



Investigating Suspects in the Death of Peter Verigin

This MysteryQuest examines documents related to one of five groups or individuals identified as possible suspects in the railway explosion that killed Doukhobor leader, Peter “Lordly” Verigin, in 1924. Students gather evidence from historical documents to determine whether this group/person deserves to be treated as a serious suspect in the crime.

A critical thinking challenge to accompany

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History

***Explosion on the Kettle Valley Line:
The Death of Peter Verigin***

<http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/12/indexen.html>

Author: Sheila Heatherington

Editors: Ruth Sandwell, Dick Holland

Series Editor: Roland Case

based on an approach developed by The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC²)

www.tc2.ca

Ages

16-18

Courses

Canadian history, law

Key Topics

- immigrant relations in 20th century Canada
- religious and ethnic prejudice
- Doukhobors in early 20th century Canada

Critical Challenge

Does the evidence support further investigation of a chosen suspect as to possible guilt in the death of Peter “Lordly” Verigin in 1924?

Broad Understanding

- Students will learn to gather evidence from historical documents to determine to what degree a group/person deserves to be treated as a serious suspect in a crime.
- Students will learn about the conflict within Canada over the Doukhobors.

Requisite Tools



Background knowledge

- knowledge of the events and social context surrounding the murder of Peter Verigin



Criteria for judgment

- criteria for probable guilt (e.g., motive, opportunity or means, reliability of evidence)



Critical thinking vocabulary

- reliability of evidence



Thinking strategies

- chart



Habits of mind

- attention to detail

Independent Study

This lesson can be used as a self-directed activity by having students individually or in pairs work their way through the guided instructions and support material found at <http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/12/indexen.html>.

Whole Class Activities

On the following pages are suggested modifications of the self-guided procedures found on the MysteryQuest website for use with a class of students. For convenience, each support material and set of directions found on the website is reproduced next to the relevant suggestions for whole class instruction.

Suggested Activities

Introduce the Verigin case

- Using *Introduction* as a guide, explain to students the challenge that is the focus of their investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Late in the evening of October 28, 1924, Peter Verigin boarded a Canadian Pacific Railway train at Brilliant, British Columbia, the headquarters of the Doukhobor community. About one in the morning a horrific explosion blew away the roof and sides of the coach. Verigin and eight others perished in the explosion, which investigators on the scene quickly concluded was no accident.

Known by the single name "Lordly," Peter Verigin lived like royalty among a group of Russian immigrants to Canada, the Doukhobors, whose motto was "Toil and Peaceful Life." The Doukhobors preached equality and rejected the authority of both Church and State. As a result, they were persecuted in Russia. In 1902 their leader, Peter Verigin, and many of his community came to Canada to take up a new life.

Who could have been responsible for the death of Peter Verigin? Although it may have been an unfortunate accident, at least five groups and individuals were identified as possible suspects in the murder of Verigin. You are invited to follow the evidence pointing to one of these suspects and decide to what degree this group/person deserves to be treated as a serious suspect in Verigin's death.

- Using *The Task* as a guide, outline the activities that students will undertake.
- You may want to download and display pictures of the Doukhobor community, the explosion, and some of the people involved.

THE TASK

This MysteryQuest invites you to make a recommendation to cold case detectives who might want to reopen an investigation into Verigin's death. Your task is to examine some of the evidence related to one of five groups or individuals who are identified as possible suspects.

You are to select one of these suspects and decide whether it would be worthwhile for the cold case crime unit to pursue further investigation of this person or group. Before preparing your recommendation, you will familiarize yourself with the historical context of the case and examine four documents pertaining to the suspect you have chosen to investigate. After identifying evidence for possible involvement in Verigin's death, you are to indicate how seriously the crime unit should investigate this suspect.

Learn about the historical context

- Using *Step 1: Learn about the historical context* as a guide, prepare students for their investigation by instructing them to work individually or in pairs to read three documents in the Secondary Documents section of *Evidence in the Case*. Explain that the documents, which are written by historians, explain the conflicts this group encountered and the sequence of events from the early history of the Doukhobors to present day.
- After reading the documents, you may choose to have students formulate several questions about possible motives or suspects responsible for the explosion. Compile a class list of questions to be revisited after students have completed their investigation.

STEP 1: LEARN ABOUT THE INCIDENT

Before examining documents from the time of the killing of Peter Verigin, it will be useful to learn more about the Doukhobors and their history before and after coming to Canada. Read the three documents in the "Secondary Documents" section of *Evidence in the Case*. These selections, written by historians, explain the conflicts this group encountered and the sequence of events from the early history of the Doukhobors to the present day.

EVIDENCE IN THE CASE

Secondary documents

Introduction

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/context/indexen.html>

Doukhobor Culture and Migration to Canada

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/context/cultureandmigration/indexen.html>

Timeline

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/context/timeline/indexen.html>

Select a suspect to investigate

- Using *Step 2: Investigate a suspect to investigate*, list for students the most frequently mentioned suspects. Instruct them to select one of these suspects as the focus of their investigation.
- You may choose to have students work with a partner to complete this activity.

