Quebec Roots 2026-2027

Pedagogical guide

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QUEBEC ROOTS: AN OVERVIEW

Quebec Roots: The Place Where I Live is a project where students explore what community means to them through writing and photography.

This work is developed in collaboration with professional writers and photographers and will be published in a book.

The task of creating a book about one's community, however, is both complex and abstract, since the notion of community is just that – a concept. It is important that students spend a significant amount of time discussing what community means to them and how they might show different aspects of this in pictures and words to an audience who may never have the chance to visit.

As a teacher involved in this project, you will have the opportunity to guide your students through the production process from beginning to end. The end product will be an anthology where each school is given a chapter for its writing and photographs.

You will not be working in isolation. An author and photographer will visit your school to give writing and photography workshops. Your class might also have a scheduled teleconference with your author and photographer. The use of technology will also allow you to maintain weekly contact with your author and photographer and to connect with other classes involved in the project. You will also have the support of the RÉCIT in your school board to help with any technical issues e.g. the teleconference, downloading photos, etc.

In the spring, your class will be invited to launch the anthology at the Blue Metropolis Literary Festival, where your students will have the chance to meet students from across the province who participated in the project.

QUEBEC ROOTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Quebec Roots fits easily into the QEP, particularly into the ELA programs at the elementary and high school levels.

To complete this project, students will be involved in developing a number of different skills, working collaboratively, as well as completing both a writing and media production process as they create their photo essay and get it ready for an audience. In particular, students will participate in:

Working collaboratively: Throughout the project, students will be working with their peers to brainstorm about which aspects of their community to wish present in their photo essay and decide how and what photographs to take and what writing to include. In addition, a smaller group will be responsible for organizing the photos and text and making layout decisions.

Immersion into texts: Before students begin creating their photo essay, they should have the chance to view older editions of Quebec Roots, as well as photo-essays online. This exercise is important because it will allow them to 'read like a writer,' to compare and contrast the texts and to evaluate how photos and text were written, whether they were successful or not, and why. This is an important step before producing any texts, as it allows students the chance to look at how different texts work, and to become familiar with their codes and conventions.

Writing and media production processes: After having had the chance to look at and talk about photos with the class and with the photographer, students will brainstorm about the types of photos that should be included in their photo-essay. They will be asked to take photos from a number of different angles, and discuss their photos with their peers, as well as uploading photographs to get feedback from the photographer.

Students may decide to reshoot after receiving feedback from the photographer or from classmates.

Once students are satisfied with their photos, they make decisions about the kind of text that should go along with them and go through a writing production process that includes drafting, getting feedback, revising and editing, and finally proofreading their texts, so that they are ready for publication.

Conducting interviews: To gather more information about members of their community or about past events, students may conduct interviews. They will need to practice writing 'open ended' interview questions that will not receive a 'yes' or 'no' answer. They will also have to practice and hone interviewing skills with their classmates before conducting real interviews.

Researching information: Depending on the type of photo essay your class creates, students may need to do research into their community's roots or into events that are talked about in interviews with community members. For instance, one group interviewed World War II vets, and had to research background information about the war to provide context to their photo essay.

Research may include looking into their community's archives, asking a librarian for books which have been written on the community, and/or surfing the Internet for background articles or websites.

Ethnographic research: In the SELA Cycle 2 program, ethnographic research is an important part of the Talk competency. It is basically field research that has the researcher taking field notes, taking photographs, interviewing, and working with questionnaires or surveys to collect information to answer a research question. If the QUEBEC ROOTS project is set up as a research project where students are trying to answer a research question, about changes in the community or traditions in the community, etc. students are using these methods to collect, learning important tools needed to conduct ethnographic research.

MAKING QUEBEC ROOTS A UNIT FOR EVALUATION

Because Quebec Roots embraces many features of the QEP, it is recommended that teachers not treat it as an 'add on' project but make use of some of the project-related activities for the purposes of student evaluation.

Ask students to collect their individual and group work (if applicable) in a separate file folder or duo-tang called "QUEBEC ROOTS." Treat the project as an ongoing unit.

