

# Creating Authentic Diaries

This modelling the tools is incorporated into critical challenges at grades 7 and 8, however, it can be adapted for use at all grade levels.

## Overview

The detailed activities that follow help students write an authentic diary/journal entry about an assigned historical event from the perspective of an individual at the time. Students examine a forged historical entry and an actual entry for evidence of the criteria for an authentic diary/journal. Students then create a brief biography of an assumed character and write an entry that involves an historical event, as seen through the eyes of this character. Students critique each other's entries before submitting their final drafts.

Care must be taken to ensure that diary/journal entries are respectful and do not express inappropriate generalizations or stereotyping.

## Session One

Introduce historical diary and journal.

- Remind students that individuals will have different perspectives on the same event. Often, the personal perspectives on an historical event are most effectively portrayed in diaries or personal journals, which provide insights not only into the great historical events of the era but also into the everyday lives of the ordinary people who lived them. Indicate to the class that they will be asked to develop a diary or journal about an event from the perspective of an individual who was alive at the time. Explain that when they take on the role and write their entry, students are developing historically empathy—the capacity to place themselves in the minds and times of historical persons. Point out the differences between a diary and journal:
  - *Diaries* tend to have shorter, more frequent entries and focus more on the day to day events that occur to the individual.
  - *Journals* tend to have longer entries and focus, in more depth, on a particular issue. They would include the writer's views on the event and/or the impact / possible impact of the event on their life.

Introduce a forged diary.

- Display overhead transparencies of [Genie Macleod's Diary](#) and [Gerald Keegan's Journal](#). The former is a fictionalized account of a trip from Ireland in 1847; the latter is an authentic journal account of the same event. Place the forged diary on the overhead and briefly discuss the following questions:
  - Is it an effective diary entry? Why or why not?
  - Does it seem that it was actually written by someone in 1847?

Introduce criteria for historical diaries/journals.

- Distribute a copy of [Effective Historical Diaries/Journals](#) to each student. Explain that the criteria in the left-hand column reflect the qualities of a historically useful, authentic diary or journal. Ask students to examine the forged diary and record evidence related to each criterion in the right-hand column, placing a + in front of evidence indicating that the criterion is present and a - before evidence suggesting that the criterion is missing. After students have recorded several pieces of evidence, invite them to share their results with the rest of the class. Referring to the bottom of [Effective Historical Diaries/Journals](#), ask students to comment on the following:
  - What (if anything) are the strengths of this diary?
  - What areas need more work?

Introduce an authentic journal.

- Display the second overhead transparency and invite students to read this actual journal entry by Gerald Keegan of his voyage to British North America in 1847. (Instead of the overhead, you may prefer to make copies of the entry for each pair of students.) Ask students to look for and record evidence for each criterion outlined on [Effective Historical Diaries/Journals](#). Suggest that students use a different coloured pen to record the evidence for this second sample. After a suitable length of time, debrief the activity as before.

Pose the critical task.

- Present the critical task:

*Write an authentic diary/journal entry about your assigned event from the perspective of a person living at the time.*

Assume a character.

- Ask each student to select one of several groups involved in an historical event; e.g., English Canadians, French Canadians, Aboriginal peoples, recent immigrants. In preparation for developing an entry, students should create a brief biography of their character, including:
  - name
  - occupation
  - age
  - family members, if any
  - place of birth.

Distribute one copy of [Character Biographies](#) to each team for them to record the four biographies.

## **Session Two**

Develop draft entry.

- Ask students to prepare a draft of their diary/journal entry from the chosen person's perspective. Remind students to focus on a specific aspect of their assigned event. Their entry should reflect the criteria for a historically useful, authentic diary/journal. Encourage students to read about the event, looking for details to make their entry more authentic. Student may eventually want to make their final copy look authentic, but they should not bother about this during the draft copy stage.

Critique the draft entry.

- Direct team members to exchange and review each others' work, using copies of the chart on [Effective Historical Diaries/Journals](#) to prepare a written critique. Ask students to share their critique, emphasizing two issues:
  - strengths of the piece
  - areas that need work.

Prepare final entry.

- Based on the feedback received, students may revise their entries and, if desired, add other authentic touches to their final copy. The historical entries for all four focus groups should be mounted beneath the time line at the appropriate place along the continuum.

## **Evaluation**

Assess the entries.

- Use the rubric [Assessing the Diary/Journal Entry](#) to assess students' diary or journal entry. According to this rubric, the assignment is assessed on four criteria:
  - accurate facts
  - specific information
  - revealing insights
  - empathic perspective.

This rubric may be used by students for peer-evaluation of the diary/journal entries.

## **Credits**

Adapted from *Critical Challenges Across the Curriculum* series. Permission granted by The Critical Thinking Consortium for use by Alberta teachers.

## ***Documents***

The following documents are referenced in the above modelling the tools.  
They can be adapted for your needs and re-saved.

### Graphic Organizers

- [Effective Historical Diaries/Journals](#) 
- [Character Biographies](#) 

### Assessment

- [Assessing the Diary/Journal Entry](#) 

### Lesson Material

- [Genie Macleod's Diary](#) 
- [Gerald Keegan's Journal](#) 