

Living History: The Walls Family Oral History Lesson Plan

SUBJECT/GRADE/STRAND: History/ Grade 7/ New France, British North America; Language/Grade 7/Media Literacy

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PURPOSE

- To examine the migration and settlement of African people in Canada
- To introduce students to oral history research
- To learn about slavery and the Underground Railroad to Canada through the story of Dr. Bryan Walls and his great great grandparents, John and Jane Freeman Walls

ACTIVITIES

Description

The class will read the historical background paper about the Walls family entitled “DR. BRYAN WALLS AND THE JOHN FREEMAN WALLS HISTORIC SITE AND UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM.” They will review the glossary of key words and do the vocabulary activity. Working individually or in small groups, the students will then design and execute an oral history project in which they will select, interview and document the history of an older person in their family or community. They will present their project to the class.

History: Grade 7 - British North America

Overall Expectations

By the end of Grade 7, students will:

- explain the origins of English settlement in British North America after the fall of New France, describe the migration and settlement experiences of African people;
- use a variety of resources and tools to gather, process, and communicate information about the beginnings and development of slavery under the new British colonies;

Specific Expectations

Knowledge and Understanding

By the end of Grade 7, students will:

- explain the historical impact of key events in the settlement of British North America on enslaved Africans (e.g., the Treaty of Paris, the Quebec Act, the American Revolution, the War of 1812);
- describe the different groups of people (e.g., Black Loyalists, African slaves, indentured servants, Iroquois Allied Nations) who took part in the Loyalists' migration and identify their areas of settlement;
- outline the reasons for the early settlement of English Canada (e.g., as an outcome of the American Revolution);
- explain key characteristics of life (e.g., family life, economic and social life, the growth and development of early institutions, transportation, relationships with First Nations peoples and French settlers) in English Canada from a variety of perspectives (slaves, slave owners);
- identify the achievements and contributions of significant people (e.g., Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe).

Language: Grade 7- Media Literacy

Specific Expectations

Creating Media Texts

By the end of Grade 7, students will:

- produce a variety of media texts of some technical complexity for specific purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques (e.g., a scene for a film based on a prose narrative).

GETTING ORGANIZED

Prior Knowledge Required

Students should know that Black settlement in Canada has a very long history (as slaves or free people) and that, after the passing of legislation against slavery here (1793 and 1833), African Americans began to escape slavery in the United States and make their way to Canada via the Underground Railroad.

Required Time: 4-6 sessions

Session 1: Students will read the historical background paper entitled “Dr. Bryan Walls and the John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum.” Review the glossary of terms and have students do the vocabulary activity. Get students to answer the comprehension questions and take them up as a class.

Session 2: Begin this session by reviewing the concept of oral history research.

Much of what we study in history is “traditional” history, or the study of governments, major political figures and important historical events like wars. However, some historians are interested in the stories of everyday people.

Social history is the history of the experiences and beliefs of everyday, ordinary people. Social historians look at the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, such as their family life, work, social life, recreational activities and religious beliefs.

Oral history research is one way of gathering social history. It is the technique of interviewing people who lived through historical events or time periods and of recording their interview.

The **interview subject** is the person who will be interviewed.

Give the next activity of the lesson plan, which is to interview someone in the student’s family or community and present the results of the interview in a particular format (e.g., video, book, PowerPoint presentation, web page, Bristol board presentation, timeline). Get students thinking about who they might interview and what interview questions they will ask.

Session 3: Give students the opportunity to research the time period, country of origin, etc. of the interview subject, once that person has been chosen.

Sessions 4-6 : Ask students to present their findings to the class in their chosen format.

Planning Notes

- Review all handouts prior to teaching lesson.
- Photocopy necessary handouts for students.
- Review online and written reference materials on other oral history projects for students.

Materials Required for Teacher

- Copies of historical backgrounder, “Dr. Bryan Walls and the John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum”
- Copies of Student Activity Package

Accommodations/Modifications

- The historical background reading can be simplified for students with reading difficulties. Audiotapes can be used here.

Assessment/Evaluation Description

- Teacher observation
- Discussion participation
- Successful completion of vocabulary activity and oral history project
- Formative rubric for oral history project

Resources Used and Consulted

- *The Blacks in Canada: a History* by Robin Winks, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997
- *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* by Daniel G. Hill, Agincourt, ON: Book Society of Canada, 1981
- *A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide for Teachers and Students* by James W. St. G. Walker, Hull, Que: Supply and Services Canada, 1980
- *The Road That Led to Somewhere* by Dr. Bryan Walls, Windsor, Ont., 1980

Additional Resources for Teachers and Students

DVDs/Videos

- *Freedom's Land: Canada and the Underground Railroad* (52 min.), CBC, 2004
- *Road to Discovery*, about the John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum and John and Jane Freeman Walls (22 min.)

