

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN: THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

VIMY IN PICTURES: WORKSHEETS

29th Infantry Battalion advancing over "No Man's Land" through German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W.I. Castle/PA-001020).

Photographs capture an instant in time, and present us with a window into a moment in the past. As primary sources, photographs can provide evidence about people, places and events that is not available in other sources. Yet rather than a straightforward snapshot of a past reality, photographs are constructed. The photographer chooses what is included in the frame and what is left out. When looking at photographs as documentary evidence, they must be questioned, explored and interpreted. Photographs were not only created to document the war. They were also taken to share certain messages with the public about war in general and, in this case, the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

These worksheets accompany the video *Think Like a Historian: Vimy in Pictures*. This video explores the image commonly known as *The Taking of Vimy Ridge*. However, the official title of the image is *29th Infantry Battalion advancing over 'No Man's Land' through the German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge*. To mark the centennial of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and help educators and students think critically about primary sources, Historica Canada has created the *Think Like a Historian* series of videos and worksheets. The *Think Like a Historian* series was produced with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Historica Canada is the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship.



Photographer Captain Ivor Castle (right, back view) with a cinematographer, Lieutenant Oscar Bovill and other officers, recording the bombardment of German positions on the Somme (courtesy of Imperial War Museum/Canadian First World War Official Exchange Collection/CO 851).

GUIDING QUESTION: What can *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* photograph reveal about the Battle of Vimy Ridge?

There are five steps to analyzing primary sources:

1. The 5Ws
2. Context
3. Exploring
4. Reaching Conclusions
5. Finding Proof

TEACHER TIP: To complete these worksheets, students may want to watch the videos more than once. Turning on the subtitles can help second language learners understand the content. Watch the video as a class at least twice before beginning the worksheets. Work through the steps above, starting and stopping the video as needed.



Canadian War Photographs Poster.
A full-length depiction of a war photographer dressed in uniform, with his camera and developing materials positioned beside him. He draws back a blue curtain to reveal a scene of trenches, infantrymen and devastated buildings (courtesy of Imperial War Museum/Art and Popular Design Department/Art.IWM PST 3293).

THE 5Ws

The first stage of analysis is asking questions of the primary source. Working in pairs, answer the following questions after watching the *Vimy in Pictures* video.

WHO? Who took the image?	
WHEN? When was the image created?	
WHERE? Where was the image taken?	
WHAT? What is happening in the image?	
WHY? Why was the image created?	

EXTENSION: Are there any gaps in your answers? Where might you look for more information?

CONTEXT

“Photography has about it the convincing atmosphere of naked reality.”

– Lord Beaverbrook,
Canadian War Records Office, 1918

Lord Beaverbrook. Sir Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, was the expatriate Canadian millionaire responsible for the creation of the Canadian War Records Office (courtesy of Canadian War Museum/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/CWM 20020045-1675).



Context helps us situate a primary source in space and time – placing one piece of evidence in the wider picture of history. To understand the historical significance of *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* it is important to conduct additional research about what else was happening at the time this photograph was created, and its lasting impact today.

In 1916, the millionaire Canadian financier Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook) used his own funds to establish the Canadian War Records Office (CWRO) in London, England. The CWRO was created as Canada’s “eyewitness to war” and used Canadian reporters, photographers, artists and filmmakers to document Canadian soldiers’ efforts for audiences on the home front. The Office also provided propaganda that publicized Canadian troops in a heroic light and attempted to raise morale and portray a united front. The Office played a key role in shaping how Canadians saw and understood the war at the time. Even today, historians and a wide array of Canadians learn about the First World War through the CWRO’s vast and fascinating collection of photographs, film and art. Most of this collection is now stored at Library and Archives Canada, the National Film Board and the Canadian War Museum.



The Taking of Vimy Ridge, Easter Monday 1917, by Richard Jack, 1919 (courtesy of Canadian War Museum/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/CWM 19710261-0160).



The Pimple, Evening, by Alexander Young Jackson, March 1918. Soldiers advance in line towards The Pimple, a position north of Vimy Ridge. Jackson was a founding member of the Group of Seven (courtesy of Canadian War Museum/Beaverbrook Collection of War Art/CWM 19710261-0198).

STUDENT ACTIVITY:

- ▶ Read **Documenting Canada’s Great War** on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.
- ▶ Working in pairs, answer the following questions:
 - How has war documentation (photographs, art and film) shaped our understanding of the First World War?
 - How does this material shape how we remember the war?
 - If these visual records did not exist, what evidence would we have to work with? How might this change our interpretation of the past?
- ▶ Take up your answers as a class.

EXTENSION: For additional reading, see **Max Aitken** on the *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, and **Lord Beaverbrook** on the Canadian War Museum website (<http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/after-the-war/history/lord-beaverbrook/>).

EXPLORING

Investigating the details of *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* can reveal more information about the battle and the experience of war. A single primary source may not answer all of the questions we ask of it, and may lead to further questions.

- ▶ Working in pairs or small groups, write a list of the visual details in the photograph. What people, objects and environmental conditions are visible?
- ▶ What questions does this image spark for you?
- ▶ If you could speak with the photographer (William Ivor Castle), what would you ask him about this photograph?



