

Grade 11 Historical Thinking Concepts Programs –

“44 Months of Hell: The Story of the Winnipeg Grenadiers”

The Manitoba Museum, 2015

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Summary of activities

Unlike the previous phase of the project where researching the feasibility and logistics of offering in-school programming was as essential as the program development, this phase focused exclusively on the research and development of a school program. Developing programs using the Historical Thinking Concepts approach calls for great attention to detail and this phase of the project definitely highlighted that point to our staff.

Based on the results of surveys conducted in the first phase of the project, the wars (WWI, WWII) were the number one area of interest for teachers and students alike. The Manitoba Museum houses a large collection of artefacts, documents and photographs, in addition to hours of oral histories, from veterans of the Battle of Hong Kong/Japanese POW camps. The Hong Kong Veterans Collection, noted as one of our Significant Collections, was the perfect repository for unique primary sources that fit perfectly with the results of our surveying. In my permanent role at The Manitoba Museum (Human History Cataloguer), I already had a fair amount of experience with the material, but combing through each piece of evidence and assessing its historical significance, whether it could viably be replicated (either in-house or by an outside contractor) and whether it fit with the overall program took a great deal of time. The Hong Kong Vet collection is comprised of 710 artefacts, including 10 diaries and 113 letters, and 94 oral histories.

Further to this, I worked on building relationships with members of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association (HKVCA), who provided me with resources and facilitated a meeting and interview with one of the surviving Hong Kong veterans who was able and willing to speak with me. He verified information, gave me additional insight into some of the artefacts and diaries I had selected and helped me evaluate the veterans I planned to feature in the program (note: based on a lack of material culture available from this veteran, he was not used in the program). This experience was not only enriching for me personally and professionally, but also helped me to answer questions arising from my research that I wouldn't otherwise have been able to address.

In sum, activities included:

- Home visit to a Hong Kong veteran;
- Building relationships with the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association (HKVCA) ;
- Vetting hundreds of artefacts, documents and photographs;
- Listening to hours of oral histories;
- Determining the veterans to feature in the program;
- Arranging for replication of specific artefacts;
- Reproducing documentary artefacts;
- Creating the Prezi presentation;
- Supervising the sound/video editing process;
- Developing handout materials;

- Delivering the program to students;
- Facilitating the evaluation process;
- Tweaking and editing the program based on feedback and observation;
- Writing detailed program descriptions for Teacher's Guide and website;
- Developing training materials and training staff to deliver the program.

Successes

- Creation of a High School program using one of The Manitoba Museum's Significant Collections;
- Replication of select artefacts and documents for use by programs staff;
- Continued fostering of relationships within the Education Community;
- Potential for program to be offered to alternative audiences (seniors groups, university groups, military groups, etc);
- Development of relationship with the HKVCA;
- Teachers demonstrated continuing interest in first phase program (Son of a Gun). With additional advertising/visibility and increased information on the website, I think teachers will be more comfortable booking either Son of a Gun or 44 Months of Hell for their classrooms (either onsite or in-class)

Challenges

- Lack of interest of Français/French Immersion teachers. This issue continued from the first phase of the project; despite repeated efforts to capture the Français/French Immersion audience, including advertising the programs in our Teacher's Guide, there was no interest from this group. The program will be translated at the Museum's expense at a later date.
- The in-class offering got a great deal of attention from teachers in communities far from Winnipeg/surrounding area. I had inquiries from Roblin, Dauphin and a school 4.5 hours north of Winnipeg (teacher was not specific about school name). Due to timing (winter) and costs (travel, accommodation, per diems) and the inability to offer other programs off-site (e.g. to capture other grades within the community and therefore make the cost more affordable for the community), we had to decline those bookings.
- Although I had thought that I would be able to develop multiple programs (including WWI), it was not feasible with the amount of research involved, as well as timing (working with partners in the military with tight schedules, applying for access to military documents, etc). In the end, the Museum can now offer two solid programs to grade 11 teachers/students, as opposed to offering programs developed for younger grades.