

Educational Activity

***The Conscription Crisis of the
First World War***

Guidelines

Silent Cinema in Quebec, 1896-1930

www.cinemamuetquebec.ca

The Conscription Crisis of the First World War

Students are invited to recreate a question period from the House of Commons concerning the conscription crisis of the First World War.

This activity is aimed at students in secondary 3 and 4 for classes in French, History or Drama.

Introduction and Objectives

The adoption and implementation of conscription during the First World War prompted a major crisis in Canadian society. At the time, movie theatres were as much places for social gatherings as for entertainment. Military police would raid theatres hoping to find young men who had evaded the military draft.

At the House of Commons, debates over conscription were some of the most heated.

This activity requires students to assume the roles of Members of Parliament (MPs) at the House of Commons and debate the issue of conscription. Students should be divided into two main two groups; one will play the role of the Government of Canada and the other the Opposition.

The activity will satisfy two objectives: it will make students familiar with the arguments on both sides of the issue and it will provide students with insight into House of Commons procedures.

Length: 2 sessions of 60 minutes.

Sources: The main references for this period are newspapers *La Patrie*, *The Quebec Chronicle*, *Le Canard* and *Le Saint-Laurent*, all accessible in PDF format at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec website.

Preparation

Show a clip of the House of Commons in session. This will allow students to understand what is expected of them.

It is essential to instruct students on the positions each side holds.

Activity Guidelines

In order to develop their arguments, students must find the most information possible.

Students could initially browse the on-line media database available in PDF format on the “Silent Cinema in Quebec” website. Time permitting, students could also conduct further research by using the search engine available on the site. Finally, they could browse the different on-line journals at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec website. In this case, students could be asked to concentrate on certain key dates identified beforehand.

Divide the class in two. On one side is the Government, which will present the conscription bill, and on the other the Opposition.

It would be best if you were the Speaker of the House.

Explain the rules and procedure for the debate before beginning. You can adapt the rules according to your time limitations.

The “question/right of reply” principle is interesting only if each student poses a question and his or her counterpart gives a reply.

Procedure

A student chosen beforehand to be the Prime Minister reads the bill.

The Leader of the Opposition replies. This is followed by a question period where students ask a question to the MP sitting directly opposite them. This question period, as in all debates, must be conducted according to the rules that have been established. The exchanges are to be polite. The person speaking must stand up and address the MP by way of the Speaker of the House, who is the House’s highest authority and whose rulings cannot be appealed.

Group Review of the Activity

In addition to the arguments offered by proponents and opponents of the conscription bill, students will also have gained knowledge of parliamentary debating procedure.

It is essential to go over the different positions of English and French Canadians so that the students understand well the argument of the Government and the Opposition.

Reading and discussing the site's archives will enable students to understand the crisis that divided Canada in 1917.

To conclude this activity, and to verify that students have understood the arguments from both sides, ask students to draw up a list in the form of two columns: in one column students will list the arguments in favour of conscription presented by Borden's Conservative government and in the other the arguments against conscription presented by the Opposition.