

# Champlain and Indigenous Informants: Mapping New France



*A painting by J. H. de Rinzy (1897–1930) entitled Champlain in an Indian Canoe.*

*Source: [Library and Archives Canada](#).*

## **Learning outcomes**

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Discuss how information was treated as a valuable commodity in early interactions between European explorers and indigenous informants in New France and provide examples of various forms these interactions took, especially through their varied treatment of power and sovereignty.
- Interpret primary sources by Samuel de Champlain, both to identify important details and extract implicit information about feelings, attitudes, and context.
- Articulate a critical understanding of what a map is and the historical practice of cartography, integrating this understanding with examples from primary sources by Champlain.

**Grade level:** II–12

**Content areas:** Social Studies, Language Arts, History

**Duration:** 1 hour 30 minutes per section, so a total of 6 hours of in-class time for the module. Each section can be broken up into as many lessons as the teacher judges necessary, depending on available time and on how much work is assigned outside of class. The time required for outside work will also depend on how many assessments are assigned.

**Additional resources:** Teachers can consult lesson plans produced by cultural heritage bodies such as [the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum](#), [the Archives of Ontario](#), and [the Canadian Museum of History](#); governmental educational agencies in [Alberta](#), [Manitoba](#), and elsewhere; and more commercial/popular outlets such as [the Portage and Main Press](#) and [Canadian Geographic](#). One excellent short overview volume, written for students, is Gayle K. Brunelle, *Samuel de Champlain: Founder of New France: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012). She writes:

Samuel de Champlain made twelve voyages to North America between 1603 and 1633. He authored four works that recounted his explorations and his struggle to found a French colony there and recorded his observations of the flora, fauna, and Native American peoples he encountered. Each volume was published in his own day and was lavishly illustrated with engravings and maps that provided the most accurate and informative depictions of North American geography then available. The works of Champlain also offer the best account we have of the conflict within seventeenth-century French society over whether and how France should colonize North America. His *Works* became increasingly popular after his death and ultimately shaped the founding narratives of the colonization of northeastern North America and the creation of New France.

The standard scholarly reference work is Conrad E. Heidenreich, *Explorations and Mapping of Samuel de Champlain, 1603–1632* (Toronto: B. V. Gutsell, 1976). This module would best be completed by one of these works or by any broader history of colonialism in the New World. I have also provided specific resources in each lesson, below. All materials for printing can be found in [the folder entitled “Champlain lesson plan materials,”](#) labeled by the lesson each corresponds to. My hope is that this module proves useful to other educators; please feel free to write to me at [alioshabp@gmail.com](mailto:alioshabp@gmail.com) if you have any thoughts, comments or suggestions.

This document provides a sequence of lesson plans (and accompanying materials) that I would use to teach a one- to two-week module on Samuel de Champlain's exploration of New France. Specifically, the module focuses on primary sources created by Champlain — his journals and maps — available at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. These sources prompt both analytical and creative work by students that inspire broader questions of indigeneity, critical cartography, and the exchange of knowledge. The module assumes no background in this topic, or indeed much historical context at all for the students. The teacher should have some knowledge of the topic, or be prepared to look through the provided materials and external resources. Although students are not expected to have prior content knowledge, this lesson works best if incorporated into a curriculum that provides support for developing key competencies. This module develops these competencies, and assumes some prior work in these areas. Specifically, the learning outcomes developed in this module include:

- Close reading of primary sources to determine both explicitly provided detail and implicit information.
- Critical thinking and analysis of a variety of source materials, including non-textual sources such as maps.
- Creative thinking and synthesis of information to create original material.

