

## **The Open Suitcase Series – Program Description**

### **Life on Prince Edward Island in the 1850s**

This program reveals what life was like on Prince Edward Island for the average person in the mid-1800s. The Island was at that time a British colony in its early stages of development. Many settlers were recent arrivals struggling to carve out a new life in a harsh environment. Listed below are descriptions of the topics covered and the contents of the suitcase. Also included is a list of suggested activities and questions for critical thinking.

#### **The written material covers the following topics:**

##### **Livelihood**

How did the people of the day make a living? What jobs were available? How were people paid? Were there career opportunities for women?

##### **Transportation**

The ability to travel from place to place influenced how the Island was settled. Early settlements sprung up along the waterways. Travelling through the dark woods could be very scary in those early days.

##### **Housing**

What type of homes did people build for shelter in the mid-1800s? How did they heat those homes and how did they light them?

##### **Water**

If people today want a drink of water they turn on the tap without giving it a thought. But in the mid-1800s getting water to drink and keeping food from spoiling was a very different process.

##### **Food**

What was the diet of Islanders in the mid-1800s? How did one go about getting food? Was a weekly trip to the grocery store a part of people's lives?

##### **Clothing and footwear**

Was fashion a major concern for the average person of the mid-1800s or was the concern more about growing enough flax and raising enough sheep to get the raw materials needed to clothe a family? Do you go to school in winter if you have no winter clothing to protect you from the elements?

##### **Personal Hygiene**

How often did people of the mid-1800s have a bath or brush their teeth? Could taking a bath cause illness?

##### **Sickness and Medical Care**

Diseases of the mid-1800s are not often heard of today, but seven out of ten children died before reaching adulthood from common illnesses. What happened if someone got sick? Were they being punished by God? Were there doctors in the colony and if so what would they use to treat the patient? How did people pay for medical help?

## **Religion**

Was religion an important part of life on the Island in the mid-1800s? Why did so many ethnic groups intermarry at this time? Was the Sabbath day taken seriously?

## **Education**

Was education the right of every child in the mid-1800s on Prince Edward Island? Who built schools and hired the teacher? What was the manner of discipline of the day?

## **Entertainment and Recreation**

What did the people of the day do to entertain themselves when they were not working or at school? Would Island youth of today be able to relate to the games played by the children of the time?

## **Questions for Critical Thought and Ideas for Further Exploration**

### **Introduction**

- Why did Prince Edward Island have such desired land? Why was shipbuilding such an important industry?
- How would the Aboriginals and Acadians feel when the British started to settle? Did the English have the right to deport the French? Would there have been other alternatives?

### **Livelihood**

- Why were working bees so effective?
- What would be some of the benefits and downfalls of using a bartering system versus a money centered economy?
- Children worked hard in the 1850s without an allowance. What do you think the pioneers of that time would think of children getting allowances today? What do you think it would be like to be in their shoes?
- Do you think learning through apprenticeship is a good idea? How would it differ from going through post-secondary programs?
- Look at the book *Early Prince Edward Island Probate Records from 1786 to 1850* to get an idea of the lifestyles of individuals at the time.
- Read the book *A Child's Day* to learn more about the life of a North American child in the 1800s.
- Have a look at the Spokeshave Plane in the suitcase. This was a tool used by carpenters to smooth cylindrical wooden surfaces. What might be some examples of its use?

### **Transportation**

- As discussed in this section, horses were vital in transportation. Have a look at the horse tool in the suitcase. Explain why such a simple tool was so important.

- Skates were a good method of transportation in the winter. Take a look at the skates in the suitcase along with the rubber boots, which were good for walking in rainy weather. Are these types of footwear as valuable today? For whom would they be important for in the 1850s? Today?

### **Shelter**

- Buying houses was not an option in the 1850s. Shelters had to be built and were not done to satisfy people's wants, but their needs. Discuss these needs and have a look at the Heritage House Notes in the suitcase. How do these houses differ from your home?
- Look through the book *The Kitchen* to learn more about the most important room in an early settler's home.
- Read the book *In the Barn* to learn more about its use in the lives of the pioneers.

