

We are More: What Does it Mean to be Canadian?



Teaching Ideas

Reading, Thinking and Writing Poetry

Grade 6 Learning Outcomes:

Social Studies:

A1- Apply critical thinking skills – including comparing, classifying, inferring, imagining, verifying, identifying relationships, summarizing, and drawing conclusions – to a range of problems and issues
B1 – assess diverse concepts of Canadian identity

Language Arts:

A8 - use speaking and listening to respond, explain, and provide supporting evidence for their connections to texts
A9 - use speaking and listening to improve and extend thinking
B4, B5 and B6 – Select and use strategies before, during and after reading to develop understanding of text
C6 - select and use strategies during writing and representing to express and refine thoughts
C8 - use writing and representing to express personal responses and relevant opinions about experiences and texts.

Our Inquiry

The 2010 Winter Olympics placed a spotlight on Vancouver, our country, and our Canadian ways. In the closing ceremonies, William Shatner and Catherine O'hara joked about rocking canoes and people who are overly quick to apologize. During opening ceremonies, Shane Koyczan told the world that, "We Are More." But what does it mean to be Canadian?

It was difficult to write all they had to say, I was confident they were ready for some group work. With charts and felts, groups of 4 continued to chat and record their thinking. Fifteen minutes later, each group shared a few highlights. Students spoke about their knowledge of symbols such as our maple leaf, the moose, beavers and salmon and agreed that hockey was our sport and one student said that lacrosse was

How do we view ourselves and what shapes our cultural beliefs?

What are our Canadian symbols? How do we view ourselves and what shapes our cultural beliefs? It was these questions that shaped our mini inquiry as I worked with a group of grade 6 and 7 students at an elementary school in Comox, B.C.

Day One

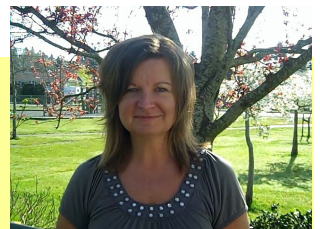
Our inquiry question, How do we view ourselves and what shapes our cultural beliefs? was projected and a whole class discussion explored our existing knowledge. As ideas were shared, notes were made around the margins of the screen. When it became dif-

too. But there was little said about our Canadian behaviours or what shapes them. It was time to layer some new information.

A Youtube clip of Shane Koyczan's We Are More was shown next. Because Shane speaks very quickly, a print version of this poem was handed out too (see copy below). Before showing this clip, I asked about voice and how it's conveyed? After viewing, students agreed that Shane's poem was loaded with voice. They defined voice as passion and a deep knowledge of topic. Next, we chunked the text, taking one or two lines at a time. Students worked in a

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Carol Walters is currently a district literacy resource teacher in the Comox Valley school district. She loves working alongside her colleague, Marty McCrick, district teacher librarian, who constantly provides her with "just the right book" to make classroom lessons lively.



turn and talk fashion with just one partner. With each new bit of text, students had a safety net to try out their thinking. As I roamed the room and listened in, I heard the gems that would carry our thinking forward. “Others need to hear that insight,” I would say quietly to one student, or, “That’s an important point. Will you share?” When students hear these messages, they are complimented and fears of sharing are reduced. Those who are often reluctant or too shy are nudged forward with encouragement. By speaking and listening to a partner and sharing with the whole class, a deeper understanding of Shane’s poem emerged. Once again, students were ready for more information.

Day two

As a literacy support teacher, I don’t have the luxury of time with each class. Our pace was faster than ideal, but during my next visit, we used a variety of short, mentor texts to add to our thinking of what it means to be Canadian. I brought in copies of Nicola Campbell’s Shi Shi Etko because I wanted students to explore and contemplate the mistakes we have made and how these have helped shape our perspectives. In this book, a family savours the final



days before their daughter is sent to a residential school. I wanted students to unearth the book’s theme. Are we a culture that learns from its mistakes? Or, will we allow history to repeat itself?

I also brought in the picture book, Every Human Has Rights, a National Geographic publication. And to further explore symbols and beliefs Heather Patterson’s, I am Canadian – a simple, yet profound book. Duke Redbird’s I Am A Canadian was yet another relatively easy text, written in short, rhythmic lines, and captured the essence of many things Canadian.

The task on this day, while working through these resources, was to borrow powerful words and short phrases that capture us as Canadian. These were to be used in a Shane Koyczan-style framework, using and repeating the words, we are more. In our earlier discussions, students had noticed how Shane used bits of our anthem in his poem, so this was added to our criteria as an effective addition to our poetic framework.

By modeling a few lines, then sharing the pen with them, their task became clear. They worked with the picture books and reshaped Shane’s poem into one of their own. During this process, they added another layer to their understanding of what it means to be Canadian, how to delve into the meaning of each text, and how to write free verse poetry. As their understanding grew, so did their writer’s voice. 🍁

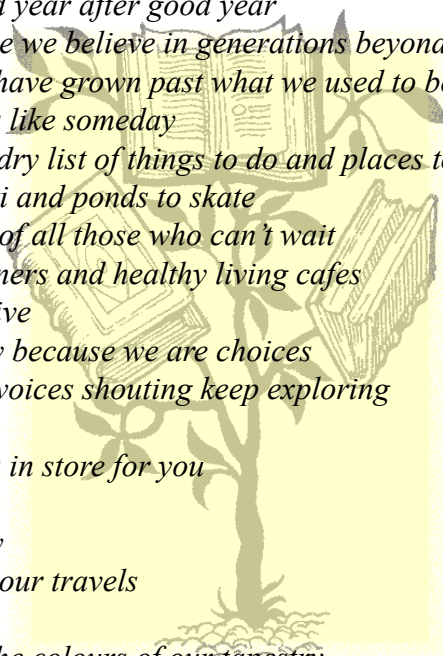
Click here for the Youtube video of We Are More by Shane Koyczan and scroll below for the text.



We Are More by Shane Koyczan

Define Canada.

*You might say that we are the home of the rocket or the great one
who inspired the little nines and the little ninety-nines,
but we're more than the Rockies and the fishing lines off the rocky coast of the Maritimes
and some say what defines us is the simple please and thank you
and as for you're welcome, we say that too
but we are more than gentile or civilized
we are an idea is the process of being realized
we are a culture strung together, then woven into a tapestry
and the design is what makes us the sum totals of our history
we are an experiment going right for a change
with influences ranging from a to zed
and yes, we say zed. We are the colours of China town and the coffee of Little Italy we dream so big that
there are those who would call our ambition an industry
because we are vineyards of good year after good year
we reforest what we clear because we believe in generations beyond our own
knowing now that so many of us have grown past what we used to be, we can stand here with all the hope
people have when they say things like someday
because we are more than a laundry list of things to do and places to see
more than countryside, hills to ski and ponds to skate
we are the abandoned hesitation of all those who can't wait
we are first rate, greasy spoon diners and healthy living cafes
a country that is all the ways to live
a nation that can give you variety because we are choices
we are millions upon millions of voices shouting keep exploring
we are more
we are the surprise the world has in store for you
it's true
Canada is the what in what's new
so don't let your luggage define your travels
each life unravels differently
and experiences are what make the colours of our tapestry
we are the true north strong and free
and what's more is that we didn't just say it
we made it be.*



References:

Campbell, Nicola. (2005). Shi-Shi-Etko. Group West
Every Human Has Rights: A Declaration for Kids. (2009). National Geographic Publication
Patterson, Heather, (2006). North Winds Press
Redbird, Duke. (2009). I Am A Canadian. Scholastic