Study Guide

This study guide has been prepared for grades 8–12, to accompany the British Columbia History magazine article “Warp Weft Weave: Joining Generations” (Vol 53, Issue 3, Fall 2020) by Jenn Ashton.

*Warning for teachers: Some of the historical topics herein may be disturbing or traumatizing to students. Please view the resources below prior to beginning this unit.*

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Background Information

Jenn Ashton is an award-winning author and visual artist living in North Vancouver, B.C. She is the author of the prize-winning "Siamelah" in *British Columbia History* in 2019 and of the forthcoming *People Like Frank, and Other Stories from the Edge of Normal* by Tidewater Press. She is a Director on the Board of the Federation of British Columbia Writers as well as The BC Indigenous Writers Collective. Jenn is currently completing a book about the history of her family in Vancouver and is studying at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Andrea Lister wears many hats. She is the principal of Absolutely Literate, a communications service specializing in editing, research, genealogy, writing, design, and marketing; outgoing editor of *British Columbia History* magazine; author of the sold-out book *Commitment to Caring: Chilliwack Hospital Auxiliary’s 100 Years*; editor of heritage award winner, *Surrey: A City of Stories*; contributor, draft *Research Guide to Learning about Indigenous People and their History in Surrey*, for the Surrey Archives; researcher, editor, coach, and image harvester for *Larder of the Wise: The Story of Vancouver's James Inglis Reid Ltd* by M. Anne Wyness.

“Warp Weft Weave: Joining Generations” is the second article in the series of written and visual art that explores Ashton's journey to discover her Indigenous roots and her Coast Salish family. She traces her family back six generations, to the time before the existence of the City of Vancouver when her ancestor family moved permanently to the village of Xwáýxway (a village inside of what is now Stanley Park) from their home in Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), where her Ancestor Grandmothers were born.
Brief Description

**Concept(s):** Historical Perspectives, Continuity and Change, Cause and Consequence

**Prepared for:** Grade(s) 8 through 12

**Province:** BC

**Time Period(s):** 1800–present day

**Time allotment:** 2 classes (50 minute classes)

People in the 21st Century, in societies and communities around the world are beginning to be willing and still enough to listen to many voices from history that have not been previously heard and recognized. As Canadians try as individuals, communities, and systems to come to terms with the past and the injustices that First Peoples worldwide have suffered, we need to decide how to move forward, balancing history, filling in the lines with the stories and histories that have all but been erased. Jenn Ashton’s story is one of those stories.

This guide is aimed at upper grades, the questions and activities suggested here may be used in any class from Social Studies to English and the Arts, encouraging students to use their creative voice in answering the questions posed.
Learning Outcomes

These questions and activities will ask students to dive deeper into the topics of Reconciliation and Indigenous history. In working through the “Warp Weft Weave” Guide students will engage with the following learning outcomes:

• Deepen understanding and knowledge of colonial histories and current realities of Indigenous People.
• Deepen understanding of social injustices and discriminatory policies in Canada (including Residential Schools, the head tax, the legal system, disenfranchisement, and internments)
• Engage with Indigenous worldviews and perspectives that contextualize and support your understanding of the theories and practices of Indigenous education.
• Develop strategies that contribute to the enhancement of Indigenous-settler relations in schools, organizations, and communities.
• Explore Indigenous worldviews and learning approaches for their application to the classroom or community learning setting.

Students will be able to answer these questions by providing examples, written or a creative, arts-based assignment.

• How can historical research help us today?
• What are some ways can we access the past? How did Ms. Ashton access the past in her article?
• What are the dangers of only being able to look backwards? Are there benefits? To whom?

Skills

By the end of this block, students should be able to confidently conduct research using one of these resources: library, internet, archives.

Students should explore the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of sources and identify bias, contradictions, and distortions.

They should also be able to show an ability to communicate with members of the public and/or professionals, through interviews, conversations and listening using correct protocols.
Questions

For discussion, written answers or creative expression. Students may choose one or more of the questions below. Have students interview at least one person and incorporate the interview into their answer.

- Discuss the idea of “historical voice”, what is it? In the history of British Columbia whose voice was loudest, that of the colonists or that of the Indigenous peoples. Why?

