Familiarize students with the concept of INFERENCE by asking students what kinds of inferences they might make about a society if they were an alien from another planet who encountered a common object from our world: a soccer ball, a coat or any other commonly used object in the classroom. Examples might include “the society had the technology to create plastics,” or “the society had enough wealth to make a lot of useless objects,” or “people must have loved music.”

Students are asked to work in pairs to brainstorm the following question:

What records will individual students in the class leave behind that this historian might use to understand their life? What records about their life will have been created, and might be preserved, for that historian to find?

After 5-10 minutes, write all of their responses on the board, encouraging students, if needed with the following suggestions: (issues that you might like to raise about the creation, preservation and interpretation of the source are in brackets)

- diaries and journals (Who will keep them? Will they make it into a public archives, as hundreds of thousands have in the past? What will they tell historians?)
- emails (Will they be preserved? Will they be machine-readable in the future? What will they tell historians?)
- VISA and other credit card bills (Where will they be stored? Will historians have access to them? What will they tell historians?)
- home videos (Will the technology still exist to view them? What will they tell historians?)
- photographs (Who will preserve them? Will they be in public archives? What will they tell historians?)
- school records (Kept by school and then by the provincial archives, as required by law; who will have access to them in the future? If they are kept by individuals, who will preserve them and who will have access to them? What will they tell historians?)
- schoolwork (How will they be preserved? What will they tell historians?)
- clothing (Do your parents understand your clothes? How will someone in the future understand what the clothing “means”?)
- music (Do your parents understand your music? How will someone in the future understand what the music means? Will the technology exist to listen to it?)
- court records (Juvenile court records may become part of the public domain after 100 years.)
- census records (Every Canadian will appear on the census if they are in Canada in a Census year, even though their individual information will not be available to historians for 96 years.)
- birth, marriage and death records (What might these tell someone in the future about teenage life: i.e. aids statistics, car accidents, teenage pregnancy, etc.?)

Divide students once again into groups of 2 or 3, and distribute the following chart. Give the students the following task:

Choose which three sources from the list on the board (or other sources they can think of) that would give a historian of the future THE BEST understanding of their life, and explain why.

On an overhead, go over one example with the students (Visa Bills, for example), filling in the spaces as demonstrated, or as students suggest, filling in all three columns:

Source Kind	What information/ evidence about me will this primary source give to historians of the future?	What makes this “good evidence” about me and my life?	What inferences about teenage life might the historian make from this evidence?
<i>1) Best source Visa bills</i>	<i>How I spent my money, or at least some of it</i>	<i>The things that I buy are a good reflection of what I like, and what I care about</i>	<i>- teenagers liked to buy things - teenagers had money to buy things (i.e. they were not totally poor) - teenagers bought things that were different for others and from adults</i>
2) Second best			
3) Third best			

After students have completed the sheet, select three or four groups to present their first choice, and discuss.

Other Introductory Exercises Using Primary Documents

There are a wide variety of lessons that teachers can do in the classroom relating to the exploration of primary documents, depending on the time available and the grade level. There are three listed in this *Teachers’ Guide*, beginning on page 11. Here are some other suggestions:

- ask students to keep a journal of the documents they create in a given week, of the “traces” that they are leaving behind for future historians to find
- ask students to create a journal, diary or short essay that they might leave for historians of the future
- get students to create a “time capsule” that best represents their lives, the lives of their family, or their school in the twentieth century

- have students write a history of their lives, or of their family based only on the documentary evidence available in their home

The Lessons

LESSON 1: WHAT HAPPENED TO AURORE GAGNON? DETERMINING “THE FACTS” OF THE CASE

(two classes, assuming 75 minute periods)

(DAYS 1 and 2 of Unit)

Overview:

Students are introduced to the details of the murder of Aurore Gagnon by her parents in 1920s Quebec. In the first day of the twoclass lesson, the teacher encourages students to think of two kinds of questions -- questions about the particular circumstances and questions about the general contexts in which the events occurred -- that they would need answered in order to understand why this murder occurred. In the second class of this lesson, students narrow their focus and work through detailed worksheets to answer two questions: How do we know what happened to Aurore Gagnon? What evidence is there that her parents should be charged with murder in the case of her death?