### **Lighting**

- Why were kerosene lamps preferred to candles?
- Try making your own candles by using either the mould provided in the suitcase, or by the traditional dipping method described in the activities section.
- How do people use the expression "ready for the pot" today? What do they mean by it?

### **Heating Homes**

- The invention of matches greatly eased the job of lighting a fire. Iceboxes greatly aided in keeping foods frozen or cold. Make a list of other early pioneer inventions that helped in daily life.
- What time of year would be the hardest for pioneers in the 1850s? Think about the hot summers and the cold winters in the uninsulated home. How did the time of year affect the daily routine?
- As mentioned in the activities section, listen to the song about the Jeffrey boys on Allan Rankin's CD found in the suitcase. Listen for the type of wood good for heating homes.

### **Water**

- Water conservation is becoming an important issue today because of the amount of water wasted. Did pioneers in the 1850s use water wisely?
- Which would be more beneficial for a settling family – a large piece of farmland with the ability to produce a plentiful harvest or a small piece of farmland by a brook?

### **Food**

- Check out some of the recipes in the activities section. Try making your own bread and butter like the pioneers. Pioneers ate much simpler than we do today. Compare the amount of ingredients used in the bread recipes to the amount found

in the bread you buy at the store. Be sure to look at the butter mould and paddle included in the suitcase.

- Based on the foods available to the pioneers, would you say they had healthy diets? Do you think it was easier or harder to eat healthy in the 1850s compared to today?
- Read the book *The Kitchen* to learn more about food preparation in the mid-1800s.
- Take a look at the potato masher found in the suitcase.
- Icehouses helped pioneers to keep food cold in the summer. Check out the ice tongs in the suitcase; they would have made handling the ice much easier.

### **Clothing and Fashion**

- After learning about women's apparel in the 1850s, would you rather be rich or poor? List some of the pros and cons of both lifestyles.
- Clothes, as were most things in the 1850s, were designed out of need. Describe the purpose of the following clothing items: long johns, straw hats / bonnets, aprons, corsets.
- Have a look at the carding paddles found in the suitcase. What was the more useful / important tool to pioneers in the 1850s – the butter paddle or the carding paddle? Why?
- Flax was an important fibre used in making clothing. Take a look at the hackle found in the suitcase. Why would this tool have been useful for the pioneers?

### **Footwear**

- Shoes are said to be one of the most important pieces of clothing since we wear them every day. Getting a pair of shoes made just for you sounds like quite a privilege to us, but was it a pleasant experience to those in the 1850s? Were new shoes comfortable?
- As an upper class lady in the 1850s, you wore a corset to make your waist smaller and shoes that were too small to give you dainty feet. If you had to wear either of these uncomfortable pieces, which would you choose?

### **Personal Hygiene**

- What does the expression "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" mean when it's said today?
- As described throughout this program, pioneers did all sorts of things to avoid catching an illness, such as never taking off their long johns in the winter, eating onions soaked in vinegar, and only bathing once or twice a year. Why were they so afraid of getting sick? Did they have the type of medicine and health care system that we have today? Try answering this question before reading the next section on sickness and medical care.

### **Sickness and Medical Care**

- Imagine being very sick but having nowhere to go for help. How do you think parents felt when their children were sick and they could not afford to see a doctor or buy any vaccines or medication?
- Because of the numerous illnesses that were so common, preventing sickness was very important. Try to remember some of the precautions put in place along with other things the pioneers did to avoid getting sick.

### **Drugs and Druggists**

- The pioneers of the 1850s did not have much available when it came to medicine and drugs for pain and curing illnesses. Would it have been more advantageous for them to develop more effective treatments to these common illnesses or improve sanitation as a preventative measure?
- How do treatments of the 1850s compare to those used today for similar illnesses, for example, cancer, earaches, colds, sprains, and bruises?

