Seven classroom-ready lesson plans and five introductory videos highlight and explore the significance and importance of Canada’s Capital Treasures. These treasures represent knowledge, sacrifice, commitment and ingenuity. This series of lesson plans is available for download at canadascapital.gc.ca/education.

ABBЕY RУINS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The learner will:

• Find out more about the life of Canada’s 10th Prime Minister;
• Explore how a park is created;
• Recreate Mackenzie King’s process in making the Abbey Ruins by creating their own park structure out of found materials;
• Examine aspects of framing as a visual strategy.

KEYWORDS

Abbey Ruins; Mackenzie King Estate; Gatineau Park; William Lyon Mackenzie King.
Lesson Six

RT. HON. WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE KING AND HIS DOG “PAT”, 1924-1948

Photo: Library and Archives Canada / C-024304

Mackenzie King aimed to create a peaceful oasis from the tumult of Ottawa politics. Using reclaimed stones from various demolished or damaged buildings, he assembled the Abbey Ruins on his estate, now part of Gatineau Park.

INTRODUCTION

Buildings tell stories; so do landscapes. In Gatineau Park, just north of Canada’s Capital, both landscape and architecture tell a very Canadian story of preservation, contemplation, and the place of nature in our national identity.

The large 361-square-kilometre park — only 15 minutes from Parliament Hill — is home to the former estate and grounds of Canada’s 10th Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. Thanks to King’s foresight, a beautiful segment of the Gatineau Hills was preserved as a park in 1938. King’s collection of rescued architectural fragments, installed in this natural setting, have also created a sort of spiritual oasis within the park.

Celebrating more than 21 years in office, Mackenzie King was the longest-serving Prime Minister in Canadian history. Leading the country through the Second World War, King was Prime Minister at a time when the country was undergoing great change. Though King strove to improve Canada’s role in the changing world state, he was also mindful of future generations. Through his efforts, he helped establish a peaceful postwar Canada that preserved its past.

King addressed his aspirations for Ottawa in a 1923 speech to Parliament. “We may not come to have the largest, the wealthiest, or the most cosmopolitan Capital in the world, but I believe that with Ottawa’s natural and picturesque setting, given stately proportions, and a little careful planning, we can have the most beautiful Capital in the world… [and] those who follow in future years will come to recognize it as an expression in some degree of the soul of Canada.”

One of the most beautiful landscapes in the region is the Gatineau Hills, where Mackenzie King created a working farm, several summer cottages for himself and visitors, beautiful French- and English-style gardens, and a permanent home to which he eventually retired in 1948. Upon his death two years later, he bequeathed his property to the people of Canada, adding to a vibrant and accessible public park that entertains more than two million visitors each year.

One small corner of Mackenzie King’s estate was devoted to architectural fragments salvaged from buildings under repair or demolition. Named the “Abbey Ruins,” these garden features were created from the fire-ravaged Canadian Parliament Buildings, from the blitzkrieg-era
British Parliament Buildings, and from various grand homes around Ottawa that were undergoing renovations and reconstruction.

Originally, King wanted to create a private chapel from the collected stones. When he realized he didn’t have quite enough material, he reimagined the collection into “ruins” resembling a gothic abbey, a Greek temple, and other time-tumbled structures. The partial buildings, beautiful in their own right, are designed to complement and frame the surrounding Canadian landscape.

King insured that not only were the stones preserved, but that they also integrated with the Canadian Shield landscape of the region. Much of King’s estate honours the landscape — which is significant to Aboriginal peoples, European settlers and park users today — by creating viewpoints and contemplative grottoes.

It is easy to visit the Abbey Ruins and imagine Mackenzie King sitting among the stones, gaining insight into the weighty problems that the country faced. Today, park visitors use the ruins as a photo opportunity. Many happy faces on Flickr and Facebook feature the ruins in the background, an ongoing part of Canada’s visual story. Because of King’s vision, Gatineau Park remains a cultural and environmental legacy that Canadians enjoy year-round.