These overall learning outcomes align well with a number of high school curricula. For example, this module addresses a number of standards in AP US History, especially:

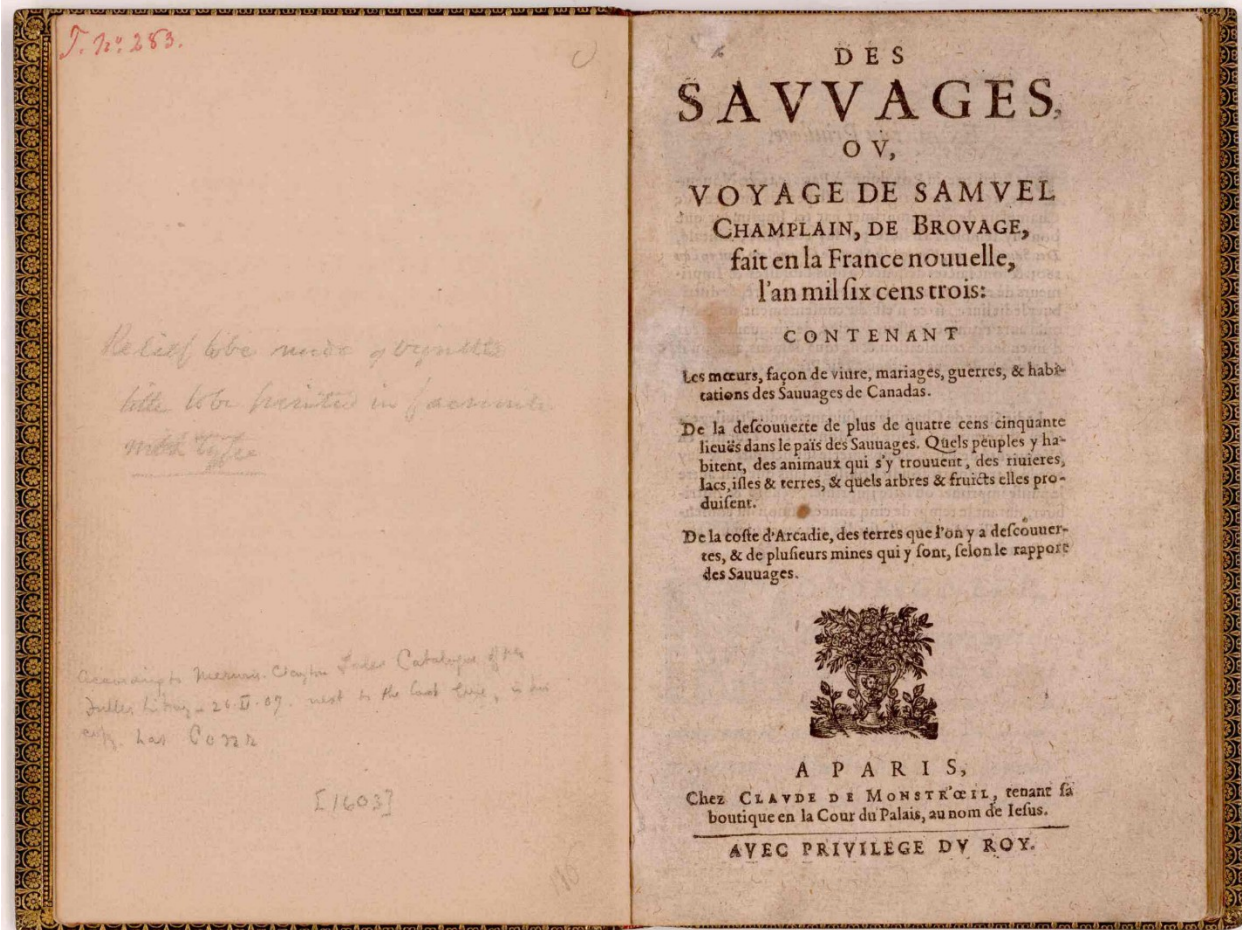
- 2. Identify and explain a source's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience.
- 3A. Identify and describe a claim and/or argument in a text-based or non-text-based source.
- 4A. Identify and describe a historical context for a specific historical development or process.

Similarly, this module addresses some of the key Common Core standards for English Language Arts, such as:

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Similarly, this module could be integrated into an IB History curriculum, or any other curricula that address the aforementioned learning objectives. This module is most appropriate for students in the last two years of high school who have prior work in social studies/history. The lessons could also be adapted to especially engage students who have some knowledge of French.

