

Documentary Lens Lesson Plan For *The Dikes*

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Curriculum Connections

Lesson Objectives

The Dikes, a 10-minute documentary directed by Roger Blais in 1955, describes how high tides in the Bay of Fundy threaten the dikes first built by the Acadian people 300 years ago. (NOTE: An alternate spelling of *dike* is *dyke*.)

After settling in the region in the 17th century, the Acadians turned the large salt marshes to their own use, reclaiming land from the Bay of Fundy's high tides by building a system of dikes and valves. The booklet *Dykes and Aboiteaux - The Acadians Turned Salt Marshes into Fertile Meadows*, prepared by the Société Promotion Grand Pré in 2002, describes the system:

The sluice, or water conduit, is placed at the mouth of a brook or canal. It is fitted with a flap or valve that automatically closes when the tide rises and opens when the tide falls, allowing fresh water to drain.

The dikes are still there, allowing farmers to continue working the fertile land of the Acadian region. However, those dikes have been battered by the tides for centuries and at the time of the film, were deteriorating.

The film portrays an Acadian community trying to protect the dikes from collapse—a catastrophe that would destroy thousands of hectares of farmland and an entire way of life.

The activities in this lesson are intended for students in Cycle 2 of secondary school and require a number of the skills and competencies set out in the Canadian Social Studies curriculum: critical thinking and creativity; historical thinking; geographical thinking; decision-making and problem-solving; research skills and active democratic citizenship; communication; and information and communication technology.

Canadian Social Studies Themes in *The Dikes*

You can use *The Dikes* to develop numerous interrelated themes, strands and key concepts in the Canadian Social Sciences curriculum.

| Theme/Strand/ Key Concept | Connection to <i>The Dikes</i> - Applications and Discussion Points |
|------------------------------|---|
| Citizenship | Acadia does not appear on any map, and Acadians are referred to as a "nation without a country." Discuss this idea, and compare the Acadians' situation with that of other minority groups in Canada. |

| Theme/Strand/ Key Concept | Connection to <i>The Dikes</i> - Applications and Discussion Points |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Multiple Perspectives | <p>In <i>The Dikes</i>, we see the various opinions among members of the community. Placide Landry is committed to repairing the dikes, even though many others show no concern until near disaster strikes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think that people in the community make so little effort? • Why is it important to have several points of view in order to solve a problem? |
| Identity | <p>The Acadians speak a unique dialect of French.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role does language play in a people's identity? |
| Power, Authority and Governance | <p>In <i>The Dikes</i>, the community turns to the government for help in repairing the dikes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is the community asking for government help? • What impact do government decisions have on the Acadian people and their dikes? • In your opinion, who is responsible for rebuilding and repairing the dikes? |
| The Land: People and Places | <p>How do the dikes and land contribute to the Acadian identity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the people in the region fail to repair the dikes, what will be the repercussions? • The land in the region no longer belongs to the Acadians. In your opinion, how do Acadians today see the land that their forefathers reclaimed from the Bay of Fundy's high tides 300 years ago? |
| Culture and Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can a manufactured object such as a dike become a part of a people's culture? |
| Global Connections | <p>Deportation of the Acadians: When the Acadians were deported in 1755, they ended up far from home, but their dikes remained on the land. Nowadays, harvests from these Acadian regions are exported throughout the world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how the Acadians of 300 years ago contributed to today's international relations. • In the film, how have the efforts of people in the community and the Maritime Marshlands Reclamation Authority contributed to the region's agricultural success? |

| Theme/Strand/ Key Concept | Connection to <i>The Dikes</i> - Applications and Discussion Points |
|------------------------------|---|
| Time, Change and Continuity | <p>Placide Landry tries to convince people that the tides threaten the old dikes and the farmers' fields.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the community indifference to the dikes compare to the efforts of the first Acadian settlers who built them? What factors probably influenced the change in attitude? <p>In the film, one scene shows a bulldozer beside a team of two horses, used by the Acadians in their fight to save the dikes and fields.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think this image is important? |
| Economics and Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do the three groups involved (the community, the government and the Maritime Marshlands Reclamation Authority) have to work together to solve the problem? • For each group, list the economic reasons that should prompt them to help deal with the problem. |

Print Resources

Cormier, Yves. *Les aboiteaux en Acadie; hier et aujourd'hui*. Moncton: Chair of Acadian Studies, 1990.

Deveau, J. Alphonse and Sally Ross. *Les Acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse; hier et aujourd'hui*. Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1995.

Société Promotion Grand-Pré, *Dykes and Aboiteaux*, 2002.

The Province of Nova Scotia, Department of Agriculture and Marketing, *Maritime Dykelands: The 350-Year Struggle*, 1987.