Books

- *Broken Shackles. Old Man Henson From Slavery to Freedom*, Peter Meyler, editor, Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2001
- *Refugees from Slavery: Autobiographies of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*, Benjamin Drew, editor, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004

Websites

- The Anti-Slavery Movement in Canada by Library and Archives Canada
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/anti-slavery/index-e.html>
- Buxton National Historic Site and Museum
<http://www.buxtonmuseum.com>
- The John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum
<http://www.undergroundrailroadmuseum.com>
- Parks Canada Underground Railroad Online Resources
http://www.pc.gc.ca/canada/proj/cfc-ugrr/cfc-ugrr1_e.asp
- Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site
<http://www.uncletomscabin.org>

Teaching and Learning Strategies

Discussion 1: Talk about the story of Walls family story and how it provides an incredible example of how oral history creates a link between the past and the present. Discuss the movement of African American people north to Canada via the Underground Railroad and how there were approximately 30,000 people who had stories to tell, stories which Dr. Walls calls “stranger than fiction.”

Reading and Vocabulary Comprehension: Students should read the historical backgrounder and do the vocabulary activity.

Analysis: Draw conclusions about African American settlement in Ontario prior to the Civil War through reading the historical background handout.

Cooperative Learning: Students can work in small groups to plan, implement and present the findings of an oral history interview of an older person in the community.

Writing: Students will write a list of question to help in guiding the interview. They also have the option of writing their findings of the interview in book format or Bristol board format.

Oral Presentation: To wrap up the lesson, have students will make oral presentations to share their findings with the class.

Dr. Bryan Walls and The John Freeman Walls Historic Site And Underground Railroad Museum

Dr. Bryan Walls is a dentist who lives in Windsor, Ontario. He established a museum in southwestern Ontario called the John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum. It is located near Windsor, in a rural area off the 401, Exit 28, North one mile. The Museum is an Underground Railroad museum, which means that the site and buildings that make up the museum were once owned by a family that actually escaped slavery and made a trip on the Underground Railroad to Canada. Dr. Walls is a descendant of this family and through his museum and book, *The Road That Led to Somewhere*, he is keeping the story of his great great grandparents and their harrowing flight alive.

When Dr. Walls was a young boy in the 1950s, his great Aunt Stella Butler told the family stories about his great great grandparents, John and Jane Freeman Walls. He calls Aunt Stella the family *griot*. *Griot* is a term in West African culture which means keeper of the oral history. Such a person is very important because their job is to recite the family names from beginning to end over many many generations so that they are never forgotten. In this way, the *griot* guards the family history and preserves its memory for future generations.

Aunt Stella was such a person in Dr. Walls' family. However, in 1976, at the age of 92, she sold the property of his great great grandparents, which included the original house and family burial plot. She thought that the family would not want to hang onto it. Dr. Walls had grown up right next to the property. The original home of John and Jane Walls meant everything: freedom and the sacrifice of his ancestors for a better life not only for themselves but also for their children's children. He sprang into action and bought back the property, paying more for it than Aunt Stella had received.

Dr. Walls and his father, brother and uncles then went to work. They stripped the siding off the log cabin and restored it to its original 19th century condition. They received a donation of a large log cabin from the Government of Ontario for which they laid a foundation and erected a new roof. They also built furniture for the buildings.

Today at the museum, there is the original log cabin that John Walls built. There is also a meeting house called the John Graves Simcoe House, which is a meeting place where visitors to the museum can watch a video about the museum and how it came about. There is a small church called the Peace Chapel and the family cemetery. You can also take a guided tour through the grounds which is like taking a trip back in time on the Underground Railroad itself.

At the entrance there is plaque that reads:

IN 1846 JOHN FREEMAN WALLS A FUGITIVE SLAVE FROM NORTH CAROLINA BUILT THIS LOG CABIN ON LAND PURCHASED FROM THE REFUGEE HOME SOCIETY. THIS ORGANIZATION WAS FOUNDED BY THE ABOLITIONIST HENRY BIBB PUBLISHER OF THE *VOICE OF THE FUGITIVE* AND THE FAMOUS JOSIAH HENSON. THE CABIN SUBSEQUENTLY SERVED AS A TERMINAL OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AND

THE FIRST MEETING PLACE OF THE PUCE BAPTIST CHURCH. ALTHOUGH MANY FORMER SLAVES RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES FOLLOWING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, WALLS AND HIS FAMILY **CHOSE** TO REMAIN IN CANADA. THE STORY OF THEIR STRUGGLES FORMS THE BASIS OF THE BOOK, "THE ROAD THAT LED TO SOMEWHERE" BY DR. BRYAN E. WALLS."