Consider giving students a final mark based on their individual work and on their group participation/ collaboration.

The individual mark could be based on the parallel assignments intended for all students (see list below or make up your own). The participation mark could be based on their concerted efforts to bring the project to fruition. Each of the individual and participation marks could be worth 50% percent of the total.

PARALLEL ASSIGNMENTS

- Journal: Have students keep an ongoing log of their work on the project. Collect the best three entries for evaluation.

- Artistic Statement: Ask students to produce a one-page artistic statement focusing on a piece of writing or photograph they created for the photo-essay (whether or not it made it into the final book). In this statement, students should outline their artistic choices, reasons for what they did, how they accomplished it, whether they felt they were successful, etc.

- The Making Of: Students who are more interested in chronicling the evolution of the project could create a "behind-the-scenes" photo-essay, showcasing funny or memorable moments that occurred while the project was underway. This material could include interviews with the authors or photographers; funny photographs; blooper moments, etc.

Upon completion of the project, students and teachers could organize a double book launch in their school/classroom.

TEACHER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Help students select the best topic/theme for development.
- Use writing exercises to generate writing that will best illustrate the chosen theme.
- Oversee the production process.
- Ensure that all deadlines are met.

QUEBEC ROOTS TIMELINE

SEPTEMBER

- Teacher Orientation Workshop
- Teachers will attend a one-day workshop to learn about Quebec Roots: what it is, how we do it, how long it takes, what to expect from the writer / photographer visits to their school, the book launch, etc.
- The teachers will meet the author and photographer they'll be working with on the project
- Two visits with the writer / photographer team will be scheduled
- Google Docs
- At the workshop, two Google Docs will be created for the project. This document will be shared by the teacher, the writer, the photographer and the Blue Metropolis Educational Programs Coordinator
- Google Doc 1: [Your School Name]: Rough Drafts
- Rough Drafts is where all the best work from the project is saved. Here, the professional writer and photographer will critique the students' writing and photography and suggest changes and improvements.
- Google Doc 2: [Your School Name]: Final
- When the photography and texts are complete, the teacher will transfer the material from Rough Drafts into Final
- Teachers, authors and photographers can insert comments and editing notes into your Google Docs using different coloured text.

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER

PREPARING FOR AUTHOR / PHOTOGRAPHER VISIT TO SCHOOL

- Tell students they will be working on a writing and photography project. Let students know that the best work from the project will be published in a book called Quebec Roots. It's a real book that is published each year, then launched at the Blue Metropolis Literary Festival in the spring.

- The students will be working with a professional author and photographer throughout the project.

- The student's task is to define in pictures and words what their community is about, and what is important to them about their community.

- The first step is to find a topic that interests the students.

- Have students look through past editions of Quebec Roots to see what topics other schools did, and what kind of writing and photos they included.

- Do some brainstorming about the topic. Ask students what the word "community" means to them. Have younger students look up the word in their dictionary.

- Encourage all ideas, no matter how crazy or off the wall. Students should be passionate about their theme. Collect and post student ideas on the blackboard, SMART Board, etc, in preparation for author / photographer visit.

- Show the Quebec Roots documentary by Louise Abbot to the class (it's on YouTube)

- Show students the author's and photographer's work. Have students prepare questions for the author and photographer.

- Find Cameras for Workshop

- Blue Metropolis will lend your school cameras 1-2 cameras, but you need to find many more. If you school doesn't have them, ask the students to bring their cameras from home.

- Charge Camera Batteries

- Charge up the camera batteries before the workshop. Remind students bringing cameras from home to do the same. The cameras won't work with dead batteries.

- Back Up Images and Format Memory Cards

- Back up the images that are on the camera onto a computer, then format the memory cards. Tell your students to do the same with cameras they bring from home. We need clean, empty cards.

