

## HALIFAX DEAD

HALIFAX, N.S., Dec. 6—Chief of Police Hanrahan to-  
ship and subsequent fire, destroying a large section of the  
nate says over two thousand. Twenty-five teams loaded

WHAT FRED  
EXPLOSION

in Ruins as  
Ship

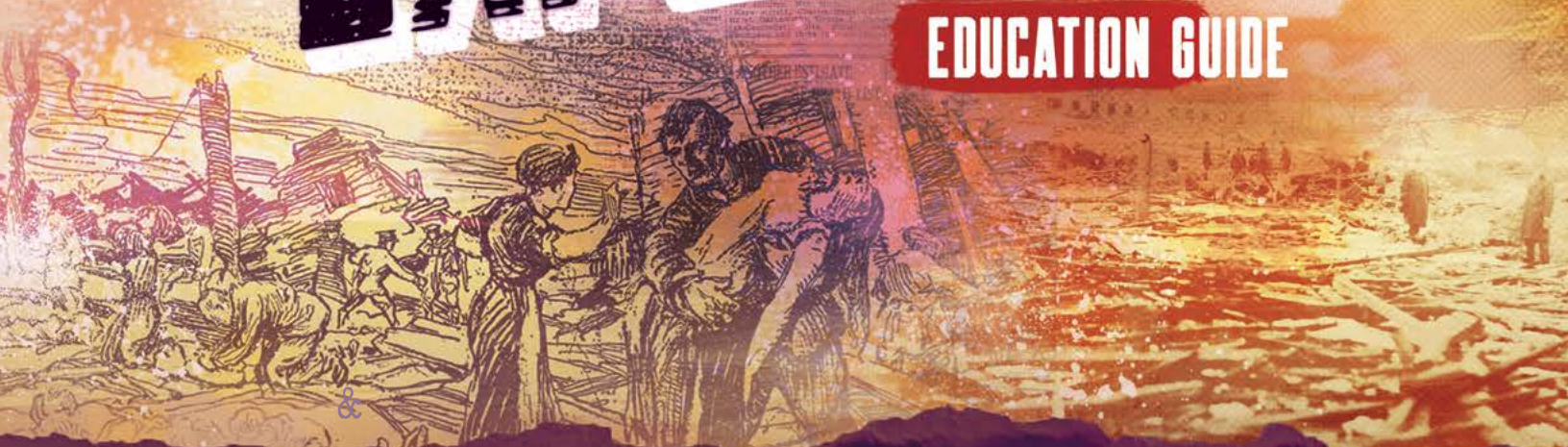


Dear Uncle Murray,  
Little I thought when I wrote  
a couple of weeks ago, that I'd  
be writing you under such  
unusual circumstances. I know  
you are all very anxious to get  
some first hand definite news  
from us and I'm going to try  
to do so. I'm now just all about  
new band to use  
the time got  
and also  
new general  
work done  
I'm sure you  
will be interested  
in it.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN:

# THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION

EDUCATION GUIDE



# MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

To mark the centennial of the Halifax Explosion, and help educators and students think critically about primary sources, Historica Canada has created the *Think Like a Historian* series of videos and classroom activities. This education guide gives students an introduction to the Halifax Explosion and working with primary sources.

Inspired by the framework developed by Dr. Peter Seixas for the Historical Thinking Project, *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion* complements Canadian school curricula from grades 4 to 12. This series invites students to deepen their understanding of the Halifax Explosion and its larger historical context. Investigating primary sources from the time of the Explosion offers students an opportunity to make sense of the events that took place and why they are significant today.

You may want to use all of the lessons in a sequence, or choose the most relevant lessons as standalone activities. Activities 1 and 2 in the education guide provide an introduction and overview to the Halifax Explosion and are designed to provide background and context. Activity 3 provides an introduction to taking historical perspectives when analyzing primary sources. Activities 4 and 5 include exercises to complement and further explore the Ethel Bond and Arthur Lismer videos in this series. You may choose to have students complete the Ethel Bond activities and video, the Arthur Lismer activities and video, or both. Activities 6 and 7 provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their understanding of historical perspectives and significance, and what they have learned about the Halifax Explosion.

