Interwar Years: the Regina Riot

**Concept(s)** Primary Source Evidence

**Prepared for Grade(s)** 10, 11, 12

**Province** BC

**By** Krista Marrs, Lesley Scowcroft, Liam Kelliher, Lindsay Gibson, Mr. Ryan Mansley with editorial help from Graeme Stacey, Tom Morton

**Time Period(s)** 1900-present

**Time allotment** 1 x 80 minutes

**Brief Description of the Task**

*Who was to blame for starting the Regina Riot of July 1, 1935?*

In this lesson students will interpret primary and secondary sources about the Regina Riot to make a judgment about who was to blame.  This lesson will have students consider the aims and conditions in the Relief Camps, the reactions of R.B. Bennett during the On to Ottawa Trek, the actions of the RCMP, and the actions of communist party members during the On to Ottawa Trek to decide who was at fault for starting the riot.  Students will be expected to develop their skills using historical evidence to come to a plausible conclusion on the topic.

**Objectives for Historical Thinking**

Evidence:

Students will be able to

Read sources about the Regina Riot and infer the position and perspective of the authors;

Seek corroboration for claims about who was responsible for the riot.

**Required Knowledge & Skills**

To complete this task students will need to:

•    Have an understanding of the context in which the On to Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot occurred.

•    Be able to read sources carefully to make inferences about the author’s perspective and historical position (race, class, etc.).

**Detailed Instructions**

**Recommended Resources:**

<http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/on-to-ottawa_trek_and_the_regina_riot.html>

A good summary of the Regina Riot, with a strong emphasis on the mistakes R.B. Bennett made when dealing with the trekkers, from the Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan.

<http://www.ontoottawa.ca/index1.html>

The On to Ottawa Historical Society web site has ample secondary sources as well as a large number of primary ones, for example, photographs of the relief camps and the trek and a recording of “Hold the Fort,” the trekkers’ rallying song. The site explains why it happened, the creation of the RCWU, the actions of the RCMP during the Regina Riot, and a summary of the findings of the Regina Riot Commission, and their determination that it was solely the responsibility of Evans and the communist party members in the On to Ottawa Trek. The goal of the society is to preserve labour's heritage, specifically the history of the On to Ottawa trek.

**Required Materials:**

•    Photocopies of required sheets..

**Lesson Sequence**

1.    Introduce the topic by giving a brief lecture on the background to the On to Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot.  Pose the focus question: who was responsible?  If needed, distribute  **ATT 1 Background Information on the On to Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot**. (10 minutes)

2.    Review the role of primary and secondary resources in constructing the past and importance of judging perspectives and assessing reliability. The Benchmarks web site at <http://historicalthinking.ca/primary-source-evidence> gives an overview of these concepts and some tips on interpreting primary sources.

Assessing perspective is often thought of as detecting bias. However, bias detection often takes on the character of a false dichotomy of telling the truth or lying. For an historian, assessing perspective is mainly about understanding the author as fully as possible with bias being a natural by product or race, class, nationality, gender, and the like. Students should be encouraged to get past the simple strategy of finding bias. If all sources are biased and bias is associated with lying, then students will be stuck when they try to decide between conflicting accounts of the Regina Riot and who was responsible.

Although you may wish to discuss bias, students would be best served by discussing corroboration as a way to decide between conflicting accounts. (15 minutes)

3.    Split the class into 6 groups.  Distribute to each group copies of one or more of the documents from **ATT 2** as well as copies of the analyzing resources worksheet **ATT 3.**  Groups need to do the following:

    a.    Read the document and fill in the analyzing resources worksheet.  Students need to consider the type of source, who’s writing it and  the intended audience for the document as well as make inferences about responsibility of the riot.

    b.    Discuss the answers. At the end of their discussion, all individuals in the group need to have a strong understanding of who their assigned document blames for causing the riot, have key evidence supporting that position, and have an idea of the perspective and position of the author.

Depending on the class size, you may want to give two shorter documents to one group or discuss how to interpret one of the documents as a whole class. (15 minutes)

4.    Now, the groups need to be split up into 6 mixed groups, each group having all 6 documents represented (if possible, depending on class size).  In these groups, the students are to present their findings from the documents their expert groups studied and take notes on the worksheet, **ATT 3.** They should then seek corroboration from the other documents that other groups studied.  After every student has had a chance to present their information and conclusions, the group should try to come to a consensus on who was to blame for the Regina Riot, why, and provide all the best corroborating evidence they have to support their conclusion. **ATT 4 Who Was to Blame for the Regina Riot** is intended to guide them in their decision making. (20 minutes)

5.    As a class, have each group explain who they believe was to blame for causing the Regina Riot, providing at least two good examples of evidence from the documents that support their answer (ask for more evidence once all groups have had a chance to present their findings).  They should discuss how corroboration or support from different sources may indicate some documents are more reliable than others.  Teacher should record whom each group has blamed, and their evidence for coming to that conclusion.  From this students could also flesh out their answers on **ATT 4**. (15 minutes)

6.    Have students establish the criteria for assigning blame before they work on their paragraph assignment.  If the class is struggling with this task, develop a piece of criteria for the assignment together as a class.  Students may use the remainder of the class to work on the assignment.

**Outcomes**

**Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Social Studies 11 in British Columbia:**

Skills and Processes of Social Studies

* Apply critical thinking skills, including: comparing, questioning, summarizing, drawing conclusions, defending a position.
* Demonstrate effective research skills, including; assessing information.
* Demonstrate effective written and oral skills.

**Society and Identity**

* Describe the effects of government responses to the Great Depression (On to Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot).