



***The Big Map:***  
**A History of Early British Columbia**  
by  
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# ***The Big Study Guide***

## **OVERVIEW**

*The Big Map* is a dramatized lecture on the early history of British Columbia from before first contact in 1774 to the large wave of immigration in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It is geared towards school audiences, grades 4 – 12, using a mixture of facts and fun to provoke questions and discussion on BC's history and its developing social structure.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

### ***Full Figure Theatre***

*Full Figure Theatre* is a small organization that produces approximately two shows per year. Along with its theatre productions, *Full Figure* has also produced **The busTin' ouT fesTival** to help raise awareness of breast cancer research. busTin' ouT has been held during the week of International Women's Day, March 8, for the past four years. The festival consists of a topical forum, a workshop, a music night, and a cabaret.

In May, 2005, *Full Figure Theatre*, in partnership with the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, remounted *the 'f' word, or Can Feminism be Funny? The 'f' Word* is a light-hearted exploration of the feminist myth that delves into those darn dogmas that perpetuate it.

### ***The Big Map***

*The Big Map* was commissioned by *Full Figure Theatre* in 2000. Sharon Heath and Faith Moosang wrote the first draft, which was then workshopped in great detail during a rehearsal period with actors Lois Anderson and Chris McGregor, and director Steven Hill. The creators of *The Big Map* are all professional artists with experience ranging from clowning to photography, administration, videography, playwriting, acting, singing, directing, acrobatics, and historical archiving. *The Big Map* toured extensively to libraries and festivals over the summer of 2000.



## **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

- Set up time: One hour.
- Performance space: Ideally, 33 feet wide by 20 feet deep.
- Changing room: At least one, with two chairs and a table of at least 4 feet by 2 feet (optional).

## **THE PERFORMANCE**

*The Big Map* is a history of British Columbia made fun for all ages. Penelope Ricketts, an earnest, socialist-feminist history lecturer, has come all the way from England to teach, ironically enough, the history of BC. Penelope is joined by her two outrageously incompetent assistants, clowns Bill and Edgar.

Penelope begins with a discussion of the many Indian Nations that lived in BC before first contact with European explorers and then looks at the escapades of some of these early explorers: Cook, McKenzie, Fraser, and Thompson. She then details several aspects of the Fur Trade, the Gold Rush, BC becoming a province in the Dominion of Canada, and the building of the railroad. Her views on aboriginal culture, colonialism, indentured labour, pioneer hardship, and industrialization help to illuminate that part of our history that has, to date, been largely ignored.

To present ideas on class structure in early BC, the relationships between Penelope, Bill, and Edgar mirror the conflicts that occurred between the underprivileged, the middle class, and the elite of BC's past.

Throughout the lecture Penelope tries to keep her assistants Bill and Edgar on task. Failure in this results in Penelope firing Bill, who then uses wily manipulation to get back in the show. The history of BC has never been funnier.

## **THE AUDIENCE**

The audience is immediately engaged in this piece through the improvisation of Bill and Edgar as they help audience members find their seats. When Professor Penelope Ricketts is introduced, the two clowns encourage the audience to vocalize appreciation. Later in the show, audience members are invited on stage to participate in dancing. Additional audience participation is encouraged as the characters work through naming the province, perform a puppet show and present a small parade.

## **ARTS ACTIVITIES**

*Note to teachers:*



*The Big Map* is a play about the early history of British Columbia. In creating *The Big Map*, the writers hoped to educate students about the early history of our province in a fun and provocative manner. However, the ultimate goal of the play is to create more well-rounded students by engendering in them the ability to critically analyze history and its relationship to political forces.

## **Preparatory**

### ***I. Research into Historical Characters and Peoples***

Research can be done on many different aspects of British Columbia's history, such as:

- Native Nations of British Columbia (The Tlinglit, Kaska-Dene, Dene-thah, Tahltan, Sekani, Dunne-za, Nisga'a, Gitksan, Haida, Tsimshian, Haisla, Carrier, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Oweekeno, Tsilhqot'in, Secwepemc, Kwakwaka'wakw, Stl'atl'imx, Nlaka'pamux, Okanagan, Ktunaxa-Kinbasket, Nuuchahnulth and Coast Salish)
- Explorers (Captain Cook, Alexander McKenzie, Samuel Fraser, David Thompson, Captain Vancouver)
- Fur Traders (Factor James Douglas, The Hudson's Bay Company, The Northwest Company, The Russian American Company)
- The British (Queen Victoria, Judge Begbie)
- Pioneers (Catherine Schubert, Billy Barker, the Hurdy Gurdy Girls, the Brideships)

