

TITANIC: THE CANADIAN STORY

Introduction

Focus

It's been 100 years since the giant passenger liner *Titanic* hit an iceberg and sank in the North Atlantic off the coast of Newfoundland. In this *News in Review* story we look at the impact of the disaster, especially on Canadians in Halifax, where many of the dead are buried.

The sinking of the *Titanic* is considered to be one of the greatest disasters of the 20th century. For 100 years, poems, songs, novels, movies, and historical accounts have recounted the tale of how a massive luxury liner, declared “practically unsinkable” by scientists, engineers, and nautical experts, ended up striking an iceberg, splitting in two and sinking into the North Atlantic with a great loss of life.

The *Titanic* was an engineering feat of its time—it weighed more than 46 000 tonnes and measured nearly two football fields long. It was described in the media of the period as a “floating palace.” Some of the luxuries provided to its first-class passengers included a heated saltwater pool, a library, a barber shop, squash courts, and an orchestra. Only the most privileged and wealthy people of Europe and North America could afford a first-class ticket on the maiden voyage of this massive and beautiful vessel.

However, people from more than 30 countries were on board for the *Titanic*'s fateful trip across the Atlantic. An especially diverse group were the passengers in steerage, or third class. These people were working-class

Europeans from a variety of countries, immigrants who were travelling to the New World in hope of a safer and more prosperous life for their families.

A little before midnight on April 14, 1912, while sailing across dark and still waters the *Titanic* struck an iceberg. The events that ensued, especially the desperate actions of men, women, and children seeking to save themselves, have become part of modern mythology. Estimates of those who died vary from 1 490 to 1 635 of the 2 224 passengers and crew. Only 710 people escaped on lifeboats. The ship had been considered safe because it was built with easily sealed-off compartments. If, unimaginably, it was to hit an iceberg or another ship, only the compartment ruptured would flood. Builders figured that in a worst-case scenario it would take the *Titanic* from one to three days to sink. But fate was to prove them wrong. The *Titanic* sank on April 14, 1912, in a little over two hours after scraping an iceberg. By the time the nearest rescue ship was able to reach it, the only survivors were to be found huddled in lifeboats, with hundreds of lifeless bodies floating in the frigid waters.

To Consider

1. What do you know about the *Titanic*? Where did you acquire this knowledge?
2. What makes a historical event memorable? What makes a historical event significant? What do you think is the difference between memorable and significant?
3. Think of other great disasters of the 20th and 21st centuries. Why do you think people are fascinated with disasters? How do you think they compare with the sinking of the *Titanic*?

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Video Review

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner or in a small group discuss and respond to the following questions.

1. Use Google Earth or an atlas to find the location of the wreckage of the *Titanic* (41.726931 degrees north, 49.948253 degrees west; depth 4 000 metres).

2. What do you know about the *Titanic* and its sinking 100 years ago?

3. Why do you think this event is still remembered today?

4. In what ways was Canada connected to the story of the sinking of the *Titanic*?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the following questions.

1. What was Halifax's connection to the *Titanic* disaster?

2. Where did the *Titanic* begin its voyage? What was its destination?

3. How many lives were lost in the sinking of the *Titanic*?

4. What caused the *Titanic* to sink?

5. Why was a special recovery effort mounted after the sinking of the *Titanic*?

6. How was the *MacKay-Bennett* prepared for its recovery effort?

7. What is the most visited gravesite in the Halifax cemetery?

8. State two important lessons that were learned as a result of the *Titanic* disaster.

9. What is happening to the wreckage of the *Titanic*?

Post-viewing Questions

1. After watching the video, review your answers from the Pre-viewing Questions. Did watching the video help you respond to the questions in greater depth? In what way?

2. Why do you think so many people visit the grave of the Unknown Child? What does this say about how people respond to historical disasters and the victims of disaster?

3. Give an example of a major disaster that has occurred in your lifetime that you think could compare to the sinking of the *Titanic*. In what ways is it similar and/or different? Do you think it will still be remembered 100 years from now, as the sinking of the *Titanic* is? Why or why not?

