

# Critical Challenges

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

## Sample Critical Challenge

### *Forging a diary/journal*

Taken from  
Snapshots of 19th Century Canada

#### Authors

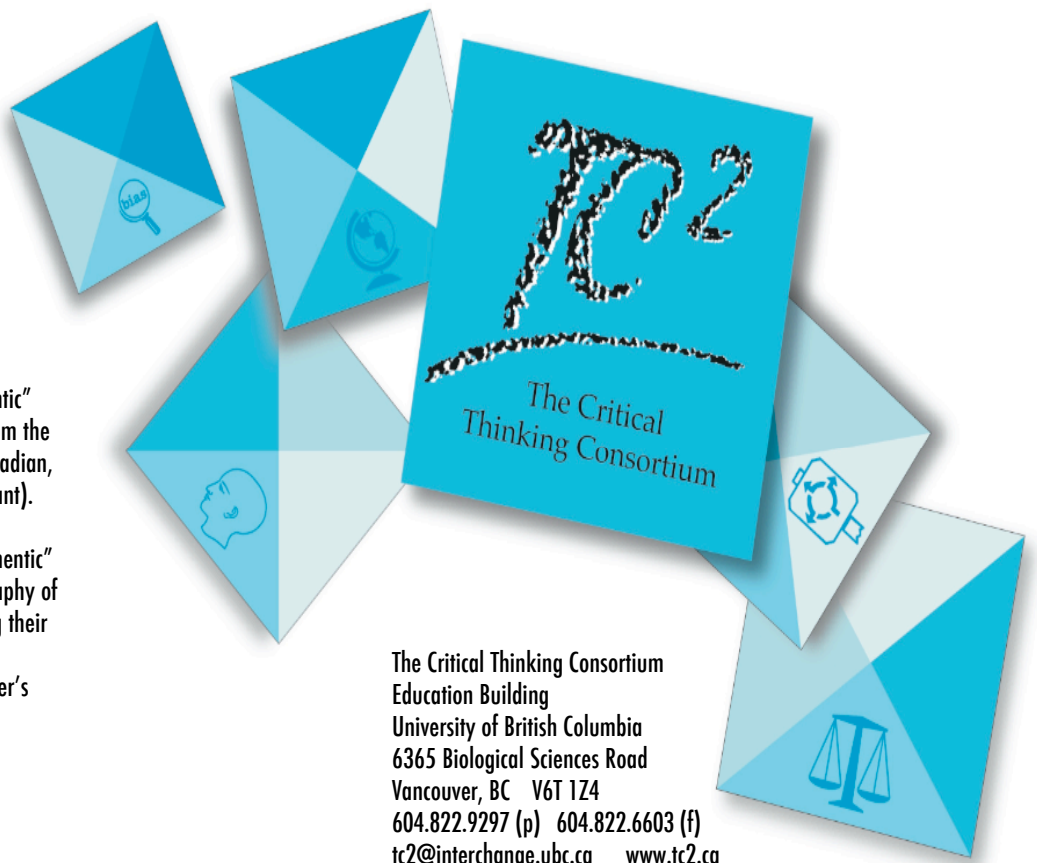
Ruth Sandwell, Mark Woloshen

#### Editors

Roland Case, Catriona Misfeldt

#### Synopsis

In this critical challenge, students write an "authentic" diary/journal entry about their assigned event from the perspective of one of the focus groups (French Canadian, English Canadian, Aboriginal peoples and immigrant). Students examine a forged historical entry and an actual entry for evidence of the criteria for an authentic diary/journal. Students then create a brief biography of an assumed character and write an entry involving their historical event as seen through the eyes of this character. Members of the team critique each other's entries before submitting their final drafts.



The Critical Thinking Consortium  
Education Building  
University of British Columbia  
6365 Biological Sciences Road  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4  
604.822.9297 (p) 604.822.6603 (f)  
tc2@interchange.ubc.ca www.tc2.ca

# Forging a diary/journal

## Critical Challenge

**Critical task** Write an “authentic” diary/journal entry about your assigned event from the perspective of an individual from one of the focus groups.

**Overview** In this critical challenge, students write an “authentic” diary/journal entry about their assigned event from the perspective of one of the focus groups (French Canadian, English Canadian, Aboriginal peoples and immigrant). Students examine a forged historical entry and an actual entry for evidence of the criteria for an “authentic” diary/journal. Students then create a brief biography of an assumed character and write an entry involving their historical event as seen through the eyes of this character. Members of the team critique each other’s entries before submitting their final drafts.