Online Resources

- Comment construire un aboiteau et une levée?
<http://www2.umoncton.ca/cfdocs/cea/axe1/editio2/page1/aboit.cfm>
- Acadian Museum in West Pubnico
<http://www.ccfne.ns.ca/~museum/french/musee/visite/aboiteau.htm>
- Virtual Museum of Canada
http://www.museevirtuel.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=Francais&ex=00000065&rd=22761&hs=0&alt=
- Musée acadien, l'Université de Moncton <http://www.umoncton.ca/maum/>
- Pélagie: l'histoire <http://fis.ucalgary.ca/alle/pelagie/histoire.html>
- The Dykes <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/acadian/english/eb41755/dykes/dykes.htm>

Activities for *The Dikes*

Introductory Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Man against Nature, Discussion

Before screening the film, ask students to discuss the concept of “Man against Nature.” Distribute the fact sheet on building dikes and the history of the Acadians. (See the Appendix.)

Discuss how the Acadians reclaimed thousands of hectares of farmland from the salt marshes of the Bay of Fundy. In the film, students will see the efforts made to protect the fields from the marshes.

- How did the Acadians in the 17th century and the people of the community shown in the film work with and against Nature?
- Is the battle over, or does it continue today?

List the students’ responses on the board, so that everyone can see the ideas of others in the class.

ACTIVITY 2: Acadia and the Deportation or Great Upheaval, Mapping

Step 1: Ask the students to locate the following on a map of the Atlantic region: Grand-Pré (NS), Annapolis Royal (NS), the Annapolis Valley (NS), Minas Basin (a watercourse between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick), and Memramcook (NB). Explain that the 17th century Acadians settled in these areas.

Step 2: Ask students to research the deportation of the Acadians in 1755 and to identify where they went. Have them chart those regions on the same map (see Step 1 above) they used to identify Acadian regions before the deportation.

English ships took the Acadians to Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana and France.

Step 3: To help them understand where Acadia is today, ask students to locate the following cities and towns on a map of the Maritimes: Grand-Pré (NS), Memramcook (NB), Moncton (NB), Baie Sainte-Marie (NS), Cheticamp (NS), Isle Madame (NS), Pomquet (NS), Bouctouche (NB), Wellington (PEI), the Acadian Peninsula (NB), Edmunston (NB), and Campbellton (NB). These cities and towns are Acadian regions. Geographically, there is no “Acadia” as such. It is the Acadians who make up Acadia.

Step 4: Have the class read an excerpt from “Evangeline,” the famous poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The excerpt is appended to this lesson.

After they have read the excerpt, ask students to draw a picture illustrating some ideas in the poem. Students can show their work to their classmates. Then, ask the students to find images of dikes on the Internet to compare with their drawings.

Concept Development Activities

ACTIVITY 3: Building a Dike, Kinesthetic and Visual Skills

Tell the students that you will have them build their own levee and dike using what they learn from the film and the following resources:

- Fact sheet for *The Dikes* History of the Acadians and Dikes (appended to this lesson).
- Web site on building levees and dikes from Galerie des aboiteaux (Université de Moncton) <http://www2.umoncton.ca/cfdocs/cea/axe1/editio2/page1/aboit.cfm>

Have students, individually or in teams, build their own levee and dike using the diagram and accompanying explanations. They can use materials such as wood, plasticine, popsicle sticks and real turf. This activity can be developed any way you—the teacher—decide.

Ask the students to write a paragraph describing their building experience. They should list the materials used (scissors, glue, etc.). Then, ask them to list the materials that would have been used 300 years ago by the Acadians to build their dikes.

Applying Concepts

ACTIVITY 4: Dike Repair and Maintenance: Whose Responsibility Is It? (Role-playing)

After watching the film, students take on the role of an interest group affected by the threat the marshes pose for the dikes. Divide the students into teams, with each team representing a different interest group. Interest groups might include farmers, the provincial government, the federal government and the Maritime Marshlands Reclamation Authority.

Each group should prepare a speech or presentation setting out its point of view on the following questions:

1. Should the levees and dikes be repaired? Explain.
2. Who should be responsible for the repairs?
3. Who should maintain the levees and dikes in the future?
4. Are there ways to modernize the levees and dikes?

Students can use the sites cited above for research.

Each group will then present its views. You, or one of the students, can act as moderator during the discussion. Another student could write responses on the board. After all the groups have presented their ideas, give students an opportunity to work together and formulate a common plan to deal with the problem.

ACTIVITY 5: Communication across the Centuries

Students can work individually (each student writing two letters) or in pairs (each student writing one of the two letters).

Letter 1: Write a letter from an Acadian from the 17th century, when the levees and dikes were originally being built. Describe the back-breaking labour, experiences on this new continent and living conditions. (You can mention the rudimentary tools used at the time.)

