

Unit 13: Video 3 Transcript

Q7: What are the most important themes that a first-year student should know?

A: First-year students should take from my area and my background, I would say go out and get yourself some books on British Columbia history. Don't just watch the videos and the YouTube whatever. Well, do a bit of that. Get some good books by BC historians.

And something that made me feel very happy at my last BC history class, which just finished last week, was a very outdoorsy, youthful, environmental studies-probably student, who in the break went out and discovered a box of books that somebody was giving away for a dollar a book. And he found a book that the editors of *BC Studies* have put together of the best articles in their journal over the last 30 years. A great little BC book. And he put his dollar, and he took the book, and he looked so proud of his book. And he was sort of flipping through. So we were joking all the way through that he's got his first BC history book. Isn't this great? And he actually came back to the next class, and he actually read bits of this. And so, just to be able to tweak people's interest in the province and get some of our good—*BC Studies*, the journal, is a good place to go. All the people working on British Columbia are contributing, usually little golden nuggets of what they work on.

As I mentioned, dig into a little bit of Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*. He walks you through the fur trade and through great epidemics that have sort of really plagued Indigenous communities in pre-contact times and also post-contact times. Read a little bit about the gold rush. Dan Marshall, one of our graduates of our program who has taught Native–newcomer relations here, has written on the—dissertation on what he calls the Fraser River War, which took place. And so get involved in that. Really get to know your place. Look around your own libraries and bookstores for books that relate to your place.

And then as you scout around, as you travel through British Columbia, take the Trans-Canada Highway. And try to relate what you're reading to what you're passing through. So don't just breeze along the Fraser Canyon, but stop at Yale. Places like Yale, which have a very rich, often painful, history. We have really big gold rush booms there. Our rail system, which is almost defunct in terms of passenger trail—travel, has sort of—it's really an important part of our history. That is important. And Yale had newspapers. Yale had opium dens. Yale had—there's a Chinese history that really has to be told in relation to Victoria, and in relation to the whole Fraser Canyon, and

our whole province. All these young Chinese men, by the thousand, who came. That's just opening up now, thank goodness. So that—think about that as you travel through that part of—as you go through Hells Gate, maybe take that tram across the river. And think about what it must have been like in 1913 when the blasting from the CNR on the other side of this tight Fraser Canyon caused a rock slide that actually blocked the river. Think of how the Indigenous people, who depended on those salmon, whose life was built around those salmon, felt when the major—in context of one of the largest salmon runs, that salmon couldn't make it past that. Matthew Evenden at UBC in the Geography Department has written lots of that—on that. There is lots on the Fraser River. Do that. It's incredibly important.

I try to encourage the students in my class to have fun with your children even, or with your siblings, or with your roommates. To dig into some of the primary sources. Our traders' journals are published. Some of the missionaries' journals are published. So you can follow Bishop George Hill is coming up the river, you know, as he keeps his journal in 1860. What does he see? As you're travelling up the river you see lots of things in 2014. But what does George Hill see two years after the gold rush in 1860? He has another journal for 1862. Huge smallpox epidemics. Just levelled Indigenous communities. What does he see? What does he hear from Indigenous people who are saying, "Somebody abducted my wife and my two daughters. I haven't seen them since." You know, just that kind of thing. What does he think of travel on the landscape?

George Dawson, his journals are published. He was a surveyor in the—from the—representing the Canadian government from the Geological Survey of Canada. He was from Nova Scotia, which interests me. Born in Nova Scotia. I'm from Nova Scotia, too. Father ended up as a Principal at McGill University. He—because of his disability, he was home schooled. He had a spinal thing that really didn't allow him to grow beyond about four-foot-eight or -ten. So despite this terrible physical disability, he ended up in British Columbia in the 1870s. Travelling every route, off-grid route you could imagine, as a tiny little man with these eyes prepped because of his home schooling and his geological—father was a famous geologist—he just saw everything. So he knew what he saw in the rocks, and the plants, and the trees, and the—he had a very Victorian lens that he looked through to see the Indigenous people. That—when you understand it as a Victorian thing, also is of interest if you read it that way. It'll look racist to us now, but interesting to see how he saw the Indigenous people. I love these early lenses.

Everything changed after the CPR. It was kind of like getting air travel. Everybody could get everywhere. We could get everywhere. You didn't need—suddenly you could get here in a matter of days. And you could also go everywhere and developing towns and—pre-emptions, the Indigenous people start really protesting after the CPR in the 1880s. And that protest effort really is one of the—in the 1910s, is another one of my areas of huge interest. How do we get at their voices of protest? They really did. Because then the landscape really became partitioned up. So things prior to that, the scene prior to that, the 1870s interests me. And you can really—it's like this visual thing. Your kids would love it in the—as you walk through these journals, because it's day to day. He's notating where he is, who he's bumping into, what he's seeing, the kinds of things. So to be able to sort of go through in 2014, against the backdrop of these journals, reading them aloud as you're going through the Fraser Canyon, and the Thompson Canyon, and various other watersheds and travel routes. The old Cariboo Highway, right up to Barkerville.

I even say read Bruce Hutchison. That's another—Bruce Hutchison was one of our great Victoria newspaper journalists. So he's written what I think is a classic book on the Fraser. And he loved the Fraser. It's 1960 or something. Again, you have to read it through the lens of somebody who is definitely a product of the '30s, '40s, '50s. So much more our grandparents' generation. That's its value, really. But it's a beautifully written book. He could write. It's accessible, and he does—even by horseback. He loves the Fraser River. Do we—how do we instil that passion in people? Just oozes this love for what we call British Columbia. Got this name in this questionable way, but Bruce Hutchison and others, all these others, primary sources on our province. [Inaudible] people like Bruce Hutchison who loved it to bits, despite the lens that we might question, are really important.