# Section I: Champlain's Journals



*The title page of Champlain's Des Sauvages, published in 1603.*

*Source: [John Carter Brown Library](#).*

**Topic of lesson:** Champlain's journals and historical context.

**Duration:** 1 hour 30 minutes.

**Learning objectives:** Students will be able to:

1. Extract relevant important information from primary textual sources.
2. Read primary sources for implicit information about motives, attitudes, and contextual information.
3. Describe important characteristics of the exploration of New France by Samuel de Champlain and his interactions with indigenous peoples, including the role of knowledge as a matter of exchange.

**Lesson plan:****1. *Context for Champlain's journals.* 30 minutes; whole group.**

Begin by providing historical context to prepare students to engage with Champlain's journals. If the teacher feels comfortable, this could be achieved by providing a short lecture that touches on the historical context for French voyages to the New World. Some students might be expected to engage directly with some of the scholarly literature (such as the introduction to Brunelle's book or Heidenreich's summary article), with the instructor facilitating an in-class discussion. Other students might be best served by using multimedia to do with Champlain and his context, perhaps by screening *Mountain Lake PBS* or a similar appropriate documentary.

**2. *First encounter with Champlain's journal.* 20 minutes; individual, whole group.**

Distribute excerpts from Champlain's journal, with one printout for each student. Explain that these excerpts were taken from the six volumes he published in the first half of the seventeenth century, after returning to Europe from his voyages. The edition excerpted is the bilingual Samuel de Champlain, *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, ed. H. P. Biggar (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1922). This first excerpt (vol. 1, 153–165) is about Champlain's contact with Algonquian-speaking people. The second excerpt (vol. 1, 334–339) concerns Champlain's exploration of Cape Ann (north of Massachusetts Bay) in 1605. The third excerpt (vol. 3, p. 44) concerns Champlain's contact with the Ottawa. Ask students to read the journal entries and highlight passages they would like to discuss with the class. I have provided a version of the journal excerpts with suggested passages to focus on; different amounts of scaffolding will be required based on the students' comfort with independent reading. Ask for a few of these passages and elicit discussion on unifying themes for the passages — for instance, Champlain's contact with indigenous people or his description of the natural environment.

**3. *Second reading of the excerpts.* 15 minutes; small groups.**

Ask students to turn back to the journal entries, and prompt them to focus on information that might not be explicitly mentioned in the excerpts — for instance, the attitudes and feelings of all the people (European and indigenous) involved; or Champlain's overall motives and goals in his travels. One effective way of prompting this discussion would be to introduce a critical opinion from a secondary source. For example, ask students to consider the following passage from Brunelle, *Samuel de Champlain: Founder of New France*, 2:

The primary purpose of Champlain's books was as propaganda in his tireless struggle to elicit support in France for exploring and colonizing North America. They are thus neither neutral nor scientific documents in the modern meaning of either word.

Champlain wrote his narratives as a firsthand observer of the events he described, and they are clearly skewed by his cultural biases. Yet Champlain's straightforward,

unembellished writing style sets his accounts apart from those of contemporaries who also voyaged to the New World and authored narratives of their adventures there ... Much more than other explorers of his era who wrote about their travels, Champlain purposely attempted to maintain a narrative voice in which he, the narrator, appeared to be a witness observing events and a source of information even while recounting his own exploits.

Ask students to discuss in groups of 3–4, considering Brunelle’s perspective alongside their own reading of Champlain’s journal excerpts.

4. ***Matters of exchange.*** 25 minutes; whole group.

Ask students to consider what it means that Champlain is ready to exchange trade goods for information about the interior of North America. Model for students how to infer these broader motives from the journal excerpts by focusing on the following passage from Champlain, *Works*, 164–5:

I inquired of them, whether they had knowledge of any mines? They told us ... there is toward the north a mine of pure copper ... the second who were questioned said they had not tasted the salt water; ... so that, according to their account, from the rapid where we had been, to the salt sea, which may be the South Sea, is some four hundred leagues. Without doubt, from their account, this can be nothing else than the South Sea, the sun setting where they say it does.

From this passage, we can infer that Champlain wanted to find a northern passage to the ocean and any precious metals the land might have. Remind students of the historical context — the Spanish had recently grown rich from their plunder of precious metals in Peru, and European traders were eager to find the Northwest Passage to Asia. Following this model, ask students to find their own evidence from the journal excerpts they read for the broader theme of knowledge as a valuable commodity and a matter of exchange. Consider also asking students to consider the circulation of Champlain’s own texts, and how they ended up in this context for classroom use today.