The *Think Like a Historian* series was produced with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Historica Canada is the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship.

## Note to Educators:

Accommodations for Special Education, ELL and ESL students are included in these worksheets, and are identified as "modifications."

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit [thinklikeahistorian.ca](http://thinklikeahistorian.ca) to view all the videos in the series and download additional free, bilingual educational resources. Other free, bilingual educational resources are available on Historica Canada's [Education Portal](#), and on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).

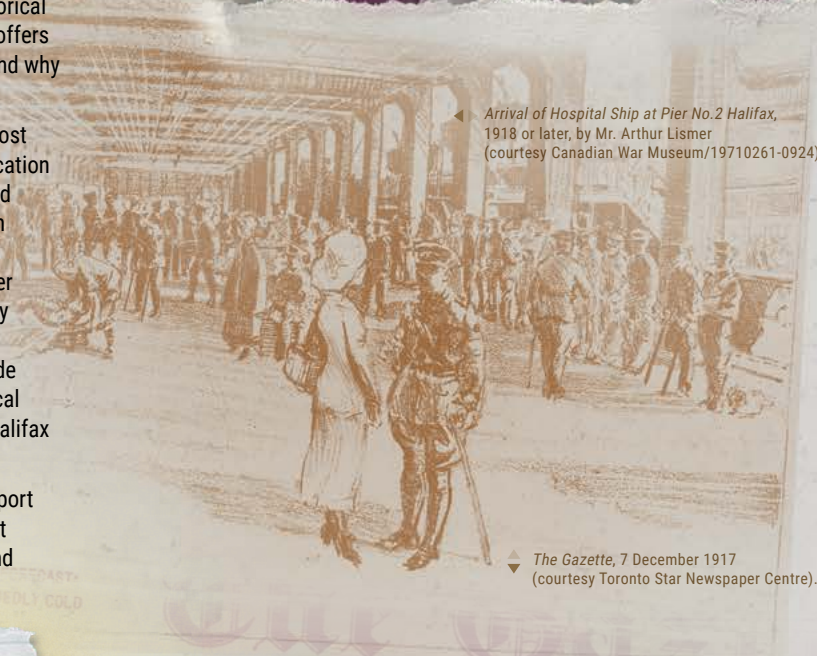
Two supplementary worksheet packages complement this education guide – the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** and the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package** – both of which can be downloaded on the [Education Portal](#).

Historica Canada Education Portal: [education.historicacanada.ca](http://education.historicacanada.ca)  
The Canadian Encyclopedia: [thecanadianencyclopedia.ca](http://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca)  
The Heritage Minutes: [heritageminutes.ca](http://heritageminutes.ca)  
Historica Canada: [historicacanada.ca](http://historicacanada.ca)

The Historical Thinking Project: [historicalthinking.ca](http://historicalthinking.ca)  
Library and Archives Canada: [bac-lac.gc.ca](http://bac-lac.gc.ca)  
Canadian War Museum: [warmuseum.ca](http://warmuseum.ca)  
Nova Scotia Archives: [archives.novascotia.ca](http://archives.novascotia.ca)

## Teacher Tip:

To complete the following activities, watch the accompanying videos as a class at least twice before beginning the activities. Students may want to watch the videos several times to familiarize themselves with the content. Turning on subtitles can help New Language Learners better understand the videos. Discuss any questions students may have about the videos after watching each one.



◀ Arrival of Hospital Ship at Pier No. 2 Halifax, 1918 or later, by Mr. Arthur Lismer (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19710261-0924).

▶ The Gazette, 7 December 1917 (courtesy Toronto Star Newspaper Centre).

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1917.—TWENTY-TWO PAGES  
**Disaster Death List Estimated**  
**Ship Blew Up, Laying North**

RELIEF SHIP GORED HULL, RISKY SALIENT  
EXPLOSIVE-LADEN FRENCH CRATER ABANDONED DE

# INTRODUCTION

On the morning of December 6, 1917, two ships collided in Halifax Harbour, generating an explosion that devastated the city and surrounding area. Nearly 2,000 people died, and another 9,000 were wounded. At the time, the Halifax Explosion was the largest human-made explosion in history.

