



## Changing Impressions of Tom Thomson and his Art

*This MysteryQuest examines how impressions of Tom Thomson's character and his contributions as an artist may have changed over time.*

*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/36/indexen.html>

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

**Ages**  
16-18

**Courses**  
Canadian history, social studies, fine arts

**Key topics**

- Tom Thomson's art and legacy
- factors affecting artists' reputations

### **Critical Challenge**

- Determine the ways in which impressions of Tom Thomson's character and his contributions as an artist have changed over time.

### **Broad Understanding**

- Students will learn that impressions of an artist's talent can change over time.

### **Requisite Tools**

#### ❖ **Background knowledge**

- knowledge of the details of Thomson's art, character and legacy
- knowledge of influences affecting Thomson's reputation

#### ❖ **Criteria for judgment**

- criteria for judging changing impressions (e.g., the focus of attention, differences in favourable aspects, basis of achievement)

#### ❖ **Critical thinking vocabulary**

- continuity and change

#### ❖ **Thinking strategies**

- data chart

#### ❖ **Habits of mind**

- independent minded

### **Independent Study**

- This lesson can be used as a self-directed activity by having students work individually or in pairs through the guided instructions and support material found on [MysteryQuest 36](#).

### **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**

- Using [Introduction](#) as a guide, discuss whether the reputations of celebrities such as Elvis Presley, Jim Morrison, and rapper Biggy Smalls have changed from the time of their premature deaths to the present period. Explain that public interest in artists sometimes evolves with the passage of time. Indicate that students will determine whether this is the case for Canadian artist Tom Thomson.

### Discuss the challenge

- Use [The Task](#) to explain that students will analyze impressions of the man and his artwork during two periods: around the time of his death (1917), and around the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth (1977). Students will judge how impressions of Thomson the man and the artist have changed and remained constant, and of the changed impressions, which are the most significant.

### Learn about Thomson

- Using [Step 1: Learn about Tom Thomson](#) as a guide, invite students to read the biography in the Background section of [Evidence in the Case](#). As they read, encourage students to identify phrases and comments that touch upon three questions:
  - *What are the main areas of interest in the man and his work?*
  - *What aspects of his character and his artwork do people describe most positively and what aspects do they describe most negatively?*
  - *When considering the reasons for his fame as an artist, do people attribute more importance to the man or to his artwork?*

Invite students to share examples of their answers to these questions.

### Recognize evidence of impression in two periods

- Using [Step 2: Consider evidence of people's impression in 1917](#) as a guide, invite students to work in pairs to identify impressions of Thomson the man and his art around 1917 using the four documents listed in this section of [Evidence in the Case](#). Ask students to record relevant statements in the left-hand column of [Finding Evidence of Impressions](#). Once each pair has recorded and shared their findings, direct them to summarize the overall impressions of Thomson based on the three questions described in [Step 1](#).
- Use [Step 3: Consider evidence of people's impressions in 1977](#) to direct students to examine the four documents published around 1977 that are found in of [Evidence in the Case](#). Repeating the procedure used with the 1917 documents, each pair of student is to record and summarize impressions of Thomson around 1977 using a separate copy of [Finding Evidence of Impressions](#).

### Identify changing and continuing impressions

- Using [Step 4: Identify changing and continuing impressions](#) as a guide, ask students individually to compare the summaries of each time period for changes and similarities in people's impressions of Thomson's character and artistic contributions. Direct students to record their findings on the top half of the chart [Analyzing Impressions](#).
- Ask students individually to select the two most significant changes in people's impressions—one relating to perceptions of Thompson's character, the other concerning his artistic contributions. Students are to record and justify their conclusions on the bottom half of the chart.

### **Share conclusions with the class**

- Direct all students to post their two most significant changes for the rest of the class to see. Ask various students to explain the reasons for the most common conclusions and to discuss the reasons for the less common suggestions. Invite students to consider why impressions of Thomson may have changed in these ways.

### **Evaluation**

- Use the evaluation rubric [Assessing Changing and Similar Impressions](#) to assess how well students were able to identify relevant evidence from the documents, and draw conclusions about changing and similar impressions of Thomson's character and contributions.

### **Extension**

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