CLASS 1, LESSON 1 (DAY 1 OF UNIT)

Activities:

Tell students that what they are about to study, for the next 15 classes, will contain graphic descriptions of child abuse and violence. They should prepare themselves to deal with mature, difficult and disturbing subject matter (following on a study of WWI, this shouldn't be too hard).

1. PARAPHRASE THE FOLLOWING TO STUDENTS/SET THE STAGE:

Who was Aurore Gagnon? She was ten years old when she died in February of 1920, in the small rural community of Fortierville, Quebec. The coroner's inquest ruled her death a homicide; her father and stepmother were charged with murder after the authorities discovered that her body was covered with over fifty welts and scars, the result of beatings with axe handles, whips and sticks. The inhabitants of Quebec were shocked by what they read in the daily news coverage of the trial. How could this have happened? Was the stepmother (who inflicted most of the abuse) solely to blame? What about the father, who inflicted his own beatings and who turned a blind eye? Why did relatives, the doctor or the priest in town not intervene? Or were more widespread cultural attitudes about respect for the parental authority and acceptance of corporal punishment responsible? Aurore Gagnon's story spread throughout Quebec, and was told and re-told over the next seventy years in plays, novels and films. Aurore Gagnon became widely known as "Aurore, l'enfant martyre," and she became an icon of popular culture in Quebec. In Quebec today, it would be hard to find someone your parents' age or older who did not know the story of Aurore Gagnon.

2. ARRANGE STUDENTS IN PAIRS. Distribute and ask students to read:

Documents on the website to use:

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/accueil/indexen.html>

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrance/crimemisajour/indexen.html>

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrance/indexen.html>

3. EXPLAIN that in this unit, thanks to a special project called the Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History, we are going to explore the mystery of Aurore Gagnon. The project has gathered and digitized primary source material relating to her case, including the transcripts of her parents' trials, and the testimony of witnesses. .What happened to her? Why was she abused? How could this happen in small town rural Quebec? What does the Aurore Gagnon case tell us about the changing role of parent-child relationships in the early 20th century? What can we learn from her case about what life was like so many years ago, for children and adults? In working through this unit, we will also be learning the skills historians use to write history. You will work with the materials historians work with, and you will see for yourself the difficult choices historians have to make when they write their histories, including what gets chosen to appear in your textbooks.

4. EXPLAIN TO STUDENTS THAT our first step, as historians, is to “define the scope of our inquiry” – to figure out what we need to learn more about in order to understand this case. After reading the two documents in #2 above, ask each pair to generate a list of items or questions for further inquiry. What questions are raised in your minds? What do you need to know more about? (Give examples of 5Ws & HOW, and also the broader social & historical contexts). Give students 10-15 minutes to generate a list of questions under the two heading areas, “specifics of the event” and “historical contexts.”

5. SHARE STEP a – Move the students into groups of 6, their home groups for the unit. Ask each group to generate one list from the 3 pairs. The pairs will have some common questions and some original contributions (this should be quick – it’s even faster if they begin the class with the desks already organized into “home” groups of 6). (Part of the purpose of this exercise is to generate appreciation for varying perspectives different people bring to the same problem).

6. SHARE STEP b – Each group shares with the class. Generate one master list areas of inquiry either on the overhead or a protected board area. Teachers can flesh out the questions if necessary, but encourage students to see potential gaps for themselves.

7. WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION – Leave the areas of inquiry list up and explain how it will provide a frame of reference for the class during the unit.

8. HOMEWORK: Ask students to familiarize themselves with the project website <http://canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/home/indexen.html> and/or to re-read the documents distributed in class.

CLASS 2: LESSON 1 (DAY 2 OF UNIT)

Activities:

1. SET THE STAGE: Students have two key questions to answer today. How do we know what happened to Aurore Gagnon? What evidence is there that her parents should be charged with murder in the case of her death? (The Coroner’s Inquest)

2. MOVE STUDENTS INTO EXPERT GROUPS: Students are put into expert groups (5 expert groups). Each group is given one document from the list below and asked to complete the following charts (each student will need a copy of the chart to take back to their home group):

First, students determine what information from each document purports to be factual or what instead gives us a window into the social and cultural world 1920s Quebec.

FACTS/INFORMATION: Is it true?	TESTIMONY/OPINION: What does it mean?

