



## Leprosy in New Brunswick: Unit and Lesson Plans <sup>1</sup>

### Note to Teachers

Thank you for your interest in the Lost Stories website. The lesson plans provided here are aimed at middle school and early secondary school students (grades 7-10). However, both younger and older students may find these materials to be useful if they are provided sufficient scaffolding and/or extension material. These lessons are meant to accomplish several interrelated goals. First, and foremost, these lessons build on the website's overarching theme of recovering lost stories from the past to encourage students to think historically. As they explore these lessons students will reflect on why this story might have been lost and how it was found. In so doing, they will experience key elements of *doing* history, which include finding and selecting evidence to build a portrait of 'what happened,' and creating a contextual narrative – a story -- that illustrates why it mattered. At the same time that the lessons are nurturing historical thinking, they also provide students with a great deal of insight into the specific issue or topic being explored, namely the challenges facing people with leprosy, a disease that has long had a social stigma attached to it. This specific issue is also tied to wider historical contexts, including public health, the value attached to women's labour, and the place of Acadians (the French-speakers of Atlantic Canada) in Canada. While the lessons provided comprise a coherent unit of study, and build upon one another in a logical fashion, it is possible to use them in a stand-alone fashion. As such, teachers

are **strongly** encouraged to adapt them to the needs of their classes.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of the primary documents used in these lessons were written by people who never suffered from leprosy. Efforts were made to uncover more documents written by those with the disease, particularly from the nineteenth century when this disease was a public health issue in New Brunswick. While such documents may exist, we were not able to find many of them in regard to these particular issues. We welcome suggestions for pertinent documents that might be added to our collection. The lack of such records is, unfortunately, reflective of what happens to groups that have been marginalized, whose records are not well preserved. It is suggested that teachers draw their students' attention to the lack of voices of people with leprosy in the primary document collection.

### Note on Terminology

It is important to note that many of the documents included in this package make use of archaic language, and include terms, statements, and images that were offensive then and are offensive now. In particular, the documents make reference to "lepers," a term that stigmatizes the person with the disease. Students should refer instead to "people with leprosy." Nevertheless, references to "lepers" have been left in the documents for the sake of historical accuracy and to allow the full nature of the discrimination faced by these

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<sup>1</sup> The research for the Leprosy in New Brunswick lesson plans was compiled by Gabrielle Rogers.

individuals to be apparent. However, teachers should explain to their students that the use of these term "leper" is no longer acceptable.

## Unit Overview

These educational materials provide teachers and students with some strategies and supplementary materials to explore in more depth – to get under the surface of - the story of individuals, mostly Acadians, who suffered from leprosy in nineteenth-century New Brunswick, with a particular focus on those who were confined to Sheldrake Island between 1844 and 1849. The three lessons that make up this unit can be used as 'stand-alone' lessons, but taken together they provide a kind of 'how to' guide for recovering lost stories from a variety of communities, including local school communities.

### Lesson One

In this two-part lesson, students develop criteria for distinguishing history from the past, and apply these to the resurrection of the Leprosy on Sheldrake Island Lost Story. Before students can begin to engage with the "Lost Stories" project in a meaningful way they need to possess some understanding of "history" as a discipline. Specifically, they need to recognize that histories are narratives constructed from the selection and interpretation of meaningful evidence left over from the past, and about an issue, event or topic that people are interested in.

**Part 1** begins with a set of simple exercises to encourage students to think more deeply about what "history" is.

**Part 2** moves students from the general discussion of history and its highly selective nature, to apply their understanding to the specific case of Leprosy on Sheldrake Island and how this story was lost and then found. In so doing, students will develop their ability to work with primary documents, while also developing a deeper understanding of how a disease was

treated in the nineteenth century and how Acadians faced significant discrimination.

### Lesson 1, Part 1 (70 minutes) History vs. the Past

In this lesson, students work in small groups or pairs to examine and interpret artifacts. Having begun to think about the interpretive nature of history, students are asked more directly to articulate specific differences between history and the past. In the ensuing Socratic dialogue between teacher and students, four key differences will be clarified, and re-defined as four criteria not only for thinking historically, but for *making history* – and therefore of recovering lost stories from the past.

#### Activity 1: Teacher in a Box

This activity draws particular attention to the fact that historians usually interpret evidence that was created for other purposes.

For this activity, the teacher collects a wide range of personally significant items from their home. Each item should have the potential to tell your students something about you. However, some of the items should be potentially misleading. For example, one teacher who has used this activity brings in a number of vegetarian cookbooks. This usually leads students to conclude, incorrectly, that the teacher is vegetarian. It is also a good idea to have more than one item for some areas of your life, thereby indicating that this is an area of greater importance, for instance bringing in several artifacts related to children or some particular activity.

Begin the activity by breaking students into small groups. Explain to them that they are taking on the role of historians in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. Because schools have all been entirely abolished by this time- replaced by individual, home-based, customized, computer-generated educational modules- historians have become very interested in the lives of teachers in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

All of the evidence that has survived about you, the teacher, is contained in the box you have brought in for them. Working in their groups students are to examine the items. Based on their observations of the evidence they will generate conclusions about you and record them using the following headings: “evidence” and “inference”. After examining all of the evidence they should write a short reflective paragraph summarizing their “conclusions.”

When debriefing this activity be sure to ask the students if there are any other types of evidence, missing from the box, they wish they had access to in order to verify conclusions or to learn more about you.