- How dangerous is it to only hear one voice in history? What are the results of writing history from a single point of view? How can we prevent that from happening?

- Why is knowing our history important to us as individuals and as a larger society? What are the benefits to hearing many points of view?

Sometimes only the loudest voices are heard.

- Can you list 5 loud voices that are heard right now in terms of history in Canada and or the world?

- Can you list 5 voices that may be drowned out in the noise?

- What can we do when we see that only one part of history is being remembered and talked about?

- What are some ways you can dig deeper into history to find a voice that was quieted or unheard during a specific time?
Activities

Choose a period in Canadian or British Columbian history that interests you. Frame a research question that will help you examine the loudest voice. Using the *Historical Thinking Project Birthday* idea, (https://historicalthinking.ca/lesson/687) have students find an event that happened historically on their birthday. Have them look at the history that is common knowledge, perhaps that we learn about in school, and investigate a different voice from that time.

Use any or all of these research tools:

- A conversation with a community elder, or someone in your family
- or an archival source in your area, online or in person
- Any relevant library resource, book, film or audio recording

**Step One:** Write 250 to 500 words explaining

- Your research question.
- The sources you were drawn to.
- The specific information you found that helped you understand historical time in a new way — use two or three examples.
- At least one lesson you will carry away from this research.

**Step Two:** In the style of your choice (fiction, poetry, music, or art) show how history might have looked if the quieter voice had been heard.
PART II

Suggested Questions and Activities for “Warp Weft Weave”

Activity


Watch the short film by Harlan Ingersoll Smith on [http://talkingwithgrandmothers.com/](http://talkingwithgrandmothers.com/).

Class Discussion / Summative Assessment

Lead a discussion, to answer the following questions pertaining to historical perspective; continuity and change; and cause and consequence:

- When you think of Indigenous Art what comes to mind? Baskets? Carving?
- How many of you knew about weaving wool as an Indigenous art before we read the article?
- What questions do you have for Ms. Ashton, or anyone else?
- What were the causes for Indigenous Peoples to become disconnected from her history?
- How did the work of anthropologists help with Ms. Ashton’s research journey?

Assignment

Write 250 to 500 words explaining:

- What historical resources did Ms. Ashton use to access the past in her article?
- How did Ms. Ashton come to be disconnected from her own history?
- What have you learned about the history of Indigenous Peoples in BC from this article?
- How can learning an artform such as weaving help us to understand the individuals and perspectives of history?
- Discuss the specific information you found that helped you understand historical time in a new way — use two or three examples.
Suggested Readings and other Resources

Dealing with potentially Traumatizing Course Content
Note: The information and material here may trigger unpleasant feelings or thoughts of past abuse. Please contact the 24 Hour KUU-US Crisis Line at 1-800-588-8717 if you require emotional support.

https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/trigger
https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use
Kid’s Help Phone: Call 1-800-668-6868 to speak to a professional counsellor. Available 24 hours a day.

Interviewing Elders
https://www.ictinc.ca/free-ebooks

Heritage/History Education and New BC Curriculum

The Historical Thinking Project “Your Birthday in History”: https://historicalthinking.ca/lesson/687

BC Curriculum: https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/social-studies/core/introduction


BC Heritage Education: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/teach/teaching-tools/history#heritage

Read — Alternative History Genre

*Man in the High Castle* by Philip K Dick

*The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Michael Chabon

*The Years of Rice and Salt*, Kim Stanley Robinson

*Making History* by Stephen Fry

*Lest Darkness Fall*, L. Sprague, de Camp

*Walsh* by Sharon Pollock

History Painting ( https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/history-painting)
**Arts: Alternative Forms of Expression**

Musicals: In class watch *Hamilton* or *Les Miserables*

Paintings: *Guernica*, Picasso (Anti-war)


**British Columbia History Magazine Articles**

*British Columbia History* magazine can be read through the EBSCO database available to schools or read online through *RBdigital Magazines* through a local public library.

“Warp Weft Weave: Joining generations” by Jenn Ashton, 53.3, Fall 2020.

“The Washboard Legacy” by Emma Quan, 53.3, Fall 2020.

“Eyewitnessing Forgotten History: Italian Canadian Internment Objects” by Angela Clarke, 53.1, Spring 2020.