**Materials:** Excerpts from Champlain’s journals, with one printed copy for each student.

**Assessment opportunity:** Students complete a short written response about the idea of information as a commodity. Students are assessed on their ability to articulate a historical argument about information and the indigenous encounter with evidence taken from the journal excerpts.

**Other resources:**

- Many accessible resources are available about Champlain at <http://www.champlaininamerica.org/>, including a PBS documentary called *Mountain Lake*.
- Samuel de Champlain's journals are published in a bilingual edition as Samuel de Champlain, *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, ed. H. P. Biggar (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1922). Most volumes are available online at <https://archive.org/search.php?query=works%20biggar%20champlain>.
- Much scholarly literature is available on Champlain. An excellent recent summary is Conrad E. Heidenreich, "The Mapping of Samuel de Champlain, 1603–1635," in *History of Cartography*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1538–49, [https://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC\\_V3\\_Pt2/HOC\\_VOLUME3\\_Part2\\_chapter5I.pdf](https://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC_V3_Pt2/HOC_VOLUME3_Part2_chapter5I.pdf).
- A good deal of excellent recent work has been done on indigenous–European encounters in early modern North America. For an account that emphasizes the sovereignty and power of indigenous political formations, with reference to early French explorers in the first chapter, see Michael J. Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
- The broader perspective on knowledge as a commodity is one shared by many scholars in Science and Technology Studies (STS), especially those who focus on the early modern world. See, for instance, Harold John Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Michael Wintroub, *The Voyage of Thought: Navigating Knowledge across the Sixteenth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

## Section 2: Champlain's Maps



This 1616 map (this imprint published 1670) by Samuel de Champlain is the first to show any part of the Great Lakes based upon European exploration. Source: [Stanford University Library](#).

**Topic of lesson:** Champlain's maps and critical cartography.

**Duration:** 1 hour 10 minutes.

**Learning objectives:** Students will be able to:

1. Apply their ability to critically analyze primary sources to non-textual sources, especially maps.
2. Explain key points from the critical academic study of cartography.
3. Synthesize information from primary sources (textual and non-textual) with critical secondary perspectives.
4. Explain the rudimentary characteristics of early modern cartography.
5. Explain more historical information about Champlain's journeys in New France.



**Lesson plan:**1. ***First engagement with Champlain's maps.*** 35 minutes; *think-pair-share*.

Distribute printed copies of the maps (or project them) and briefly describe their context of publication (5 minutes). Note in particular that these maps accompanied the written works Champlain published when he returned to Europe after his voyages. Thinking about their context of publication and reception, ask students to annotate the maps, making reference to their previous lesson on Champlain's journals (10 minutes). Discuss the function of these maps in small groups (10 minutes). Then come back to the whole class and then ask students to generalize in order to give an answer to the question: what is a map? (10 minutes; the answer will likely tend towards some version of "an ordered representation of space.") If necessary, consider supplementing the discussion with a definition of a map found in a secondary source about Champlain (Heidenreich, *Explorations and Mapping*, xi):

All maps are graphic interpretations of spatial information. They are abstractions of spatial reality at the point in time when reality was perceived by a particular author within the framework of accepted cartographic procedures. ... Champlain's maps reflect cartography at a stage in its development when it broke away from the impressionistic cartograms of the 16<sup>th</sup> and preceding centuries. His maps departed from a long tradition and marked the beginning of the modern mapping of Canada.

2. ***Critical cartography.*** 20 minutes; *whole group*.

Circulate copies of the comic by Krygier & Wood entitled *This is Not a Map* (ideally, this would be expected reading before the lesson). Guide students towards identifying a few key insights from this article. Different classes will require different amounts of scaffolding; some students might be ready to dive into some of the important secondary literature on critical cartography (e.g. J. B. Harley's "Deconstructing the Map"), while other students might require explicit prompts from the instructor. Conclude this segment by asking students what a map is according to Krygier & Wood (a proposition, not a representation) and how this relates to their earlier response to the same question.

3. ***Champlain's maps, again.*** 15 minutes; *think-pair-share*.

Return to the maps introduced in the beginning. Ask students to refer back to their previous notes and think about how they might consider the map differently in light of *This is Not a Map*. This reflection can be facilitated well by a think-pair-share model.

**Materials:** Two maps created by Samuel de Champlain, preferably in printouts distributed to each student; a printed copy of *This is Not a Map*.

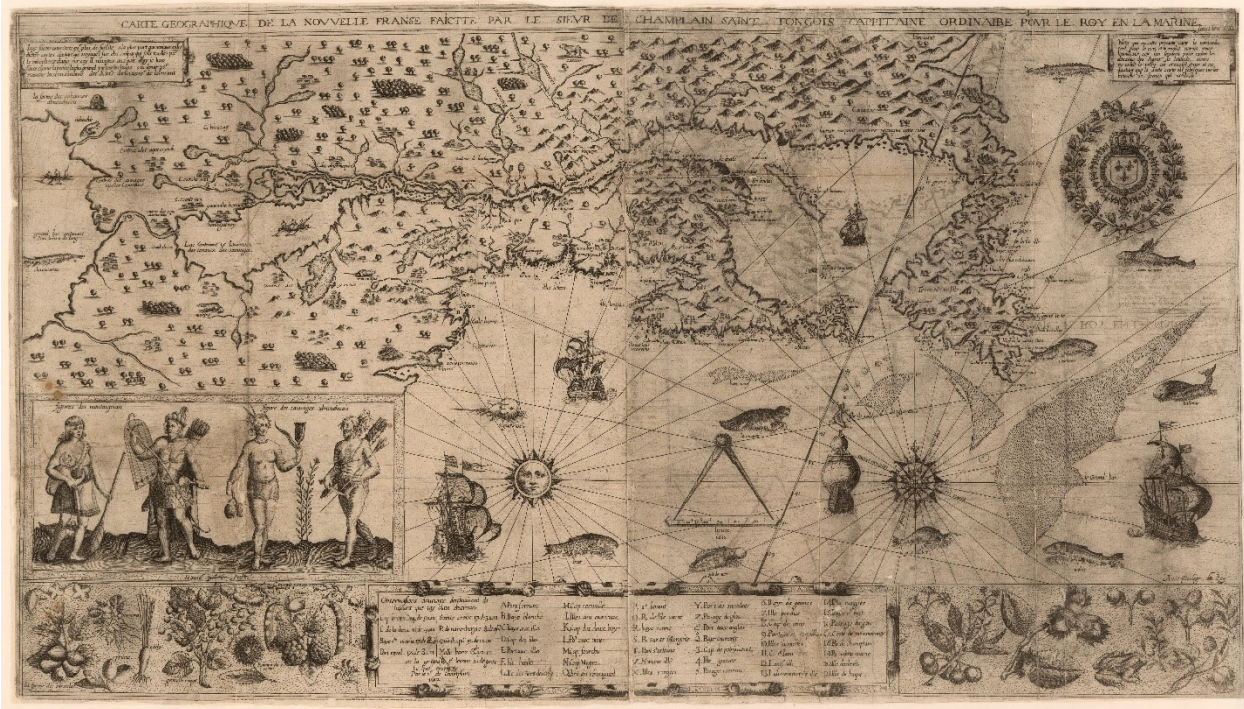
**Assessment opportunity:** Students produce a written analysis of Champlain's maps, making reference to Krygier & Wood. Successful responses advance a coherent argument about what

propositions the map is making, integrating visual evidence and support from the journal excerpts considered earlier.

**Other resources:**

- More maps are available from the digital archive of the John Carter Brown Library, <https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet>.
- The comic by Krygier & Wood entitled *This is Not a Map* is available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267513468>. This provides a rigorous but accessible introduction to critical cartography.
- The classic article by J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 26, no. 2 (October 1989): 1–20, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4761530.0003.008>.
- An excellent critical look at early modern cartography is available in Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- Some of the academic literature on indigenous counter-mapping includes Jeremy M. Mikecz, “Peering Beyond the Imperial Gaze: Using Digital Tools to Construct a Spatial History of Conquest,” *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 11, no. 1 (March 2017): 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ijhac.2017.0177>; G. Lewis, “Indian Maps Their Place In The History Of Plains Cartography,” *Great Plains Quarterly*, April 1, 1984, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1767>; Louis de Vorsey, “Amerindian Contributions to the Mapping of North America: A Preliminary View,” *Imago Mundi* 30 (1978): 71–78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1150704>.

## Section 3: Champlain's 1612 Map



*This is Samuel de Champlain's 1612 map of New France. Source: John Carter Brown Library.*

**Topic of lesson:** Close reading of Champlain's 1612 map.

**Duration:** 1 hour 30 minutes.

**Learning objectives:** Students will be able to:

1. Critically analyze a map, building on previous knowledge.
2. Articulate the role of indigenous informants in mapping New France.
3. Practice historical awareness and imagination by focusing on the encounter between Champlain and his informants.
4. Strengthen historical understanding by relating Champlain's voyages to their own experience.

**Lesson plan:**

1. **Map of the school.** 10 minutes, or homework; individual.

Ask students to draw a map of their school, in any form that they choose. This would work well as homework due at the beginning of class.

2. ***Return to previous material.*** 15 minutes; whole group.

Ask students to draw on previous lessons in order to recall: (a) key historical information about Champlain and his interactions with indigenous people; (b) various understandings of what a map is, with reference to the secondary literature on critical cartography and the history of the early modern world; (c) how information circulated as a matter of exchange in encounters between Champlain and indigenous informants.

3. ***Close reading of the 1612 map.*** 20 minutes; whole group.

Focus class on Champlain's 1612 map of New France. This map should be reproduced in as large a scale as possible, ideally by projection or large-scale printing (the John Carter Brown library has reproductions available). Compare the map with a satellite view of the same area to help orient students (provided as an image, or accessible using Google Maps). Begin discussion by pointing to a few general features. These might include the title; the rich illustrations of animals and plants from the New World; the royal coat of arms; the insets at top left and right; the coordinates given in the legend; and the depictions of native people. The following passage from Brunelle, *Samuel de Champlain: Founder of New France*, 53, provides useful information and a valuable secondary source for students to consider:

[Champlain] intended that [his map] be used as an aid for navigation and to illustrate for the literate public in France the vast territory, resources, and peoples of the New World. ... While the 1612 map displays Champlain's skills as a cartographer, it is also rich with what map scholars call "iconography," meaning inset and/or marginal illustrations depicting the flora, fauna, and natives of the lands shown in the map, often rendered with a high level of artistic skill. ... One of the inserted illustrations depicts two Native couples, one Montagnais and the other Almouchiquois. Although based on Champlain's descriptions, the engraver clearly modeled the facial features on Europeans (note the bearded man on the right) Yet the figures do illustrate the basic distinction Champlain drew between nomadic foragers and sedentary agricultural peoples (the Montagnais on the right are nomadic hunter-gatherers; the Almouchiquois on the right are semi-nomadic farmers). Europeans tended to divide the peoples they encountered into these fundamental categories. The costumes rendered here reflect Champlain's descriptions of Native dress and implements. Although Champlain had not yet reached Huronia, he shows the Great Lakes in this map based on information he had obtained from the natives.

4. ***Group activity.*** 25 minutes; small groups.

The previous activity primed students to consider specific sections of Champlain's map for more information than is immediately apparent. Split the class up into groups of 3–4 students and ask them to each focus on one of these sections of Champlain's map. Ask students to focus on the role of indigenous people in Champlain's cartography. For instance, ask students to use different colors to highlight what parts of the map

Champlain directly observed and what parts he could only have learned about through indigenous informants (Heidenreich provides a detailed analysis of the sources for the 1612 map in *Explorations and Mapping*, 80–1). Write the following questions on the board: How do you make a map when only a tiny portion of it is directly observed? How do your aims (Northwest passage and mines) affect the questions you ask and the maps you draw? Ask students to write notes during their group discussions. These can be collected for assessment; alternatively (or additionally), the instructor can circulate among groups and ask more questions when appropriate.

5. **Final activity.** 20 minutes; small groups.