29th Infantry Battalion advancing over "No Man's Land" through the German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W.I. Castle/PA-001020).

REACHING CONCLUSIONS

As you gather information about a primary source, begin to develop an interpretation based on what you can infer from your observations. Consider the following questions when arriving at your conclusions:

- ▶ What can *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* photograph reveal about the Battle of Vimy Ridge?
- ▶ Can a doctored photograph reveal something of the truth?
- ▶ Can doctored photographs be trusted as authentic primary sources?

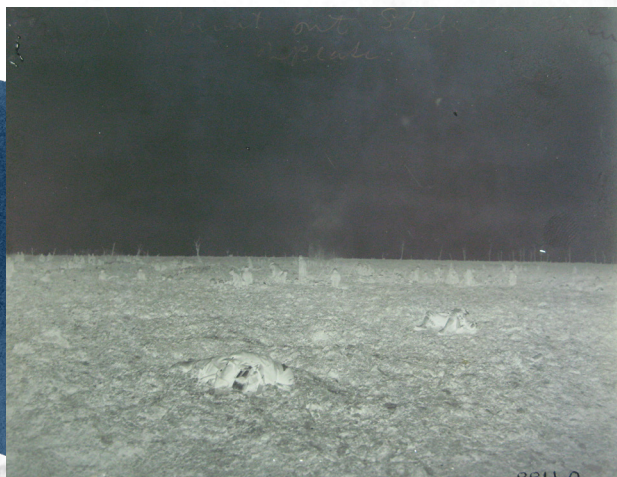
1. Working individually, make a list of five conclusions you have reached based on your analysis.
2. Working in pairs, share your findings with your partner. Compare the conclusions you have both arrived at. In your pair, come to a yes or no answer about the following question: Can a doctored photograph reveal something of the truth?
3. Come together as a class and take a vote on the above question. Be prepared to defend your vote!

EXTENSION: Put yourself in Ivor Castle's shoes. Why did he create a composite photograph? What was his goal? Imagine that you are Ivor Castle and have been asked to defend your reasoning for creating *The Taking of Vimy Ridge*. How would you respond?

Perspective-taking is an integral part of examining the historical narrative. By using historical context and evidence, students are better able to make inferences about the beliefs and actions of people in the past. See historicalthinking.ca for more information on the Historical Thinking Concepts.



William Ivor Castle in civilian dress, seated in a chair. Portrait probably taken soon after the First World War (courtesy Imperial War Museum/Q 113949).



Glass plate negative. Canadians occupying old German third line trenches, Battle of Vimy Ridge, April 1917 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W.I. Castle/PA-1093).



Glass plate negative. 29th Infantry Battalion advancing over "No Man's Land" through German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W.I. Castle/PA-001020).

FINDING PROOF

Before a final conclusion can be drawn about *The Taking of Vimy Ridge*, we need to corroborate our inferences about the photograph. We need to compare our conclusions with other primary and secondary sources.

- ▶ Compare *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* photograph to the article on the **Battle of Vimy Ridge** on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.
- ▶ Create a T-chart. On one side, make a list of the conclusions you have drawn about *The Taking of Vimy Ridge*. On the other side, create a list of facts from the article that support your conclusions. Can your conclusions be corroborated?

CORROBORATION: Evidence that confirms a conclusion.

<i>THE TAKING OF VIMY RIDGE - CONCLUSIONS</i>	<i>THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE - CORROBORATION</i>

- ▶ Write a half-page summary that assesses the benefits and challenges of working with photographs as primary sources.
- ▶ Using examples from the **Battle of Vimy Ridge** article, write a half-page reflection on whether you were able to confirm your conclusions from *The Taking of Vimy Ridge*.
- ▶ Discuss the findings as a class.

ALTERNATE ACTIVITY: Create a T-chart listing the strengths and limitations of working with photographs as a primary source.

EXTENSION: Compare *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* with another primary source. Do you think one source is a more reliable representation of the Battle of Vimy Ridge? If yes, which one? Why?

FINDING PROOF (continued)

MODIFICATION: Working in pairs, compare the two images below. Create a T-chart and make a list of descriptive words for each image. Compare the two lists. What is similar and what is different? Do these images tell the same story of the Battle of Vimy Ridge?



Canadian Byng Boys returning after beating the Germans at Vimy Ridge (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/PA-001451).



29th Infantry Battalion advancing over "No Man's Land" through German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/W.I. Castle/PA-001020).

<i>THE BYNG BOYS</i>	<i>THE TAKING OF VIMY RIDGE</i>

SUMMATIVE ACTIVITY

As a class, discuss how war photography has changed in the last hundred years. How have social media and camera phones changed photography as a medium and how war is documented?

EXTENSION: Students interested in the history of photography can explore this subject further by reading **Photography** on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

EXIT CARD: 3-2-1

- ▶ What are three new things that you learned about the Battle of Vimy Ridge?
- ▶ What are two new things that you learned about primary sources?
- ▶ What is one question that you have now?