“Japanese Charcoal Making on Salt Spring Island” by Chuck Tasaka, 52.3, Fall 2019.


“Conflicts with The Law: Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors” by Vern Giesbrecht, 52.2, Summer 2019.

“Ancient Clam Gardening on the Northwest Coast” by Dana Lepofsky and Nicole F. Smith, 50.1, Spring 2017.


“Kalso’s Not-so-Famous Six” by Frances Welwood, 51.2, Summer 2018, (Women running for office).

“Many Times I have Cursed the Day I Left You” by Forrest D. Pass, 48.1, Spring 2015, (Francophones).
I began the art of felting wool over a year ago, because I wanted to feel my hands slide over the soapy warm fibres. It was so satisfying that I wanted more: I wanted to learn more about fibres and how they held together when spun, sort of like a family and their stories. When I began my genealogical research for the history of my First Nations family a few years ago, I could never have imagined that it would lead me to explore the art of weaving wool — connecting back five generations and to an art form that is centuries old.¹

The Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) is known for beautiful weavings of cedar, mountain goat wool, and sheep wool, and even hair from a small breed of woolly dog.² They are also known for the beautiful carved tool used to work the wool — the spindle whorl. The spindle whorl is a wooden stick with a large disk on the end. It is used to spin and twist the wool fibres together to prepare them for weaving. A beautiful contemporary interpretation of a whorl can be seen at the Vancouver International Airport. Artist Susan Point's
whorl carving entitled “Flight” greets international travelers passing through security.3

When I discovered our family history — residential school survivors, hidden generations, and generations who hid — my DNA fairly burned with the realization that I wasn’t alone in my life, and so many women walked before me on a similar path. It was then that I began making art to honour my family and to make sense of my place in this family line. I began by painting Eslhá7an, (the #1 Mission Reservation in North Vancouver) where my family lived, and soon I was painting my family as I discovered their photos, and then the world around them, because it is also my world and in that I find a closeness that I can share with my Ancestors. Although there were no First Nations “painters” in my family line, there are many painters and artists in my family today and I like to attribute this to the fact that we had to be very creative in order to stay alive throughout the past two centuries, and in order to survive the colonizaton of the Lower Mainland.

While my family knew we had a strong connection to the original First Peoples of the Lower Mainland, we did not know that our family were direct participants in the shaping of the early city of Vancouver. This history had been lost to us more recent generations as Residential School systems successfully separated my great-great grandmother Annie Carrasco (nee Merrifield) from her mother and her past.5 Both my second great-grandmother, Annie Merrifield, and my third great grandmother Siamelaht, were born in Xwáýxway, a village inside of what is now Stanley Park.5 Annie (Merrifield) Carrasco was an informant for ethnographer Charles Hill-Tout in his anthropological field work on the Squamish language.6 My third great-grandmother’s older sister Sally xwaywát, was the mother of Chief Khatsahlano, Xats’alanexw. Since making these discoveries and still working on my connections to my ancestor families, I continue to research and learn more about our heritage, from learning the Squamish language to meeting the many people that I am related to. I am also learning more about my family’s way of life and their livelihoods and that is how I came to learn how to work with wool.

I went on to teach myself how to spin with a drop spindle, or spindle whorl. Thankfully I have the internet as a guide and after some hit and miss, I found myself coming first in my category of Drop Spinners in the International Spin Together Competition in October 2019.

Next came the wheel. A fibre friend searched out a used spinning wheel for me and I began the next phase of my relationship with wool. It was during this time that I met two people, one living, and one long passed. The first was Mary Frame, the Andean textile

Henriette (Harriet) Hakst’n’ using the spindle whorl. A still taken from the film “The Coast Salish Indians of British Columbia” by Harlan Ingersoll Smith circa 1928.
expert and scholar living in West Vancouver. The second was my historical ancestor Skwetsiya, or Henriette (Harriet) Hakst’n’, my third grandmother Siamelaht’s older sister. Hakst’n’ was a member of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nation and came from Yekw’apsem eventually settling in Xwáýxway in Stanley Park. Hakst’n’ was removed to Eslha7an (the #1 Mission Reservation) in North Vancouver, where she passed on in 1930.