Halifax was a bustling port city, and played a particularly significant role during the First World War (1914–1918). Halifax served as an important destination for Allied ships travelling across the Atlantic Ocean. Ships carrying troops and supplies gathered in Halifax Harbour before setting off in a convoy (a group of ships travelling together) across the ocean to Europe. The constant presence of soldiers and the threat of shelling by German submarines (U-boats), meant that Nova Scotia was closely connected to the war in Europe.

The morning of December 6 began like many other days – people prepared breakfast and went to work, children went to school, and ships moved in and out of the Harbour. But on this morning, the movement of those ships led to a deadly collision. A Norwegian ship, the *SS Imo*, carrying relief supplies to Belgium, began its departure from Halifax Harbour. At the same time, a French ship, the *SS Mont Blanc*, loaded with explosive munitions bound for the battlefields of France, was arriving. Passing through the narrow passage of the harbour, miscommunication led the two ships to collide, sparking a fire. Few people knew that the *Mont Blanc* was loaded with explosives and therefore few were aware of

the immediate danger. Within 20 minutes, the fire aboard the *Mont Blanc* ignited the explosives. The detonation of nearly 2,500 tonnes of explosive materials sent a blast across the city, shattering windows, levelling buildings and taking thousands of lives.

The Halifax Explosion made international news, and offers of relief came swiftly from neighbouring communities in Canada, the United States and beyond. The city rallied together to support the 6,000 people made homeless by the Explosion, and the many thousands more left without adequate shelter. Friends, family, community shelters and relief stations provided food, clothing and shelter to those who had lost everything. The state of Massachusetts played a particularly essential role, acting quickly to send trains of supplies and medical personnel, including surgeons and nurses to treat the thousands of wounded.

For a more comprehensive overview of the event, please read "[Halifax Explosion](#)" on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

*Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion* explores the role of Halifax during the First World War, the causes and consequences of the Explosion, and the experiences of survivors so that we can better understand the perspectives of those who lived through or died as a result of the Explosion. Individual perspectives of survivors, brought to life through primary sources, reveal what it was like to be in Halifax on that fateful day. These primary sources provide a window to explore this dramatic event in Canadian history.

## 1. HALIFAX DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

### HOW DID HALIFAX CHANGE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR?

What role did Halifax play during the war effort? Explore the wartime conditions in Halifax and assess the biggest changes the city experienced during the war.

1. Form small research groups of three or four people. Drawing on what you know, brainstorm as a group how Halifax, and how life for its residents, may have changed as a result of the war. Consider the city's role in the war effort, as well as its geographical location, resources, residents and infrastructure.
2. In your group, generate a list of three to five things that might have changed as a result of the war.
3. Read "[Wartime City](#)" in the "[Halifax Explosion](#)" article on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* to examine how various aspects of life in Halifax changed. Add additional ideas to your list as you uncover them.
4. In your group, make a final judgment about the degree of change Halifax experienced during the First World War based on your list. Rank the degree of change on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being a small degree of change; 5 being a large degree of change), and justify your ranking.



▲ *Olympic with Returned Soldiers, 1919*, by Mr. Arthur Lismer (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19710261-0343).

**Teacher Tip:** Halifax faced many wartime changes. Consider the following changes with your class: the threat of German U-boats, blackouts for Halifax homes and businesses out of fear of bombing, an increase of soldiers in the city, the arrival of hospital ships and the return of wounded soldiers, total war, the role of women in the war effort, and the role of children in the war effort.

# 2. THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION: CAUSES & CONSEQUENCES

## WHAT WERE THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION?

"Wrecked homes – Campbell's [sic] Rd.", 1917 or 1918  
(courtesy Nova Scotia Archives).

## Cause & Consequence

Historical events are **not inevitable**, but the result of complex relationships between causes and consequences. Short- and long-term causes are the product of the interaction between **context** (existing conditions) and **agency** (the power humans exercise). Some consequences are **expected**, others **unexpected**. For more information on the Historical Thinking Concepts, visit [historicalthinking.ca](http://historicalthinking.ca).

