The Power of One

Developed By
Victoria Baldwin - Thomas

Suggested Length
2 – 3 class periods per lesson

Suggested Grade Level(s)
10, 11, 12

Subject Areas
Social Studies, Visual Arts, Language Arts

Overview
In this unit students will learn about the principles on which Canada was founded and the elements that affect federal and provincial policy making. They will be empowered with the knowledge that their opinion counts – changes in public policy can start with one citizen and blossom into a large scale unit of concerned voters.

Links to Curriculum Outcomes
Students will (be expected to)
• analyse the origins, purpose, function, and decision-making processes of Canadian governments and how their powers are acquired, used, and justified (social studies)
• identify and evaluate various strategies for influencing public policy (social studies)
• create art works to carry personal messages to a diverse range of audiences (visual arts)
• articulate their own processes and strategies in exploring, interpreting and reflecting on sophisticated texts and tasks (language arts)

Links to Telling Stories: Themes / Key Words
• Communicating one's own message

Art Works
• Preparatory Drawing For The Fathers Of Confederation, 1883, Robert Harris, CAG H-1724
• Key To The Figures Of The Fathers Of Confederation, C1916, Robert Harris, CAG H-1444
• Original Sketch For The Fathers Of Confederation,(1883), Robert Harris, CAG H-60
• Oil Study For Repainting The Fathers Of Confederation, 1916, Robert Harris, CAG H-1297
Background

Review with students the purpose of the meeting of the Fathers of Confederation in PEI, and how premiers' policy making is influenced today by the federal government and special interest groups.

Lesson #1: A Spoon Full of Humor Helps the Dust Go Down

Objective

Referencing The Fathers of Confederation, students will learn how the political decision making process can be disrupted by public opinion as voiced by political cartoonists.

Materials

- pencil
- paper
- ink pen

Activities

1. As a class view all four pieces in the unit. Teachers may use this opportunity to inform students about how the foundations of political power in Canada were initially agreed upon.

2. Have students imagine and articulate the conversations between the men.

3. Using Harris' Key to the Figures of The Fathers of Confederation, have students choose three figures to research. Take the class to the library and / or computer lab to conduct their research. Encourage them to note the figures' personal and political agendas and humorous character flaws.

4. Also have students research historical political cartoons of the era and contemporary political cartoons. (The New Yorker Magazine is a good reference.) Students photocopy or print out these styles of cartooning to use as a visual aid.

5. Have students choose one or two individuals from The Fathers of Confederation to portray as a political cartoon. Consulting their research, students decide on a historically relevant situation for the work.
6. They roughly sketch out the cartoon, and then apply the ink over the sketch (shading with lines or pointillism), including any comments or titles.

7. Display their work.

**Computer Option**

- Students at this level are usually able to navigate a site for research purposes, but for those having difficulty use key words: *political cartoons, Canadian History, Ottawa*, and *Charlottetown*.

**Ideas for Assessment**

In the cartoons, look for humor based on solid research of the individual. Note how the subject is positioned, and the exaggeration of prominent facial and body features.

Lesson #2: *Policy Makers Run Amuck*

**Objective**

Students will create a visual that has the power to impress others and sway them towards their opinion on a current public issue.

**Materials**

- poster board cut in half
- political magazines: (e.g., Time, MacLean’s)
- pencil
- scissors

**Activities**

1. Guide the class in a discussion on what factors influence public policy. Ask students:
   - What role do special interest groups play in political decision making?
   - How does public opinion affect the policy makers?
   - Can one citizen make a difference?
   - What are some national and provincial hot topics?
   - How do other countries influence Canadian policy, and should they?
   - What role do the media play in influencing public opinion, and do they have a moral responsibility to Canadian citizens or to the government?
2. View the Harris pieces in this unit. Ask students if they could replace the figures in the pieces with present day Canadian or world leaders of their choosing. Note their comments on a flip chart.

3. Have students cut out political figures of their choice from magazines.

4. Students lightly sketch out The Fathers of Confederation composition on poster board (horizontally).

5. Students choose their replacement for each of the founding fathers, concentrating on a political issue. Remind the students that their goal is to sway the opinion of their peers. They create a new political meeting that conveys a message of their choice concerning a current issue.

6. Students glue and paste the figures in place until they are satisfied that they have conveyed their own message in a convincing visual format.

**Ideas for Assessment**

Observe and make notes as students view and comment on the displayed cartoons, and ask the artist questions pertaining to the impact of the piece.

**Lesson #3: Rattle the Cage**

**Objective**

Students will recreate The Fathers of Confederation painting using contemporary global or Canadian policy makers to express their own views on human rights and/or issues of public concern.

**Materials**

- oil pastels
- black construction paper (11" x17")
- white pencil crayon
- drawing pencils
- sketching paper

**Activities**

1. The class views all the Harris pictures in this unit. Point out the importance of preliminary sketches for determining color and composition.
2. Together assess the placement of the figures on Harris’ picture plane. Ask the class how this affects the overall feeling of the pieces.

3. Students now consider what plans and policies these men have for Canada’s future. Ask them what they would include or change in these policies.

4. They also consider present day global and Canadian issues, including human rights and topical issues of concern. What are their opinions on some of these issues?

5. Have students create a fictional meeting of global and / or Canadian leaders. While they draw a rough sketch of this meeting, students consider the conflict in the world today and how this will influence the physical positions of the figures. Have them find references for their chosen political figures.

6. Students then abstract the images into an expressionist style of art, unlike the realistic Harris pieces.

7. Students block out the rough sketch with a white pencil crayon on black construction paper. As they apply the pastels they constantly consider the emotional impact they wish to evoke in the viewer. This process allows the student freedom of expression within the boundaries of their political opinions.

8. Students strive to fill the entire page with bursting color and emotion, consistent with their desire to open the viewers’ eyes to issues of public justice.

Ideas for Assessment
Invite students to circulate and discuss their intentions for the piece.

Lesson #4: Congratulations, You’ve been Elected!

Objective Students will interpret historical text and visuals pertaining to The Fathers of Confederation and, placing themselves in the policy makers’ position, they will articulate an understanding of this responsibility by writing an original story of their journey.

Materials
- Pen, paper
Activities

1. Students assess the Harris pictures and search for meaning in the sketches and oil painting. Organize in groups of four and share historical research on the founding fathers.

2. After noting the policy issues and power distribution factors influencing the meeting, students share group information.

3. Individually they imagine themselves as provincial policy makers, choosing the province and specific issues pertaining to their jurisdiction (historical or topical issues affecting their province). They examine these issues considering their moral responsibilities to the public, and weigh this against their federal commitments.

4. Now students write a rough draft of a week in the life of a policy maker.

5. They refine the draft into a fictional story, embellishing it with "slice of life" incidents to make the main character more interesting. This allows for an intriguing read, thus enticing a broad range of readers. Students include ethical dilemmas and the character's method of problem solving.

6. Throughout the short story students have the freedom to try to impose their beliefs and political agendas on the reader. They strive to make the character believable and one whom we want to read more about. Encourage students to be creative, and even develop fictional conflicts and situations.

7. Students sign their work with a pseudonym that reflects the character's personality.

Ideas for Assessment

Distribute the stories to other students and have them determine the main character's flaws and most pressing concerns. Students will not know who wrote the story until later, so they will feel free to offer constructive criticism which the author may ultimately defend.

Suggested Resources

- local library
- historical institutions
- newspapers