

SPIES IN THE SHADOWS

LESSON 3: WOMEN AND INTELLIGENCE

Overview

In this lesson, students will look at the role of Canadian women involved in intelligence activities from the early formation of Canada to today. Students will read about and explore the differing roles that women have played in known espionage operations from spying to intelligence gathering to code-breaking and deciphering. By the end of lesson, students will have come up with their own conclusions on how and why women were either directly or indirectly involved in shaping Canada using intelligence and espionage.

Outcomes

Students will:

- conduct research and gather information using a variety of resources
- formulate questions on topics and issues in the history of Canada
- interpret and analyze information according to historical inquiry
- identify different viewpoints
- organize and record information
- express ideas and draw conclusions
- communicate the results of historical inquiries using appropriate terms and concepts in various formats
- examine and explore the cause and consequence of an historical event(s)
- demonstrate effective written, oral, and media communications, both individually and collaboratively, in different and varied ways

Duration

several class periods plus research time

Skills

writing, researching, communicating, critical thinking,

interpreting and analyzing, organizing, summarizing, presenting

Materials

- pens, pencils
- notebook paper or notebook
- *Spies in the Shadows*' website (Espionage Timeline, The Secret Files, and Elements of Intelligence History document, and Links page)
- BLM 1 Women of Influence in Early Canada (for Part A)

- BLM 2 KWL Chart on Women in the 20th and 21st Centuries Chart (for Part B)

Teacher Background and Notes

From early Canada until today, women have played significant roles in the development of our country, including espionage and intelligence gathering. Women such as Madeleine de Verchères in 1692 and Laura Secord in 1813 warned their neighbours and supporting military of impending attacks on their communities. Sarah Edmonds dressed in disguises and changed identities in order to join the Union Army and work against the Confederates during the Civil War.

During World War (WWII), Canadian women both at home and abroad also worked behind the scenes, in situation rooms, in administrative roles, as resistance fighters, couriers, code-breakers, and flew planes from factories in Canada to bases in Britain as part of the Allied front in Europe. Sometimes these roles were intentional, in other cases they were due to circumstance.

In 1979 during the Iranian hostage crisis, Flora MacDonald, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, oversaw our country's participation in the secret operation to exfiltrate six American diplomats from Iran. Under extraordinary circumstances, External Affairs Minister MacDonald worked with her American counterparts as well as the Canadian government to assist the Canadian embassy in managing the operation before the story appeared in the media, including securing Canadian passports for the American embassy members.

In addition, Canadian women have advised various prime ministers on military and national security issues in which Canada has been involved both at home and abroad.

This tradition of women working within the intelligence community has expanded with Canada's capability to protect its internal and external security needs. Today women actively contribute to Canadian intelligence agencies (e.g.: RCMP, CSIS, CSEC, FINTRAC) and the international agencies that use intelligence (e.g.: NORAD, NATO).

Part A: Early Canada: Women in Espionage and Intelligence

Teaching and Learning Strategies

1. Tell students that in this activity they will look up and investigate the contributions of women in espionage and intelligence gathering in early Canada. As spies, couriers, code-breakers, decoders, and defenders, women played a significant role both directly and indirectly in the development, sovereignty, and defence of Canada.

2. Start the activity by reminding students of Laura Secord, who delivered information warning the British of a surprise attack at Beaver Dams (now Thorold, ON) by the Americans during the War of 1812. Then tell students that another woman prior to Secord passed messages and defended her home against outside forces. That woman was Madeleine de Verchères, who lived in New France in the 1600s.
3. Like Secord, Madeline de Verchères risked her life to pass messages and warnings about attacks that affected her community.
4. Taking chances and working subversively are some characteristics that make up the profile of men and women in espionage and intelligence gathering. (See Lesson 1: Spy Identities and Methods). Sometimes women such as Secord and de Verchères deliberately put themselves in danger to save their country or defend their cause. At other times, circumstance and opportunity determine whether or not someone will become a spy, courier, code-breaker, or a defender of their home or cause.
5. Pass out **BLM 1 Women of Influence in Early Canada**. Mention to students that there were many influential women in early Canadian history, who defended their home, acted as couriers, passed messages, disguised themselves in enemy territory, or helped refugees to safety. These women either intentionally or unintentionally helped shape Canada.
6. With a partner, students will be conducting research on the women listed on the BLM. Suggest they use the *Spies in the Shadows*' website including **The Secret Files** and **Espionage Timeline** (found under the **Cryptography Laboratory**) or the **Elements of Intelligence History** document (listed under the **Teachers' Lounge**) to find information for the BLM. Invite them to also look for additional information on the **Links** page of the site and to review other print and online resources of their own choosing.
7. After they complete their research, one pair of students can share their information on the BLM about women's actions with another pair. Suggest they look at what information is similar and what is different. Have them add any new information to their BLM. This will help them in the whole-class discussion that follows.
8. Now direct a class discussion on how the actions of these women might have been decisive moments in the development of or important to Canada at the time. Why did these women take such actions? Ask students to speculate on the outcome for the future nation of Canada, if, for example, Laura Secord had not warned the British about the American plans? How can time-sensitive intelligence play a role in defending a country?