### Part A: causes

What caused the Explosion? View the Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion introductory video and the [Halifax Explosion Heritage Minute](#) and read "[Halifax Explosion](#)" on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* to learn about the causes.

1. Note any causes of the Explosion you observe or hear while watching the video(s) and reading the article. What questions do you have about the causes?
2. Explore a variety of sources to gather evidence about what caused this event.
3. In pairs, share the causes you have uncovered. Sort them into short-term (immediate) and long-term causes.
4. Create a timeline that presents the causes that led to the Halifax Explosion that you have identified in chronological order.

### Part B: consequences

What occurred in the aftermath of the Explosion? Assess the most significant consequences.

1. In pairs, brainstorm the different ways a large explosion could affect an urban port. Create a list of consequences.
2. Explore various sources to gather more evidence about the impact of the Explosion, and identify other consequences.
3. Create a list of categories of consequences (physical damage, immediate responses, human loss, economic consequences, etc.). Sort your list of consequences into the categories you have created. Are there any outliers that don't fit any particular category? If so, make a note of them.
4. Sort the consequences into expected and unexpected consequences.
5. Write a short reflection on the consequences you have listed. Were there any that surprised you? Were there any that you didn't initially foresee?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITY 1:

Using the criteria for historical change [see below], have a class discussion about the most significant consequences of the Halifax Explosion. Take a class vote on which consequence had the most significant impact.

### Criteria for Historical Change

1. **Substantial effect:** Led to a dramatic difference in the way things functioned
2. **Relatively permanent:** Led to a lasting condition or development
3. **Widespread:** Effects were broadly felt across a particular society/time period<sup>1</sup>

### EXTENSION ACTIVITY 2:

Have a class discussion about the issue of responsibility in the Explosion. Which people or groups were responsible? Consider the following questions: How do we know whether someone is responsible? What does it mean to be responsible? How is responsibility different from blame? Write a reflection outlining your thoughts.

### Modification 1

Search the internet for images of the Halifax Explosion. You may also want to search the Canadian War Museum, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Library and Archives Canada, the Nova Scotia Archives and SOS! Canadian Disasters. Create a poster or PowerPoint presentation of the causes and/or consequences using images you found in your search. Add captions to the images, noting whether each depicts a cause or consequence.

### Modification 2

Create a commemorative postcard that captures one of the significant consequences of the Halifax Explosion. Choose a newspaper headline, quote, map and/or image from the Canadian War Museum, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Library and Archives Canada, the Nova Scotia Archives or SOS! Canadian Disasters to incorporate into your postcard design.

### Research Resources

For additional research resources, read "[The Halifax Explosion and the CNIB](#)," "[The Halifax Explosion Feature](#)," "[The Halifax Relief Commission](#)" and "[Halifax Explosion Map](#)" on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and/or watch a 13-minute silent film on post-Explosion Halifax on the Nova Scotia Archives [YouTube channel](#).

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "Learning about Continuity and Change", The Critical Thinking Consortium, [https://tc2.ca/uploads/PDFs/thinking-about-history/continuity\\_and\\_change\\_elementary.pdf](https://tc2.ca/uploads/PDFs/thinking-about-history/continuity_and_change_elementary.pdf)

# 3. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE DURING THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION THROUGH PRIMARY SOURCES?

1. Brainstorm memorable experiences or events in your life and choose one to describe to a partner. Take turns describing events with your partner. Offer a vivid account using the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) and personal thoughts. While your partner tells you about their experience, listen for words that reveal their thoughts, values and beliefs about the event, and about the world more widely. Discuss with your partner. Compare what you thought was significant with what they thought was significant.
2. As a class, discuss how you can take what you've learned and apply it to primary source analysis. How can you tell how the person you are analyzing (in this case, your partner) felt or thought about the events that took place? For example, which words or phrases offered the most insight into their perspective? Even though you may not be able to identify with their experience, you may be able to better understand their perspective by paying attention to those details.