### ***II. Clowning and Improvisation***

The character relationships within *The Big Map* are really clown relationships of high status, The Patron or Father (Penelope), and low status, the Joeys (Bill and Edgar), who are very mischievous and fun-loving. The Patron must always have access to something that the Joeys want, such as food, money, or romance. This keeps the Patron in a high status position, who can then use access to what the Joeys want along with violence or the threat of violence to maintain control.

The Joeys, meanwhile, get carried away having fun. They love the audience and love to play games or *lazzes*. A *lazze* is an activity taken as far as the Joeys can get away with under the Patron's nose. Not to pull one over on the Patron, but because it is so much fun. The Patron has the ability to threaten them and, thereby, discipline them by taking away their food, money, romance or well being.

Many games can be played with the students to illustrate this relationship.

#### **Status Games:**



A scared person is afraid of losing status in the eyes of the audience. Status is not what you are: status is what you do. For example, a president can play low status and a garbage man can play high status.

Try different partner scenes wherein you and your partner have the same status or one has high and one has low. Try playing a status exactly opposed to your social status. For example, an executioner playing low status might apologize to the victim because there wasn't enough time to clean up, or may cut his thumb on the axe. Try a low status hijacker, a low status mugger. Try a high status slug talking to a gardener.

### Low Status

An improviser enters and starts an activity. Another joins him. They each try to be lower status than the other. The audience can participate by pointing at the person who has the lowest status until it changes.

### High Status

This is played much like the Low Status game except each tries to be higher status than the other.

### Status Reversal

This game is more difficult. The improvisers start with opposite status and then through the course of the scene the status switches.

### Master/Servant

Bear in mind that servants can be high status and masters can be low. This game has a script, as follows:

Master: Jeeves! (or whatever name the Master chooses for the Servant) I have something to talk to you about.”

Servant: Oh no, sir/ma'am, not the \_\_\_\_\_? (the Servant improvises some task, e.g. “not the tree in the back yard” or “not the paper clip”).

Master: No, not the \_\_\_\_\_ (repeats what the Servant said) Why? What did you do?

Servant: I \_\_\_\_\_ (he improvises what he did, e.g. “Well, I was on the bulldozer widening the ditch, and I took out that favourite tree of yours.”).

Master: \_\_\_\_\_ (He then reacts to what the Servant has said). No, I have something else I want to talk to you about.

Servant: Oh no, sir/ma'am, not the \_\_\_\_\_?

And the scenario repeats to the Master firing the Servant, or beating him, or something as terrible.

### The King Game



This is an improvised scene between a King/Queen and his/her Servants. The King/Queen orders the Servant around. The moment the servant irritates the King/Queen in the slightest way, the King/Queen can snap his/her fingers, and the Servant must then commit suicide in a creative way. Enter another Servant.

### Pecking Order

Number yourselves one to four. Number one is boss of all the others, but relates mainly, or entirely, through Number Two. Number Two is the boss of three and four, but relates mostly to three and one, and so on.

### Boris

A variation on status games wherein someone is interrogated by a person who is assisted by an invisible torturer named Boris. Every time Boris is directed to do something, the person being interrogated must react accordingly.

## **Clown Games**

### Buffoon

One actor walks to a chair, sits down, says something, gets up walks back. Each actor in turn slightly exaggerates the actor before until it becomes buffoonery.

The following games are best played with red noses. It is essential that the clowns play to the audience, including them in every new development. The red noses must be respected like a mask. Before each entrance, the Teacher/Patron can give a signal to enter like pounding a drum or shaking a tambourine. The Teacher/Patron can coach throughout, and the actor is obliged to obey the Teacher/Patron. The actor can get around this only by being entertaining. It is best to start off with no talking until each actor has 'found his or her clown'. Costumes can eventually be introduced to delight the clown, who will do well to let the costume affect his/her performance.

### Entrance and Exit

The actor makes an entrance, gestures hello in some way and exits. The Teacher/Patron can tell the actor what to do if they are boring or taking too much time.

### Strange Object

The actor enters and sees a strange object on the stage. He reacts honestly, as a clown, to this object.