Second, now that students have sorted out facts/information from testimony/opinion, they complete the chart below.

What happened to Aurore Gagnon? List what you can reasonably prove did or did not happen to her, according to what is in your document.	According to this document, identify evidence presented to the Coroner that would make him suspect that Aurore’s parents were the cause of her death.

Students return to their home group (each group of 6 will have 2 from 1 expert group) to complete the chart and answer the questions below, combining the evidence from all 5 documents:

What Happened to Aurore Gagnon? By Combining the Evidence from the different documents, can you reasonably establish what did or did not happen to her?	
DOCUMENT	EVENT/ACTION/OCCURRENCE

Which documents provide *Corroborating* evidence?

Which documents provide *Conflicting* evidence?

Does your group feel that there was reasonable evidence presented to the coroner to suspect that Aurore’s parents were the cause of her death?

Do you feel confident in your findings? What questions do you wish you could have answered?

What else do you need to know?

3. WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION

Was your group able to determine what happened to Aurore Gagnon from just one document? Why?

What happened when you combined documents? Could you determine what happened to Aurore Gagnon then? Why or why not?

Historians know and expect that different primary source documents, as you have seen here, reveal different interpretations of the same events. Documents also contain different kinds of truths: the world as the

author or speaker sees it and clues about the broader social and cultural world in which the author or speaker lived – what they valued, what they thought was important. What do these documents tell you about Aurore’s world?

Documents on the website to use: found in Coroner’s Inquests, “Strange Death”

Testimony of Dr. Albert Marois :

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enqueteducoroner/329en.html>

Testimony off Exilda Auger

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enqueteducoroner/330en.html>

Testimony of Marie-Jeanne Gagnon

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enqueteducoroner/331en.html>

Testimony of Telesphore Gagnon

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enqueteducoroner/332en.html>

Toxicology Report

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enqueteducoroner/333en.html>

**LESSON 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS:
LEARNING MORE ABOUT AURORE GAGNON’S WORLD**

(three classes)

(DAYS 3 and 4 of Unit)

BOOK LIBRARY TIME FOR THIS CLASS

Overview:

In this three-class lesson, students work in groups to explore one of six areas that provides a broader context for understanding the crime: Global issues, Federal Issues, Quebec Issues, Other Province’s Issues; Daily Living, and Life in Quebec. They create a poster that represents their research, and present it to the class.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS/POSTERS

(DEPENDING ON STUDENTS’ BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE AND LEVEL OF HISTORICAL AWARENESS, YOU MAY WISH TO TAKE AN EXTRA PERIOD FOR THIS ACTIVITY)

SUPPLIES NEEDED: BRISTOL BOARD & MARKERS/GLUE STICKS

CLASS 1, LESSON 2 (DAY 3 OF UNIT)

Activities:

ORGANIZE STUDENTS INTO THEIR HOME GROUPS AGAIN. Each group will research and create a poster on one of the following topics, which will hang in the classroom until the completion of the unit. Junior level secondary students will need some direction with respect to research strategies and sources. To expedite matters, the instructor/librarian can identify and/or set aside appropriate textbooks and reference

works (the *Canadian Historical Atlas* and *Atlas Historique du Quebec* are invaluable for the demographic information).

Global Issues (1919-1920): World population? What main events were happening outside of Canada? (things like the end of WW1, the Paris peace conference, the creation of the League of Nations, the global flu pandemic, etc).

Federal Issues (1918-1920) what was the big news at the federal level in Canada? (who was in power, the Winnipeg General Strike, fear of communism, recent attainment of women's suffrage, prohibition debates, postwar recession, etc).

Quebec Issues (1915-1920) what was life like at the provincial level? (population split French/Catholic; English/Protestant, other demographic statistics. Major cities? Who held political power? Recent issues of conscription, WW1, Ontario Schools crisis, worsening French/English relations, other issues). (Other Province-pick one you are in or other if Quebec) what was the big news in this province? Population? Major cities? Provincial level political issues?

Daily Living & New Technology -- how did people live? (Rich/middle class/rural/poor). What technology was available to people for a) communication? b) transportation? c) food preservation and storage? What new technology was just becoming available?