## Activity 2: History versus the Past

A simple, yet highly effective, way to introduce students to the idea of “history” as a discipline is to discuss the difference between “the past” and “history”. Create a “T Chart” like the one below:



Place students into groups of two or three and ask each group to identify two differences between these two terms. Debrief this as a whole class, writing students’ answers on the board. During this discussion, the teacher should push students to recognize that “the past” is literally everything that happened before this exact moment in time, and history is the selection from it, based on certain criteria as identified below. Students can then be asked: “how is history different from the past?” During this discussion, the teacher should provide students with the following criteria for “making history:”

1. People need **evidence** -- traces and accounts -- left over from the past before they can begin to research and understand any aspect of history. These traces or

accounts are called Primary Sources. Like evolutionary biologists and geologists, historical thinking depends on the existence of primary sources that have remained from the past into the present. In other words, if a tree falls in the forest and leaves no trace, it is part of the past, but will not be part of history. Think about your own life: out of everything that you experienced yesterday, how much of it left traces and accounts?

2. Traces and accounts not only have to be created, this evidence **needs to be preserved** through time before it can become part of history. Think again about your own life: of that evidence about your life yesterday that was created - a shopping list, a text message, a record of a visa purchase, a conversation that you remember – how much will be preserved through time? How much will be available in the future? Evidence (or fragments) from the past can be found stored everywhere - in everything from government statistics and personal letters in provincial archives, to scientists’ pollen samples, and stories told from one generation to the next and preserved in family memories.
3. The creation and preservation of a record of the past is still not enough to make it become part of history. People need to **interpret the evidence**, the primary document. No primary source “tells the truth” about history; even eyewitness accounts, photographs and videos were created by a person at a particular time and place, and these factors influenced what was recorded, and how. Evidence, therefore must be interpreted
  - in the context of how, when, where, why and by whom it was created,
  - in the relevant historical contexts of the time and place it was created
  - in the context of issues and concerns in the present

- Historians interpret evidence that they see as **significant**– meaningful, important, of consequence. What is significant changes from place to place, from person to person, and over time. This is one of the reasons why history is never really finished, and one of the reasons why stories from the past are always getting lost and found.

In conclusion, suggest that students remember these criteria, because we will be using them to explore how a lost story from the past becomes history.

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### **Lesson 1, Part 2: (210 minutes) Why are stories lost? How do stories get found?**

Begin this lesson by watching the Leprosy on Sheldrake Island video on the Lost Stories website. While watching the video, students consider the question: Does the Leprosy on Sheldrake Island story meet our criteria for history (in comparison with the past)? Debrief the video by asking students to discuss, first in small groups then as a class, the following questions:

- What evidence is presented in the film that was created during the period that people with leprosy were confined to Sheldrake Island? Provide as many examples as you can.
- Does the film show where and/or how that evidence was preserved? Provide at least 2 examples (and remember that human memories count as evidence!) Does it provide other evidence that was not created at the time? What kind?
- What individual person or people are responsible for interpreting the evidence for this Lost Hi/Story?
- People seldom explicitly state why they think the history they are telling is significant, but they usually leave clues. What does the artist think is most important about this story? Can you guess what other participants in the film think is most important about the story of Leprosy on Sheldrake Island? Or the

filmmaker?

- What are three reasons why the Leprosy on Sheldrake Island story might have been lost?
- What are three reasons why we are now able to “find” this story?

At the end of this discussion, explain to students that they are to complete a two-part critical challenge. First, students are to work in small groups to examine all of the primary documents provided in the *Leprosy in New Brunswick Historical Document Collection* in the **Teaching Lost Stories** section of the Lost Stories website. They will find that these documents support three theories, or cases, as to why the Leprosy in New Brunswick story was lost.

- The story was lost because of the place of Acadians in Canadian society.** Leprosy in New Brunswick affected rural Acadians more acutely than other groups and reporting in the mid-nineteenth century time tried to situate the problem as being uniquely Acadian. Many Acadians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were illiterate, and so we have very few first-hand accounts of their stories, particularly in terms of Sheldrake Island.
- The story was lost because leprosy is no longer a major health problem in Canada.** In Canada, very few cases of leprosy are reported each year. As a result, the disease has not become part of the national narrative. Leprosy is viewed as something disagreeable that happened elsewhere, and so stories such as the one at Sheldrake Island, have been lost.
- The story was lost because women's work is devalued.** Women were the primary caregivers for most of the history of leprosy in New Brunswick. As women's work has been historically disadvantaged, the story was lost because people were not as interested in the lives of women.

The teacher will assign each of the groups **one** of these theories and ask that each group identify the

four or five pieces of evidence that best support their assigned theory. Students can use the **primary document analysis organizer** to help them through this process. The group's work can be summarized in a poster that they will present to the class. Each poster should briefly restate the theory the group was trying to support (maximum 2 sentences) and should clearly identify and explain the four or five pieces of evidence they found most compelling. For each piece of evidence the group should provide the title of the relevant primary document(s), as well as quotes or summaries and pictures or drawings

Teachers may need to provide their students with assistance, by giving them additional historical context, as they try to interpret the documents.

Once all groups have presented their posters the class should discuss which interpretation is best supported by evidence using the criteria provided on the **primary document analysis organizer**. Teachers should ask all students to rank the order of the theories or cases from most to least convincing and collect this information as an exit ticket. The results can be shared at the start of the next lesson. Teachers are also encouraged to draw attention to the absence of the voices of people with leprosy in the document collection. An easy way to do this is to ask the students what other types of evidence they would like to have had available.

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### Note on the Primary Documents

Teachers can allow each group to examine all the documents. Alternatively, teachers can point students towards the documents that most directly address their assigned theory. In this case, we would recommend that students investigating the idea that **the story was lost because of the place of Acadians in Canadian society** can look at documents 1, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19. Students looking into the idea that **the story was lost because leprosy is no longer a major health problem in Canada** can look at documents 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19. Finally, those students focusing on the theory that **the story was lost because women's work is devalued** should look at documents 3, 4, 6, 9.