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A Night to Remember

Digging Deeper

For more information about historical significance, refer to the worksheet at the CBC Learning News *in Review* website at http://newsinreview.cbclearning.ca/worksheets/historical_significance/.

Focus for Reading

Is the sinking of the *Titanic* on April 14, 1912, truly “a night to remember”? Is it a historically significant event?

Historical Significance

Your task is to argue that the sinking of the *Titanic* is or is not a historically significant event. Historical significance is more than a personal belief (“I think the *Titanic* story is fascinating.”) or a statement made in a history book (“The sinking of the *Titanic* changed history forever.”) Historical significance can be associated with people or events that resulted in great change over long periods of time for large numbers of people.

Using the chart below and the criteria of historical significance (great change over time, large numbers of people impacted) determine whether the sinking of the *Titanic* was a historically significant event.

Determining if the Sinking of the *Titanic* is Historically Significant

Brief description of the <i>Titanic</i> and its passengers:		
Brief description of the sinking of the <i>Titanic</i> :		
Criteria for Historical Significance	Does the <i>Titanic</i> meet the criteria? Yes/No	Proof that the <i>Titanic</i> meets (or does not meet) the criteria
Did the sinking of the <i>Titanic</i> result in a great change?		
How many people were impacted by the sinking of the <i>Titanic</i> ?		
How long-lasting was the change that the sinking of the <i>Titanic</i> made?		
Does the sinking of the <i>Titanic</i> help us to understand the past?		
Do you think the sinking of the <i>Titanic</i> will remain historically significant for the next 100 years? Give two reasons for your answer.		

Did you know . . .

Captain Smith planned to retire following his command of the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, hoping to end his long and distinguished career with the White Star Line on a high note.

FYI

Some historians have speculated that the owners of the *Titanic* were aware that a low-intensity coal fire was burning in the ship's massive coal holds even before its maiden voyage was underway but kept this information secret, fearing it would delay the ship's departure. In order to contain the fire, the *Titanic's* stokers were ordered to keep the engines fuelled at all times, causing the ship to travel at close to maximum speed. Had the *Titanic* not been moving so fast when it collided with the iceberg, the damage to its hull might have been less serious, and its sinking not so rapid.

The Voyage and Sinking of the RMS *Titanic*

The RMS (Royal Mail Ship) *Titanic* was the largest moving object on earth at the time it was built. It was a remarkable feat of engineering, taking 26 months to build in the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Not only was it new and massive but it was also luxurious beyond belief. Captain Edward J. Smith, 62, was in charge of the vessel, its 908 crew members, and 1 316 passengers. The ship was only at half of its full passenger capacity for the first trip across the Atlantic.

The *Titanic* began its maiden voyage to New York from Southampton, England, on April 10, 1912. The ship carried the elite of New York and London society who had paid over USD\$55 000 in today's prices for a one-way trip in first class. Other passengers included 285 second-class passengers and 706 working-class immigrants. These passengers were kept separated from the first-class passengers due to the prevailing social belief that rich and working class people should not mix. The ship commanded a great deal of media attention and was known as "a floating palace" where the rich and famous would be pampered with an orchestra, heated saltwater pool, barber shop, and six-course meals.

Four days into the journey, six vessels began transmitting radio warnings of icebergs in the vicinity. Smith continued to steam along at 22.5 knots (approx. 40 km/h); the *Titanic's* top speed was 24 knots/52 km/h. The ocean was completely calm and the skies dark that evening when the lookout, Frederick Fleet, who was stationed high above the deck in the crow's nest, saw an iceberg and shouted "Iceberg dead ahead!" Historians note that if the moon had been out that night or had there been a wind to create foamy waves indicating

its presence, the iceberg, which was the size of a high-rise apartment building, may have been spotted earlier. First officer William Murdoch ordered a "port around" manoeuvre by swinging the bow to the left, then to the right. Then, shortly after 11:40 p.m. on April 14, a number of passengers and crew members felt a slight tremor. The iceberg had scraped open the *Titanic's* supposedly invulnerable hull. A wall of ice moved past the railings and chunks fell onto the deck. Some passengers grabbed pieces to cool their drinks. People in their cabins were startled by the dark mass of frozen water gently gliding by their portholes.