Although decades separated us, I was fortunate that in 1928 the renowned American archeologist and photographer Harlan I. Smith documented my Ancestor Auntie’s spinning and weaving in photos, and a silent black and white film called *Coast Salish Indians of British Columbia*. I was able to access this through the generosity of Jonathan Wise, the Collections Information Specialist at the Canadian Museum of History Archives. He also furnished me with a number of photos, including an image made from a lantern slide, coloured by Smith himself.

During the discovery of my familial connection with fibre, I was also learning about working with fibres of all kinds including, silk, camel, rabbit, various sheep breeds, squirrel and goat thanks to Mary Frame, who I was sharing my discoveries with. She found the Salish way of spinning very interesting, and on seeing the film footage, remarked,

I’ve never seen spinning done that way! Most of the pictures I’ve seen show rolling the spindle on the thigh here on the NW Coast. In Peru, they often spin off the top of a free-hanging spindle, although there are at least five different ways of spinning that I have encountered.

For me to be able to share this film footage with Mary was an honour and Mary observed: “That video was very memorable, and really blew life into looking at the stationary spindle.” Another weave in the fabric of the past shuttled through to the present.

I recently came across a piece of weaving my ancestor Auntie Harriet Hakst’n’ had made that sits in the Museum of Vancouver. I think back to the creativity that spawned that work, it came out of necessity, the same way my painting came out of me. Even though it is my livelihood and I need my voice to access my authentic self, my Ancestor Auntie’s work was for a different kind of survival, and when I look at the weave that her hands had made, I am in awe of the thousands of years of creative living turned into traditions that not only kept my ancestors warm and dry, but that marked their positions in life that are now important touchstones for their descendants.

The next step in my fibre education was to learn how to weave in the Salish way, I feel this has maybe been my ultimate goal all along, or maybe it is a natural progression. When I found the bit of my ancestor Auntie’s weaving in the Museum of Vancouver, my goal was to one day replicate it using my own spun fibres. I soon found out that Chepximiya Siyam’ Chief Janice George, Master Weaver and hereditary Squamish First Nation Chief, and her husband Skwetsimeltxw Willard “Buddy”

Check out the Website and Video

Link to website with short film by Harlan I. Smith ....

http://talkingwithgrandmothers.com/
Joseph had recreated the exact same pattern on a robe. I thought this a coincidence until I learned through a conversation with Chief Janice that Buddy himself is the great grandson of Harriet Hakst’n’. And not only that, but at one time Harriet was also married to Chief Janice’s great, great grandfather George. I am so honored to learn from them both, and I feel that the link to my past is solidifying and my family grows with each breath I take.

Sitting in front of an iMac computer screen is not normally how traditional Salish weaving is taught, but I was happy to have the opportunity to be taught by Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph. The weavers were meant to display and teach their craft at the famous Blue Cabin, a floating artisan workshop which was initially built as a North Vancouver floating home in 1927 but due to the COVID-19 virus’ physical distancing guidelines their teaching had to be moved to an online format. It has been a long journey for me to get here to this place, so I am thankful to be able to learn in any way that I can, even if it is just in front of my computer.

Whatever alchemy brought me to this craft, I am doubly grateful and I feel the urge once again to weave my freshly spun wool into something useful and lasting. My friend, artist Roy Henry Vickers recently gifted me some advice that his art teacher had given him. He said:

Learn who you are and create from that place. There is nobody like you so you will be unique. If our vision is clear and passion is strong and we work from inspiration we will create beauty. I was told early in life that you make a difference in the world and your story is the most important story you have to share.

So here I am now, weaving our family stories together with fresh eyes, for the benefit of future generations.

Biology


Endnotes


5. Family documents.


7. Family documents and conversation with Chief Janice.


Jenn Ashton is an author and visual artist living in North Vancouver. She is currently completing a book about the history of her family and Vancouver, and is a teaching assistant in The Writer’s Studio at Simon Fraser University, helping others learn how to tell their stories. She was a runner-up for the best article award for her article “Siemelaiht” published in Winter 2019.

Photo by Melissa Newbery

Jenn Ashton’s modern spindle whorl. Photo by Jenn Ashton