Ask students to imagine that Samuel de Champlain visited their school. In groups of 3–4, ask them to discuss what kind of information they would provide to Champlain about their school and then share out in the whole class. Ask them what kind of map Champlain would produce of their school; if time allows, ask students to try and produce a map of their school as Champlain would have drawn it. Prompt a comparison between this map and the map they produced of their school at the beginning of class.

**Materials:** Previously distributed handouts. Stationery materials to create their own maps.

**Assessment opportunity:** Students create a map of their school as they imagine Champlain would draw it based on the information their group decided to provide. A successful map integrates student’s own experiences and creative choices with a critical understanding of how Champlain’s maps were created in dialog with his indigenous informants.

**Other resources:**

- The most meticulous, comprehensive information on Champlain’s cartography is found in chapter 3 of Conrad E. Heidenreich, *Explorations and Mapping of Samuel de Champlain, 1603–1632* (Toronto: B. V. Gutsell, 1976). For information about the 1612 map, see especially pp. 79–83.
- An excellent example of reimagining Champlain’s map is Michael J. Hermann, Margaret W. Pearce, and Michael J. Hermann, *They Would Not Take Me There: People, Places, and Stories from Champlain’s Travels in Canada, 1603–1616* (Orono, ME: University of Maine Canadian-American Center, 2008), <https://umaine.edu/canam/publications/champlain-mapthey-would-not-take-me-there/>.
- The copy of the map held by the Boston Public Library was stolen a few years ago, and its recovery ended with a commendation by the Boston mayor to the map curator — a rare honor! See Tristin Hopper, “Rare Early Map of Canada, Drawn by Samuel de Champlain in 1612, Recovered after Theft by Collector,” *National Post*, December 5, 2015, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/rare-early-map-of-canada-drawn-by-samuel-de-champlain-in-1612-recovered-after-theft-by-collector>.

# Section 4: Writing Historical Fiction

**Topic of lesson:** Writing historical fiction.

**Duration:** 35 minutes in-class time, plus time for the final assignment.

**Learning objectives:** Students will be able to:

1. Synthesize historical information to prompt their own creative practice.
2. Integrate specific evidence from primary sources into historical fiction.
3. Confidently express their own ideas and make their imagination part of fluent creative expression.

**Lesson plan:**

1. **Summary of previous lessons.** 15 minutes; think-pair-share.

Use a think-pair-share model to elicit key takeaways from previous lessons. Consider using a whiteboard to facilitate class discussion through a mind-map, or by grouping keywords. Make sure students have access to the maps and journal entry handouts previously distributed. Elicit information about Champlain's journals, including his motives and attitudes in indigenous-European encounters; secondary literature around critical cartography; and a solid understanding of Champlain's maps.

2. **Partner work.** 10 minutes; pairs.

Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss a journey they have taken that made them feel uncomfortable. Ask them to include events, impressions of the environment, and feelings and emotions. If you'd like to extend this activity, consider asking students to ask the same question of a relative or other person close to them outside of school. This activity is meant to engage students in more personal reflection to tie into their writing.

3. **Historical fiction.** 10 minutes for prompt, take assignment home; individual.

Using the rest of the time for the session, ask students to produce their own work of short historical fiction. Provide the following written prompt:

*Imagine that you are a French sailor travelling with Samuel de Champlain on his first voyage to New France. Making reference to what we have previously learned about Champlain and his journeys, write a narrative between 750 and 1000 words about one aspect from the perspective of this French sailor.*

Different classes will need different scaffolding. As necessary, the instructor could: share and review the scoring rubric with students; discuss the different components and expectations; and show a past example, if available, and have students score it.

Hopefully, the first activity provided enough of a link between previous lessons and this

activity; if needed, feel free to remind students of salient journal excerpts, or of the critical mapping exercise that also involved a creative element.

**Assessment opportunity:** The writing should be collected and assessed against a rubric. A successful work should meet the following expectations:

- The student has selected appropriate and relevant sources that support their narrative structure.
- The narrative is clear, coherent, and effectively organized.
- The student carefully chooses language to clearly and effectively communicate their creative vision, with a high degree of accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and sentence construction; register and style are effective and appropriate.
- The student draws clear connections between the narrative and their reflections on the content of the module.

**Materials/resources:** Previously distributed handouts; something to write the narrative with.