Smith was in his cabin when he was summoned to examine the damage with the ship's designer, Thomas Andrews, who told Smith that the *Titanic* would sink within two hours since six compartments has been pierced. These supposedly watertight compartments were not, in fact, watertight. Their tops were open and their walls extended only a few feet above the waterline. Because the *Titanic* would tilt nose-down from the weight of the water as each compartment filled, it would spill over to the next. The compartments were only watertight horizontally. Nobody had anticipated water to rise above the waterline.

At 12:05 a.m., Smith ordered the lifeboats to be launched and asked his Marconi radio operators to send out distress signals. As could be imagined, every type of human behaviour ensued after the alert was sounded. At first there was general disbelief. Some people panicked, while others calmly organized the escape of their fellow passengers. Families rushed around to gather themselves together and bid each other goodbye. Some women refused to leave their husbands on the ship. One man allegedly dressed as a woman to gain entry onto a lifeboat. The ship's orchestra

continued to play music throughout these dire hours in order to maintain calm. One has to keep in mind that the ship was, at first, taking on water relatively slowly. However, an hour after the impact, water came over the top of the first of the five watertight bulkheads, flooding the boiler room. When the first lifeboats were launched, people were reluctant to leave since they could not believe that the ship was sinking. Many of the lifeboats were launched at only half capacity. And even if they had been filled, all the lifeboats combined could only hold half the passengers. At this time of history, it would have been considered brave for men to remain on the boat to assist the escape of women and children. Those who died in the sinking of the *Titanic* were disproportionately from the lower classes since the rescue efforts followed by the crew focused on saving the first-class women and children.

At 2:15 a.m., the amount of water inside the bow caused the ship to sink into the ocean, pushing the stern up at an 80-degree angle. Many passengers were washed into the sea and died of hypothermia, not drowning. Survivors claim they could hear the cries for help for a few minutes, followed by an eerie silence. Fifteen minutes after, the lights went out as the ship's electrical system failed. As the stern of the ship was lifted high above the sea, the keel fractured, breaking the ship in half.

Rescue

No ships were close enough to reach the *Titanic* as it was sinking (although some controversy surrounds the position of the SS *California*, which increased when crew members testified that the *Titanic*'s emergency fireworks/distress signals had been misinterpreted by the ship's captain). The *Carpathia* was the only ship to reach the scene, four hours after the sinking, and picked up many of the

survivors before heading to New York where a media circus awaited to hear who of the rich and famous had died and who had survived.

Lessons Learned

The wreck of the *Titanic* was discovered in 1985 by oceanographer Robert Ballard. In 1991 a scientific team led by Steve Blasco, a Canadian ocean-floor geologist, conducted what was called the "Imax dive" because the expedition's main purpose was to create a film for the six-story Imax theatres. On one of their dives they discovered metal that looked like part of the *Titanic*'s hull. When tested at the surface, this piece confirmed what metallurgists suspected: the steel used to make the *Titanic* was brittle and hadn't simply bent on impact with the iceberg but had fractured, allowing massive volumes of water to enter quickly into the ship. Had the builders guarded against steel embrittlement, the vessel would likely have stayed afloat in time for other ships to arrive for a rescue. One lesson Blasco learned was that construction technology should not be allowed to outrun materials science. In other words, in order to avoid disasters, engineers should be sure that what they want to build is made of materials that can sustain and support it.

Another lesson from the tragedy involved reforms to nautical safety. The wireless operators of the *Titanic* had been busy sending out passenger messages to friends and relatives when they should have been listening for warnings of icebergs from other ships. The first person to hear the SOS signal was a 14-year-old teenager named Jimmy Myrick who was training to become a wireless operator at Cape Race, Newfoundland. Once received, a message was sent to the rest of the world via telegraph that the *Titanic* was in trouble.

Following the *Titanic* disaster, the U.S. Congress began requiring ships to monitor airwaves at all times. The International Convention for the Safety

of Life at Sea called for ships to carry enough lifeboats to hold every passenger and for the creation of an international ice patrol to monitor for icebergs.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, compare the information in your charts dealing with the sinking of the *Titanic* as a historically significant event. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. Based on this information, discuss with your partner whether or not you think the sinking of the *Titanic* can be considered a historically significant event and present your viewpoint to the rest of the class for further discussion.

