

Background for Teachers

Passage

Passage tells the story of the discovery of the Northwest Passage, and of Inuit and European relations from the nineteenth century to the present. In 1848, British explorer Sir John Franklin and his crew of 128 men perished in the Arctic during an ill-fated attempt to discover the Northwest Passage. The search had been an international obsession for centuries, as the passage would provide an alternative trading route for spices and goods from the East. The news of Franklin's failure came as a disappointment to the British public; more shocking was a report of the crew's descent into madness and cannibalism. The report came in 1851 from John Rae, a Scottish doctor working for the Hudson's Bay Company. Travelling thousands of miles on foot and in small craft, Rae had done what six years of searching by the British, Americans, French and Russians had failed to do – he'd discovered the fate of Franklin and found the final link in the Passage.

Rae's horrific news about Franklin's crew did not sit well with the British Navy and ruling class. They waged a bitter public campaign, with the aid of Charles Dickens, which discredited Rae's version of events, banished him to the margins of history and labeled the entire Inuit nation murderous cannibals.

Set in the actual locations of Rae's journey, from his boyhood home in the remote Orkney Islands off Scotland's north coast to the epic landscape of his Arctic expeditions to the boardroom of the British Royal Navy – the centre of power of the British Empire – *Passage* is a story of incredible sacrifice, stunning distortion of the truth and single-minded obsession. It challenges the way we look at history.

This document has been designed to facilitate your use of *Passage* in high school history classes. In the pages that follow, you will find:

- A **Film Chronology**, outlining the issues and events addressed in each chapter of the film.
- A **5-Day Unit Plan**, and a **6-Day Unit Plan**, to help you use parts of the film over five or six days.
- A **2-Day Lesson Plan** and a **3-Day Lesson Plan**, to support your use of a section of the film for two or three periods.
- **Student Activity Sheets**, to help students engage with important questions as they watch the film.
- **Student Activity-Sheet Answers**, to facilitate teachers' and students' reviews of the Student Activity Sheets.

The DVD is available for sale at <nfb.ca/store> or by calling the NFB's toll-free customer service line at: 1-800-267-7710. More information about these and other educational films can be found on the NFB website: <nfb.ca>. Extensive collections of NFB productions are also available at partner libraries across Canada.

Film Chronology: *Passage*

Film (148 minutes)

- 0:00 The story of John Rae – the man who eventually discovers the Northwest Passage (Plus background information on the history of the search for the Northwest Passage)
- 7:12 Life on the Orkney Islands, Scotland, the boyhood home of explorer Dr. John Rae
- 15:24 Introduction to the Northwest Passage and John Franklin, a British explorer and Royal Navy Officer
- 25:14 Life in the Canadian Arctic (actor playing John Rae visits the Arctic to learn about his character)
- 35:06 Inuit Culture (customs and survival strategies in the Arctic)
- 45:19 Searching for John Franklin (The British Royal Navy and Lady Franklin fear that Franklin has perished and send John Rae to search for the missing crew)
- 57:03 John Rae discovers John Franklin’s fate, and returns to England with the shocking news of cannibalism
- 116:45 Modern perspectives on Rae’s report from the actors and historians involved in the making of the film
- 129:16 Charles Dickens and his perspective on Rae’s report
- 137:54 Evaluating the controversy from a twenty-first century perspective (actors, historians, Charles Dickens’ grandson Gerald Dickens, and Inuit Advisor Tagak Curley)

5 Day Unit Plan – European-Inuit Contact

***Passage* (148 minutes)**

Grade Level: Secondary (Grades 9–12)

Subject: History

Time Period: Nineteenth-Century British North America, Great Britain

Time Allowance: Five classes (60–80 minutes per class)

Overview

This week-long unit is based on viewing the NFB film *Passage* from 15:24 to 137:54. Students will gain an understanding of the history of the discovery of the Northwest Passage and of European-Inuit contact. After students view the film, they will create a report which will demonstrate their ability to: i. describe the characteristics of Aboriginal communities before and after contact with Europeans, and analyze the significant effects of the interactions between Aboriginal communities and their colonizers; ii. assess and compare the impact of other diverse cultural interactions since the sixteenth century; iii. describe the key European beliefs, philosophies, and ideologies that have shaped the West and the rest of the world since the sixteenth century (ie. religious, political, cultural, social and economic). In pairs, students will produce a historical report on the multiple “discoveries” of the Northwest Passage and will discuss the importance of Rae’s report to present-day issues. How did Rae’s report impact a) the public image of John Franklin? b) the public image of John Rae? c) the construction of the story of the Northwest Passage? d) the way the story of the Northwest Passage is taught in history textbooks?

