

# Developing understanding through literature

*What might Ukrainian and other European immigrants have felt and thought?*

## CRITICAL CHALLENGE

Create a list of insightful inferences about the thoughts and feelings of characters in a story about Ukrainian immigrants using clues from the text and the illustrations.

## SUMMARY

In this two-part lesson, students listen to and discuss the story of two Ukrainian immigrants to Canada. Before reading, students examine an illustration from the story and anticipate some of the possible thoughts and feelings experienced by the main characters. As they are reading, students pause to discuss key moments in the text and infer additional thoughts and feelings experienced by the two main characters. After reading, students view a key illustration from the story and examine its interesting, unusual and/or unexpected features in order to discover further clues about the characters' thoughts and feelings. The lesson concludes with students sharing their collected list of thoughts and feelings.

## OBJECTIVES

### Broad understanding

Understanding the feelings, thoughts and experiences of Ukrainian and other European immigrants affected by Canada's first national internment operations of 1914–1920

### Requisite tools

#### *Background knowledge*

- knowledge of internment operations in Canada

#### *Critical thinking vocabulary*

- empathy
- observation
- inference

#### *Thinking strategies*

- making observations and drawing inferences

#### *Habits of mind*

- empathetic thinking



## **MATERIALS**

### **Briefing sheets**

Understanding European immigration to Canada, 1891–1914 (Briefing sheet #3)

### **Literature**

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch, illus. Michael Martchenko. *Silver Threads*. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2004.

### **Activity sheets**

Exploring an illustration (Activity sheet #E-1)

Exploring an illustration—sample answers (Activity sheet #E-2)

### **Background information for teachers**

For more information on European immigration to Canada, consider reading *Background information for teachers: European immigration to Canada, 1891–1914* (Briefing sheet #1) prior to teaching this lesson. This briefing sheet is intended to support teachers with historical details related to the content of this lesson and is not intended for student use.

*Silver Threads* is a picture book written by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch and illustrated by Michael Martchenko. It tells the story of a newlywed couple, Anna and Ivan, and their journey to Canada to begin a new life. When Anna and Ivan first arrive, they must work hard to clear their land, build a home and plant their crops. When the First World War breaks out, Ivan is taken prisoner as an enemy of Canada and confined in an internment camp with other Ukrainian Canadians. Anna is left at home alone to manage the farm and hopes one day to be reunited with Ivan.

# Suggested Activities

---


## Share initial inferences

### SESSION 1

1. Display or project the cover illustration for students to view.
2. Share the following introduction with students: This is the story of Anna and Ivan, a husband and wife who left their home in Ukraine to come to Canada in search of a new life. While Anna and Ivan are fictional characters, their experiences in this story actually did happen to many people who immigrated to Canada during the late 1800s and early 1900s.
3. Pose the question: “What are some of the possible thoughts and emotions that Anna and Ivan might have felt about leaving their home to come to Canada?”
4. Prompt students to revisit the cover illustration, and invite them to share their ideas about what the main characters might be thinking and feeling. Encourage students to be empathetic when thinking about what the characters might have felt.
5. Invite students to use the sentence starter “I think they might be feeling/ thinking...” to begin their ideas. Student responses may include:
  - I think Anna and Ivan might be feeling excited about beginning their new lives in Canada.
  - I think Anna and Ivan might be thinking about where their new home might be and how much work it will take to move to Canada.
  - I think they might be feeling a bit nervous about leaving their house and their friends behind.
6. Share the lesson challenge with students: *Create a list of insightful inferences about the thoughts and feelings of characters in a story about Ukrainian immigrants using clues from the text and the illustrations.*
7. Direct students to begin a list containing one or more of their initial inferences. Explain to students that they will have an opportunity to infer more about Anna and Ivan’s thoughts and feelings throughout the lesson.

