

## Time to start thinking about Heritage Fairs

There is substantial research demonstrating that students learn best and are most engaged when the topics they study have personal meaning and when they have an authentic audience with whom to share their knowledge. In northern classrooms we have increasing anecdotal evidence of this as well. One great tool for making this kind of learning happen are the NWT Heritage Fairs.

What is a Heritage Fair project?

- Student-created projects that explore and share the history of their family, community, regions of Canada, heroes and legends, milestones and achievements.
- Projects may be completed in a variety of mediums: creative writing, performances, multimedia, painting, sculpture, poetry, prose, music or computer based.
- Projects are presented in situations/locations which provide the students with an authentic audience of parents and other members of the community.
- Projects are judged. Winning projects may go on to regional and Territorial fairs.

## 10 Best Practices for Successful Heritage Fairs

1. **Plan ahead.** Include heritage fairs in your year plan and ‘talk it up’ with your class to get them thinking early.
2. **Get students excited!** Share with your students the slide show of past projects that can be found on the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre website. Share exemplary projects from the year before with your class.
3. **Know what’s going on around you!** Connect with your regional heritage fair representative so that you are kept up to date about the heritage fairs program from a regional and territorial perspective.
4. **Chart progress.** Break down all the tasks into smaller parts and post a chart with due dates. This will make the task seem less daunting.
5. **Choice, choice, choice!** Allow for broad choice in topic selection. The more open the selection process, the more engaged students are in their topic and the better the project - and more importantly, the more they’ll learn in the process of doing their project.
6. **Why should I care?** The judges will base their evaluations on the students’ personal connection to the topic. Ensure you ask your students, ‘what personal significance does this project have for you?’ early in the topic selection.
7. **Use benchmarks!** Especially during the selection of project topics, guide students’ ideas through several filters or ‘benchmarks’. Using these benchmarks will help students build some of the skills important to social studies learning, and will help the projects they build be powerful and meaningful to them. The six Benchmarks of historical thinking that will be useful in this process are:
  - Establish historical significance (why should we care about certain events today),

- Use primary source evidence ( i.e. interviews),
  - Identify continuity and change (what has changed and what has remained the same over time)
  - Analyze cause and consequence (how and why certain conditions and actions led to others)
  - Take historical perspectives (show understanding of the past with its different social, cultural, intellectual, and even emotional contexts that shaped people's lives and actions),
  - Understand the moral dimension of historical interpretations (show understanding of how the same event may be viewed differently by different people)
8. **Engage families!** Encourage parent, grandparent and community involvement. Conversations between generations are important. This can be done intentionally by starting the project with a homework assignment where they students interview someone in their family to help select their topic.
  9. **Students should know what to expect.** Share the judging rubric with the students. Have students use the rubric on their own projects. Have a class 'practice fair' where students use the judging rubric to interview three other students. This allows for peer learning on the specific topics as well as practice on project delivery. By using this technique students will also learn from each other what makes a good project.
  10. **Find a diversity of judges.** During the school fairs ensure there are Aboriginal and French language judges. Ask all judges to arrive early and have a session on how to judge so that there is as much consistency as possible.

Go to [www.pwnhc.ca](http://www.pwnhc.ca) and select NWT Heritage Fairs under the education tool bar or go directly to ([www.nwthistory.ca](http://www.nwthistory.ca)) to get more information including;

1. Sample judging rubric
2. Territorial heritage fair brochure
3. How to organize a local fair brochure
4. Research paper on Project Based Learning