Plan showing devastated area of Halifax City, N.S., 1918 (courtesy Nova Scotia Archives/N.S. Board of Insurance Underwriters, V6/240 – 1917 Halifax: Location 4.2.3.2).



## Historical Perspectives

Exploring **historical perspectives** involves working toward a better understanding of those who lived in the past — people who had different **worldviews** and **experiences**, and who lived in a different historical context. We cannot simply imagine or guess what someone from the past believed or valued; we must examine **evidence** to draw **observations** and **inferences** that will shape our understanding. The perspective of one person from the past can provide a wealth of evidence about an event, an experience, or a worldview, but we cannot generalize based on one perspective. We must consider **multiple perspectives** and develop a broad understanding of the different perspectives that existed in the past. Primary sources, including personal letters and sketches, are an excellent way to explore historical perspectives and better understand the lives and experiences of people in the past. Read more about the Historical Thinking Concepts at [historicalthinking.ca](http://historicalthinking.ca)

# 4. ETHEL BOND: LETTERS

Through the following activities, students will work towards a better understanding of the experiences of people who survived the Halifax Explosion. To begin, watch and listen carefully to the Ethel Bond video. Afterwards, share your responses with the rest of the class (including connections, questions, etc.).

As you work through the activities in this section, keep in mind the following guiding question:

## GUIDING QUESTION:

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT ETHEL BOND'S EXPERIENCES DURING THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION FROM HER LETTER?

### Teacher Tip:

- Download the **3D Primary Source Pyramid** from the [Education Portal](#). Have students assemble a pyramid to help guide and prompt their analysis in the activities.
- Download the **Annotated Ethel Bond Letter** in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** for additional context and tips on how to guide analysis of the letter in your classroom.
- A **biography of Ethel Bond** is available in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** on the [Education Portal](#).



Bond Family, c. 1900 (private collection of Koralee King).

## A) The 5Ws

After reading the **Ethel Bond Letter Transcript** in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** on the [Education Portal](#), look for clues to answer the who, what, when, where, and why of the account.

1. In pairs, use the **5Ws Chart** in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** to write your observations about the letter:

- \* Who wrote the letter?
- \* To whom was it written?
- \* When and where was the letter written?
- \* What is the letter about?
- \* Why was the letter written?

2. What further questions do you have?
3. Discuss your findings as a class.

# 5Ws

## B) CONTEXT

Exploring the context in which Ethel's letter was written helps us better understand the content in the letter.

Ethel Bond's family lived in Richmond, a North Halifax working-class suburb that was devastated by the Explosion. Many of the people who lived there were skilled railroad and construction workers, although Ethel's father, Alexander Bond, owned a sugar mill.

Read more about the areas of Halifax affected by the Explosion in the "[Halifax Explosion](#)" article on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Make notes answering the following questions:

- What can this tell you about which people and communities were most affected?
- What questions do you still have?

## 4. ETHEL BOND - CONT'D

### C) EXPLORING

Reread and analyze Ethel Bond's letter. A close reading is important to gain a deeper understanding of Ethel Bond's experiences.

1. In pairs, identify and define any unfamiliar words or phrases.
2. Underline or circle words or phrases in the letter that offer clues about Ethel Bond's feelings and thoughts, and what was important to or valued by Bond.
3. Explore the letter to understand her experiences using the five senses. Briefly summarize what Bond describes seeing and hearing, and make inferences about what she might have smelled, tasted, or touched.

**Teacher Tip:** Prompt students to look out for sentences that don't make sense even though they may know the meaning of the words. Consider printing copies of the letter for students.

Letter from Ethel Jane Bond to Murray Kellough, 16 December 1917 (courtesy Nova Scotia Archives/Murray Kellough fonds/2010-015).

### Word Key

**Magazine:** place to store ammunitions

**Rent:** pierced or disturbed with sound

**Harrow up:** to deeply disturb or distress

### D) REACHING CONCLUSIONS

As you study the details of the letter, develop conclusions based on what you observe and what you can infer. What can we learn about Ethel Bond's experiences from her letter?

Record your observations, hypotheses and conclusions in the **Reaching Conclusions Chart** in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** on the **Education Portal**.