## Infer thoughts and feelings from text clues

1. Explain to students that they can infer the thoughts and feelings of characters using clues that the author provides in the text. If drawing inferences is new for students, consider using the activities from Module 1, Lesson B to help students draw reasonable inferences.
2. Divide students into pairs and direct them to have their lists of thoughts and feelings ready. Explain that they will discuss key moments in the story with their partner and add additional thoughts and feelings to their lists as they read more.
3. Read the story aloud, stopping at the three points in the text listed below to ask the related prompting questions. At each point, invite students to turn to their partner and share their thoughts on the question.

- 
4. Direct students to use clues in the text to infer what the characters may have been thinking and feeling. Remind students to use the sentence starter: “They might be feeling/thinking...”
  5. Instruct students to add their inferences to the list of thoughts and feelings started at the beginning of the lesson.

### **Stopping point #1**

“... and in the darkness Anna and Ivan left their home” (p. 5).

Prompting questions: “Why might Anna and Ivan be leaving their home in Bukovyna? What clues in the text support your thinking?”

Thoughts and feelings suggested by students might include:

- They might feel upset and scared because they are seeing people being chained and taken away from the village.
- They are feeling afraid and worried because the text says that the emperor has stolen people’s lands.
- They might be thinking that they don’t want their land stolen from them.
- Ivan and Anna might be thinking that their lives will be better in Canada because there was a sign in the village saying that there is lots of land to farm.

### **Stopping point #2**

“They planted their first small crop of wheat” (p. 12).

Prompting questions: “What are some of the thoughts and feelings Anna and Ivan may have had while building their new life in Canada? What clues in the text make you think this?”

Thoughts and feelings suggested by students might include:

- They might be feeling tired because they had to remove all the trees that covered their land before building their house and planting their crops.
- They might feel happy and safe because they are working together and there is no war in Canada.
- They could be hungry and worried because it says in the text that food was scarce and they could only plant a small crop of wheat.

### **Stopping point #3**

“As the first star appeared, Anna prayed for her husband’s return” (p. 20).

Prompting questions: “What are some of the thoughts and feelings Anna may have experienced while she was separated from Ivan? What clues in the text make you think this?”

Thoughts and feelings suggested by students might include:

- Anna might feel lonely because she has to do all the farm work by herself and she doesn’t have Ivan to help pull the plough.
- Anna is worried she might lose the farm because she isn’t able to clear any more land without Ivan there to help.
- She may be heartbroken because the official told her that if Ivan hasn’t come home yet then he is probably dead.

## Make initial observations

- Invite students each to share one thought or feeling they've inferred using the clues in the text. Remind students to share the clues they used to draw their inferences.

## SESSION 2

- Display the illustration found on page 18 of *Silver Threads*. This illustration depicts Anna planting and tending the crops that grow around the stumps that remain on their land.
- Provide each student with a copy of *Exploring an illustration* (Activity sheet #E-1).
- Invite students to begin by sharing what they first observe in the illustration. Keep this initial sharing simple by inviting students to share their initial observations. Student observations may include: a house, chimney smoke, geese, Anna, plants, tree stumps.
- Instruct students to record these observations in the column headed "What do you see?" on the activity sheet.
- Remind students of the lesson challenge: *Draw insightful inferences about the thoughts and feelings of characters in a story about Ukrainian immigrants using clues from the text and the illustrations.*
- Explain to students that they will now explore how an illustration in a story can help them to better understand what characters might be thinking and feeling.

**Lesson E** Activity sheet #E-1

**Exploring an illustration**

Looking carefully at the visual elements in illustrations can help you deepen your understanding of character and story elements. Use the chart below to help you analyze the elements within an illustration.

Illustration:

What do you see?	Which visual elements (colour, shape, texture, spatial layout, interesting, unusual or surprising)?	What insightful inferences can you draw about Anna's thoughts, feelings and experiences?