### Talking Cookie

This can be done with a talking anything. The actor enters and a cookie begins to speak to him. The cookie can order him around, depending on what happens.



Many variations of simple theatre games and improvisation games can be played with the red noses on, for example, the mirror game, sound and gesture, wink murder, and many warm-up activities.

## **Post-performance**

### ***I. Activities or Spin-off Projects***

1. If you had to write a five-minute scene from this or another time in B.C.'s history, what characters would you use and why? This could result in a lecture or a monologue on a specific historical character that could then be performed.
2. Find out about a Native Nations in British Columbia and present the information to your class. Compare and contrast the different Nations from the different parts of the province.
3. Research into the many aspects of The British Empire.
4. Research into the Gold Rush of 1858.
5. Research into how British Columbia became a province of the Dominion of Canada, including the building of the Railway.
6. Research into the many aspects of Immigration.
7. Draw a map of the street where you live and try to note down the different nationalities of the people who live in the houses/apartments next to you or on your street. If you don't already know who these people are, you may have to do a bit of detective work. Try to imagine why these different families might have come to B.C. Do some research on the countries they left behind, and see if you can pinpoint some reasons why so many people from other nations have chosen Canada as their home.

### ***II. Oral Histories***

Have the children embark on an oral history project with someone close to them—grandfather, grandmother, uncle, cousin, best friend's grandmother, etc. The scope of this project is limited only by imagination. For example, students could draw their own map of the world, showing where ancestors came from. Or you could keep a class map and link the Old Worlds of the students' families to the New World with ribbon. Students could make videos, audiotapes, plays, etc.



Below, we have provided typical oral history questions. They have all come from an excellent resource book entitled, “Oral Testimony and Ethnic Studies,” by Robert F. Harney. [Published by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario.] Some students may not have any family member old enough to remember how things “used to be.” If that is the case, try pairing some students up, or work out a community program with a home for the aged in your community.

### 1. The Old Country

Where were you born?  
What was your nationality?  
What was the size of town, village, city?  
What was the size of your family?  
What type of house did you live in?  
What were the occupations within the family?  
What was daily life like? (Give some examples)  
What were the main social and religious activities?

### 2. Migration

What were your reasons for leaving?  
What was your age and position in the family at time of leaving?  
What did you know about the new country before you came here? (Has your impression changed since you’ve been here?)  
What was your original destination?  
How long did you intend to stay?  
Did you have any relatives here when you arrived?  
What was your first job here?

### 3. Emigration

How did you get here, starting from the moment you stepped out the door of your home?  
Were you traveling with anyone, or were you alone? If with someone, who were they?  
How much money did you have to make the journey?  
If you came on a boat, what was its name, what were the names of the ports? If you came on a plane, what airline was it?  
How much did the trip cost?  
Were there any language problems?

### 4. Early Settlement

Where did you live in the city, town or rural area?  
What was your reason for choosing this place?  
What kind of place did you live in (house, apartment, boarding house, hotel)?  
How much was the rent?



Were there any problems with housing? (crowding, house falling apart, etc.)  
Can you describe the neighbourhood?

## 5. Employment

How did you get a job?  
How did you find out about this job?  
What was the pay?  
How many hours and days a week did you work?  
Were there any language problems?  
How did you get to work?  
Why did you leave this work?  
Can you describe the work place, what you did, and the people you worked with?  
Where did you eat, see movies, have a good time, hang out?  
Who were the community leaders when you arrived here? Do you have any stories about any of these people?  
Were you involved in any political movements, e.g. the trade union movement, WWII, etc?

## 6. Family

If you are married, can you provide details of the wedding, where it took place, who arranged it, what the bride and groom wore, what was eaten for the wedding dinner, did you go on a honeymoon? Etc.  
Who handles money in the family?  
Who is responsible for child rearing?  
What are the responsibilities of children?  
What are the expectations for children?  
What are the family traditions and celebrations?  
Who prepares food? What kind of food is it?  
What is the relationship to family left in the old country?

Do your students know about the Mormon Genealogy Archives in Salt Lake City? The records can be reached at [www.familysearch.org/](http://www.familysearch.org/). This is the largest archive in the world that is completely devoted to the genealogy of common people's history. Other genealogy sites are: <http://www.genealogy.com>; <http://cyndilist.com>; <http://firstct.com/>.