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The Canadian Connections

Note to Teacher

The classroom must promote a safe place for students to discuss sensitive issues such as death and burial. Prepare students for the topics that will be discussed and allow for individual reflective time in addition to small group activities where students can process their thoughts and emotions.

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, make notes on the following questions:

1. Look at a map of the *Titanic's* proposed voyage and sinking, such as the one at www.discovernorthernireland.com/titanic2012/Titanic-Route-Map-A2196. What do you think would have been some important Canadian connections?
2. How did the Canadian passengers on the *Titanic* represent a snapshot of everyone aboard the vessel?
3. What happened to Maj. Arthur Peuchen and Neshan Krekorian?

Canadian Passengers

Titanic passengers with a connection to Canada ranged from infants and young nannies to rich business owners. According to the ship's records, five first-class passengers were born in Canada, 35 people resided in Canada, and 81 were travelling to Canada for various business and personal reasons.

Toronto's Maj. Arthur Godfrey Peuchen was a passenger on the *Titanic* who escaped on a lifeboat. He spent the remainder of his life defending his reputation against public attacks that he boarded a lifeboat instead of remaining on the vessel to aid women and children as was expected by the societal norms of the time. In his defence, Peuchen was a skilled yachtsman who was assisting in the lowering of the lifeboats when the passengers of lifeboat number 6 shouted that they needed another seaman to row and navigate the 65 people on board to safe passage in the ocean.

Neshan Krekorian, an Armenian Christian fleeing Turkish rule to live in

Brantford, Ontario, also survived the disaster. As a third-class passenger in steerage—the below-deck area—he faced gates that were locked at night to separate the third-class passengers from other classes. In the complete darkness that resulted when the ship's electricity failed, Krekorian broke down the gate with an axe to get up to the deck where the lifeboats were being launched. He jumped into the half empty lifeboat number 10. After a few hours in the dark and brutal cold, one of the crewmen who had been rowing the lifeboat died and was rolled overboard. Krekorian took his place as a rower. The first rescue ship on the scene, *Carpathia*, wouldn't arrive until nearly four hours after the *Titanic* disappeared into the ocean.

Recovering the Dead

There had been no immediate response by the White Star Line to search for victims until public anger grew and the *Titanic's* owners mounted a recovery effort. The company contracted two

Halifax telegraph-cable laying ships—one from Quebec and one from St. John's—to see what they could find. While St. John's was closer to the spot where the ship sank, Halifax had rail lines to the rest of North America that would allow families to retrieve the bodies of loved ones.

Six days after the horrific sinking of the *Titanic*, the Halifax ship *Mackay-Bennett* noted the floating remains: deck chairs, broken wood, clothing, and dozens of bodies, many still in their life vests. On that first day, 51 bodies were recovered: 46 men, four women, and one baby. For two months following the disaster, the world's attention had turned from a media circus in New York, where the survivors had landed upon the *Carpathia*, to quiet and unassuming Halifax, where the dead were being recovered and mourned as privately as possible.

The *Mackay-Bennett* recovered the majority of the 306 bodies, with the Canadian seamen given twice their normal pay for their efforts. Despite that incentive, none of the crew was prepared for the disturbing task ahead of them. Lifting saturated, lifeless, bruised bodies from the ocean was traumatic and exhausting work that left painful psychological scars.

One day during the recovery efforts, the ship's assistant engineer, Clifford Crease, found a baby boy floating on his back. According to his granddaughter's account "He sat holding the baby's body in his arms as his crewmates rowed back to the *Mackay-Bennett*. It really affected him finding that child. He made a promise right then, with all the guys in the boat: If this baby's parents can't be found, we will create a proper funeral and burial monument for the child" ("Halifax and the grim aftermath," *Toronto Star*, April 14, 2012).