## Objectives

### Broad understanding

History is not an impersonal set of dates and names but a series of incidents with important and direct consequences for the individuals who experience them.

### Requisite tools

#### **Background knowledge**

- understanding of diary or journal genre
- knowledge of the assigned event



#### **Criteria for judgment**

- criteria for effective diary/journal (e.g., accurate, specific, revealing, empathic)



#### **Critical thinking vocabulary**



#### **Thinking strategies**



#### **Habits of mind**

- historical empathy



# Suggested Activities

## Session One

Blackline Masters #21-24

Introduce historical diary and journal

- ▶ Remind students of the police line-up activity completed during the first lesson of the unit. The purpose of that activity was to appreciate that individuals will have different perspectives on the same event. Often the personal perspectives on an historical event are most effectively portrayed in diaries or personal journals. These can provide interesting insight, not only into the great historical events of the era but also into the every day lives of the ordinary people who lived them. Indicate to the class that they will be asked to develop a diary or journal about their event from the perspective of an individual who was alive at the time. Explain that when they take on the role and write their entry students are developing historically empathy—the capacity to place themselves in the minds and times of historical persons. Point out the differences between a diary and journal:

- *diaries* tend to have much shorter, more frequent entries. They focus more on the day to day events that occur to the individual;
- *journals* tend to have much longer entries. They focus in more depth on a particular issue. They would include the writer's views on the event and/or the impact / possible impact of the event on their life.

Introduce a "forged" diary

- ▶ To help students develop their own "authentic" entry, make overhead transparencies of *Genie Macleod's diary* (Blackline Master #21) and *Gerald Keegan's journal* (Blackline Master #22). The former is a fictionalized account that parallels in an inferior manner the second journal which is an authentic account of a trip from Ireland in 1847. Place the forged diary on the overhead and ask students to comment on this diary:

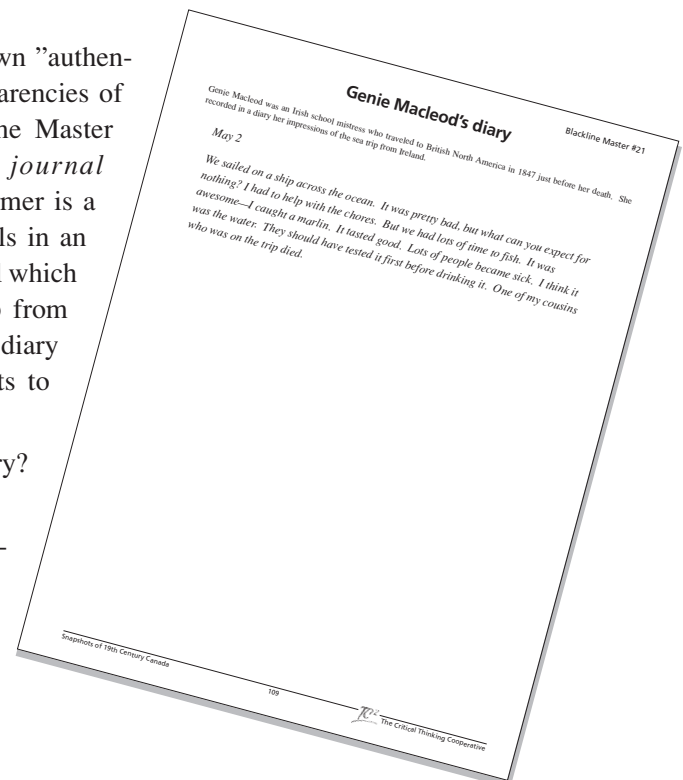
- Is it an effective diary entry? Why or why not?
- Does it seem that it was actually written by someone in 1847?



historical empathy



understanding of genre



**Criteria for historical diaries/journals**

- After a brief discussion of student reactions, distribute a copy of *Effective historical diaries/journals* (Blackline Master #23) to each student. Suggest that these four criteria reflect the qualities that a historically useful, authentic diary or journal might possess. Review the criteria in the left-hand column of the chart and ask students to examine the forged diary noting evidence for each criterion. When recording their evidence in the right-hand column, students should place a “+” in front of evidence indicating that the criterion is present and place a “-“ before evidence suggesting that the criterion is missing. After students have recorded several pieces of evidence, invite them to share their results with the rest of the class. Referring to the bottom of Blackline Master #23 ask students to comment on the following:

- What (if anything) are the strengths of this diary?
- What areas need more work?



criteria for effective entry

Criteria	Evidence (+ if criterion present - if absent)
<b>Accurate</b> • includes documented historical facts • is plausible for the time, person and place	
<b>Specific</b> • contains clear and precise details of the event	
<b>Revealing</b> • Provides information that is useful in understanding the historical event	
<b>Empathic</b> • is sensitive and realistic in presenting the writer's feelings and opinions	
<b>Comments</b> • strengths • areas needing work	

**Introduce an authentic journal**

- Display the second overhead transparency (Blackline Master #22) and invite students to read this actual journal entry by Gerald Keegan of his voyage to British North America in 1847. (Instead of the overhead, you may prefer to make copies of Blackline Master #22 for each pair of students.) Students are to look for and record evidence for each criterion outlined on Blackline Master #23. Suggest that students use a different coloured pen to record the evidence for this second sample. After a suitable length of time debrief the activity as before.

**Gerald Keegan's journal**

May 2

The gale blew itself out during the night and today it is calm, the ship pitching and rolling on a glassy swell, and the sails flapping as if they would split. There is a mist, and it is very cold, which the boatswain tells me, indicates ice is near. Lead cast and soundings found, showing we are on the Banks. Some of our people, who are fishermen, bargained with the cook for a piece of salt pork, and using it as bait when for half an hour they caught cod and dogfish as fast as they could haul them in. The school then left and fewer caught afterwards. They gave a few of the best fish to the cook and I fever caught afterwards. They gave a few of the best between decks had enough to eat. The drinking water has been growing daily worse, and now the smell of it is shocking. The barrels must have been filled from the Lifej near a sewer. Repugnant as it is to sight, smell and taste it continues to be doled out in such measure that the sick are continually crying for water with not a drop to give them. The number now sick is appalling—the young of dysentery, the old of fever, the cause of both discases starvation. Uncle's second boy died this afternoon of dysentery. Poor uncle, his lot is a sore one, yet he never complains.

**Pose the critical task**

- Once students have examined the actual journal and are familiar with the criteria for an authentic entry, present the critical task:

*Write an “authentic” diary/journal entry about your assigned event from the perspective of an individual from one the focus groups.*



**Assume a character**

- Each student in the team is to select one of the four groups (English Canadians, French Canadians, Aboriginal peoples and immigrants) within their event. In preparation for developing an entry, students should create a brief “biography” of their character including:

- name,
- occupation,
- age,
- family members (if any),
- place of birth.

Distribute one copy of *Character biographies* (Blackline Master #24) to each team for them to record the four biographies.

**Session Two**

**Blackline Master #23**

**Develop draft entry**

- When the brief biographies are complete students are to prepare a draft of their diary/journal entry from that person’s perspective. Remind students to focus on a specific aspect of their assigned event. Their entry should reflect the criteria for a historically useful, authentic diary/journal (e.g., accurate, specific, revealing, empathetic). Encourage students to reread their “snapshot” briefing sheet (Blackline Masters #10-18) looking for details to make their entry more authentic. Students may eventually want to make their final copy look “authentic”, but they need not bother about this during the draft copy stage.



*knowledge of assigned event*

**Critique the draft entry**

- When the draft entries are complete, team members should exchange and review each others’ work. Distribute another copy of the chart on Blackline Master #23 to each student. Each member is to prepare a written critique of another member’s diary/journal entry using this Blackline Master. Ask students to share their critique, emphasizing two issues:
  - strengths of the piece,
  - areas needing work.

**Prepare final entry**

- Based on the feedback received, students may revise their entries and, if desired, add other “authentic” touches to their final copy. The historical entries for all four focus groups should be mounted beneath the timeline at the appropriate place along the continuum.

Assess the entries

➤ Using the rubric *Assessing the diary/journal entry* (Blackline Master #25) to assess students' diary or journal entry. According to this rubric the assignment is worth 20 marks and is assessed on four criteria:

- accurate facts,
- specific information,
- revealing insight,
- empathic perspective.

This rubric may be used by students for peer-evaluation of the diary/journal entries.

Blackline Master #25

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the following rubric to assess student's historical journal/diary. Award intermediate marks for evidence falling between the descriptors.