Family Life in Quebec (rural/urban) – contrast and compare urban and rural life in Quebec. How large were families? Did people typically lived in multi-generational and other “extended” households? Was family more important to French Canadians than to other Canadians? Why? What role did the Catholic Church play in everyday life? What career options were available to both men and women? How much education did people have and where was it available?

HOMEWORK: Complete researching questions assigned to individuals by group members, if necessary.

CLASS 2, LESSON 2 (DAY 4 OF UNIT)

Students return to their home groups and assemble their poster on Bristol board for the group presentation.

CLASS 3, LESSON 2 (DAY 5 OF UNIT)

Presentations are short (8 minute news flashes) and then the posters are affixed to the classroom walls for the duration of the unit.

OPTIONAL ASSESSMENT: posters can be assigned a group mark, group members can also evaluate their own and others contributions to the project.

LESSON 3: LEARNING TO READ HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS –

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN AND STANDARDS OF CARE (INFERENCE VERSUS DIRECT OBSERVATION)

(one class *(Day 6 of Unit)*)

Overview:

Students begin the class with a discussion of contemporary expectations of behavior and feelings within families. Students then explore a series of documents, noting the inferences that they can make about attitudes that parents had of their children, and children of their parents from the evidence they contain.

1. HOMEWORK: Complete the worksheet relating to family expectations.

Relationship	Examples of good conduct between parent and child
Parent to child	What responsibilities and duties does the parent have for the child? As a parent, what do you think you should do for your child? What will you owe your child?
Child to parent	What responsibilities and duties does the child owe the parent? What behaviours will you expect from your child?

CLASS 1, LESSON 3, (DAY 6 OF UNIT)

In this assignment students will develop their skills of inference and direct observation.

Activities:

1. Assign one document from the list below per group. Each group should skim the document and get a sense of the overall testimony. Give students as well the background sheet (from the *Cast of Characters Section* of the website). Then the group should divide the document into thirds. Each pair should analyze a third of the document, looking for statements from which they can *infer* qualities of the parent-child or child-parent relationship (as in Task 4 above) in 1920s Quebec.

Identify relevant statement in document	Inferred aspects of the parent-child/child-parent relationship
i.e. person acknowledged that child was beaten because she was disobedient	i.e. person indicates that they view corporal punishment as acceptable for disobedience, suggesting that children are expected to be obedient to their parents

2. IN GROUPS: Each pair should then share their findings with the group, so that students have a sense of the entire document

WHOLE CLASS: Have groups present their findings to the class, and generate a class list from the documents of statements and inferences.

Documents on the website to use: (Under “Strange Death,” “Preliminary Inquiries”)

Deposition of Emilien Hamel, Preliminary Inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon:

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enquetespreliminaires/324en.html>

Deposition of Albertine Gagnon, Preliminary Inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon:

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enquetespreliminaires/325en.html>

Deposition of Telesphore Gagnon, Trial of Marie-Anne Houde for Murder

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/142en.html>

Deposition of Wille Houde, Trial of Marie-Anne Houde for Murder

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/144en.html>

Deposition of Marguerite Leboeuf, Preliminary Inquiry of Marie-Anne Houde for Murder

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/mortetrangle/enquetespreliminaires/322en.html>

HOMEWORK OR IN CLASS:

Students should complete the following chart.

Relationship	Examples of good conduct between parent and child in 1920s Quebec
Parent to child	What responsibilities and duties did parents have towards children in 1920s Quebec? Is there any evidence that these responsibilities and duties were changing? If so, what?
Child to parent	What responsibilities and duties did children owe their parents in 1920s Quebec? Is there any evidence that these responsibilities and duties were changing? If so, what?

LESSON 4: WHOM SHOULD WE BELIEVE? FEATURES THAT ENHANCE AND FEATURES WHICH DIMINISH THE CREDIBILITY OF TESTIMONY

(one class *DAY 7 of Unit*)

Overview.

The lesson is designed to help students develop criteria for judgement. about this murder by inviting students to read some of the documents on the site, and collectively create a set of criteria for evaluating the credibility of evidence.

CLASS 1, LESSON 4 (DAY 7 OF UNIT)

A key job of the historian is to evaluate and assess the credibility of evidence offered. These tasks provide students with specific training in this skill.

