

## Evangeline – Part of Our Canadian Identity

### Grade 8

8.1.1 Investigate how artistic and literary expression reflects the following aspects of Canadian identity: landscape, climate, history, people-citizenship, and related challenges and opportunities.

The story of Evangeline and Gabriel was inspired by the tragic events of the mid-1750s in and around New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, the land known as Acadie. The “Great Upheaval” or “Le Grand Dérangement” is the name given to the deportation or expulsion of thousands of Acadian people in the Maritimes, a result of the British-French wars that marked that time period. The Great Upheaval begins in Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, in July 1755 with almost 12,000 Acadians being separated from family and displaced to various colonial locations along the coast of what is now the United States and, in later years, to France. Many would die of disease, hunger, and drowning aboard the transport ships. Many made their way back to what they considered their ancestral lands in the Maritimes searching for loved ones along the way. Others established lives in their new surroundings and became our Cajun ancestors.

*Evangeline*, the performance, is a work of both artistic and literary greatness. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1847 epic poem is transformed into a visual and auditory narrative that chronicles the devastation of the Acadian expulsion in the 1750s. While the story transcends Canadian borders (non-existent at the time), it is truly a Maritime Canadian story--one that is part of our broader Canadian identity.

**INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES** are intended to stimulate interest and provide a means of gauging student knowledge (or, misconceptions) about this historical event. It also serves to activate student curiosity so that they may formulate their own questions about the event.

### Pre-performance Activity #1

**Find out what students know and do not about the Acadian Expulsion. Students may know some basic facts but they may also have some misconceptions about this historical event.**

#### **The Great Upheaval in Maritime Canada**

What I know for sure....	What I think I know...	What I'd like to know...

### Pre-performance Activity #2

#### **FREE-WRITE**

**Invite students to participate in a 2-minute free-writing activity based on the topic of the Deportation of the Acadians. They may write about what they know, don't know, or would like to know more about. Remind them if the rules of free-writing:**  
**1) writing must be continuous even when ideas get "stuck"—just keep pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and keep writing whatever comes to mind; and 2) writing is private unless they wish to share it with another person or the class. Ask students to keep their free-writing piece so they can compare it to another one that they will do after the performance.**

## Pre-performance Activity #3

### ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Students will respond to each statement twice by writing “Agree” or “Disagree” once **before** they have been to the performance of Evangeline and again **after** they have seen the performance.

Pre-performance

Post-performance

\_\_\_\_\_ The Deportation was an event that involved PEI,  
New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ The Deportation is about Acadians moving their  
families and belongings to find a better life. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ All Acadians were considered a threat to the British. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ The poem, *Evangeline*, was written by an Acadian poet  
who wanted to commemorate his ancestors. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Evangeline, like Anne of Green Gables, was a fictional  
character. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ There are no more Acadians in the Maritimes as a result  
of the Deportation. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ The soldiers who were ordered to expel the Acadians included \_\_\_\_\_  
American militia men.

**POST- PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES** allow students to draw upon new knowledge learned from the performance itself and/or supplemental inquiry efforts. The activities require students to process and synthesize knowledge and then to re-form it into new understandings of the story. The following activities are based upon the Historical Thinking Concepts\* below.

Thinking historically involves asking open-ended questions that require critical thinking skills. It is the “problematizing” of historical content to create new meaning and to arrive at plausible conclusions to new questions. Historical thinking extends beyond the simple recall of factual information and requires students to use historical evidence to develop reasoned responses. Below are brief explanations of the six historical thinking concepts, two of which form the basis of the study unit for the performance of *Evangeline*.

\* For more information on these concepts please refer to the following publication: Denos and Case. *Teaching about Historical Thinking*. (2006). Vancouver: The Thinking Consortium (TC<sup>2</sup>).

**Historical Significance** – why an event, person, or period from our past is important. Criteria used to determine historical significance include a) prominence at the time; 2) consequences (magnitude of impact, scope of impact, lasting effects); and 3) prominence (has it been remembered or memorialized in present day), or does it help us to understand a part of our history?

**Evidence** – sources of information that can be used to support a theory or historical argument. Evidence may come from either “primary” sources (first-hand accounts, church or public records, photos, artifacts) or “secondary” sources (deliberately prepared accounts by historians, textbooks, and movies.)

**Continuity and Change** – that which changes and that which remains the same over time. Change is ongoing and may occur quickly or slowly. Both change and continuity may be either positive or negative in a society. Comparisons can be made to learn more about a period of time, historical events, people, or social attitudes and trends.

**Cause and Consequence** – factors that lead to historical events or significant historical decisions. This concept speaks to the “whom” or “what” that influences history and the changes or repercussions that come about because of whomever or whatever. The causal factors may be intentional or non-intentional, and the consequences may be direct or indirect.