Students can select a name for their character, or try to find the names of Acadians who settled the region in the 1600s, e.g., Louis Saulnier, Daniel LeBlanc, Jean Melanson, Marguerite Gaudet, etc.

Letter 2: Imagine that you're one of the characters in *The Dikes* (Placide Landry, Jacob Gaudet, Éloi or his wife Eva), and write a letter describing your feelings about the threat that the marshlands will swamp the levees and dikes. Talk about your character's concerns, ideas for saving the fields, and views about what needs to be done and why.

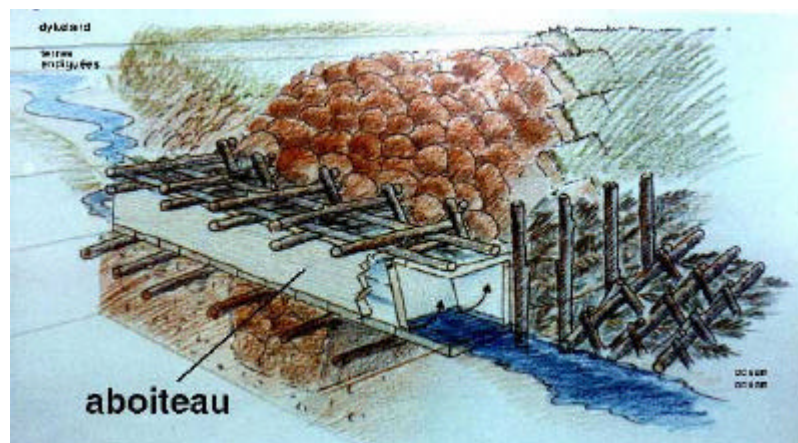
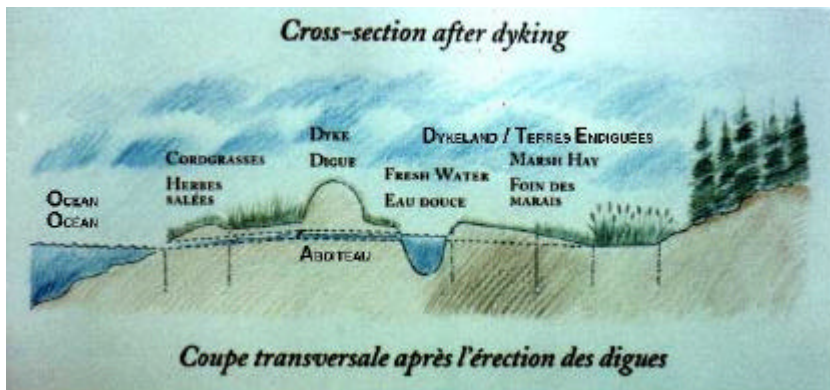
Fact Sheet for *The Dikes* History of the Acadians and Dikes

After settling in the region in the 17th century, the Acadians turned the large salt marshes to their own use, reclaiming land from the Bay of Fundy's high tides by building a system of dikes and valves. The booklet *Dykes and Aboiteaux - The Acadians Turned Salt Marshes into Fertile Meadows*, prepared by the Société Promotion Grand Pré in 2002, describes how the system works:

The sluice, or water conduit, is placed at the mouth of a brook or canal. It is fitted with a flap or valve that automatically closes when the tide rises and opens when the tide falls, allowing fresh water to drain.

The dikes are still there, allowing today's farmers to continue working the fertile land of the Acadian region. However, those dikes have been battered by the tides for centuries and are now deteriorating

The two images below are from the Web site of the Acadian Museum and Archives at West Pubnico, Nova Scotia. (<http://www.museeacadien.ca/english/museum/tour/aboiteau.htm>). Reproduced with permission of the Acadian Museum and Archives. www.museeacadien.ca



**Excerpt from the poem “Evangeline,”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

(From the Web site <http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/books/longfellow/evangeline01.html>)

In the Acadian land, on the shores of the Basin of Minas,
Distant, secluded, still, the little village of Grand-Pré
Lay in the fruitful valley. Vast meadows stretched to the eastward,
Giving the village its name, and pasture to flocks without number.
Dikes, that the hands of the farmers had raised with labor incessant,
Shut out the turbulent tides; but at stated seasons the flood-gates
Opened, and welcomed the sea to wander at will o'er the meadows.
West and south there were fields of flax, and orchards and corn-fields
Solemnly down the street came the parish priest.
Spreading afar and unfenced o'er the plain; and away to the northward
Blomidon rose, and the forests old, and aloft on the mountains
Sea-fogs pitched their tents, and mists from the mighty Atlantic
Looked on the happy valley, but ne'er from their station descended.