Developing Understanding Through the Arts 108 The Critical Thinking Consortium

## Consider specific details in an illustration

- Direct student attention to the prompt at the top of the second column of the activity sheet.
- Ask students to review their initial observations and invite them to share any details from the illustration that they think are interesting, unusual and/or surprising. To stimulate student thinking you might consider asking questions such as:
  - Which parts of the illustration do you notice right away?
  - Are there any details in the illustration that surprise you or make you curious?
  - Is there anything in the illustration that appears unusual or different from the way you would expect to see it?
- Direct students to record these details in the second column of the activity sheet. See *Exploring an illustration—sample answers* (Activity sheet #E-2) for possible illustration features that students may notice and base inferences on.

**Lesson E** Activity sheet #E-2

**Exploring an illustration—sample answers**

Looking carefully at the visual elements in illustrations can help you deepen your understanding of character and story elements. Use the chart below to help you analyze the elements within an illustration.

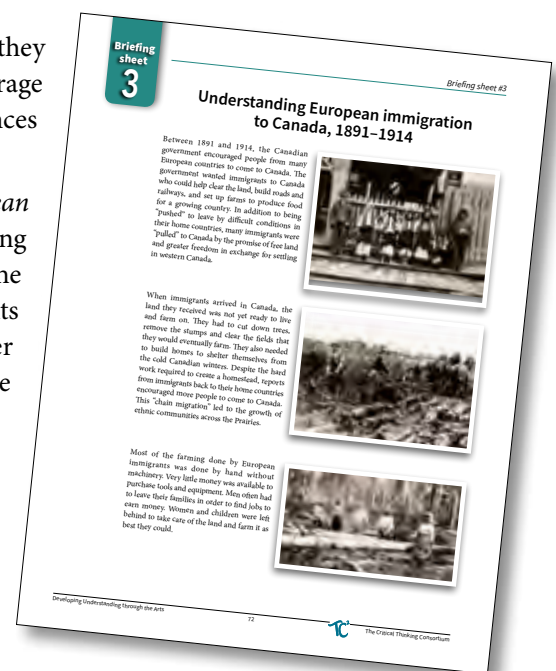
Illustration: page 18 from *Silver Threads* on the Farm

What do you see?	Which visual elements (colour, shape, texture, spatial layout, interesting, unusual or surprising)?	What insightful inferences can you draw about Anna's thoughts, feelings and experiences?
plants	The stumps look really big.	The stumps could be big because it is showing us how Anna is working and how hard she is getting things done.
stumps	The plants look like they are spreading across the page.	Anna's house being small might mean that Anna's family is getting smaller and she is feeling lonely.
Anna	The house is from large to small across the page.	The plants might symbolize Anna's hope for Ivan's return. They are spreading because she isn't giving up that one day Ivan will come back to her.
house	Anna's house is really small in the background.	
geese	The trees look like clouds and are orange.	
blue sky		
trees		

Developing Understanding Through the Arts 108 The Critical Thinking Consortium

## Draw insightful inferences

1. Select one of the recorded details (for example, the oversized tree stump) from the second column to discuss as a whole group.
2. Record the prompt from the third column of the activity sheet on a sheet of chart paper: “What insightful inferences can you draw about Anna’s thoughts and feelings?”
3. Encourage students to be insightful by inviting them to first identify the obvious and then to look for deeper connections and meanings. For example, a student may say that the tree stump was big because it was a large tree. Prompt students to think about whether the tree stump might be a symbol for something else and to consider what other messages its size might represent.
4. Invite students to draw inferences creatively by encouraging them to combine what they observe in the illustration and the information from the text.
5. Listen for opportunities for the group to refine and build upon individual inferences. For example, one student may infer that the illustrator made the stump large because it represents one of Anna’s bigger challenges on the farm. Prompt students to build on this by asking them to rephrase or offer different thoughts on the stump as a symbol. Sample prompts include:
  - What might be added to the inference to make it more insightful?
  - Are there other ideas or details that might connect to what has been shared?
  - Can you explain this same idea in another way?
6. Record the student thinking shared during this discussion beneath the chart paper prompt. Invite students to select one of these inferences to add to their compiled list of thoughts and feelings.
7. Continue with other parts of the illustration that students identified as interesting, unusual and/or unexpected on the activity sheet. You may wish to continue these discussions as a whole group or in pairs or small groups. Remind students to record their insightful inferences in the third column on the activity sheet.
8. Prompt students to review the inferences they have recorded on the activity sheet. Encourage them to transfer one or more of these inferences to their thoughts and feelings list.
9. Consider distributing *Understanding European immigration to Canada, 1890–1914* (Briefing sheet #3) to pairs of students if not used in the previous lesson. You may wish to have students read the information provided and infer additional thoughts and feelings in response to their reading.