	Underdeveloped	Competent	Well Developed
<b>Accurate facts</b>	Many facts are inaccurate or historically implausible. 1	A few minor details are inaccurate or historically implausible. 3	All facts are historically accurate and highly plausible. 5
<b>Specific information</b>	Almost no historical detail is provided; account is incomplete and vague. 1	Historical detail is thinly provided; account needs elaboration and more specifics. 3	Considerable historical detail is provided; account is fully developed and very specific. 5
<b>Revealing insight</b>	The entry does not add to the reader's understanding of the event described. 1	The entry provides some useful insight that helps in understanding aspects of the event. 3	The entry offers a revealing account that helps in understanding the event. 5
<b>Empathic perspective</b>	The entry does not offer an historical character's point of view. The perspective is unrealistic and impersonal. 1	The entry captures some of an historical character's point of view. The perspective is quite realistic and personal. 3	The entry richly imagines an historical character's point of view. The perspective is very realistic and personal. 5
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>5</b>

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

/ 20

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The Critical Thinking Cooperative

## Genie Macleod's diary

Genie Macleod was an Irish school mistress who traveled to British North America in 1847 just before her death. She recorded in a diary her impressions of the sea trip from Ireland.

*May 2*

*We sailed on a ship across the ocean. It was pretty bad, but what can you expect for nothing? I had to help with the chores. But we had lots of time to fish. It was awesome—I caught a marlin. It tasted good. Lots of people became sick. I think it was the water. They should have tested it first before drinking it. One of my cousins who was on the trip died.*

## Gerald Keegan's journal

Gerald Keegan was an Irish school master who visited British North America in 1847 just before he died. In a daily journal he recorded his impressions of the trip from Ireland.

*May 2*

*The gale blew itself out during the night and today it is calm, the ship pitching and rolling on a glassy swell, and the sails flapping as if they would split. There is a mist, and it is very cold, which the boatswain tells me, indicates ice is near. Lead cast and soundings found, showing we are on the Banks. Some of our people, who are fishermen, bargained with the cook for a piece of salt pork and using it as bait cast our lines. Their patience was tried for a while, until we struck a school of fish, when for half an hour they caught cod and dogfish as fast as they could haul them in. The school then left and fewer caught afterwards. They gave a few of the best fish to the cook and in consideration, he cooked what they had, so for one day all between decks had enough to eat. The drinking water has been growing daily worse, and now the smell of it is shocking. The barrels must have been filled from the Liffey near a sewer. Repugnant as it is to sight, smell and taste it continues to be doled out in such meagre measure that the sick are continually crying for water with not a drop to give them. The number now sick is appalling—the young of dysentery, the old of fever, the cause of both diseases starvation. Uncle's second boy died this afternoon of dysentery. Poor uncle, his lot is a sore one, yet he never complains.*

Excerpts from Gerald Keegan's "Journal of the Voyage from Ireland, 1847," Cited in 'A Few Acres of Snow': Documents in Canadian History, 1577-1867, Thomas Thorner, ed. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1997).



## Effective historical diaries/journals

Criteria	Evidence (+ if criterion present; – if absent )
<p><b>Accurate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• includes documented historical facts</li> <li>• is plausible for the time, person and place</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Specific</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contains clear and precise details of the event</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Revealing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides information that is useful in understanding the historical event</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Empathic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is sensitive and realistic in presenting the writer's feelings and opinions</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengths</li> <li>• areas needing work</li> </ul>	

# Character biographies

Event: \_\_\_\_\_

**Diarist****Biography****English  
Canadian**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Family: \_\_\_\_\_ Residence : \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Education: \_\_\_\_\_

**French  
Canadian**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Family: \_\_\_\_\_ Residence : \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Education: \_\_\_\_\_

**Aboriginal  
person**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Family: \_\_\_\_\_ Residence : \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Education: \_\_\_\_\_

**Immigrant**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Family: \_\_\_\_\_ Residence : \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Education: \_\_\_\_\_

## Assessing the journal/diary

Use the following rubric to assess student's historical journal/diary. Award intermediate marks for evidence falling between the descriptors.

	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>Competent</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Accurate facts</b>	Many facts are inaccurate or historically implausible. 1	A few minor details are inaccurate or historically implausible. 3	All facts are historically accurate and highly plausible. 5
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**TOTAL****/ 20**

Comments: