

## Skookum Stories Project

“Skookum” comes from the Chinook Jargon - a trade language that developed in BC and the West Coast during the 1800s. It means “big” or “strong” and has crossed over to become a word in the English language. This project is about telling a strong story that draws on your own roots and culture. The story will be told to the class and will include a visual element such as a poster, pictures, objects, video, or slideshow.

### Steps (not necessarily in order -- feel free to move around):

1. Find out more about your cultural heritage. This often starts by talking to the elders in your family
2. Decide what part of your “story” interests you for further inquiry.<sup>1</sup>
3. Gather evidence and conduct research about either your family’s roots or your culture, with special attention to stories that have a connection to history, place, and ideas.<sup>2</sup>
4. Design some inquiry questions to help guide your project.<sup>3</sup>
5. Organize your evidence and response to questions into a project with spoken and visual elements.<sup>4</sup>
6. Get some feedback from family, friends, and your teacher(s) before finalizing your story and presentation.

### Ideas for gathering stories:

First of all, “family” and “culture” can mean lots of things. For some, a family is simply an inner circle of trusted people. Similarly, culture can be about beliefs and values picked up from experience and society, and is not necessarily tied to ethnicity.

Every family has some interesting stories about settling in Canada, moving around the country, or building homes, jobs, traditions, and memories... What’s your story? What are some interesting beliefs that have been held in your family? Where did they originate? How about cultural activities? Food? Music? Special Skills?

Were any members of your family connected to world events or the history of Canada? Wars, railroads, rebellions, settlements? What are some “ordinary” achievements in your family, like clearing land, building a business, raising livestock, or surviving the Depression?

Maybe “family” is not the right approach for everyone, maybe you want to look into the cultural traditions of the general group of people you consider as part of your heritage. Many students feel a strong connection to “adopted” cultures and traditions. Sometimes these things come more from the community than the family.

### Sometimes the best way to gather information for this project is with an interview. How to do that?

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<sup>1</sup> If you have a diverse background, you could pick one aspect or many. Students who can’t connect to the culture/heritage angle can look at how culture is developing around them, e.g. local history.

<sup>2</sup> Examples: immigration stories, pioneering or homesteading, unusual jobs, war service, attitudes at the time, important events in your family (of the world), connections to ideas that come up in Social Studies.

<sup>3</sup> We’ll spend more time with this. The questions will relate to significance, evidence, then-and-now, different perspectives, and sense of place.

<sup>4</sup> Each student will be given about 10-15 minutes of presentation time in class. We will also have a feast — and opportunity to share some food that is special to your family or comes from your culture

Pick someone in your family, or an elderly person you know, who can share some knowledge of the past. You can start with these questions, or make your own. Think carefully about how you will ask your questions, how you will record the responses, and how you will present the results. Be a good listener, and give the interview subject a chance to expand on their comments. Sometime it helps to say “can you tell me more about that?”

Sample questions (pick some and make some of your own):

1. Where/when were you born? Describe your home, street, or town at the time.
2. When you were growing up, what were your favourite tv or radio programs?
3. What were your favourite activities or pastimes as a youth?
4. What was your family like? (jobs, personalities, skills, challenges)
5. How did your family come to live in Canada (or at least the town you grew up in)?
6. What did you and other boys and girls wear? drive?
7. What were some events (local or global) that you remember from your childhood?
8. Did you or anyone in your family have a connection to any important local, national, or global events?
9. How did you meet your spouse?
10. How was the world different then or now?
11. Are there any special heirlooms that have been passed down in your family?
12. Anything else, an interesting story?

To start, just come up with a list of people you could interview and start picking out or writing down the questions you might ask them. Later, schedule a time for the actual interview.

### **What else can you include, or do to gather information for this project?**

- ▶ family history, family tree — more for the stories than the names and dates
- ▶ scrapbooks and photo albums — look for interesting images with stories behind them
- ▶ objects of interest heirlooms, and artifacts — what story do they tell?
- ▶ letters, documents, old journals — while often limited in perspective, these are valuable sources
- ▶ maps, print or online — “place” is a very important aspect of all stories
- ▶ library print sources — great for understanding the context of your family or culture
- ▶ online sources — specific to your heritage or more generally about your culture

### **What else is there to support your heritage inquiry and storytelling?**

Check out <http://www.thielmann.ca/skookum-stories.html> for more “stuff” including student examples.