As a class, discuss what we can learn about the Explosion from Ethel Bond's letter.

- What does the evidence suggest about Ethel Bond's thoughts and feelings about the Explosion?
- What has this letter taught you about one person's perspective on what it was like to live through the Explosion?



Letter from Ethel Jane Bond to Murray Kellough, 16 December 1917 (courtesy Nova Scotia Archives/Murray Kellough fonds/2010-015).

Ethel Bond (young adult), c. 1911 (private collection of Koralee King).

### E) FINDING PROOF

Compare two or more individuals' experiences of the Halifax Explosion. Is there enough evidence in other sources to corroborate Ethel Bond's account?

1. In pairs, compare Ethel Bond's letter to her sister's letter in the **Primary Sources Supplement** in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package** on the **Education Portal**. Using the **Finding Proof Chart**, also in the **Ethel Bond Worksheets Package**, compare and contrast Bond's account with this other account. Record your findings in the chart. Consider the following questions when making your assessments:
  - How is Ethel's perspective on the Explosion different from another survivor's?
  - How is it the same?
2. Discuss the similarities and differences you noted with another pair. Record your findings in your notebook.
  - Are the accounts more similar or different?
  - What are the most important similarities or differences? Are there inconsistencies?
  - What does this tell you about the reliability of individual sources?
  - What does comparing perspectives reveal to you about the Explosion?
3. Are there still any gaps in your understanding of the experience of different people living and working in Halifax at the time? What accounts or whose voices are you still seeking?

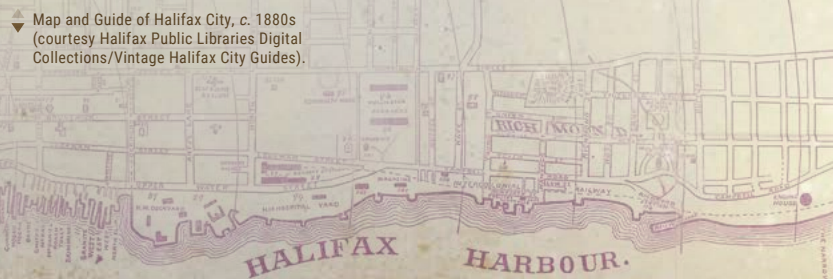
### Modification

Create your own sketches of visual descriptions in the letter as you watch and listen to the video at least twice.

### NOTE TO TEACHERS:

Alternatively, read the letter transcript aloud while students sketch their vignettes.

Map and Guide of Halifax City, c. 1880s (courtesy Halifax Public Libraries Digital Collections/Vintage Halifax City Guides).



# 5. ARTHUR LISMER: SKETCHES

Arthur Lismer, A.R.C.A. ▶  
(courtesy Archives of Ontario/  
F 1075-12-0-53/10007820).

A.Y. Jackson, Fred Varley, ▶  
Lawren Harris, Barker Fairley,  
Frans Johnston, Arthur Lismer,  
J.E.H. Macdonald at the Arts  
and Letters Club  
(courtesy Archives of  
Ontario/F 1066-6/10010313).

A biography of Arthur Lismer is available in the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package** on the **Education Portal**.

In the following activities, you will work toward a better understanding of the experiences of people who survived the Halifax Explosion. To begin, watch and listen carefully to the “**Halifax Explosion in Sketches**” video. After watching the video, share your responses with the class (including connections, questions, etc.).

As you work through the activities in this section, keep in mind the following guiding question:

## GUIDING QUESTION:

**HOW DO ARTHUR LISMER’S SKETCHES PROVIDE A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WHO LIVED THROUGH THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION?**

**Teacher Tip:** Download the **3D Primary Source Pyramid** from the **Education Portal**. Have students assemble a pyramid to help guide their analysis.

## A) The 5Ws

After watching the “**Halifax Explosion in Sketches**” video, complete the 5Ws chart to record your findings and organize your thoughts.

1. Use the **5Ws Chart** in the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package** to record your answers.
  - \* Who is the artist?
  - \* When and where were the sketches created?
  - \* What do they communicate?
  - \* Why were they created?
2. What questions do you have?
3. Discuss your findings as a class.