1. Assemble students in their home groups. Each group should have three of the depositions listed below, along with the relevant biographies (from the *Cast of Characters* inside *Biographies* inside *Context* Section of the website).
2. IN PAIRS, students take one of the depositions and biographies. Each pair identifies features (either of what people saw or who they were in terms of their relationship to the accused, their training and/or personal motivation) that either enhances or reduces the credibility of the testimony.

Individual	Main Points of Testimony	Points (either relating to background or testimony) which enhance the credibility of this evidence	Points which diminish the credibility of this evidence

3. IN GROUPS – Based on their work, each group should generate a list of criteria to apply when evaluating the evidence in primary source documents.

What questions should they ask of the documents? The list should include the following:
Is there any reason to believe that the evidence was tampered with?
Is there any reason to suspect that the witness is lying? (If so, what reasons?)
Is there any reason to think that the witness is exaggerating unduly?
Is the testimony internally consistent?(or does witness contradict him/ herself?)
Does the testimony contradict testimony of other witnesses?
Is the testimony consistent with what you know of the historical contexts? (culture, economy, politics etc.)

4. CLASS DISCUSSION – When the groups have completed their task above, ask groups to share their findings with the class. Ask students to reflect on their findings.

Documents on the website to use:

- Deposition of Laureat Couture, preliminary inquiry of Marie-Anne Houde
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/321en.html>
- Deposition of Marguerite Leboeuf, preliminary inquiry of Marie-Anne Houde
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/322en.html>
- Deposition of Adjutor Gagnon, preliminary inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/323en.html>
- Deposition of Emilien Hamel, preliminary inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/324en.html>
- Deposition of Albertine Gagnon, preliminary inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/325en.html>
- Deposition of Dr. Andronic Lafond, preliminary inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/327en.html>
- Deposition of Dr. Vitaline Leboeuf, preliminary inquiry of Telesphore Gagnon
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/deposition/328en.html>

**LESSON 5: DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING
THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP**

(one class, *DAY 8 of Unit*)

Overview:

In this lesson, students develop criteria for evaluating the parent-child relationship in the present and in 1920s Quebec, and discuss these issues in relation to the Aurore Gagnon case.

CLASS 1, LESSON 5 (DAY 8 OF THE UNIT)

Activities:

In groups, develop criteria for evaluating parent-child relationships. In one column, develop contemporary criteria. In another, develop standards for 1920s rural Quebec. Use the headings: the long-term best interests of the children, the long-term best interests of the parents, and society's needs.

CRITERIA	TODAY	1920s Quebec
Long-term best interests of the child		
Long-term best interests		

of the parents		
Society's needs		

2. AS A CLASS, DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Can either Marie-Anne Houde or Telesphore Gagnon be considered good parents (either in whole or in part) under either set of criteria?

Was Aurore Gagnon a “good child” by either set of standards?”

In your opinion, what do children owe their parents?

In your opinion, is corporal punishment ever justified?

By the standards of 1920's Quebec, was it appropriate to punish Aurore Gagnon? And was she punished appropriately?

LESSON 6: DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE I:

READING THE NEWS

(two classes; *DAYS 9 and 10 of Unit*)

Overview:

In this lesson, students are introduced to some of the factors that shape newspaper reporting. Students begin by examining a newspaper account of the trial, and writing a critical assessment of it. In the second class, students work in groups with those who read an account in a different newspaper, comparing different accounts of the same events in the sensational Gagnon trials. The lesson concludes with a class discussion to explain the discrepancies.

CLASS 1, LESSON 6 (DAY 9 OF UNIT)

Activities:

1. IN PAIRS. Give each pair two articles published on same day by two different papers. Ensure that half the class covers the Houde trial and half the class covers the Gagnon trial. Each student reads one article.
2. Each pair uses a chart to compare how the different articles presented the same testimony. Identify words or phrases that are inflammatory or leading.
3. INDIVIDUALLY (COMPLETE FOR HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT) Write a one page assessment of the newspaper coverage which you assessed. Does one paper give a more fair-minded account than another? Support your opinion directly with evidence from the articles.

Documents on the website to use:

Pair, for example,

La Press, April 14, 1920, « An Emotional Trial : The Gagnon Woman, Accused of Having Martyred her Step-daughter »

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/148en.html>

and
Le Devoir coverage of April 14, 1920, “A Woman at the Assizes”
<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/181en.html>

Or compare the coverage in three newspapers in one day (for a full list of newspapers, see Newspapers in the Archives section)

CLASS 2, LESSON 6 (DAY 10 OF UNIT)

Activities:

1. Rearrange partners. Partner students who reviewed the coverage of the Houde trial with students who covered the Gagnon trial. Each person should share their findings. Together, each pair should assess the quality of coverage. Did one accused receive more or less biased coverage than the other? Support your opinion with evidence from the articles.

2. Select pairs to present their findings to the class.

3. CLASS DISCUSSION – why might Houde and Gagnon have received different coverage in the press? Show students some examples from the *Echoes* section of popular culture interpretations of Aurore Gagnon’s case. Discuss with students the concept of stereotyping and have students brainstorm ways in which both Houde and Gagnon feed into popular stereotypes. What can the existence of these stereotypes tell us about family life and attitudes towards children in 1920s Quebec? Are these stereotypes still in play today?

LESSON 7: DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE II: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE (one class; DAYS 11 of Unit)

Overview:

This lesson allows students to explore in more detail some of the interpretive frameworks for understanding unacceptable violence and conflict. Students explore differing explanations of the violence against Aurore Gagnon, and are asked to examine it in terms of current psychological theories. Lesson 7

CLASS 1, LESSON 7 (DAY 11 OF UNIT)

Activities:

Students will read:

“The Gagnon Case at the Quebec Assizes,” *La Presse*, April 15, 1920

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/149en.html>*

*Note: This document is quite long, and the teacher may need to excerpt relevant passages of the testimony. It also contains violent details of child abuse and may require teacher intervention and some sensitivity exercises among students.

And one of the following documents :

« *La Presse* responds to attacks from other newspapers » *La Presse*, April 16, 1920.

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/425en.html>

« The Martyrdom of Aurore Gagnon : Why did the Authorities not Intervene ? » *La Presse*, April 17, 1920

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/152en.html>

« A pressing reform » *La Presse*, April 19, 1920, p. 4.

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/154en.html>

« The Gagnon Woman is Accountable » *La Presse*, April 21, 1920.

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/archives/newspaperormagazinearticle/187en.html>

3. In class discussion, ask students “Drawing on the newspaper coverage of the trial, who and what were people blaming for the tragedy that befell Aurore Gagnon?”

4. Using contemporary resources for abused children (i.e. the StatsCan website www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/), provide students with materials that allow students to explore the historical and contemporary context perspectives on domestic violence and violence against children.

LESSON 8: IS THIS EVENT SIGNIFICANT? THE TEXTBOOK TEST

(one class, *DAY 12 of Unit*)

Overview:

In this class, students examine their textbook to explore the kinds of issues covered by school history. Using the textbook and other kinds of historical writing, students then debate whether or not this is an historically significant event.

CLASS 1, LESSON 8 (DAY 12 OF UNIT)

Activities:

1. IN PAIRS, have students examine the coverage of French Canadian family life in their textbook. Note the presence of Aurore Gagnon’s story in, for example, Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, eds. *History of the Canadian Peoples* and its absence in most textbooks. What topics are given attention in the 1920s?

2. IN GROUPS, ask students: Is the Gagnon case an important historical event? Why/why not? Does your textbook cover it? Should your textbook cover it? Do you think any other history books cover issues like this?

3. From this discussion, students can generate criteria of what makes an event, or an issue, historically significant.

4. DEBATE: the following question:

Should all historically significant issues and events be taught in school?

LESSON 9: SHOULD MARIE-ANNE HOUDE HAVE BEEN

EXECUTED FOR HER CRIME?

(two classes, *DAYS 13 and 14 of Unit*)

Overview:

After discussing Canada's contemporary policy regarding capital punishment, students read some of the arguments for and against Madame Houde's execution. Students are given a position for or against capital punishment which they must support in a debate that takes place in the second class of this lesson.

CLASS 1, LESSON 9 (DAY 13 OF THE UNIT)

Activities:

1. Lead a discussion of capital punishment as a theme in the case. Discuss the history of capital punishment in Canada. A concise resource for developing this discussion (or alternately, assigning students to read) is online at http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2003/doc_30896.html/

2. Ask students to read the selected documents* that represent different perspectives on the death penalty in the Aurore Gagnon case.

