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# "PRODUCING A HERITAGE PLAY"

## TO THE TEACHER:

Plays are an excellent way to bring your community's history to life. They are very rewarding and everyone involved learns something new. This project may be used to embellish or create a history unit which emphasizes community heritage and/or transmission of culture. It emphasizes active citizenship on the part of the student and results in a product which is designed to increase awareness in the class and community about the importance of heritage and history. While this activity is geared toward the upper elementary grades (4-7) it may be easily adapted to fit the student's age, skill level or special interest.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- understand why heritage and history are important
- stimulate awareness of the community and how it was shaped
- integrate various curricula (social studies, fine arts, language arts)
- discover how to gather information from a variety of sources and present it in different ways
- learn how to work in a team environment
- develop presentation of self to others (public speaking)

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- period costumes
- props
- art supplies (paint, glue, cardboard boxes, etc. for set construction)

## ACTIVITY:

(grades 4-7)

Step 1  
Choose a story

Try re-enacting a special moment of local historical importance such as the founding of your town, or dramatize the life and struggles of the first pioneers. Other ideas may be to trace the life of an important individual from your community (e.g. the woman who started the first hospital), or the arrival of Europeans from the First Nations perspective. You can even make this a school project, inviting each class to interpret a different decade or era of your town's history.

Step 2  
Doing the research

After the theme and characters have been decided on, it's time to do the research. Divide up the task, some students can research the characters while others do background research on the actual event.

Contact your local historical group, museum, library and archives to help you find information on the people and/or event you have chosen.

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They will be able to assist you in finding local history books, newspaper articles, diaries or other people in the community who will be able to help the class with their research. Invite local historians to come and talk to the class about the topic they have chosen, or have the students interview them. For interview tips see Student Guidelines from "Family Treasures".

**NOTE:** *the teacher should check beforehand that there is enough information on the theme the class has chosen-it's a good idea to keep a couple of extra ideas in mind in case one doesn't work out (check with the local museum or archives for other ideas).*

Step 3 Writing the script The script should be simple and to the point. Clear communication of the event is important, especially for the audience who may not be familiar with the town's history.

Step 4 Rehearsal & set design Keep in mind that not all the students can or want to be in a play. Divide the class at this point and have those who want to be actors begin to review the script and those who don't start thinking about set design, making costumes, finding props, sound effects, and lighting. Remember theatre is not just about actors, it's a team effort!

The set does not have to be complicated. A painted backdrop may be enough to create a feeling of the past. Furniture stores are the best places to find large cardboard boxes, ideal for set building. Look at historic photographs of your community to help give your play a sense of time and place.

**NOTE:** *at this point it might be interesting and helpful to invite members from your local theatre group in to help the students rehearse their lines, design and construct the set and learn about what goes on "behind the scenes".*

Step 5 Costumes, props & performing Contact your local museum or theatre group to see if they have costumes or props for your class to borrow. If not, have the students investigate their grandparents attics for appropriate clothing or encourage parents to participate by sewing costumes-in any case, check out old photos to see what kinds of clothing were worn during the time when the event took place.

Perform the play for the school or on stage at the local theatre.