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CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

Supply Line

The Canadian War Museum's Second World War Discovery Box

SANDRA O'QUINN

Abstract: How do you bring the museum to the classroom? In 2014, the Canadian War Museum introduced the Supply Line program to mark the centenary of the First World War, circulating Discovery Boxes of real and reproduced objects from the Great War to schools across the country, reaching Canadian students in every province and territory. With the arrival of the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Museum staff, in consultation with teachers, added new Second World War Discovery Boxes that are proving as successful as the first program. This article discusses the development process behind the Second World War Supply Line kit.

Comment transporter le musée dans la salle de classe? En 2014, le Musée canadien de la guerre a lancé le programme Ligne de ravitaillement pour marquer le centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale, en faisant circuler des Boîtes de découverte qui contiennent des artefacts authentiques et des reproductions liés à la guerre dans les écoles du pays. Elèves dans chaque province et territoire du Canada ont profité du programme. À l'occasion du 75e anniversaire de la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, le personnel du musée, en consultation avec des enseignants, a ajouté de nouvelles boîtes de découverte avec artefacts de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, et qui ont autant du succès que celles du premier programme. Cet article traite du processus derrière la mise au point de la trousse de Ligne de ravitaillement de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

MUSEUMS KNOW know that objects help make history real for visitors. The galleries of the Canadian War Museum are filled with objects that tell stories and illustrate ideas. As Canada's national museum of military history, our Supply Line Discovery Boxes harness



A Student tries on a Mark II helmet, Bayside Middle School, Saint John New Brunswick. [Canadian War Museum CWM2019-0052-0050-Dm]

the power of objects and reach students across the country, no matter how remote the community. The Discovery Boxes are travelling trunks filled with artifacts and museum-quality reproductions, delivered to schools for a two-week loan, entirely free of charge.

In September 2019 the War Museum launched the Second World War Discovery Box. The project was a follow up to the hugely successful First World War Discovery Boxes which have been circulating since 2014. One particularly compelling finding from surveys is that the program reaches many schools unable to access museums because of distance or costs, contributing to its appeal.

The heart of the Discovery Box—and the reason for its success—is the objects. Through them, learners' curiosity is sparked, history becomes real, and pathways to Canada's military past open up. Curating those objects was a critical element in the development of the Second World War box.

CANADA AT WAR IN 23 OBJECTS

Each Second World War box contains 23 objects—6 authentic artifacts and 17 high-quality reproductions. Examples include a



A student demonstrates an original Second World War-era camera, Bayside Middle School, Saint John, New Brunswick. [Canadian War Museum, CWM2019-0052-0005-Dp1]

reproduction army battle dress jacket, an authentic lifeboat ration tin and a canvas printed with wartime artwork. Each object had to earn its place in the box, meeting several selection criteria established at the outset of the project. Priorities included:

- Durability: Objects must be suitable for handling by students in all grades;
- Size and weight: Objects must fit into the box, and the total weight of the box, for shipping and manoeuvrability must be under 65 pounds.
- Accessibility: For example, try-on clothing must accommodate a variety of body sizes, positions and physical abilities;
- Diversity: There must be objects to relate to a wide variety of experiences including armed services, civilian life, industrial production, and the experiences of children.
- Relevance: Objects must relate to an experience or perspective relevant to Canadian experiences of the Second World War.



Lifeboat Ration Tin. [Canadian War Museum]

- Curiosity: Finding objects that are unfamiliar, interesting or weird is, perhaps, the most important element. Objects should pique curiosity in students and support historical thinking.

Each object is supported by background texts as well as one or more photographs showing the object in use during the Second World War. Lesson plans supporting the teaching of historical thinking concepts are included, ready for teachers to use in the classroom. All materials are available in both English and French and were developed with same rigour as museum exhibitions or publications.

EVIDENCE-BASED DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The continued success of the Supply Line program depends on how well it is meeting the needs of teachers and students. Evaluation and consultation with teachers shaped the themes and contents of the Second World War box at most stages in its development.

Every Supply Line loan is accompanied by a voluntary, confidential evaluation survey. In the lead-up to the Second World War box, teachers were asked specific questions related to the Second World



Students examine a piece of sweetheart jewelry, Bayside Middle School, Saint John, New Brunswick. [Canadian War Museum, CWM2019-0052-0047-Dm]

War—What types of objects should be included? What themes and stories would be most interesting and useful? Workshops held with teachers during the development helped further refine choices.

Teachers asked for content to support differentiated learning. This includes the needs of additional language learners, immersion students, students with learning disabilities as well as advanced students. In response, we made conscious choices regarding reading levels, the use of images and archival materials. The goal is to provide maximum flexibility for teachers.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY AT EVERY STAGE

Teachers also stressed the importance of including multiple perspectives. If teachers, and the Museum, want to engage all students today, those students need to see themselves in the stories and objects. This includes stories of people from all parts of the country, youth and women, as well as meaningful representation of Canada's ethnic and cultural diversity. We established diversity and inclusivity as priorities at the outset of the planning process.



Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps nurses enjoying a cup of tea in France, July 1944. [Lieut. H. Gordon Aikman / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-132851]

This started with the selection of objects and the images used to support them. For example, a Mark II helmet could relate to the battle experience of a soldier. Equally, it could apply to the experiences of a nurse in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps or to the involvement of civilian Air Raid Precautions volunteers on the home front. The diversity of experience that can be associated with this object can be seen in the three contextual images that were chosen to illustrate the helmet.

Additionally, we created bilingual thematic packages available for download from the [War Museum website](#). Using personal stories and primary sources, these packages expand upon material in the Discovery Boxes, giving students an eye-opening look at the different ways in which Canada and Canadians experienced the war.

The personal stories, especially, offer a snapshot of Canada during the Second World War. They help put a face to the events and foster empathy. In choosing the individuals to feature we set intentional targets aimed at including as many perspectives as possible. For example, we gave equal weight to gender, included at least one story of an Indigenous person or a member of a visible minority per theme



African Canadian volunteers training to help protect parts of Halifax in the event of an air raid. [Image Courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives. Halifax Civil Emergency Corps fonds, 1985-188 no. 41]

and featured a broad range of ages (children, teens, adults, seniors). We also aimed for a balance of regional representation within Canada.

The Supply Line program reminds us of the power of objects to tell stories. To date, the Discovery Boxes (both First and Second World War versions) have reached approximately 250,000 students in every province and territory. It is one of the most significant ways that the Canadian War Museum makes military history tangible, meaningful and accessible to Canadians everywhere.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandra O'Quinn has been a Learning Specialist at the Canadian War Museum since 2006. She was the Project Lead for both the First and Second World War Discovery Boxes.

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