

Grades 6-8

Learning about ethical judgment

Overview

This lesson is one of a series that introduces six historical thinking concepts developed by Peter Seixas of the University of British Columbia. Each lesson supports teachers in using a video to introduce one of the concepts. The videos are available at <http://www.tc2.ca/videos.php>. The lessons are available in different versions for grades 6-8 and grades 9-12.

This lesson's written materials and six-minute *Ethical Judgment* video offer an engaging way to introduce students in grades 6-8 to the concept of ethical judgment. The video looks at ethical judgments in historical accounts using the decision of the Canadian government to intern Ukrainians during WW I to illustrate explicit and implicit judgments. It invites students to raise questions about the ethics of this past action by asking what the government knew at the time, whose interests were considered and the evidence taken into account.

Ethical judgment

Is what happened right and fair? When studying the past, historians do not just describe what happened, they also consider whether actions and decisions were fair or unjust, or should or should not have been taken. Ethical judgments are about the effects of actions or decisions on people. Other kinds of judgments made in history are not ethical in nature.

Objectives

Students will understand that:

- ethical judgments may be positive or negative
- ethical judgments should consider interests and perspectives of all key groups
- ethical judgments of the past must be sensitive to historical context
- the quality of ethical judgments depends on adequacy of the evidence

This resource was developed with contributions from:



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Suggested activities

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Discuss judgments in history

Invite students to consider the question: *Is history fact or judgment?* Listen freely to responses and have a brief class discussion without giving any examples or further guidance. Present students with the following three statements about a historical event familiar to them:

- First Nations Chief Theresa Spence attempted to coerce Prime Minister Stephen Harper into meeting with her to address issues in her community, Attiwapiskat, Ontario by going on a hunger strike and initiating troublesome disruptions and blockades across Canada under the banner, "Idle No More".
- First Nations Chief Theresa Spence bravely went on a hunger strike to re-establish a fair and balanced relationship for First Nations communities with the government of Canada, sparking nationwide solidarity protests and marches as part of the 'Idle No More' movement.
- First Nations Chief Theresa Spence went on a hunger strike in order to meet with Prime Minister Stephen Harper to address longstanding concerns in First Nations communities. Her actions became the symbol of a nationwide movement known as "Idle No More".

Ask students to consider the statements and determine what is different about them and whether they are facts or judgments. (Possible student response: *The first two statements are include judgmental language either condemning or justifying the actions described, while the third statement is neutral.*)

Encourage students to discuss the difficulties in teasing out fact from judgment and invite them to consider what they would need to know in order to be able to judge whether judgments offered in these statements are justified or not. (Possible student response: *More background knowledge is needed for each statement, as well as the identity of those making them.*)

Connect to the lesson

Relate this more familiar event in history to an event that is likely less familiar, that of Ukrainian internment in Canada during the WW I era. Invite students to examine the following statements and determine:

- whether they are fact or judgment
- which statement is most defensible

In order to determine which statement is most defensible, explain to students that they must consider the following criteria to judge the quality of their ethical judgment:

- Interests and perspectives of all key groups are considered
- Beliefs at the time are considered
- Adequate relevant evidence is consulted

Learning about ethical judgment

Introduce the statements about Ukrainian internment

Statement 1: In World War I, the Canadian government took more than 8 000 people away from their homes and families, confiscated their possessions, forced them to live in substandard conditions and made them do hard labour as though they were slaves for up to six years – all because they were Ukrainian.

Statement 2: During World War I, the Canadian government had no choice but to detain alien enemies associated by heritage with the Austro-Hungarian Empire in order to protect its citizens.

Discuss the statements

Invite students to present their responses. Ask students to identify words used in each statement which reveal the judgment being made. Following class discussion, share the definition of an ethical judgment with students:

Ethical judgments are attempts to assess the appropriateness of past actions and our current responses to them, remaining mindful of present values and sensibilities and considering fully the norms of the time.

Introduce different types of ethical judgments

Tell students that ethical judgments found in historical accounts take various forms. Ethical judgments can be positive or negative. For example, the statement, “the quality of life in Canada is far better today than it was in the 1930s,” is an example of a positive judgment, while the statement, “Income inequality continues to affect the quality of life of many Canadians,” is an example of a negative judgment.

DURING THE VIDEO

Invite students to view the video. Ask students to use the activity sheet *Identifying ethical judgments* to note any factors in the video that might help them decide which historical account of the internment is most defensible. If possible, provide students with multiple opportunities for viewing.

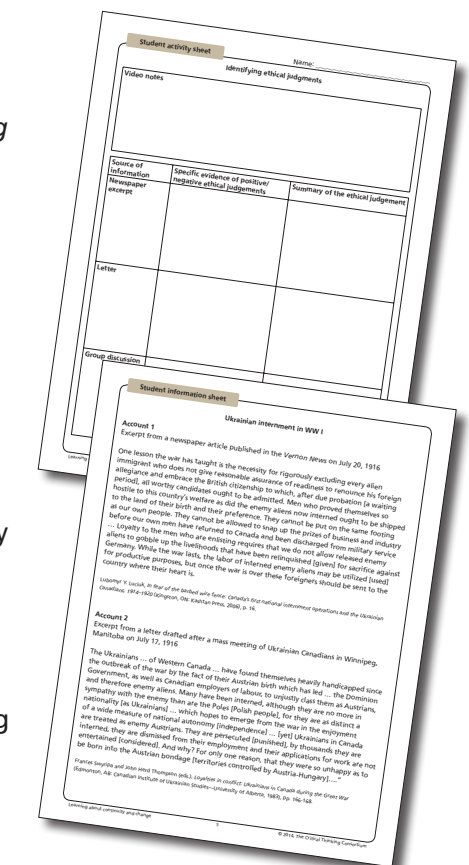
AFTER THE VIDEO

Identify ethical judgments

Invite students to read the two historical accounts on the information sheet *Ukrainian internment in World War I*. In the corresponding sections of the activity sheet, *Identifying ethical judgements*, ask students to:

- provide specific evidence of ethical judgements
- identify what types of ethical judgments are present (implicit or explicit; positive or negative)
- summarize the ethical judgment regarding internment of Ukrainians during WW I expressed in each article

You may wish to ask students to share and hone these statements in small groups or as a class, possibly referring to the sample response sheet provided.



Learning about ethical judgment

Assess ethical judgments

Invite students to use the activity sheet, *Assessing ethical judgments*, to compare the historical accounts of the Ukrainian internment and to determine which of the two accounts is more justifiable. Remind students that when assessing the justifiability of ethical judgements, they need to provide evidence in light of the criteria established earlier.

Share assessment of ethical judgments

Ask students to discuss their assessments in pairs or small groups. Focus the discussion on whether the judgments in the accounts are reasonable given the criteria. If students have difficulty choosing one account as more reasonable than the other, do not force the point, provided they can produce good reasons for judging them to be relatively equal in their validity.

Discuss with students how this exercise relates to the study of all historical accounts, including textbooks, and that accepting ethical judgments of others given in textbooks without adequate evidence is unwise.

Assessment for understanding

In order to assess whether students are beginning to develop an understanding of ethical judgement, you might use the following activities:

- Listen to student conversations when they are asked to discuss ethical judgement. Are they using criteria and evidence in their conversations?
- When identifying forms of ethical judgements, do they choose powerful and relevant pieces of evidence to support their justifications?
- Examine student use of the activity sheet *Assessing ethical judgements*.
- Have they selected accurate and relevant evidence? Do their ratings reflect an understanding of the evidence?
- At a later date, when students are once again asked to identify ethical judgements of a historical event, do they continue to consider the criteria discussed during this lesson?

The image shows a student activity sheet titled "Assessing ethical judgments". It includes a header for "Name:" and a table with four criteria and a 5-point evidence scale. The criteria are: 1. Ethical conclusions: What are the ethical conclusions arrived at in the account and what evidence is provided to support these conclusions? 2. Complete account: Does the account include the important information required to make a fair ethical judgment? 3. Balanced perspective: How fairly does the account represent the key perspectives on the topic? 4. Credible details: How accurate and trustworthy are the details included in the account? 5. Reasonable ethical judgments: How reasonable are the ethical judgments arrived at in the account? The evidence scale ranges from 1 (Completely unreasonable) to 5 (Very reasonable).