Instructions

Days 1 and 2

- Students will watch the movie, from 15:24 to 137:54, over two periods, and will complete the supplementary Student Activity Worksheets during the viewing of the film.
- The teacher will divide the students into groups of two or three, and provide them with the choice of completing one of the following:
 - a map displaying the journeys of explorers (such as John Ross, John Franklin and John Rae)
 - a report analyzing the multiple attempts preceding, and the potential reasons behind, John Rae’s successful discovery of the Northwest Passage.
 - a report on the contemporary implications of the story of the discovery of the Northwest Passage as it pertains to the Canadian and the international community. How does Rae’s discovery of the Northwest Passage affect the histories of Canada, and Great Britain?
- Before research commences on previous voyages, their routes and strategies, and John Rae’s report and its legacy, the teacher will address the elements of a historical map (including retracing exact routes, stopping points, dates) and how to create a formal report (with reference to format, style, research, etc.).

Day 3

- Students will conduct research on the Northwest Passage for their selected assignments.

Day 4

- Students will continue to research, write and design their maps and reports, ensuring that their assignments meet the criteria developed at the beginning of the unit by referencing proper map and report techniques described in class.

Day 5

- Each group will present its map or report to the class.

Six-Day Unit Plan – Differing Points of View ***Passage* (148 minutes)**

Grade Level: Secondary (Grades 9–12)

Subject: History

Time Period: Nineteenth-Century British North America, Great Britain

Time Allowance: Six classes (60–80 minutes per class)

Overview

This six-day unit is based on viewing the NFB film *Passage* from 15:24 to 116:44. Students will gain an understanding of the history of the discovery of the Northwest Passage, and the differing viewpoints (Inuit and European) of that discovery. Following the film, students will be placed in groups of 4–6 students. Students within each group will then be assigned a viewpoint (either European or Inuit). They will subsequently conduct a debate from this viewpoint. Drawing on information taken from the film, and conducting research, students will debate: i. what happened to the English sailors; ii. John Rae’s report; iii. the message communicated by the monument to John Franklin’s discovery of the Northwest Passage.

Instructions

Day 1

- Students will watch the part of the film (15:24–116:44) that provides background information necessary for the debate, and will complete the supplementary Student Activity Worksheets. Students will not watch the debate that takes place on film (from 116:44 to the end).

Days 2 and 3

- The teacher will introduce the assignment, and will generate a list of effective debating techniques. Teachers may also discuss what constitutes a well supported argument. (See <education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson304b.shtml> for ideas on how to run debates within different classroom contexts. This site also supplies debate rubrics and tips for students.)
- The teacher will ask students how their knowledge of European-Inuit relations has been changed by the film. The teacher will make a list, on the board, of differences between European and Inuit culture. The teacher will explore how conflict and co-operation arose from each of the groups’ attributes and needs.
- The teacher will organize students into groups of 4–6. Students within each group will then be assigned a viewpoint (either European or Inuit – no more than three students per viewpoint).
- The teacher will summarize the issues that the students will debate: i. what happened to the English sailors; ii. John Rae’s report; iii. the message communicated by the monument to John Franklin’s discovery of the Northwest Passage.
- The teacher will summarize how the students will be evaluated – 50% of their mark will be determined by their debate performance, and 50% will be determined by the research profile that they will submit at the end of the unit. The research profile will reflect the quality of the research used to support the students’ arguments, and their consideration of possible counter-

arguments from the opposing side. (The teacher should consider using “Creating Worlds: Debate Resources”, at <education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson304b.shtml> (select “Research Template”). This model enables students to keep electronic records of their research and helps them stay organized.)

- Students will be research the issues connected to the debate, with special emphasis on their assigned viewpoint, and will develop their arguments.

Day 4

- Each group will engage in a debate
- Following the debates, students will consolidate their experience with the opposing side in their group by noting the opponents’ arguments. They will attempt to come to a mutual decision about which side made the most persuasive argument. Each group will conclude by informally presenting its findings in a teacher-led class discussion that will take into account all major points and display them for all to see, using the chalkboard, whiteboard, or overhead projector.

Day 5

- Students will watch the remainder of the film, including the development of the debate and its outcome.
- The teacher will lead a class discussion on the similarities and differences between the debate in the film, and the class’s debate.

Day 6

- Students will write a reflection piece which analyses both sides of the issues that they debated. The reflection essay should make reference to three points from each side of the debate and demonstrate the student’s ability to reason between the two arguments. Students should be encouraged to make personal connections and come to their own conclusion on which side was most convincing, and why. This is an opportunity for students to express their own opinions about the issues under discussion.

Two-Day Lesson Plan – Inuit Life Before European Contact ***Passage* (148 minutes)**

Grade Level: Secondary (Grades 9–12)

Subject: History

Time Period: Nineteenth-Century British North America, Great Britain

Time Allowance: Two classes (60–80 minutes per class)

Overview and Instructions

This lesson is based on viewing the NFB film *Passage* (from 15:24 to 57:02), during which students will gain an understanding of the discovery of the Northwest Passage and of the lives of the Inuit before contact with the Europeans. In this lesson, students will watch as the actor who plays John Rae learns to live like the Inuit. Students will discuss the history and culture of the Inuit people, and the stereotypes that are often associated with them. Students should complete the “Student Activity Sheet” as they watch the film.

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of lifestyles do we associate with Inuit people today?
2. Why do we make these assumptions about the Inuit?
3. Why would people in mid-nineteenth-century England find John Rae’s reports difficult to believe?
4. What did individuals living in England think of Inuit peoples (and Aboriginal peoples in general)?
5. How did John Rae’s experiences in the Arctic affect his attitudes towards the Inuit?
6. How are diaries organized today? What issues are addressed? How are these organized?
7. Can diaries that were written by people long ago shed light on historical events?
8. If you were to write a diary, what would you want to include to ensure that it could be used as a reliable source of historical information to people who might read it in the future?
9. Make a list of information that a historian could learn from reading a student’s journal in the future.

Extension Activity

After watching the film extract, each student should choose one aspect of Inuit culture that was identified in the film (such as clothing or food). Students should draw on information taken from the film, and conduct research on their own. They should then write a journal entry about it from the perspective of John Rae. (Students should cite any sources that they used to create their journal entry (a review of proper citation methods will help).

Three-Day Lesson Plan: Addressing the Wrongs of the Past

Passage (148 minutes)

Historical Letter of Apology Analyzing Western Beliefs

Grade Level: Secondary (Grades 9–12)

Subject: History

Time Period: Nineteenth-Century British North America, Great Britain

Time Allowance: Three classes (60–80 minutes per class)

Overview and Instructions

This lesson is based on viewing the NFB film *Passage* (from 15:24–129:15). In this lesson, students will watch as the actor who plays John Rae learns to live like the Inuit. Students will discuss the history and culture of the Inuit people, and the stereotypes that are often associated with them. Students will learn about the discovery of the Northwest Passage in general, and of the legacy of the accusations made against the Inuit by the British in particular. Students will also gain a deeper understanding of apologies from a government or organization to a specific group of people. Students should complete the “Student Activity Sheet” as they watch the film.

Discussion Questions

1. For what reasons might a student apologize to his or her teacher?
2. In what kinds of situations should a government issue an official apology?
3. How does an apology by a student to a teacher differ from an official apology by a government to a group of people?
4. If you owe someone an apology, what kinds of emotions do you feel? If you are owed an apology, what kinds of expectations do you have from the apology?
5. What kinds of stereotypes are prevalent today that might prevent us from seeing different types of people as equals? Do these misconceptions only affect individuals or do they affect entire cultures?
6. How might people who believe stereotypes record history differently?
7. How can we see stereotypes in written and recorded history?
8. Compare and contrast the European tradition of written history and the Inuit tradition of oral (spoken) history.
9. Are written histories and oral histories equally “true”?
10. How does writing down history, or speaking (and hearing) history, change our understanding of the past?
11. What does it mean to be “Eurocentric,” and how might this perspective affect Europeans’ opinion of the Inuit peoples?
12. How would those who held a “Eurocentric” perspective view the claims of Inuit peoples regarding the demise of Franklin and his crew?

Extension Questions and Activities

1. As a class, write a basic letter of apology (e.g. for using inappropriate language); rewrite the letter of apology, substituting where appropriate, so that the final letter is an official apology by a government to a specific group of people. Be sure to include the proper form, and language, and to make specific reference to the wrongs for which you are apologizing.
2. Discuss the differences in emotion and expectations between an entire society (or representative) writing a letter of apology and a society receiving a letter of apology. How are these emotions different or similar?
3. Write a formal letter of apology to the Inuit people on behalf of the British government, Charles Dickens and Lady Franklin. Use evidence from the film, and from outside research, to write the letter of apology. (Students can consult the *Passage* website at www3.nfb.ca/webextension/passage/resources.php for information about the search for the Passage. Students should cite any resources they use (a review of citations may be necessary).
4. Watch the part of the film focused on Gerald Dickens (in the present), and Charles Dickens (in the past) (129:16–137:53). Discuss why a prominent writer might have attacked John Rae's report and develop a list of contemporary celebrities who are outspoken on specific issues. Discuss whether or not students value celebrities' opinions, and how they influence, positively and negatively, the public's perception of issues.

Student Activity Sheet
***Passage* (148 minutes)**

As you watch the film, answer the following questions:

Chapter One (00:00–7:11)

1. What did Dr. John Rae report to the British Admiralty?

2. Who did the British send to look for the Northwest Passage in 1845?

3. How long did the British Navy search for Franklin and his crew?

4. Who unlocked the mystery of the fate of Franklin?

5. Why are the actors meeting in London?

Chapter Two (7:12–15:23)

6. Why does the film focus so much attention on Orkney?

7. How did the landscape and culture of Orkney prepare Rae to be an explorer?

Chapter Three (15:24–25:13)

8. What famous writer wrote about the search for the Northwest Passage?

9. List three reasons why some British politicians were concerned about Franklin leading the

expedition.

Chapter Four (25:14–35:05)

10. How long had Rae been in the Arctic, with the Hudson’s Bay Company, before the British Navy sent John Franklin to search for the Northwest Passage?

11. What does Inuit Advisor Tagak Curley say about Franklin’s abilities as an explorer?

12. What two groups were competing to find the Northwest Passage?

Chapter Five (35:06–45:18)

13. According to the Inuit guide, why did some people call the Arctic “barren land?”

14. How many animals did it take to make Rae’s parka?

Chapter Six (45:19–57:02)

15. According to Tagak Curley, what was wrong with Franklin’s ships?

16. How did Rae avoid the problem associated with Franklin’s ships?

17. How many years had Franklin’s crew been away before the British Navy finally admitted that Franklin was lost?

18. What animal meat was said to best warm the body?

Chapter Seven (57:03–1:16:44)

19. What evidence of Franklin's ships did the Inuit people provide Rae?

20. Where did Rae eventually find Franklin's ships?

Chapter Eight (1:16:45–1:29:15)

21. Who is honoured for having found the Northwest Passage, despite Rae's Report?

22. Aside from cannibalism, what are some other explanations for the cut marks on the bones of Franklin's crew?

23. What is Tagak Curley's response to the charge that the Inuit attacked Franklin's crew?

Chapter Nine (129:16–1:37:53)

24. What surprised Gerald Dickens most about the article written by his ancestor, Charles Dickens? Why?

Chapter Ten (1:37:54–1:48:00)

25. Why do historians believe the character assassination of the Inuit took place?

26. Where and when was John Rae buried?

Student Answer Sheet
***Passage* (146 minutes)**

Chapter One (00:00–7:11)

1. What did Dr. John Rae report to the British Admiralty? (Rae told the British Admiralty that Eskimos claimed Franklin, and his crew committed cannibalism.)
2. Who did the British send to look for the Northwest Passage in 1845? (They sent Sir John Franklin and 128 seamen.)
3. How long did the British Navy search for Franklin and his crew? (The British Navy searched for Franklin and his team for six years.)
4. Who unlocked the mystery of the fate of Franklin? (Hudson Bay Company employee John Rae discovered the fate of John Franklin.)
5. Why are the actors meeting in London? (The actors are meeting in London to discuss the making of the film *Passage*.)