5Ws

## B) CONTEXT

Contextualizing a primary source involves placing the source in space and time. Examining the context of a source helps us situate one piece of evidence in the wider picture of history. To analyze Arthur Lismer’s sketches as evidence from the past, it is important to consider them within the events of the time.

1. Working in pairs, review the **Arthur Lismer Sketches Collection** in the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package** on the **Education Portal**.
2. Using your knowledge and notes from Activities 1 and 2 in this guide, assess what evidence you can see in Lismer’s sketches of the Explosion. Consider the following questions:
  - Is the broader historical context of the First World War visible in Lismer’s sketches?
  - Is it obvious that these sketches depict the Halifax Explosion? Or could they be depicting another event?
3. Discuss your findings as a class.

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS:** Assign students one of the images in the **Arthur Lismer Sketches Collection** to analyze.

## C) EXPLORING

Studying the details of a sketch can reveal a deeper understanding of Lismer’s perspective and the Halifax Explosion itself. In pairs, select a sketch to analyze. Use the **I See, I Think, I Wonder Chart** in the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package** to record your observations as you work through the steps below.

1. Study the image closely. Cover three-quarters of the image with a piece of paper, and focus on one quadrant at a time to examine the details.
2. Working independently, begin with the “I See” section of the chart. Think about the following questions and record your observations in the “I See” section:
  - Who is in the image? Consider age, gender, social or familial role(s).
  - What details do you see? Consider the actions and expressions of figures, and the buildings or landscapes depicted.
  - What is the mood and tone? Consider the composition, and techniques like lines, shading and colour.
3. Next, work with your partner on the “I Think” section. Building on what you recorded in the “I See” section, develop inferences [see below] about what the sketch communicates, what Lismer’s intentions may have been, or what it might tell us about the Explosion. Which details do you think tell us the most about the experiences of people who lived through the Explosion?
4. Do you still have questions about what is going on in the sketch? List your questions in the “I Wonder” section.
5. Come together as a class to discuss your findings.

### Inference:

*An inference is an educated guess, based on evidence and reason.*

## D) REACHING CONCLUSIONS

1. Using your notes from the **I See, I Think, I Wonder Chart**, draw three conclusions that answer the guiding question: What can we learn from Arthur Lismer’s sketches about people’s experiences during the Explosion?
2. Discuss your conclusions in small groups. Are your findings similar to or different from those of other groups?
3. Have a class discussion.

## E) FINDING PROOF

Compare one of Lismer’s sketches with a similar photograph in the **Image Comparison Supplement** in the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package** on the **Education Portal**.

1. Working in pairs, choose an image set from the available photographs and sketches to compare. Record notes about the details in each of the images in the **Finding Proof Chart** in the **Arthur Lismer Worksheets Package**.
2. Consider the similarities and differences that you found and discuss your findings with another pair.
  - Are the images more similar or different?
  - What are the most important similarities or differences?
  - Are there inconsistencies?
  - What does comparing images of the event reveal to you about the Halifax Explosion?

## Modification

Write a brief caption for a sketch and a photograph from each artist’s perspective.

# 6. SUMMATIVE: A

## Debating Visual Evidence

As photographic technology evolved in the early 20th century, cameras became a more accessible way to capture a moment in time – with the perception of recording reality.

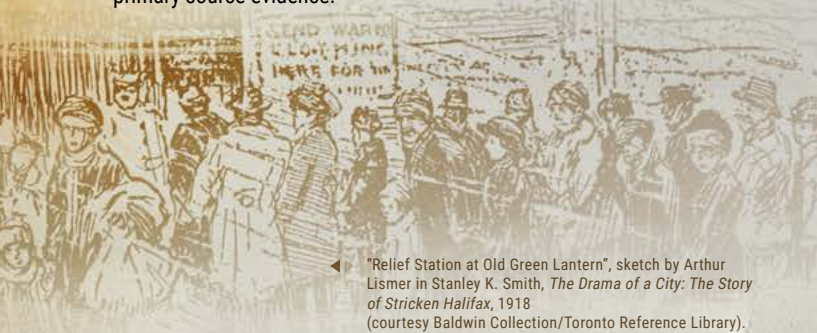
Photographic postcards of the Explosion were widely circulated after the disaster, but some newspapers – like the *Canadian Courier* – believed sketches evoked more feeling:

*“...because the Artist felt what he saw he flung down his impressions in quick, nervous lines and splashes more eloquent than the accurate lines of any camera, at a time when the eyes and ears and the very brains of people were in a State of Chaos in a City of Wrecks.”*

Newspapers were the primary source of information for Canadians at this time. Lismer’s drawings, in the context of this article, played a role in shaping the public perceptions of what those who lived through the disaster experienced.

1. As a class, debate whether sketches or photographs are more useful to understand the Explosion? Which is more reliable? Why?
2. Alternatively, discuss the strengths and limitations of using visual evidence – like sketches or photographs – as opposed to textual primary accounts (like letters).

**Teacher Tip:** Refer to **The Memory Project: A Guide to Primary Sources** for more info about the strengths and limitations of visual primary source evidence.



◀ “Relief Station at Old Green Lantern”, sketch by Arthur Lismer in Stanley K. Smith, *The Drama of a City: The Story of Stricken Halifax*, 1918 (courtesy Baldwin Collection/Toronto Reference Library).

## Visual Primary Sources

Visual primary sources, like photographs and sketches, can be valuable and rich pieces of evidence about the past. Visual evidence can reveal clues that historians are unable to find elsewhere. For example, visual evidence can give us details about clothing styles, daily life and architecture, or it can capture moments from significant events. Visual evidence can also be analyzed as a representation of a particular moment in the past. For instance, a recruitment poster from the First World War might tell us not only how soldiers were persuaded to enlist, but also reveal attitudes about gender roles at the time.

For more information, see **The Memory Project: A Guide to Primary Sources** on the Education Portal.

Damage caused by the Halifax Explosion at the north end of Campbell Road (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-003625B).

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from “Considering Significance”, The Critical Thinking Consortium, [https://tc2.ca/pdf/T3\\_pdfs/EHT\\_TheGreatestHits.pdf](https://tc2.ca/pdf/T3_pdfs/EHT_TheGreatestHits.pdf)

# 6. SUMMATIVE: B

## Missing Perspectives

Our understanding of the past is shaped in large part by the primary-source evidence that has been saved and shared through time. This means that when evidence from the past goes missing, is thrown away, or is not publicly accessible (in museums or archives), the voices contained in that evidence are silenced.

1. Working in pairs, take stock of the individual perspectives that you have explored so far. Have a brainstorm discussion about the following questions:
  - Whose voices are represented? Consider age, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and religion.
  - Whose voices are missing? Why are these voices often absent from historical records?
  - Whose voices would be helpful to create a more complete picture?
2. As a class, have a discussion about whose perspectives are missing. Why do you think this is? How can we try to get at absent perspectives?

**Teacher Tip:** You may want to prompt students to consider the different ways in which voices are left out, including how different cultural groups preserve their histories, how literacy can affect written records, and how a museum or other heritage organizations decide what enters their collections.

# 7. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION

## Should We Study the Halifax Explosion?

**WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION IN CANADA'S HISTORY? SHOULD IT BE INCLUDED IN THE K-12 SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM IN EVERY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY ACROSS CANADA?**

Imagine the history curriculum is being rewritten, and you have been asked to weigh in on whether an event should be included.

1. In a small group, discuss the historical significance of the Explosion based on your research thus far.
2. Use the Historical Significance Criteria [see below] to record your findings.
3. Decide as a group whether, or to what extent, the Explosion should be included in the curriculum. Is it a significant event just for Haligonians? For people from Nova Scotia? For the Maritimes? All of Canada? The rest of the world? Make recommendations, and provide evidence to support your reasoning.
4. As a class, vote on whether the Explosion is significant enough to be studied in your province or territory.

## Historical Significance Criteria

**Prominence:** Was it recognized as significant when it happened?

**Consequences:** How significant was the impact?

**Revealing:** What does it reveal about the larger historical context or current issues?<sup>3</sup>