In a speech in 2007, Dr. Walls told the audience about this legendary secret movement of people flowing northward. "The Underground Railroad was the first great freedom movement in the Americas and the first time that good people, Black, white and of different races and faiths, were able to work together in harmony for freedom and for justice.

"Just to give you a few highlights I am told that the Underground Railroad was not a train running under ground from the South to the North. However it was a secret network of courageous people willing to risk their lives for the cause of freedom. I am told it was first formally organized in 1787 by a young Quaker abolitionist by the name of Isaac T. Hopper in Pennsylvania. The Quakers were very witty people who believed that all men should be treated equal, that they were not animals but human beings. After the war of 1812, the soldiers went back south and reported that they did not see slavery in Canada. In fact, some even reported fighting against "coloured" free regiments in the Niagara and Detroit areas. By the early 1800s, there were definite routes of the Underground Railroad making their way to freedom. This is a fascinating period in history, made more personally exciting for me because in 1846, my ancestors crossed the 49th parallel to freedom."

What was the original story that Aunt Stella told the family? This is what she said:

John was born in 1813. He was born on the same day that Daniel, the slave master's son, was born. However, Daniel's mother died in childbirth, so John's mother, Jubil, suckled both boys. A close bond of friendship developed between the two that would strengthen throughout their lives, made stronger by mutual respect. When John grew up he married Sarah, an African American woman on a nearby plantation. The couple had two children. But John lost Sarah and his children when they were sold and forced to move further south. Meanwhile, his boyhood friend Daniel married Jane King, a young woman of Irish and Scottish descent. They produced four children. However, at some point Daniel took seriously sick. On his deathbed, Daniel asked John to take care of his family, because he knew that John would guard them with his life. After Daniel died, John and Jane fell in love. Although Jane also had an abolitionist spirit, they could not marry due to the slave laws in North Carolina of 1715, and reinforced in 1838, preventing interracial marriage. So they left with Jane's three daughters and son and a fourth young slave girl who helped Jane with the children. They travelled at night through the forests of North Carolina and Kentucky. They made their way to Indiana, where white Quaker abolitionists by the name of Ephraim and Mary Stout, hid them. They stayed with the Stouts approximately one year, then continued on to Toledo, Ohio, and then crossing over to Amherstburg, Ontario. They stayed in Amherstburg for about one year. John was so worried that slave catchers were

coming to take him back that they moved inland to the Puce Road, which in those days was a full day's ride away on horseback.

Aunt Stella passed away in 1986 at 102 years of age, her mind sharp up to the end. Now Dr. Walls and his family members are the modern-day griots of their history. Dr. Walls makes many speeches throughout North America keeping this important story of his ancestors alive. Inspired by the interracial aspect of his history, he has also taught cross-cultural training at the Toronto Police Services and teamed up with the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, the National Alliance of Faith and Justice, and other African American organizations that are trying to make a difference among the youth. He has also written *The Key To The Road That Led To Somewhere*, a genealogical manuscript to support the truth of the story told to him by Aunt Stella. Amazingly, he is also working on a libretto of the story for Broadway and a screenplay for the movies.

Bryan Walls has been honoured with many awards for his work, including the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada. As Bryan Walls stated, "I stand on the shoulders of great men and women who have gone before. The personal story of the Underground Railroad has become my shield and my sword is words like mutual respect, reconciliation, cooperation and love, against which, in our perilous post-9-11 world, there is no argument." His motto is, "Never, never, never give up!"

Glossary of Key Words/Vocabulary

- Descendant - a person who is a child of a particular family, however distant in the line of descent
- Ancestor - any person from whom one is descended
- Generation - A stage or period of time in the line of natural descent, such as a mother, daughter and granddaughter
- Quaker - a religious sect that was opposed to slavery
- Abolitionist - someone who was against slavery
- Regiment - a military unit consisting of two or more groups of soldiers
- Plantation - a large farm that grows crops cultivated by workers living on it
- Interracial - involving members of different races
- Genealogy - the study of family history using a chart or record of the

		descent of a person or family from one or more ancestors
Libretto	-	the words of an opera
Reconciliation	-	the settling of differences among people

Vocabulary Activity

Find a word from the above glossary that is a synonym for the following:

1. offspring
2. forerunner
3. estate
4. anti-slavery activist
5. lineage
6. harmony

Student Activity Package - Living History: The Walls Family Oral History Lesson Plan

Your Task

Using the historical background handout as an example of how history comes alive through the tradition of oral history, interview an older person in your family or community. Document this person's story by taping (audio or video) or writing down significant events in his/her life and then share this information with the class. This can involve the creation of a PowerPoint presentation, a videotape of your experience, a physical book or a Bristol board presentation and/or timeline.