Some bodies were stacked on ice

to return to Halifax while others were sewn into canvas bags, weighed down with iron bars, and buried at sea. There were unfounded public rumours, that still persist in historical accounts today, that only the rich or Protestant victims were being brought back in coffins for "proper burial" but Blair Beed, whose grandfather worked as an undertaker's assistant during the recovery says the decision for burial at sea or being brought back for a land burial probably came down to the state of the remains.

News people from around the globe descended on the temporary morgue waiting for the bodies of the rich and famous individuals to be found. Halifax officials kept the bodies hidden from view despite overzealous reporters eager for the next newspaper headline. Forty bodies, including the baby that Crease found, could not be identified. Crease and his crewmates gave the boy a funeral and placed a copper pendant on the coffin with the inscription, "Our Babe." He was known as the "unknown child" until 2007, when DNA techniques helped identify him as 19-month-old Sidney Leslie Goodwin of England, who had perished with his entire family while travelling to Canada for a better life.

More than 120 victims of the sinking are buried at the Fairview Lawn Cemetery in Halifax, with another 30 at two other cemeteries in the city.

The Wreckage Site

The *Titanic* lies exactly where it sank, about 240 km off the coast of Newfoundland. It is considered too expensive to pull up the ship since its condition is weakening. A group of scientists, working for a private Atlanta-based company that won legal salvage rights, is hoping to preserve the remains by taking hundreds of thousands of high definition photos and videos to piece together the look of the wreckage site.

Since the *Titanic* was made mostly of iron it is corroding, and bacteria that eat the iron are adding to the demise of the vessel. Scientists hope to document as much of the wreck as they can before it disintegrates. They also opened the ship's cargo to recover 5 000 artifacts from passengers' luggage. These artifacts are now part of a high-profile auction in New York. The company has faced considerable scorn from those who consider the auction no better than grave

robbing. Halifax's Maritime Museum of the Atlantic has a significant *Titanic* collection of artifacts donated by survivors or recovered from the surface. It has condemned the auction, stating that it would refuse to display such artifacts as that would create a commercial market for salvage operations that may not follow proper archaeological procedures or show the proper sensitivity regarding an underwater burial site.

To Consider

1. With a partner, compare your responses to the questions in the Focus for Reading above. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. What does it mean to respect the dead? How did Halifax and Halifax seamen show respect to the dead? In what ways does our modern-day society continue to respect the dead and in what ways does it not?
3. How do you think artifacts retrieved from the site of the *Titanic* on the ocean floor should be treated today?

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The Titanic as Cultural Symbol

FYI

Although the sinking of the *Titanic* is probably the most famous maritime disaster of all time, it is by no means the worst in terms of total loss of life. At least six other such disasters resulted in a greater death toll, including the collision of the French munitions ship *Mont Blanc* and the Belgian vessel *Imo* in Halifax harbour on December 6, 1917, which caused a massive explosion that killed over 2 000 people in the city.

Did you know . . .

According to a recent survey, the sinking of the *Titanic* is the third most popular topic for non-fiction books published in English, behind the life of Jesus and the American Civil War.

Reading Prompt

As you read this section, make notes on the following questions.

What is a symbol? What are some important national and cultural symbols you can think of? Why do you think the *Titanic* became a cultural symbol after its sinking? Why do you think it remains one today?

The sinking of the *Titanic* keeps creating cultural responses from music, movies, musicals, literature, and comedic parodies. The *Titanic* has been viewed through many interpretive lenses. For example, it has symbolized the end of the Gilded Age and the beginning of the tragedies of the First World War; it has symbolized humanity's arrogance or hubris with regard to science and technology; it has symbolized the attractive and unattractive aspects of the culture and society of the time (e.g., how men and women were to behave, how rich and poor were to behave); and it has been viewed as a reflection on human nature in the face of death. The *Titanic* seems to have been rendered immortal by the quantity of interpretative lenses and cultural effects it has attracted, and it seems that each generation has a new and unique way of reassessing the facts and human histories that make up the tragedy.