TAKING IT FURTHER

The following activities might be used to further develop the concept of ethical judgment:

- Regularly invite students to assess actions of groups or individuals (e.g., was Fraser a rogue or a hero?).
- Research various perspectives on historic issues of injustice (e.g., residential schooling of Canadian Aboriginals) and assign responsibility to individuals, groups or institutions.
- Assess responsibility of current generations (e.g., what should the Canadian government do regarding Attawapiskat, or what, if any, redress is appropriate for the descendants of Ukrainians interned during WW I).

Ukrainian internment in WW I

Account 1

Excerpt from a newspaper article published in the *Vernon News* on July 20, 1916

One lesson the war has taught is the necessity for rigorously excluding every alien immigrant who does not give reasonable assurance of readiness to renounce his foreign allegiance and embrace the British citizenship to which, after due probation [a waiting period], all worthy candidates ought to be admitted. Men who proved themselves so hostile to this country's welfare as did the enemy aliens now interned ought to be shipped to the land of their birth and their preference. They cannot be put on the same footing as our own people. They cannot be allowed to snap up the prizes of business and industry before our own men have returned to Canada and been discharged from military service ... Loyalty to the men who are enlisting requires that we do not allow released enemy aliens to gobble up the livelihoods that have been relinquished [given] for sacrifice against Germany. While the war lasts, the labor of interned enemy aliens may be utilized [used] for productive purposes, but once the war is over these foreigners should be sent to the country where their heart is.

Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, *In fear of the barbed wire fence: Canada's first national internment operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914–1920* (Kingston, ON: Kashtan Press, 2006), p. 16.

Account 2

Excerpt from a letter drafted after a mass meeting of Ukrainian Canadians in Winnipeg, Manitoba on July 17, 1916

The Ukrainians ... of Western Canada ... have found themselves heavily handicapped since the outbreak of the war by the fact of their Austrian birth which has led ... the Dominion Government, as well as Canadian employers of labour, to unjustly class them as Austrians, and therefore enemy aliens. Many have been interned, although they are no more in sympathy with the enemy than are the Poles [Polish people], for they are as distinct a nationality [as Ukrainians] ... which hopes to emerge from the war in the enjoyment of a wide measure of national autonomy [independence] ... [yet] Ukrainians in Canada are treated as enemy Austrians. They are persecuted [punished], by thousands they are interned, they are dismissed from their employment and their applications for work are not entertained [considered]. And why? For only one reason, that they were so unhappy as to be born into the Austrian bondage [territories controlled by Austria-Hungary]...."

Frances Swyripa and John Herd Thompson (eds.), *Loyalties in conflict: Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War* (Edmonton, AB: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies—University of Alberta, 1983), pp. 166-168.

Identifying ethical judgments

Video notes

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Source of information	Specific evidence of positive/negative ethical judgements	Summary of the ethical judgement
Newspaper excerpt		
Letter		
Group discussion		

Identifying ethical judgments

Video notes

Source of information	Specific evidence of positive/negative ethical judgements	Summary of the ethical judgement
Newspaper excerpt		<i>Those who are interned are enemy aliens and cannot be trusted. They are a threat to Canadian security during the war and should be deported to the land of their birth after the war ends.</i>
Letter		<i>Ukrainians have been wrongly classified as enemy aliens by the Canadian government and by employers because of their Austrian birth. They are not disloyal to Canada, but by being labelled enemy aliens, they have experienced great hardships.</i>
Group discussion		

Assessing ethical judgments

Criteria	Evidence 1 = Completely unreasonable, 5 = Very reasonable				
<p>Ethical conclusions: What are the ethical conclusions arrived at in the account and what evidence is provided to support these conclusions?</p>	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Complete account: Does the account include the important information required to make a fair ethical judgment?</p>	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Balanced perspectives: How fairly does the account represent the key perspectives on the topic?</p>	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Credible details: How accurate and trustworthy are the details included in the account?</p>	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Reasonable ethical judgments: How reasonable are the ethical judgments arrived at in the account?</p>					
<p>Evidence:</p>	1	2	3	4	5