Chapter Two (7:12–15:23)

6. Why does the film focus so much attention on Orkney? (Rae was born in Orkney in 1813.)
7. How did the landscape and culture of Orkney prepare Rae to be an explorer? (The extreme weather conditions and sea-faring lifestyle, as well as the isolating nature of the island prepared Rae to be an explorer in the Arctic.)

Chapter Three (15:24–25:13)

8. What famous writer wrote about the search for the Northwest Passage? (Charles Dickens wrote about the search for the Northwest Passage.)
9. List three reasons why some British politicians were concerned about Franklin leading the expedition. (Franklin was overweight and old, and his wife was overly ambitious).

Chapter Four (25:14–35:05)

10. How long had Rae been in the Arctic with the Hudson's Bay Company before the British Navy sent John Franklin to search for the Northwest Passage? (Rae had been in the Arctic for 13 years.)
11. What does Inuit Advisor, Tagak Curley, say about Franklin's abilities as an explorer? (Curley says Franklin was a lousy navigator, and had failed twice before.)
12. What two groups were competing to find the Northwest Passage? (The British Navy, led by

John Franklin and the HBC, led by John Rae)

Chapter Five (35:06–45:18)

13. According to the Inuit guide, why did some people call the Arctic “barren land?” (People only referred to the Arctic as “barren land” because they did not know how to survive there.)

14. How many animals did it take to make Rae’s parka? (It took two animals to make Rae’s parka.)

Chapter Six (45:19–57:02)

15. According to Tagak Curley, what was wrong with Franklin’s ships? (Franklin’s ships were too deep to travel into the Bay.)

16. How did Rae avoid the problem associated with Franklin’s ships? (Rae went North on foot and on small watercraft.)

17. How many years had Franklin’s crew been away before the British Navy finally admitted that Franklin was lost? (Franklin’s crew was away for three years.)

18. What animal meat was said to best warm the body? (Seal meat was said to best warm the body.)

Chapter Seven (57:03–1:16:44)

19. What evidence of Franklin’s ships did the Inuit provide Rae? (The Inuit provided evidence such as forks, spoons, broken compasses, and eye-witness accounts of the fate of the lost expedition.)

20. Where did Rae eventually find Franklin’s ships? (Rae found Franklin’s ships stuck in the ice off Victory Point.)

Chapter Eight (1:16:45–1:29:15)

21. Who is honoured as finding the Northwest Passage, despite Rae’s Report? (Sir John Franklin was said to have discovered the Northwest Passage.)

22. Aside from cannibalism, what are some other explanations for the cut marks on the bones of Franklin’s crew? (Another explanation for the cut marks was that the British Naval men were defending themselves from the Inuit, and that their bodies were mutilated afterwards.)

23. What is Tagak Curley’s response to the charge that the Inuit attacked Franklin’s crew? (Curley demands an apology and says there is no evidence because Dickens was never in the Arctic and the crew was spread out over 80 miles.)

Chapter Nine (129:16–1:37:53)

24. What surprised Gerald Dickens most about the article written by his grandfather Charles Dickens? (He thought his grandfather would have sided with Rae over Franklin, because his grandfather had a reputation for supporting the underdog.)

Chapter Ten (1:37:54–1:48:00)

25. Why do historians believe the character assassination of the Inuit was perpetrated? (Because the British Imperialist views of Victorian England were Eurocentric and arrogant in nature; “savages” were an easy target to explain away English cannibalism.)

26. Where was John Rae buried? (Rae was buried in Orkney in 1893.)