FIRST VISIT FROM AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER

- Set aside at least 2-3 hours for this visit.
- During the visit, the author and photographer will work with students to find a topic. The students will be doing writing exercises and taking photos.
- The best writing from this workshop will go directly into your school's Google Doc.
- The photos will be saved into a folder on the teacher's desktop computer at the school. Label the folder "Quebec Roots." Then, make a sub-folder inside with that day's date and put the photos inside.
- The photographers will take these images with them when they leave after the workshop, then will add the best photos to the Google Doc within a few weeks.
- Our final goal for this project is for the students to produce 1,000-1,500 words of text and 8-10 images.
- Continue Working on Project Until Christmas
- After this meeting, teachers will continue working on the project with students until the Christmas break. Keep working on the writing you started with the author and set aside at least 1-2 class periods for the students to take photos
- Any new photos the students take should go into a new folder labelled with the date they were taken.

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER

SECOND VISIT FROM AUTHOR / PHOTOGRAPHER

- During the second workshop, the author and photographer will look at the Google Doc with the students and talk about how the project is going so far. The author will do more writing exercises, and the photographer will take the students out to take more photos.

- The best writing from this workshop will go on the Google Doc, while any new photos will be saved onto the teacher's desktop computer in a folder labelled with that day's date.

- Any new photos the students take will go into a new folder labelled with the date they were taken. The photographers will take these images with them when they leave after the workshop, then will add the strongest 8-10 images to the Google Doc within a few weeks.

- Continue Working on Project Until Deadline

- A few weeks before the deadline, the teacher (in consultation with the author) will take a final look at the writing and remove the weaker texts.

- Then, together with the students, project the Google Docs and select the best 8-10 images together. Label the photos that remain with the student's first and last name, then decide which photo goes with which text, and suggest the order in which students want the material to appear.

- Finally, either select a few students, or working together as a class, write a paragraph describing your school. This may appear at the beginning of your chapter.

- When all this work is done, send a note to your author and photographer that the project is finished.

JANUARY - FEBRUARY

- Texts will be proofread, a graphic designer will lay out the book, then the book will be sent to the printer to be published.

APRIL

- Book launch
- Your class will receive a box of printed books to produce a launch.
- An exhibition featuring excerpts from the book will be presented at the Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival (end of April).
- A digital version (PDF) of the book will be posted on the project website: https://bluemetropolis.org/roots/

PHOTO EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. Six Elements

Go to a street corner, park, or other location, and photograph nine elements of a scene, including light, shadow, repetition, texture, colour, point of view.

2. Two Trips

Walk somewhere without a camera and look for photographic subjects, but don't take any. Leave your camera in the bag. When you get to your destination, walk back over the same route while still looking for photos.

Then, take out your camera, retrace your steps for the third time and capture those photographs.

It's essential that you leave the camera in your camera bag for the first two trips. Do not pull it out until you get back to the start. No cheating. Be disciplined. Look hard. Be observant. Walk slowly.

3. 100 Paces

Go somewhere and take 10 pictures of your surroundings. Make sure that all of pictures are different.

Then, walk 100 paces forward and take another 10 photos.

After you've completed this exercise three or four times, you'll start noticing things that you might have missed before.

4. Upon Reflection

Take 5 photos of reflections. Use puddles, car mirrors, windows, glass, polished metal – anything you can find with a reflective surface.

Be sure not to press the shutter unless you're pointing at a reflected image.

5. Know your ABCs

Take 26 photographs, each of a subject beginning with a different letter of the alphabet. Take your time over every picture to get the best image of your alphabetized subjects.

You'll need to get creative as some letters are far more difficult than others. Best of luck with X.

To make exercise easier (and shorter), you can work with a friend and choose letters at random. The first one to return with ten photographs of subjects beginning with that letter wins.

6. The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Imagine that you've been hired by the Montreal tourist office to take five beautiful photos of your surroundings that would appeal to visitors.

Next, take five photos that would make those same surroundings look scary, awful or ugly.

These exercises will help you to see places that you're familiar with in completely new and contrasting ways.

7. Two Dozen

Pick a location. Stand in one spot and take 24 unique photographs while standing in the same place. You cannot move your feet.

8. Ten of One

Take 10 different photographs of one small subject. The object has to be a small, so not your school, or the city of Montreal, for example.