*Suggested list of documents:

“Letter from a group of quebecois,” 12/09/1920

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/suites/marieannevitependaison/351en.html>

« The Gagnon woman's sentence is commuted,” 30/09/1920

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/suites/marieannevitependaison/341en.html>

“A Last Appeal for Clemency » 24/09/1920

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/suites/marieannevitependaison/348en.html>

“Is a Woman to Hang?” 07/08/1920

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/gagnon/suites/marieannevitependaison/347en.html>

Divide students into groups of two to complete the “Finding Evidence” worksheet.

Finding Evidence Worksheet		
Source Document	Position on Capital Punishment	Supporting Evidence
		1. 2. 3.
		1. 2. 3.
		1. 2. 3.

4. Assign students a position in favour of, or in opposition to capital punishment. Tell students to prepare for the debate the following day by studying the reasons for or against capital punishment, using arguments and evidence expressed in the 1920s.

CLASS 2, LESSON 9 (DAY 14 OF UNIT)

Activities:

Ask students to work together to prepare for the debate. Agree on the formal structures of the debate, and clarify the criteria. Make sure to include the requirements that

- a) every position/reason must be supported by evidence or argument
- b) students will be disqualified if they speak disrespectfully to each other

In preparation for the debate, students might find it useful to consider the following questions: Do you think the judge made the right decision in sentencing in this case? Should the Federal Minister of Justice have commuted that sentence? Explain, using specific examples from the historical context discussed in class and the primary documents you have read. Would the outcome have been different if had Telesphore Gagnon been found guilty of murder and sentenced to hang? Explain your opinion.

LESSON 10: WRITING BIOGRAPHY (three classes, *DAYS 15 to 17 of Unit*)

Overview:

In this lesson, students are invited to write a fair-minded biography of one three individuals deeply embroiled in the case.

CLASS 1-3, LESSON 10 (DAY 15-17 OF THE UNIT)

Activities:

Based on the evidence you have read and analyzed to date, write a fair-minded, balanced and well-reasoned 400-500 word biography of one of the following individuals. Incorporate evidence from the primary source documents into your biography, and include citations where appropriate. [Give, as an example, an entry from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, (University of Toronto Press) (or equivalent reference work of biographies).

Aurore Gagnon
Telesphore Gagnon
Marie-Anne Houde

LESSON 11: CULMINATING EVENT: POINT OF VIEW PANEL DISCUSSION (four classes)

Overview:

In this lesson, students take on the persona of a film maker asked to do a remake of the 1952 film, or of one of the key historical characters in the case. In this persona. they will participate in one of two panel discussion of key questions about this case

CLASS 1-4, LESSON 11, DAYS 17-20 OF UNIT

Students will participate in panel discussions and consider the following questions:

Was the stepmother appropriately punished?

Was the father let off too easily?
Were both parents instead caught between changing values in what is appropriate in the parent-child relationship?
Were they guilty of abuse by the standards of 1920?
Is this the story of a wicked step-mother?

IN PANEL DISCUSSION A, student participants will take on the roles of various individuals involved in the case, including the parents, the judges, the coroner, relatives and neighbours and will present their views from the perspective of the 1920s case.

IN PANEL DISCUSSION B, student participants will take on the role of present-day historians and journalists. (See Interpretations section for modern day historians' interpretations of the evidence). They will debate the questions above, but will also consider the question of how Aurore's story should be told today, in a fair minded and balanced fashion.

Allow three days for students to research and prepare their roles, and one day for the panel discussions. Students should also be able to pull from the context posters hanging in the room. Be sure to invite your administrators and other interested personnel.

Note: Students ready for more advanced intellectual work will find the potential for more challenges in Panel Discussion B.

9. The Integrated Unit Option

This unit has been designed to be flexible in its application. The suggested social sciences lesson plans have been designed to stand alone, in connection with each other, and readily lend themselves to an expanded unit at the individual teacher's discretion. The integrated components are presented as suggestions only, and will depend upon the availability of time, space, and educational resources. While students are sometimes invited to imagine themselves living in the Canadian past, rarely are they presented with the opportunity to experience elements of this life. Audio visual materials and field trips to sites of historical re-enactments can facilitate students' development of historical empathy, but these resources are not always accessible or relevant to the issue at hand. Adopting an integrated approach facilitates students' experiences of the various realities of a historical existence.