**ACTIVITY ONE: WRITE A SHORT PAPER**

William Lyon Mackenzie King is an important figure in Canadian history. Research and write a short paper on his accomplishments. His life is well documented through his diaries (now part of Library and Archives Canada). How does his private estate reflect his private life?

**ACTIVITY TWO: MAKING PARKS**

How are parks created? In a small team, research a park in your area. Who is responsible for maintaining the park? How do people use the park? Does the park preserve any natural area or historical landmark? Is there an area in your community that you think should be a park? Suggest a new park in your area or neighbourhood. What events or activities would take place there?

**ACTIVITY THREE: RECYCLING ART**

King reassembled old stones to create a new park feature, the Abbey Ruins. These structures provide seating for weary visitors, climbing structures for adventurous kids, and tranquil backgrounds for people taking photographs. Try making a maquette, or model for a park near you. Gather materials that would otherwise go into your recycling bin. Select a suitable area for your structure. Identify what purpose your structure will serve. Draw a design for your structure and recreate a small model of it using your recycled materials.

**ACTIVITY FOUR: SEE THROUGH THE KEYHOLE**

The Abbey Ruins provide photographers with many interesting viewpoints and vistas. Look at the keyhole photo of Abbey Ruins. The photographer has chosen to shoot one scene framed by the architectural keyhole feature in the foreground. Using a large piece of paper, cut out a decorative “window.” Your window can be modern or a more historical one (such as the one in the Abbey Ruins photo). Using drawing materials, provide detail
around the hole, such as stones, curtains and so on. Using a second piece of paper, draw a scene that will be seen through your keyhole window.

ACTIVITY FIVE: WRITING A SHORT PAPER AND CREATING EPITAPHS (GRADE 1 OF HIGH SCHOOL IN QUEBEC OR GRADE 7 IN ONTARIO)

William Lyon Mackenzie King was Canada’s longest serving Prime Minister. Create a graph that shows the length of time served by each Canadian Prime Minister. How can you create the graph so that it is easy to compare the data? Who is the current Prime Minister and what length of time has he/she served? Be sure to include him/her on your chart. How will you indicate that his/her term has not yet ended? See if you can find two reliable online sources that indicate which three Prime Ministers have been the favourites of the Canadian public. Guess whether or not this might have a correlation to the amount of time they spent in office and then check your guess. What might you conclude from this?

ACTIVITY SIX: BOXING THE PRIME MINISTER (GRADE 2 OF HIGH SCHOOL IN QUEBEC OR GRADE 8 IN ONTARIO)

Prime Minister Mackenzie King was Canada’s tenth prime minister. Research to find out more about Mackenzie King, or any one of Canada’s other Prime Ministers, and then create a memory box that shares biographical information about him or her. Create artefacts to place in the box that reflect something about the Prime Minister’s personality and/or significant events in his or her private and public life, for example, a tape recording of an important speech, photocopies of historical photos, the collar of a well-loved pet, ribbons, or medals, etc. Be prepared to explain the relevance of each item to class members.

ACTIVITY SEVEN: MAPPING/MODELING A VISION FOR YOUR REGION (GRADE 3 OF HIGH SCHOOL IN QUEBEC OR GRADE 9 IN ONTARIO)

As you read in the introduction, Mackenzie King said, “...I believe that with Ottawa’s natural and picturesque setting, given stately proportions, and a little careful planning, we can have the most beautiful Capital in the world...[and] those who follow in future years will come to recognize it as an expression in some degree of the soul of Canada.” He worked hard to beautify the growing city in a way that befitted a capital, including building the Peace Tower, erecting a statue of the former Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and creating Confederation Square. He commissioned Jacques Gréber, a well-known French architect and planner, to create a plan for the region that included making parkways and greenbelts, moving the railway out of the downtown, and expanding Gatineau Park. Many of his suggestions were put in place. Do some online research with a partner to learn about the various considerations that urban planners must take into account and list them. Look at a map of the place where you live. Think about what you like about your home and what you would like to change. With your partner, come up with a mutual vision for the region. Sketch out a map or create a model that shows how you would like your region to look 5, 10 or 50 years from now, taking into the account all the considerations you listed.