9. Four Corners

Choose a subject and place it in each corner of the frame and take four different pictures.

WRITING EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. What's New Around You?

Ask students to identify a key place in their community or attend an important community event, and interview someone on site (see "Interviewing Tips").

Stress the importance of sensory details. Prior to the exercise, spend time reviewing the art of writing questions. A follow-up lesson on how to incorporate quotations into a written text might also be required.

2. "I am from" Poems

Sit back-to-back with a partner. Have paper and pencil handy. Ask each student to respond to the following writing prompts:

I am from a geographical point you pass on your way to school/work every day

I am from your favourite thing to eat. e.g. a hot fudge sundae with chocolate sauce & nuts

I am from a favourite family saying or expression

I am from a keepsake you will never throw away & where it is kept e.g. My mother's gold wedding band wrapped in tissue paper in my top drawer

I am from a decision that was made for you or by you that changed you forever

I am from the nicest thing an adult – teacher, parent, coach - has ever said to me

I am from the place I will return to when I have time or money

3. Director's Notebook

Imagine that you have been hired to produce a documentary about your school.What message would you like the film to convey? What images would you capture on film? Identify and make a list of 8 to 10 different things (positive or negative) that would give your audience (people who have never been there) a realistic sense of what life is like there. Have students compare lists.

(e.g. it is a one-room school house, the school is located under an overpass, all students have to do volunteer work to graduate, mother tongue of the student body is not English, school is closed for Goose Break holiday, etc.)

4. What We Are Not

Post an overhead photograph of the school. You may decide to use one of the student photos. Have students study the picture and write a paragraph explaining what their school is not. (e.g. “My school is not located in the hilly landscape of the country.” / “Our students do not come from upper middle-class families with two-door garages.”) Remind students to use sensory details.

5. The School Personified

Post an overhead photograph of the school. Tell students to imagine that the school is not inanimate, but that it is a human being. The students’ task is to write a monologue in the voice of the school – as though they themselves are the school. Their monologue should convey important details about the place.

(e.g. The kids in this school must love me: they write all over my walls in big green pens and their graffiti is beautiful. It is like having a tattoo.... etc.)

6. School Song

Put students into teams of 3 or 4 and have them compose an original school song. Tell them to provide details that convey an accurate sense of place.

7. List Poem

Have students make a list of all the items in their lockers or desks. Everything. Tell them to arrange their list of items creatively, putting some kind of order to it. Add a line or two. Give it a title and call it a poem.

8. Portrait of a Mentor

Have students interview a school or community mentor (teacher, principal, star athlete, high achiever, etc.) and take notes. Instruct them to select a genre (e.g. journal entry) and write a text incorporating the material gathered in the interview. Then ask students to produce a second text in a different genre (e.g. a newspaper story).

9. Brainstorming Exercise

Get out paper and pens. Set stopwatch for ten minutes. Tell students to close their eyes for few moments, then to start writing when you give the following writing prompts.

Think of the moment you:

- Were so happy you could have cried
- Had so much fun you didn't want it to end
- Felt so scared you froze solid.
- Felt angry or proud or some other strong emotion.

After the ten minutes are up, pick one of the memories and list as many sensory details about the memory as you can. Where did the event take place? At what hour of the day? In what season? Go through your five senses and get details from each sense about the setting, or any person involved. You are well on your way to writing a solid, evocative piece about something that matters to you.

10. The Poet as Camera

Choose a picture of something in your community that intrigues you. Study it carefully. Observe objects, landscape, people and clothing. Observe lighting, shadow, blur, etc. Make notes about what you see. Be as precise as possible.

• Write the poem from the point of view of the photographer.

• Write the poem as though you were someone or something in the picture.

• Address your poem to someone in the picture.

• Write a poem telling what happened just before the picture was taken.

• Write a poem telling what happened just after the picture was taken.

INTERVIEWING TIPS

When you write or phone to request an interview with your subject, let the person know exactly how long you expect the interview to take.

Do your homework! Find out whatever you can about your subject before meeting him or her. Preparing in advance for an interview will show your subject that you are taking your assignment seriously.