Casualty Rates and Social Class

The prevailing cultural and social beliefs of the time led to the segregation of the classes of passengers on the *Titanic*. There was to be no mixing of rich and poor during eating, recreational activities, or in the washroom facilities. The luxurious first-class accommodations included 11-course meals offering caviar, lobster, fresh grapes, and peaches on tables covered with pink roses and white daisies. The

lavishly decorated dining areas were filled with women in shimmering gowns of satin and silk, the men immaculate and well-groomed, and a string orchestra playing Tchaikovsky. A heated saltwater swimming pool and exercise equipment were provided for leisure activities.

A diverse group of people inhabited the steerage class, including Lebanese and Syrian peasants and townspeople, Flemish beet farmers, Croatians, Finns, Swedes, and Danes. Most were travelling to the United States or Canada to escape poverty and persecution in their homelands. They were fed simple but plentiful food in an austere gallery and slept two to 10 in a cabin, with single men and women positioned at opposite ends of the ship in order to prevent any unseemly mingling of the sexes. There was only one bathroom for men and one for women. They had to launder their own clothes, unlike the first- and second-class passengers. The library, smoking room, and gymnasium were for all passengers to use.

Some historians claim that this dominant belief in the superiority of rich people trumped the other moral code of the time that declared "women and children first" in the case of a disaster. They believe that the higher death rate among the steerage class was due to classist attitudes that did not value the lives of working class people as highly as those of rich people.

To Consider

Do you think classism accounts for discrepancies in the death rates among classes of passengers? Give reasons for your answer. State five or six additional questions you would like to answer before you can make your decision.

Approximate death toll (there has never been agreement on the number of passengers deaths) ranges from 1 490 to 1 635.

Type of Passenger	Total Aboard	Men	Women and Children
Crew	908	Men 192 saved, 693 died	Woman 20 saved, 3 died
Third Class/Steerage	706	Men 75 saved, 387 died	Women and children: 103 saved, 141 died
Second Class	285	Men 14 saved, 154 died	Women and children: 104 saved, 13 died
First Class	325	Men 57 saved, 118 died	Women and children: 145 saved, 5 died (3 by choice)

Source: *Toronto Star*, April 14, 2012

The Titanic in Popular Culture Molly Brown

Margaret “Molly” Brown was an American socialite, philanthropist, and activist for women’s rights who became famous for surviving the sinking of the *Titanic*. She was noted for her bravery in assisting others into lifeboats and for arguing with the male rowers to return to the ship to retrieve more survivors. She was named “The Unsinkable Molly Brown” by historians. Her fame as a *Titanic* survivor allowed her to promote causes that were important to her, such as the rights of workers and women, education for children, and commemorating the bravery and chivalry displayed by the men aboard the *Titanic*. Her life story was made into a Broadway musical in 1960 and again in 1964. Her character was also highlighted in most *Titanic* movies (Kathy Bates played her in 1997 movie *Titanic*, as did Tucker McGuire in *A Night to Remember* in 1958.).

A Night to Remember

American author Walter Lord wrote the definitive account of the night of the *Titanic*’s sinking in his 1955 bestseller, *A Night to Remember*. Lord had been a passenger on the *Titanic*’s sister ship,

the *Olympic*, when he was a young boy and had an acute fascination with the story of the *Titanic*. As an adult he interviewed 60 survivors in order to write the book that has never gone out of print and is published in more than a dozen languages. It is a minute-by-minute account of the behaviour of the passengers and crew, revealing insights into human behaviour during a disaster. It was made into a motion picture in 1958.

James Cameron’s *Titanic*

James Cameron, a Canadian film director and producer, released his blockbuster movie *Titanic* in 1997. The film was over three hours long and had an unprecedented USD\$200-million budget. The movie, starring Leonardo DeCaprio and Kate Winslet, won three Academy Awards. It remains one of the highest-grossing films of all time, speaking to the appeal of the *Titanic* story in contemporary times. It was rereleased in April 2012 in 3D on the centenary of the sinking of the *Titanic*. The Canadian singer Celine Dion gained worldwide popularity for her rendition of the movie’s theme song, “My Heart Will Go On.” Hundreds of other songs about the *Titanic* disaster have been published.