Completing an Oral History Interview

1. Select a person to interview.

2. Obtain their permission.

3. Set up an interview time and location.
4. Do some background research on the era of this person. If he/she comes from a different country, research the country of origin.
5. Prepare a list of interview questions. Try to ask questions that involve more than a yes/no answer.
6. If possible, tape record or videotape the interview. Otherwise, take notes during the interview.
7. Be on time.
8. Make sure your equipment works properly and that you have extra tapes (audio or video) and extra batteries.
9. Be polite.
10. Before you begin the interview, do a practice question to make sure the recorder is working.
11. Start the interview by stating your name, the interview subject's name, the date and time of the interview.
12. Keep your recording session to about 30-40 minutes.

13. Thank your subject for his/her time.

Areas of Interest and Sample Questions

When conducting the interview, you should have a list of question to help guide the discussion with the interview subject

- Ancestry (Who were your grandparents, great grandparents, where were they born and what were their accomplishments?)
- Place and date of birth (Where were you born and what is your date of birth?)
- Family (What are the names of your parents, brothers and sisters, and when were they born?)
- Places lived in (Where did you live? What country did you come from?)
- Education (How far did you go in school? What were your educational experiences like?)
- Occupation and accomplishments (What work do/did you do? What accomplishments do you feel you have achieved in your life?)
- Special skills and interests (Do you have any special skills or interests?)

- Community and religious activities (including specific customs involving food and cooking, marriage, death, celebrations and recreational activities related to specific racial/ethnic/religious groups etc.)
- World events (What world events took place during your lifetime and how did you react to them? How did you feel about them?)

Presentation of Findings

Your presentation, whether it be in book form, video, PowerPoint or Bristol board presentation, should be a synopsis of the interview subject's personal history, and include visuals (e.g., subject portrait, family photographs and/or images of world events of the time period of the subject). Feel free to be creative. You will be asked to present it for the class.

MARKING RUBRIC FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW AND PRESENTATION

CRITERIA	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Planning of Interview Student conducted research, drafted a detailed plan for the interview. (T/I)	Student had difficulty researching and preparing for their interview.	Student researched and prepared for their interview with some accuracy and effectiveness.	Student adequately researched and prepared for their interview.	Student researched and prepared for their interview very carefully and thoroughly.
Execution of Oral History Interview Student conducted interview and designed an appropriate vehicle to convey his/her findings. (K/U, A)	Showed little thought or consideration in conducting interview or in designing an appropriate presentation of their findings.	Showed some thought and consideration in conducting the interview and in presenting their findings.	Showed an adequate amount of thought and consideration in conducting their interview and in the presentation of the story.	Conducted interview and designed a creative, thoughtful presentation of the oral history interview.
Written Description of Oral History Research Findings Students who wrote a descriptive piece of writing about their interview. (C, A)	Writing was unclear and described few aspects of the oral history interview.	Writing was fairly clear and described some aspects of the interview.	Writing was clear and concise and described the interview with insight and in some detail.	Writing was very clear and concise and described the interview with great insight and in considerable detail.
Videotaped Presentation of Oral History Research Students who made a videotape of their interview subject and his/her life.	Videotape was not very creative or informative in telling the story of the interview subject's life. Videotape showed little technical skill.	Videotape was somewhat creative and informative in telling the life story of the interview subject. Videotape showed some technical skill.	Videotape was creative and informative in telling the life story of the interview subject. Videotape showed a great deal of technical skill.	Videotape was very creative and informative in telling the life story of the interview subject. Videotape showed superior technical skill.
Presentation of Oral History Research Presented findings with a confident voice tone, appropriate eye contact, and effective sequencing. (C)	Demonstrated a weak understanding of the oral history research process and findings. Student was not well prepared for this presentation. Little or no rehearsal done.	Demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the oral history process and findings. Student could either not be heard or eye contact with the audience was missing.	Demonstrated an adequate understanding of the oral history process and findings. Student used a voice that could be heard and had good eye contact with the audience.	Demonstrated a strong understanding of the oral history research process and findings. Student used a clear and effective voice, could be heard and understood well, and had good eye contact with the audience.