### **Home Remedies and Midwifery**

- Because of the cost and scarcity of medication and doctors, home remedies were very common. Talk with older members of your family and community to discover what home remedies were used when they were young. Does your family still use any today?
- What do you think it would be like to be a midwife or a doctor in the 1850s? List some of the challenges they would have faced.
- Midwives were very important in the 1850s as many people had very large families. With all the risks associated with childbirth as well as all the infant illnesses at the time, why was it still important that people still have such large families?

### **Religion**

- In the 1850s, people often looked to the church to promote morals. What might some of these morals be? Are they still encouraged today?
- What is your opinion of observing a Sabbath day of rest? Was it helpful for the pioneers?

### **Education**

- Why was there a push in the 1800s to open public school? Why is education so important?
- What were some of the disadvantages that prevented children from going to school? Would they have seen it as a missed opportunity to not be able to go to school?
- How do you feel about the methods of discipline? Were they effective?

- Have a look at the ink well and the slate pencils in the suitcase. Which do you think pioneers preferred writing with – quill pens and inkwells or slates and slate pencils?

### **Schoolhouses and Teachers**

- Why might women teachers not have been welcomed in some communities?
- Would the job of a teacher be an easy one? Make a list of the challenges they would have faced. Think about the building, the age range of students, etc.

### **Entertainment and Recreation**

- Pioneers of the 1850s worked very hard but they still took time for recreation. Why is recreation important?

### **Games Children Played**

- Games in the 1850s were simple and often used basic supplies from around the house. From what you learned in this section, did the children make the best out of their recreational time?
- Are many of the games played over a hundred years ago still popular today? Make a list of the games pioneers played that you still play today. Can you think of other games that require only simple materials that could have been played in the 1850s?
- Check out the book *A Child's Day* to learn more about the life of a North American child in the 1800s.

### **Suggestions for Activities:**

1. Go to the Island Register website <http://islandregister.com> and view the 1863 Lake Map based on actual surveys by civil engineers D. J. Lake and H. S. Peck. The map gives an accurate overview of the Island at this point in its settlement. You will be able to see the stage of development in your own community.
2. The Island was originally covered in Acadian Forest. To learn about the type of trees early settlers cleared from the land, check out the MacPhail Woods Ecological Forestry Project website <http://www.macphailwoods.org/acadianforest.html>. You can also look at the Island Nature Trust website at <http://www.islandnaturetrust.ca/forest.html>. What is the status of the Acadian Forest on Prince Edward Island today?
3. Listen to the song about the Jeffery boys on the Allan Rankin CD. Discover what types of wood are best for certain fires.
4. View the PEI Heritage Foundation architecture booklet included in the box. How many of these early house designs can you find in your community? Try to date your own home and name its architectural style.
5. With the supervision of an adult, try making candles without a mould. Take a deep pot and melt tallow (which can be purchased in the meat department of most grocery stores) or Parowax until it is a liquid. Place a pencil or small stick in the centre of a string long enough to make two candles. Dip the string into the melted tallow and allow it

to harden. Dip them again, let harden, and then repeat until enough wax is built up to make a candle. It will take thirty to fifty dips.

6. Try making candles using the mould provided in the box. Run the wick through the mould and secure it at the top. Pour in the melted wax or tallow and allow it to harden. Was the mould an improvement in the making of candles?

7. If you experience a dry scalp trying running bran through your hair to see if it helps.

8. Cut up an onion and soak it in vinegar for a few minutes. Then eat it as a snack. This was often a bedtime lunch. See if it will prevent you from getting a cold.

9. Talk with older members of your family and community to discover what home remedy cures were used when they were young.

10. Have a debate on whether or not disease is a punishment. Think of it in terms of our modern day. Are people getting diseases because God is punishing them or is it from eating fast foods, not exercising and getting enough sleep?

11. Bread is called the staff of life as it has been the main source of nutrients down through the generations. Try making the Irish Soda Bread recipe or the Frybread recipe listed below. Both would have been common with settlers of the 1850s.

### **Irish Soda Bread**

½ cup (125 ml) milk  
1 teaspoon (5 ml) vinegar  
2 cups (500 ml) flour  
1 teaspoon (5 ml) baking soda  
1 teaspoon (5 ml) cream of tartar  
½ teaspoon (3 ml) salt  
2 tablespoons (30 ml) butter

Add vinegar to milk and set aside. The vinegar will sour the milk.

Mix together flour, baking soda, cream of tartar, and salt.

Rub in butter with your fingertips.

Add milk mixture to flour mixture a little at a time and stir in to form the dough.

Shape the dough into a flat circle about 2 inches (5cm) thick

Bake on a lightly greased cookie sheet 30 minutes in a 425F or 220C oven.

Eat while fresh and warm.

### **Frybread**

1 ½ cups (375 ml) flour  
1 teaspoon (5 ml) baking powder  
1 tablespoon (15 ml) melted butter  
½ cup (125 ml) warm milk  
Pinch of salt  
Pinch of sugar  
4 tablespoons (60 ml) vegetable oil

Mix all ingredients except oil in a bowl  
Knead the dough until smooth and divide into four pieces  
Shape each piece into a flat circle  
Using a medium setting, heat the oil in a frying pan on the stove  
Cook or “fry” dough pieces one at a time until brown and crispy

12. Butter does make it better. The early settlers who owned dairy cows made their own butter. They separated the milk and churned the cream into butter. Try making butter in the classroom using a very simple method. Purchase a 125 ml container of 36 percent fat whipping cream. Pour the cream into a large Mason jar and seal the cover tightly. Then take turns shaking the jar. As the churning process progresses the contents of the jar will fall away from the sides. Upon opening the jar you will find a clump of butter in the midst of the buttermilk. Drain the buttermilk and drink it or save it for making muffins or pancakes. Shake the butter some more until all the buttermilk is removed. Drain buttermilk again and remove butter. You can eat as is or add a pinch of salt to give flavour.

### **Items in the suitcase**

Besides the written material contained in the binder a number of other materials have been gathered for the suitcase that will increase the student’s understanding of the lives of the people of the day.

**Early Prince Edward Island Probate Records from 1786 to 1850:** The wills contained in this book reveal a great deal about how people lived their lives, what material possessions they had amassed, and how they chose to distribute them upon death. The wills reveal how women and daughters were viewed in comparison to male offspring, and even how behaviour could be controlled through the promise of an inheritance. They also reveal literacy rates. Many things can be learned through a will, not all of them are written down.

**The Kitchen:** Written by Bobbie Kalman, this book is part of the Historic Communities series published by Crabtree Publishing. It tells the story of the kitchen considered to be the most important room in an early settler’s home. It answers many of the questions about how people of the time went about preparing their daily food. The book is filled with colourful photographs and illustrations.

**In The Barn:** Written by Bobbie Kalman, this book is part of the Historic Communities series published by Crabtree Publishing. It tells the story of the barns built by pioneers to house their animals and crops. It relates well the chores of the different seasons, as well as tells how the barn played a part in the social lives of people. The book is filled with colourful photographs and illustrations.

**A Child’s Day:** Written by Bobbie Kalman and Tammy Everts, this book is part of the Historic Communities series published by Crabtree Publishing. It tells the story of the day in the life of a North American child in the 1800s. The book is filled with colourful photographs and illustrations.

**Ads from The Islander and The Examiner, Charlottetown newspapers of the 1850s:** A number of ads from the two papers were scanned to show students not only what was being sold at the time, but the style of writing in newspaper ads. The ads tell a great deal about the life of the times.



**Heritage House Notes:** This is a book written by the Museum and Heritage Foundation of Prince Edward Island. It shows the different styles of architecture built in early Prince Edward Island.

**Allan Rankin CD:** Rankin, an Island songwriter and singer, sings a song about cutting the firewood. He refers to what types of wood to burn to meet different needs such as cooking and heating.

### **Artefacts**

Several artefacts have been placed in each suitcase for students to examine and identify. The artefacts included will depend on the suitcase your classroom has received.

**Candle Mould:** This candle mould would be considered a real advancement in technology. Several candles could be made at once and left to harden in the mould. Once hardened they would be removed and hung over a nail until needed. The old way of making candles was very labour intensive. Children and women had to hand dip the wick in the melted fat, hang it to harden and then dip again until a candle was formed.

**Potato Masher:** Whatever tools a pioneer woman had to work with in her kitchen were likely handmade at home using wood. This potato masher is a perfect example of how people were inventive.

**Butter Mould:** After the woman of the house or the children had churned the butter and washed out the buttermilk, the butter would be spooned into moulds and left to harden. Once the butter had set it would be removed from the mould, wrapped and stored in a cool place. Most moulds were one-pound forms and many had a designed carved in them that would transfer to the soft butter. The plunger pushed the butter out of the mould.

**Butter Paddle:** After the butter was churned and the buttermilk drained off, the butter would then be washed with clean water to remove any remaining buttermilk. The butter paddle would be used to squeeze out any remaining water before the butter was spooned into the butter mould.

**Carding Paddles:** Once the sheep were sheared the collected wool would be washed to clean it and then in order to untangle and fluff it, it would be carded using carding paddles. The spinner would then spin it into a long continuous thread.

**Hackle:** Flax was a common crop grown by early Islanders to make clothing and linens. The flax fibres were pulled through the teeth of a hackle to comb out knots and make long threads that could then be spun and woven.

**Ice Tongs:** People had to find ways to keep their food and drink cold and fresh in the heat of the summer. They used ice for the job. In winter when rivers and ponds were frozen large blocks of ice would be chopped out and stored in the icehouse for summer use. The icehouse was a building burrowed in the ground and without windows to keep it cold during summer. The ice would be packed in sawdust for additional insulation. The large cold blocks would be handled with ice tongs so that the person moving it wouldn't get cold hands.

**Skates:** Skates weren't just for recreation; they were also a means of transportation for the early settler who used them to travel over frozen waterways. Skates have been

around for centuries with the first European ones being made of bone. These skates are simply the metal blades set in a wooden platform that fastened unto the skater's boots.

**Rubber Boots:** Charles Goodyear discovered how to vulcanize rubber in 1836, and from there the many uses of rubber continued to grow and expand. Rubber boots were invented in the mid 1800s and are still going strong today.

**Ink Well:** For those early settlers fortunate enough to know how to write, the tools included a quill pen and an inkwell. The inkwell held the liquid ink, into which the quill would be dipped. The ink that stuck to the quill would then be used to write on paper. The quill could be various materials as long as it was pointed and the ink would adhere. This ink well is crockery, meaning it is made from clay, but for the right price they could be purchased made from crystal, metal, ceramic, etc.

**Slate Pencil:** Students in the mid-1800 would have little opportunity to have paper on which to write their lessons, as it was expensive and hard to get. They did their schoolwork on a piece of slate (an argillaceous rock which readily splits into thin plates) that could be marked on with a slate pencil. When the lesson was done the slate would be wiped clean for the next assignment.

**Horse Tool:** This is another handmade tool created out of necessity. Horses, which were the work animal of the farm and a source of transportation could be high strung when it came to having medicine given to them or work done on their feet. This tool was simple, a handle shaped out of a block of wood with a rope put through one end. The rope would be placed over the horse's nose and mouth and twisted tight by the handler. This kept the horse still until the necessary work was completed.

**Spokeshave Plane:** There were many types of planes used by carpenters, wheelwrights, coopers and joiners. A plane is a carpenter's hand tool with an adjustable blade for smoothing or shaping wood. The Spokeshave Plane is a small plane that has a handle on each side of its blade; used for shaping or smoothing cylindrical wooden surfaces (originally wheel spokes.)