**Historical Perspective** – the viewing of the past through the social, intellectual, emotional, and moral lenses of the time. Being able to understand historical perspective requires more than simply putting oneself in the shoes of another person from another time. It demands that one to set aside present-day views and suspend all judgment in order to comprehend the complexities of the norms and attitudes of the period.

**Moral Judgment** – an attempt to assess actions, events, or decisions through an ethical lens according to the context (norms) of the times, and in light of present-day values and sensibilities. It is important for students to understand the difference between factual statements and value statements in order to effectively comprehend the depth of this concept.

**Historical Significance** is determined by a specific set of criteria that includes

- 1) importance at time of event/personnage i.e. *Was it considered a prominent event/personnage at the time? How long did the event last?*
- 2) impact of the event/personnage i.e. *How deeply affected or widespread was the impact of the event/personnage at the time? Did it change the lives of many people?*
- 3) lasting place in history i.e. *What has the event/personnage revealed to us today about this period in history? Are there still issues related to this event?*

Fast facts about the Great Deportation:

- It was the climax of several years' worth of tensions, conflict, and war between the French and the English.
- It began in July 1755 and continued through 1763.
- It is estimated that close to 12,000 Acadians were deported with as many as 50% dying due to disease, hunger, and drowning.
- What began in Acadie (PEI, NB, NS, and parts of Maine) spread into many colonial lands along the Atlantic coast of what is now the U.S. and overseas to France.
- There are many accounts of the story of Evangeline – as much a love story as a testimony to the political, economical, and social conditions of the period.
- The Acadian population of the Maritimes continues to fight to keep its heritage and language alive even today.

### **Post-performance Activity #1**

*Anne of Green Gables is a Canadian icon throughout the world despite being a fictional character. Evangeline (also a fictional character) is also a famous icon and a symbol of Canadian heritage despite her British poet roots. The story has been made into several variations of plays and movies since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in both Britain and the U.S. Both fictional characters are historically significant. Use the criteria (stated earlier) to compare characters and answer the questions: Which character is more Canadian – Anne or Evangeline? Is this story relevant today? Why?*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Anne of Green Gables</b>	<b>Evangeline</b>
Importance at time		
Impact – number of people affected		
Lasting place in history		

**Evidence** refers to existing, tangible proof that explains, describes, or corroborates events or factual declarations from the past. Evidence is considered to be either a *primary* or *secondary* source. **Primary sources** may include first-hand accounts such as diaries, letters, photos, paintings/sketches, artefacts, original map drawings, ships' manifests, census records, and more. **Secondary sources** are usually documents or artefacts that have been created by using primary sources such as textbooks, maps (drawn from other maps or descriptions), paintings/sketches (from other peoples' descriptions), ballads that tell a story, documentaries, or theatrical performances based on an historical event or period.

Primary and secondary sources only become “evidence” when they are used to support or corroborate a hypothesis or theory. In other words, sources are only pieces of random information until they serve a purpose in a debate or declaration. Bias and validity are very important to consider in analyzing sources and often tell a tale themselves.

### **Post-performance Activity #2**

The play, *Evangeline*, would be considered a *secondary* source since it relies on the original poem by Wadsworth for its plot and several other researched documents and sources to add context. Consider the use of *primary* documents within the play—the British letter from Governor Lawrence outlining the expulsion orders, the register of displaced Acadian families, and the visuals of historic maps showing the travels of Evangeline in her search for Gabriel.

Have students consider the use of the above primary sources and fill in the following tables to determine what pieces of evidence can be found (or, not found) in the documents. (The letter from Governor Lawrence can be found in Appendix B.) Discuss how secondary sources are created by historians or others when they piece together “clues” that are left behind as “traces of the past”. How might some of these sources be misinterpreted, or how might there be different versions of history (bias)?

Many primary documents that have become the basis of what we know about Acadian history have come from British sources and archives. Why is this? (Many French documents did not survive the burning of Acadian buildings or the ship passages). How does this possibly skew what we know about Acadian history? How true is the old adage that “the winners write the history books”?

Have students investigate an excerpt from another primary document—the diary\* of a young American soldier, Jeremiah Bancroft, who signed up to help the British militia and became part of history during his participation in the Great Upheaval of 1755 (Appendix C).

\*The diary (a 1925 transcript of the original, was recently discovered in the archives of St. Mary's University library in Nova Scotia.) The full diary may be accessed at [http://www.acadian-home.org/Fowler\\_Lockerby\\_Bancroft.pdf](http://www.acadian-home.org/Fowler_Lockerby_Bancroft.pdf)

How important are primary sources in our understanding of the past?

**1) Letter from Governor Lawrence**

What do we know?	What do we NOT know?	Valuable – Yes/No Why?

**2) Register of Acadian Families Deported**

What do we know?	What do we NOT know?	Valuable – Yes/No Why?

**3) Map of travels showing deportation routes and landings in North America**

What do we know?	What do we NOT know?	Valuable – Yes/No Why?