## Reflect on the learning

1. Invite students to select three thoughts or feelings from their list that they think may have been shared by other European immigrants during this time. Prompt students to share their selections in small groups or as a whole class.
2. Invite students to suggest some of the long-term effects of the internment experience. Possible student responses might include feelings of betrayal, mistrust, anger or resentment, and the undermining of communities.

## Exploring an illustration

Looking carefully at the visual elements in illustrations can help you deepen your understanding of character and story elements. Use the chart below to help you analyze the elements within an illustration.

Illustration: \_\_\_\_\_

What do you see?	Which visual elements (colour, shape, texture, space) appear <i>interesting, unusual</i> or <i>surprising</i> ?	What insightful inferences can you draw about Anna's thoughts, feelings and experiences?



## Exploring an illustration—sample answers

Looking carefully at the visual art elements in illustrations can help you deepen your understanding of character and story elements. Use the chart below to help you analyze the elements within an illustration.

Illustration: page 18, Anna works on the farm

What do you see?	Which visual elements (colour, shape, texture, space) appear <b>interesting, unusual</b> or <b>surprising</b> ?	What insightful inferences can you draw about Anna's thoughts, feelings and experiences?
plants	The stump looks really big.	The stump could be big because it is showing us how Anna is worried that her problems are getting bigger now that Ivan is gone.
stumps	The plants look like they are spreading across the page.	
Anna	The leaves go from large to small across the page.	Anna's house being small might mean that their family is getting smaller and she is feeling lonely.
house	Anna's house is really small in the background.	
geese		
blue sky	The trees look like clouds and are orange.	The plants might symbolize Anna's hope for Ivan's return. They are spreading because she isn't giving up that one day Ivan will come back to her.
trees		

# Background information for teachers: European immigration to Canada, 1891–1914

*This information is intended to support teachers with historical details related to the content of this unit and is not intended for student use.*

After Confederation, the Canadian government wanted to attract immigrants, particularly to settle on the Prairies. The government was concerned about the possibility of the United States annexing the Prairies, so it wanted to establish a Canadian population there. People were needed to clear the land, build roads and railways, and establish farms to feed a growing population.

European immigrants were actively encouraged by the Canadian government to come to Canada until 1914, when the First World War broke out and immigration rates radically declined due to wartime conditions. Europeans who were encouraged to immigrate included Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, Romanians, Serbians, Slovaks and Slovenes. Canada's first Immigration Act, passed in 1869, contained few restrictions on immigration because Canada's immigration policy aimed to encourage settlement of the West. Although some immigrants arrived during the 1870s and 1880s, a major immigration boom did not start until the 1890s.

Clifford Sifton was the Minister of the Interior, the department that handled immigration, in Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government, from 1896 to 1905. His policy was to try and attract immigrant farmers from northern and eastern European countries, in part because they were experienced farmers used to basic living conditions, in part because they were used to a harsh climate in Europe that was similar to the prairie climate. Sifton's policies fuelled an immigration boom while he headed up this department.

The Europeans who immigrated to the Canadian Prairies left Europe for several reasons. Many of them were poor tenant farmers with only small plots to farm. The promise of land ownership and economic freedom was very attractive. In addition, conditions in Europe were difficult: political unrest and the threat of war looming, overpopulation due to rising birth rates and declining mortality rates, and conflict over scarce resources during an economic recession, all contributed to the decision to go to Canada to seek a better life.