Any truly integrated unit will develop each component so that it contributes toward the overarching unit goals. In this case, the goal is to exercise critical and informed judgement as to why this highly publicised and violent incident in French-Canadian history has been adopted into the public and cultural imaginations of the Quebecois. What was its cultural significance at the time, and what is its significance now? Additionally, students will be invited to develop a critically informed awareness of the constructed nature of historical narratives. In pursuing these goals, students will simultaneously broaden their knowledge of the Canadian past, be introduced to the use of historical primary documents, and learn to exercise skills of critical analysis, evaluation, and thinking. This unit offered in the Teachers' Guide is only partially integrated in that not every suggestion offered here directly engages students in resolving the issue. Students at the senior elementary and junior secondary stages of their education can not be expected to have the time and academic resources to re-examine every proffered piece of evidence from interdisciplinary perspectives. Nevertheless, each exercise and lesson suggested here draws students further into the case itself, and encourages a personal engagement with history, and generates an opportunity to examine history and the social sciences in a more critical and informed manner.

SOME SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS AND SUBJECT AREAS:

The integrated approach to this unit incorporates a range of subject areas. However, the complete lesson plans offered here have been focused on a more narrowly conceived student body.

Science Components

Forensic sciences and criminology are educational fields that are becoming increasingly popular. The forensic and toxicological data had some impact as the events of the Aurore Gagnon case unfolded. This unit provides an excellent opportunity to draw students into scientific learning using forensics as a “hook.” The internet lists numerous literary and physical resources, and interactive presentations. Several sites offer excellent youth-oriented units and exercises which can be adapted to in-class learning. See for examples <http://www.whyfiles.org/014forensic/> or <http://www.cyberbee.com/whodunnit/crime.html/> or alternately check out the listing of science and forensics sites under <http://www.scienceteacherstuff.com/forensicscience.html/>

Mathematical Components:

Statistics: Introduction to StatsCan website, especially regarding domestic violence (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/) Uses elementary statistics skills, practices manipulation of numerical data, graphing skills. Students can create a time line for the case history, including the births of all 8 children. Uses negative and positive equations to chart numerical data in chronological order. Practices conversion of word data into numerical data for an exercise in applied mathematics.

Geographical Components:

This case could be used to explore Quebec provincial geography, and urban or human/cultural geography. Online (and on-site) materials can be used to create or analyse charts, maps and graphs concerning population demography, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and class composition of 1920s rural and urban Quebec.

Language Arts Components:

The lesson plans listed in the Social Sciences Lessons below contain a heavy emphasis on literacy and reading skills. Some of the lesson plans even culminate in an evidence-based creative writing exercise which could easily be expanded. Additionally, viewing one of the film versions of this case offers an arena to expand into the dramatic and literary arts. Students who are Francophone or bilingual could be required to view a film version in class, and then write a critical film review, incorporating their own knowledge of the case derived from the primary sources. Both through the education system, and through popular culture, most students will have been exposed to a range of literature and audio visual media genres which depict scenarios of child neglect and abuse. Dicken’s *Oliver Twist*, Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, and Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series are some notable examples. Short stories, novels, and poetry which touch upon child abuse lend themselves to a number of connections with this unit

Physical Educational Components:

If time and organisational factors permit, a physical educational component to this unit will involve students more holistically in the experience of the historical past. Physical education aspects of this unit should incorporate evidence crucial to the case, and to capturing an aura of youthfulness, and expressing early 20th century French-Canadian children's culture. Recreating children's games from the early 20th century would be an excellent way of accomplishing this goal. See for example Steven A. Cohen's [The Games we Played: A Celebration of Childhood and Imagination](#) provides information on a number of these games. Some of the popular urban games of the 1920s which can be recreated in an indoor or outdoor physical educational site are Kick the Can, Ringoleavio, and Skully. For instructions, see <http://www.streetplay.com/rulesheets/>

In addition to offering an opportunity for expanded historical empathy, such activities could incorporate a number of goals specific to the physical education curriculum. Students could research and discuss whether these games would have been played in rural Quebec as well as the rest of urban North America. They include cardiovascular fitness training, repetitive and controlled motion, and opportunities to experience a lifestyle which incorporates physical fitness.