



## Should the Thomson Case Be Reopened?

*This MysteryQuest examines evidence concerning the mysterious death in 1917 of Tom Thomson, one of Canada's most influential painters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Students learn that determining cause of death requires sufficient credible and admissible evidence.*

*A critical thinking challenge to accompany*

***Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History***  
***Death on a Painted Lake: The Tom Thomson Tragedy***

<http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/35/indexen.html>

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*based on an approach developed by The Critical Thinking Consortium*  
[www.tc2.ca](http://www.tc2.ca)

**Ages**

11 – 14

**Courses**

Canadian history, social studies, civics, law

**Key Topics**

- life in rural Ontario in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- theories about the cause of Thomson's death
- historical evidence

## **Critical Challenges**

- Determine whether the presented facts support the theory, challenge the theory or are simply not relevant.
- Rate the overall plausibility of the collected evidence for each theory.

## **Broad Understanding**

- Students will learn to find evidence in textual sources to support a causal explanation of a historical theory.

## **Requisite Tools**

- ❖ **Background knowledge**
  - knowledge of the events and people associated with the death of Tom Thomson
- ❖ **Criteria for judgment**
  - criteria for relevant evidence (e.g., supports or disputes a theory)
  - criteria for plausibility (e.g., amount, degree of believability, completeness)
- ❖ **Critical thinking vocabulary**
  - credibility
- ❖ **Thinking strategies**
  - data charts
- ❖ **Habits of mind**
  - attention to detail

## **Independent Study**

This lesson can be used as a self-directed activity by having students individually or in pairs work their way through the guided instructions and support material found in [MysteryQuest 35](#).

## **Whole Class Activities**

On the following pages are suggested modifications of the self-guided procedures found on the MysteryQuest website for use with a class of students. For convenience, each support material and set of procedures are linked next to the relevant suggestions for whole class instruction.

## **Suggested Activities**

### **Set the context**

- Suggest to students that there have been reports of vandalism in their town. Some people are convinced that a certain group of students are responsible and the authorities are gathering evidence to determine the plausibility of this suspicion. Ask students to identify possible evidence the authorities might

consider (e.g., eye witness statements, purchase of spray paint by particular individuals). If students offer only relevant evidence, suggest some extraneous facts (e.g., the spray painting was messy, the same problem had occurred years early in a different town, the event happened on a Tuesday). Explain that some pieces of the evidence are more relevant – directly connected to the case – than others. Invite students to work with a partner to determine which pieces of evidence are relevant and why. Discuss the ideas as a class.

- Using [Introduction](#) as a guide, explain to students the incident that is the focus of their investigation.

### **Discuss the challenge**

- Using [The Task](#) as a guide, explain that students' challenge is to work collaboratively in groups of four to examine the evidence for one of three theories of Tom Thomson's death: suicide, accident or foul play.

### **Identify a theory to explore**

- Using [Step 1: Identify the theory to explore](#) as a guide, describe the events surrounding the discovery of Tom Thomson's body. Direct students to work in their assigned groups to examine the three documents in the Background section of [Evidence in the Case](#). Based on this, each group is to select one theory to pursue. Suggest that students identify a second choice in case the theories are unevenly selected among the groups.

### **Decide on the relevance of facts**

- Using [Step 2: Decide on the relevance of facts](#) as a guide, remind students that some facts will be more relevant than others in supporting or challenging the theory.
- Distribute copies of [Identifying Relevant Evidence](#). Direct students to work in their groups to determine whether or not the evidence listed is relevant to their selected theories. Remind students that they are to explain their conclusions.

### **Test the theory with primary evidence**

- Using [Step 3: Test your theory with primary evidence](#) as a guide, instruct students to examine the eight documents in the "Primary documents" section of [Evidence in the Case](#). You may choose to direct each student within a group to examine two of the documents and share their results with the other members.
- Distribute copies of [Finding Additional Evidence](#) to each student to record relevant information and an assessment and justification of each fact from their assigned documents.

### **Decide on the plausibility of the theory**

- Using [Step 4: Decide on the plausibility of your theory](#) as a guide, discuss possible questions or concerns about the evidence. To help groups determine whether their theory is plausible, direct them to develop criteria (e.g., amount of relevant evidence, degree of believability, and completeness of the evidence). Provide an opportunity for all students within a group to share their results with each other.
- Distribute a copy of [Reaching a Conclusion](#) to each group. Direct them to summarize the key evidence collected by all students in the group, and record the major questions or concerns. Point out that each group is to rate the overall plausibility of the theory on a scale from +2 (highly plausible) to -2 (very implausible) and, referring to the criteria, give three reasons for the group rating.

### **Share finding with other groups**

- Arrange for those groups who examined the same theory to meet together to compare their results. Ask representatives from each group to present a summary of the evidence and of possible concerns for their theory. As a class discuss each theory and invite students to rank the theories in order of their plausibility.

### **Evaluation**

- Use the rubric [Assessing the Evidence, Ratings and Conclusion](#) to evaluate how well students were able to identify evidence from the historical documents, rate and explain their relevance, and draw a plausible overall conclusion about one theory concerning Thomson's death.

### **Extension**

- Invite students individually or as a class to pursue the suggested activities listed in [Extension](#).