Extensions

9. In the 1800s, both men and women helped slaves in the US to settle in Canada. As part of the Underground Railroad, Canada became one of their final destinations. Women created quilts using specific sewing, knotting, and pattern techniques that relayed secret messages to slaves who were escaping to the North. These messages contained subtle navigational clues for slaves to follow the Underground Railroad. Suggest students work in pairs or small groups to look up information on the quilts that women made to help slaves escape to the North. Have them consider how the women making the quilts used simple methods or techniques to effectively pass secret information. Then invite students to make presentations showing some examples of the quilt codes to the class.
10. Canadian Sarah Emma Edmonds took on several different names in order to join and become a part of the Union Army during the Civil War. American Sarah Slater also took on different names and worked under cover as a courier for the Confederate Army. As a small group activity, have students conduct some further research other than that on BLM 1 about Edmonds and Slater. Then suggest students compare and contrast Edmonds' activities for the Union with that of Slater's for the Confederates. Students might consider assembling their information in a T-chart or some other type of comparing and contrasting organizer. What facets of both women's work, if any, directly affected Canada? How did their work affect Canadian and American relations during the US Civil War?
11. Ask students why people get involved in such dangerous work. Ask them to determine what tactics women may have had to use to safely do their work, such as changing identities and coding techniques to name a few. What motivated Edmonds to take on these roles? What kind of challenges would she have faced on a daily basis as an undercover spy? Encourage students to keep track of their information in a graphic organizer or as jot notes. Then suggest that they produce a collage or a multi-media presentation or write a short paper about her life in espionage.
12. Invite students to think about the culture and society at the time that women, such as Secord, de Verchères, Edmonds, or Slater, were actively engaged in some type of intelligence work. Then in small groups or in pairs, have students discuss the following questions:
 - a. What might have drawn these women to participate in such dangerous activities?
 - b. What tactics did women need to safely perform their work?
 - c. What challenges would they have faced on a daily basis?
 - d. What advantages or disadvantages might these women have encountered as they performed their work?

Then suggest that they write a personal essay or op-ed piece on how these women took on roles that were different than society's accepted expectations for women at the time.

Part B: Women in the 20th and 21st Centuries in Espionage and Intelligence

13. Tell students that threats outside of Canada in the 20th century saw more women taking on roles that used intelligence. Point out to students that during World War I and World War II women took on roles that were traditionally unfamiliar to them. In WWII, women worked as code-breakers, resistance fighters, designed aircraft for the Royal Air Force (RAF), piloted planes between factories and squadrons (prior to the build up for D-Day), and coordinated communications centres such as Camp X. Since WWII, women have also been involved in diplomatic, military, security, and political communities.
14. Read out to students the following names of women who were involved either directly or indirectly in intelligence.
 - Mona Parsons—resistance fighter in Europe during WWII
 - Evelyn Davis—communications coordinator in Camp X near Ajax, ON
 - Marion Orr—pilot for Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) in Canada and Britain
 - Elizebeth Friedman—American Cryptographer who testified in a major Prohibition smuggling case related to Canada
 - Flora MacDonald—Secretary of State for External Affairs in Canada
15. Pass out **BLM 2 KWL Chart on Women in the 20th and 21st Centuries** to the class. Tell students they will use the BLM to conduct research on a number of women in the 20th and 21st centuries who participated in some way either directly or indirectly in intelligence operations.
16. Suggest they start with **The Secret Files** (found under the **Cryptography Laboratory**) and **Elements of Intelligent History** document (located in the **Teachers' Lounge**). Encourage them to search for additional information using print resources and online websites.
17. As they conduct their research, encourage students to determine which of the women listed in BLM 2 were involved in espionage, which of them participated in intelligence operations, and which women provided intelligence or used intelligence as part of their job. Suggest students note this on the BLM.
18. After students have finalized their research, they may work in pairs, in small groups, or as individuals to complete one of the following activities:
 - a. Suggest they write a series of diary entries in which they talk about one of the women's roles in intelligence operations. Students might consider including what motivated that individual to get involved in such a potentially dangerous occupation as well as if and how it changed her life. Suggest students also comment on how typical or atypical the woman's

involvement was for the time. Invite them to accompany the diary entries with illustrations or photocopies of newspaper clippings. Students can either read some entries or present it to the class.