The first Ukrainian immigrants to arrive in Canada, in 1891, were Ivan Pylypiw and Wasyl Eleniak. The population of the Prairies exploded after this as a result of Canada's policies and conditions in Europe. Between 1896 and 1914, about 170,000 Ukrainians immigrated to the prairie provinces. Although many Ukrainians and other Europeans homesteaded in the prairie provinces, after 1905 immigrants were also encouraged to settle in Ontario and Quebec to provide labour for the forestry and mining industries and to work in factories and on railway construction.

In exchange for settling in western Canada, immigrants were promised 160 acres (64.7 hectares) of “free” land to homestead on and greater economic, religious and political freedoms than they had in their home countries. To obtain legal title to their homesteads, immigrants were required to clear the land of trees and construct temporary shelters. While no money was paid for the homesteads directly except for a \$10 registration fee, there was a price to pay in materials and labour.

In their home countries, immigrants that had been farmers lived in towns or villages and farmed on the surrounding land. After moving to Canada, government requirements meant that immigrants had to build their homesteads far apart. This often contributed to immigrants feeling isolated and alone. However, the Prairies were also settled in what were called block settlements—where people of shared ethnic background clustered together, where they could create communities with a similar heritage.

Knowing that forests would provide important resources, many Ukrainian immigrants chose to settle near the aspen and poplar forests of western Canada. As the land was cleared, trees were cut down and used as building material. Building a house usually involved many months of hard work. Cold Canadian winters meant that building a sturdy, warm home was a top priority. The first shelters built on the Prairies by Ukrainian immigrants, which were called *boordays* or *kurniks*, were made from branches, clay and thatched grass. Building a house required many months of hard work.

Much of the farming done by these immigrants was done with basic tools and equipment. Men often needed to leave their families in order to find jobs to earn money. Women and children were left behind to take care of the land and farm as best they could.

The immigration boom that occurred from the late eighteenth century to 1914 had a major impact on the development of the Prairie provinces. The many European communities that were established during this time have continued to shape the economy and culture of the Prairies to the present day.

Other sources of information on immigration to Canada that may be useful for teachers include:

- Conrad, Margaret and Alvin Finkel. *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, vol. 2. Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2015.
- Fodchuk, Roman Paul. *Zhorna: Material Culture of the Ukrainian Pioneers*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006.
- Francis, R. Douglas and Chris Kitzan, eds. *The Prairie West as Promised Land*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007.
- Lehr, John C. *Community and Frontier: A Ukrainian Settlement in the Canadian Parkland*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011.
- Luciuk, L. Y. and B. S. Kordan. *Creating a Landscape: A Geography of Ukrainians in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.
- Mucz, Michael. *Baba's Kitchen Medicines: Folk Remedies of the Ukrainian Settlers in Western Canada*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012.
- Rollings-Magnusson, Sandra. *Heavy Burdens on Small Shoulders: The Labour of Pioneer Children on the Canadian Prairies*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009.

## Understanding European immigration to Canada, 1891–1914

Between 1891 and 1914, the Canadian government encouraged people from many European countries to come to Canada. The government wanted immigrants to Canada who could help clear the land, build roads and railways, and set up farms to produce food for a growing country. In addition to being “pushed” to leave by difficult conditions in their home countries, many immigrants were “pulled” to Canada by the promise of free land and greater freedom in exchange for settling in western Canada.



When immigrants arrived in Canada, the land they received was not yet ready to live and farm on. They had to cut down trees, remove the stumps and clear the fields that they would eventually farm. They also needed to build homes to shelter themselves from the cold Canadian winters. Despite the hard work required to create a homestead, reports from immigrants back to their home countries encouraged more people to come to Canada. This “chain migration” led to the growth of ethnic communities across the Prairies.



Most of the farming done by European immigrants was done by hand without machinery. Very little money was available to purchase tools and equipment. Men often had to leave their families in order to find jobs to earn money. Women and children were left behind to take care of the land and farm it as best they could.