Disasters that Signal the End of an Era of Complacency

Author Verklyn Klinkenborg compares the sinking of the *Titanic* to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York and Washington, D.C. He argues that these two events are similar in that they tore at everyone's sense of normalcy. The feeling that nothing would be the same again was prevalent. Civilization seemed to be threatened with coming undone. As Klinkenborg stated, "In the collective grief and fascination that followed the *Titanic*, the realization dawned that there is nothing insuperable about human technology—perhaps the first such realization on a twentieth-century scale." For many contemporaries of the *Titanic* disaster, it was human pride and vanity that was called into question.

100th Anniversary Memorials

The Canadian Government has issued five stamps to commemorate the sinking of the *Titanic*. A *Titanic* Memorial Cruise

set sail from Southampton to retrace the voyage in April 2012. Passengers were encouraged to wear historical costumes, eat food from the original menus, and listen to the music of the time. Tickets were priced at CAD\$4 430. Needless to say, some people find this type of memorialization bizarre and somewhat morbid, while others are strongly attracted to it.

In Nova Scotia, the Ministry of Tourism planned many commemorative events, including a memorial service at Halifax's Fairview Lawn Cemetery. Local authorities hope that the continuing popular fascination with the *Titanic* and its Canadian connections will attract more tourists to the Halifax area.

Sources: "Titanic repercussions," by Verklyn Klinkenborg (*American History*, April 2012); "Unsinkable: Why we can't let go of the *Titanic*," by Mark Mendelsohn (*New Yorker*, April 16, 2012, www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/04/16/120416fa_fact_mendelsohn)

Follow-up

1. With a partner, compare your responses to the questions in the Reading Prompt above. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. Based on your responses to the questions in the Reading Prompt, discuss with your partner why you think the *Titanic* remains such a powerful cultural symbol 100 years after its sinking.
3. What important historic lessons do you think we can learn from the sinking of the *Titanic*? What do we learn about humanity's need to remember historic events, particularly tragic ones?

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Activity: Remembering the Titanic

Museum curators are skilled artists with a finely developed historical sense. When faced with the difficult task of creating a display to commemorate a historical event or personality, they must decide which artifacts to use, how best to display them, what order they will be viewed in, what descriptions to provide for the viewer, and what will be left to the viewer's sensibilities when making sense of the event or person that is being memorialized. In other words, a museum display is carefully crafted through consideration of the connections between the artifacts, the audience, and the setting or how the artifacts are displayed. The most engaging museum displays honour the historical events or people involved in the story and make the audience bear witness to the past in an emotionally evocative way.

Your task is to form groups to create a display that memorializes one aspect of the sinking of the *Titanic*. As curators, you may choose what stories you find most compelling, what facts most interesting and most informative. Together as a class, your small-group displays will tell the story of the *Titanic* through different viewpoints.

Suggested Display Topics

- The Design and Construction of the *Titanic*
- Who were the passengers?
- How did the ship sink?
- The Halifax Recovery and Burials
- Survivor Stories
- The State of the *Titanic* Wreck Today
- The *Titanic* as a Cultural Symbol
- The Canadian Connections
- Centenary Observances, April 2012

When the groups have finished preparing their displays, they can be presented at different locations in the classroom or school. Students may be invited to leave comments or questions on the displays in the form of stick-on notes. After the class has had the opportunity to view all of the displays, it may wish to hold a full-class discussion or debriefing about what it learned about the *Titanic* from examining the memorial displays.

Sources for Research

History Channel's interactive *Titanic* website: www.history.com/topics/titanic

Virtually explore the *Titanic* wreck: www.rmstitanic.net/expedition

Artifacts and stories from a scientific perspective: www.titanicscience.com

The *Titanic* in Nova Scotia: <http://titanic.gov.ns.ca>

CBC Web resources: "*Titanic*: The Canadian story," www.cbc.ca/doczone/titanic/index.html?1335466489491

"Waking the *Titanic*": www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/episode/waking-the-titanic.html

"Rediscovering *Titanic*": www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/2012/04/13/rediscovering-titanic/

"Remembering the *Titanic*": www.cbc.ca/news/world/features/titanic/

BBC News Special Report, "*Titanic* 100": www.bbc.co.uk/news/17488357