- b. Encourage students to create a zine on one of the women. They might add photocopies of photographs, newspaper articles, documents, or any other materials obtained online to put in the zine. Invite them to be creative and original, but stress that they must include historically accurate information. Then have them present the zines to the class.
 - c. Invite students to produce a triptych presentation on the one of the women. Each panel might represent different parts of her life. Be sure to include her contribution to Canada's intelligence and her participation in any espionage activity, if applicable. Invite them to display it for the class.
 - d. Students might work in pairs to conduct a radio or television interview that will be presented in front of the class. One person takes on the role as the interviewer while the other person is the interviewee. As students prepare for the interview, ask them to develop a list of questions on how that person's work in espionage and intelligence contributed to Canada's development. Remind students that some of the women were born in Canada and others in the US. Have them consider asking some questions about their nationality and whether or not this influenced their work in intelligence. Tell them to rehearse their interview several times before they present it to the class.
 - e. Invite students to write and perform a monologue about one of the women they researched. Tell them to include at least one historically important moment from their life demonstrating the risks they took and actions taken. Then have them perform the monologue for the class.
 - f. Alternatively, encourage students to come up with their own activity that best represents one of the women from the list. Remind them to present their project to the class.
19. To conclude the activity, discuss with the class what they learned about the participation of women in defending and/or shaping Canada. What did students learn and understand about the impact of women in intelligence and espionage? Are the characteristics and skills of these women different or similar to those from early Canada? Explain.

Extensions

20. Introduce students to the Iran Hostage Crisis that began in early November, and familiarize them with Canada's role in helping to free six American embassy members. Canadian Ambassador Ken Taylor is most associated with the Americans' escape. However, at least three Canadian women also played important roles in the rescue of the six Americans. External Affairs Minister Flora MacDonald managed the situation diplomatically from Ottawa. On the ground in Iran, Zena Sheardown, and Patricia Taylor found themselves involved in varying facets of the operation.
 - a. In a small group, have students conduct research on how and why the covert rescue developed. Did Canada volunteer to rescue the hostages? If

not, how did they become involved? Was it a situation where circumstance and opportunity overtook planning? Tell students to focus on the security, political, and intelligence factors that these women had to deal with and the risks they took. What pressures might these particular women have faced under these conditions? How do their actions demonstrate the ethical and moral dilemmas that are part of espionage and intelligence gathering? Suggest students discuss their conclusions and then share them with another group. (**Note:** Students might use their textbooks as one source to look for information on this topic.)

- b. As an alternative individual activity, encourage students to choose one of two books to read about the Iran Hostage Crisis: (1) *Our Man in Tehran* by Richard Wright (HarperCollins Canada, 2010), or (2) *The Canadian Caper* by Jean Pelletier and Claude Adams' (Macmillan of Canada, 1981). Tell students to write a review of the book highlighting the role of the women in securing the safe escape of the embassy members.
21. During WWII across Canada, women from the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service transcribed and transported coded messages from radio communication stations in British Columbia and Nova Scotia. They also worked in the Examination Unit part of the National Research Council of Canada (later changed to Communications Security Establishment [CSEC] in Ottawa, ON). As a small group or as an individual activity, encourage students to find out more about the women from the Naval Services. Suggest they consider the following questions as they conduct their research:
- a. How did Canadian women's contributions parallel those of Canada's Allies?
 - b. Why were the women who decoded messages so essential to intelligence gathering for Canada and the Allies?
 - c. What impact did their contributions make on the outcome of WWII?
 - d. Did their participation have any effect on women's roles in society afterwards? Why or why not?

Invite students to make either an oral presentation or give a slide or multi-media presentation on these women to the class. (**Note:** Students may want to read about and see images from artist Nina Levitt's *Relay*, an art installation piece that pays tribute to the women who worked in radio communications during WWII. Her work was shown at the Robert McLaughlin Art Gallery in Oshawa, ON, as part of a Remembrance Day tribute.)

22. Women journalists now routinely cover intelligence issues for major newspapers in Canada and the US (e.g.: Michelle Sheppard for the *Toronto Star*, Kimberly Dozier for the *Associated Press* [AP], Siobhan Gorman for *The Wall Street Journal*, Dana Priest for *The Washington Post*). They also work as foreign correspondents in dangerous locations for various television news networks (e.g.: Christiane Amanpour for CNN and now ABC, and Ann Medina, a former CBC correspondent). What does this indicate about today's society that women

now routinely cover intelligence issues for newspapers and television networks at home and abroad? Invite students to write an op-ed piece about the topic.

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