Prepare a list of questions before the interview. Begin with basic background questions, such as your subject's date and place of birth. Work your way up to more complicated questions.

If possible, interview your subject in a place that's important to him or her (his home, her office, the community centre he or she helped found 50 years ago.) Be sure to jot down physical details about your subject and the place where you are doing the interview. These kinds of details add what journalists call "colour" to a story.

It's often a good idea to begin an interview with a little chit chat. ("I really like that painting over your couch.") Chit chat can be an effective way to warm your subject up for the interview.

Don't feel you have to stick exactly to your list of questions. Often, during the course of an interview, you will come up with new questions.

Try not to ask questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

Act interested! Nod your head when it's appropriate; say "Interesting!" or "Cool!" when your subject tells you something interesting. Your positive energy can contribute to a successful interview.

Don't cut your subject off.

Take careful notes. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotes, that is, when you are quoting your subject word for word.

Don't be shy to ask your subject to slow down if he or she is speaking too quickly.

Thank your subject when you are done!

Using the Five Senses

An effective way to make writing come to life is by using some of the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste.

Deliver the world that you are sensing, and you will win your readers. By writing in a way that uses the senses, you call to a reader's emotions, not just to his intellect.

Human beings are visual creatures, so sight may dominate the other senses in your writing. (If dogs could write, they'd fill their pages with smells, because noses dominate in the canine world.) Make sure you look carefully at people and places you're writing about. Make field trips to visit people and places in the community. Bring notepads and note down all the sights, sounds and smells you can.

Write About Things That Matter to You

If you (the writer) feel emotion about your subject matter, chances are your reader will too. If you feel nothing, the reader feels nothing and gets bored.

Try to write about things and people that excite you or call to you.

A FEW MORE IDEAS ABOUT INSPIRING YOUNG WRITERS -- FROM MONIQUE POLAK

If you keep a diary, write letters, poetry or short stories, let your students know you write, too. I have found it is also useful for teachers to write when their students are engaged in classroom writing assignments – it's a good way to model the kind of behaviour we want to see in our students.

Encourage students to develop their powers of OBSERVATION when they write. Specific details make stories come alive. Students should try to use all five senses when they write descriptively. Effective observation involves the SELECTION OF DETAIL. When writing a description, students should try to create a single dominant mood or impression. For example, students can describe their bedrooms – is the dominant mood one of tranquility or energy? Some teenagers' bedrooms indicate they are in transition – they may have a teddy bear on the bed, but tickets to a rock concert on the bulletin board. Details can be selected to portray this transition.

Encourage students to EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS through writing. Many of us write when we are sad or angry. Writing during these times can help us work through difficult feelings. Also encourage students to write when they are happy or excited.

Encourage students to REFLECT in their writing. Writing lets us think on paper. Ask students to respond to issues or news events. These kinds of exercises provide a good opportunity to discuss the importance of ORGANIZING their writing. Have students consider various organizational strategies such as: chronological, simple to complex, and most obvious to least obvious.

Encourage students to HAVE FUN with writing. Not all writing has to be formal. Provide students with opportunities to play with writing. In my classes, I occasionally let students make "pictures" with words (for example, a self-portrait consisting of a drawing created with words, rather than lines). I have also experimented with allowing students to write with their non-dominant hands.

This last exercise seems to be especially fun for those who are right-handed. Another good way to get past writer's block is to ask students to write lists of 100: 100 things they want to do before they die; 100 qualities they value in a friend; 100 things they like/dislike about themselves.

Encourage students to REWRITE. Emphasize that often, what distinguishes poor writing from effective writing is effort. Professional writers rarely submit their first drafts. Instead, we review our work over and over again. I like to carry a printout of whatever page or two I'm working on with me. That way, I can read it over and make adjustments when I'm out for a walk or waiting in line at the grocery store.

Encourage students to SHARE THEIR WORK. In the world of professional writing, writers depend on outside readers such as editors. Create opportunities for students to share their work with peers. Also encourage students to read their work aloud – it's a great way to spot errors.