

Commemorate Canada - Canadian Decorations for Bravery

Overview:

This lesson plan celebrates the 50th Anniversary of Canada's Decorations for Bravery. Students will reflect on what it means to be brave and learn about individuals who have received medals for bravery.

Time:

60 mins

Subject/topic:

History, Geography, Social studies

Grade:

5 - 9

Learning objectives:

- Students will learn about the Canadian Decorations for Bravery and individuals who have received these medals.
- Students will discuss what it means to be brave.
- Students will identify and write about someone in their lives who they consider to be brave.

Materials:

Online copies of the following *Canadian Geographic* articles:

- [Profile in courage: The Canadian woman who risked her life to save people in Haiti trapped beneath a collapsed schoolhouse](#)
- [Profile in courage: The Canadian man who dove 12 metres into the sea to try and save a friend](#)
- [Profile in courage: The Canadian coast guard who rescued fishermen stranded in a winter storm](#)
- [Profile in courage: The Canadian man who saved his brother after a helicopter crash](#)
- [Profile in courage: The Canadian man who saved a woman from the jaws of a polar bear](#)

Lesson Description

Minds on:

Students will begin the lesson by having a class discussion about bravery and reflecting on their own experiences. Then, in small groups, students will be assigned a Profile in Courage article to review.

Action:

Students will write a reflective essay of 500 words about someone they think is brave and answer questions to support their essays.

Conclusion:

Students will finish the lesson with a discussion about what they read and learned about bravery.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Begin the lesson by asking your students: What does it mean to be brave? Write your students' answers on the board and have a class discussion about their definition of bravery. Let your students take a few minutes to think about a time in their lives when they had to be brave. If possible, ask your students to share their experiences with the class.

Once students are finished sharing their stories, tell them about the Canadian Decorations for Bravery, which are a series of medals awarded by the office of the Governor General of Canada. These medals were established in 1972 by Queen Elizabeth II as a way to recognize courageous acts. Over the course of the last 50 years, the Governor General has awarded more than 4,200 Decorations for Bravery.

"Recipients of the Decorations for Bravery would never call themselves heroes, but that's exactly what they are: everyday heroes. The individuals recognized by these decorations are those who have risked their lives and chose to defy their own instinct of survival to try to save a loved one or a perfect stranger whose life was in immediate danger." — [Office of the Governor General of Canada](#)

Have students form small groups. Assign each group one of the Profile in Courage articles from *Canadian Geographic*. Encourage your students to write down key moments of bravery mentioned in their article. After your students are finished, have them share what they learned with the class.

- [Profile in courage: The Canadian woman who risked her life to save people in Haiti trapped beneath a collapsed schoolhouse](#)
- [Profile in courage: The Canadian man who dove 12 metres into the sea to try and save a friend](#)
- [Profile in courage: The Canadian coast guard who rescued fishermen stranded in a winter storm](#)
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- The [Commemorate Canada GeoMinute](#) on the Canadian Decorations for Bravery
- A projector or SMART board
- Electronic devices with internet access
- Paper
- Writing utensils

Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework:

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Gather and organize
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

N/A

Action

In the next part of the lesson, have your students write a reflective essay about someone in their life who they think is brave and explain why they deserve a medal for bravery. Students should make connections to themes and ideas in the articles that they read. Have students research how you can nominate someone for [Decorations for Bravery](#) and have them include in their essay their reasoning for why their person is eligible for one of these medals for bravery. The reflective essay should be at least 500 words. Students should answer the following questions:

- Who in your life has displayed a sense of bravery?
- How did they show bravery during that moment?
- Why did they choose to be brave during that moment?
- How did they feel after it happened?
- Why do you think they should get a Decoration for Bravery? Which level or insignia should they get?

When students are finished with their essays, and if they are comfortable, have them share their essays with the class or in small groups.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Conclude the lesson by having your students watch the [Commemorate Canada GeoMinute](#). Discuss as a class the following questions:

- What was your first thought after watching the Geo Minute?
- What is the highest honour for bravery that the Governor General of Canada can bestow on a Canadian civilian?
- What makes an act of courage selfless?
- Who are some of Canada's heroes?
- Have your views of bravery changed after reading the Profile in Courage articles?
- Which article inspired you the most?
- Why do you think Canada has medals for bravery?

Extend your geographical thinking

- Students can research how other countries around the world recognize bravery or how international organizations recognize bravery with awards.
- Students can research historical figures that have received Decorations for Bravery or other types of medals/awards in Canada.
- Students can take the extra step of submitting a nomination for someone they believe should be recognized for their courageous acts.

Modifications

- Students can complete this activity virtually.
- Students can choose one Profile in Courage article and complete this activity individually.
- Students can have discussions in small groups instead of as a class.



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Assessment Opportunities

- Assess students' learning based on their participation through the class discussion.
- Assess students' learning based on their reflective essay and research.
- Assess students' learning based on their participation in small groups.
- Assess students' learning through the completion of the questions.

Sources and additional resources

- [The Governor General of Canada - Decorations for Bravery](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia - Decorations for Bravery](#)
- [Canadian Bravery Decorations](#)
- [Canadian Medals Chart](#)