STEP 2: INVESTIGATE A SUSPECT TO INVESTIGATE

Various theories have been offered as to who might have been responsible for the explosion that killed Verigin. The following are the most frequently mentioned suspects:

- the Government of Canada or of British Columbia who might have wanted to be rid of someone they saw to be a troublemaker;
- factions within the Doukhobor community who thought that Verigin had become a problem;
- members of a racist group such as the Ku Klux Klan who wanted to stop the spread of this immigrant group;
- the Soviet government who might have wanted to get back at a person who had embarrassed its regime;
- or Verigin's own son, Peter Petrovich Verigin, who was very bitter towards his father.

Select one of these suspects as the focus of your investigation.

Gather evidence about the suspect

- Using *Step 3: Gather evidence about the suspect* as a guide, instruct students to examine four documents found in the Primary Documents section of *Evidence in the Case*.

STEP 3: GATHER EVIDENCE ABOUT THE SUSPECT

Documents that might shed light on the possible guilt of the suspect you have chosen are found in the "Primary Documents" section of *Evidence in the Case*. Select the group or person you wish to investigate and go to the appropriate link on the related Mysteries website. There you will find an introduction and a list of primary documents related to your suspect. Read the introduction and select only four of the documents that you will review for evidence.

In reviewing each document, look for three factors:

- *Motive*: Is there evidence to suggest that the suspect had a strong motive for wanting to kill Verigin? For example, does it seem likely that the suspect's feelings towards Verigin would be sufficiently strong to cause the person or group to risk everything to carry out the killing?
- *Opportunity or means*: Is there evidence to suggest that the suspect had the ability and resources to arrange the explosion that killed Verigin? For example, is it likely the person had access to the explosives needed, knew how to construct a bomb, and would have been able to place the explosives under the train?
- *Reliability of evidence*: Is there evidence to suggest whether the information in the documents is trustworthy and believable? For example, perhaps the person providing the information might have wanted to spread false rumours about the suspect.

As you read each of the four documents, record any evidence that is relevant to each of these three factors on the chart *Suspect Investigation*. After you have recorded this information, ask yourself whether there is reason to question or doubt whether the evidence points to the suspect. For example, the evidence might indicate that your suspect had access to explosives. You might raise several questions about this evidence. Is there an innocent explanation why the suspect might have had explosives? Perhaps they were miners. Were the explosives the same kind that were used to blow up the train? Is there any evidence that any of the explosives that the suspect had were missing? Record these questions or concerns in the right-hand column of the chart.

- Point out to students that they should look for the following three factors in the documents: motive, opportunity or means, and reliability of evidence.

EVIDENCE IN THE CASE

Primary documents

Doukhobor Factions

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/factions/indexen.html>

Government of Canada/British Columbia

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/government/indexen.html>

Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/kkk/indexen.html>

Soviet Government

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/sovietgovernment/indexen.html>

Peter P. Verigin II (Verigin's son)

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/peterverigin/indexen.html>

- Duplicate and distribute to students copies of *Suspect Investigation* to record any evidence that is relevant to these factors.

MysteryQuest 12 **Support Materials 1 (Activity Sheet)**

Suspect Investigation

Suspect: _____

Factors to consider	Evidence	Potential questions/concerns about the evidence
Strong motive for killing Verigin		
Ready opportunity or means to kill Verigin		
Reliability of sources providing the evidence		

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Prepare your recommendation

- Using *Step 4: Prepare your recommendation* as a guide, explain to students that they are now ready to record their overall conclusion and provide a detailed justification on the chart *Recommendation*.

MysteryQuest 12 **Support Materials 2 (Activity Sheet)**

Recommendation

Suspect _____

Your recommendation to the cold case detectives:

<input type="checkbox"/> Further investigation of this suspect is definitely worthwhile.	<input type="checkbox"/> Further investigation of this suspect may be worthwhile.	<input type="checkbox"/> No clear support for a recommendation either way.	<input type="checkbox"/> Further investigation of this suspect may NOT be worthwhile.	<input type="checkbox"/> Further investigation of this suspect is definitely NOT worthwhile.
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Justification:

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STEP 4: PREPARE YOUR RECOMMENDATION

At this stage you should have reviewed four documents related to your chosen suspect and recorded on the chart all the relevant evidence and any possible questions about the conclusions to draw from each piece of evidence. You are now ready to make your recommendation to the cold case detectives on the value of further investigation of your suspect for the murder of Peter Verigin. Decide whether or not the evidence supports further investigation of your suspect. The more likely it seems that your suspect may be guilty, the more value there is in investigating the suspect further. Indicate your conclusion by selecting the appropriate option found on the chart *Recommendation* and provide a detailed explanation for your conclusion.

- You may choose to have students carry out a mock coroner’s inquest. Divide students into groups according to whom they believe is the most likely suspect in the death of Peter Verigin. Appoint a student to act as the coroner who will determine the order of which groups report. An appointed investigator from each group will report to the class about their suspect as called upon by the coroner. All other class members will act as members of the jury and are free to ask questions of the presenters. The coroner will ask the jury to come to a vote on its recommendation based on what it has determined after hearing and recording the investigators’ reports.

Evaluation

- Use the rubric *Assessing Evidence and Recommendation* to evaluate students’ conclusions about whether or not their chosen suspect should undergo further investigation.



MysteryQuest 12 Evaluation Materials 1 (Rubric)

Assessing Evidence and Recommendation

	Outstanding	Very good	Competent	Satisfactory	In-progress
Identifies relevant and important evidence	Identifies the most important and relevant statements in the documents.	Identifies relevant statements including most of the important ones in the documents.	Identifies some relevant statements in the documents but important ones are omitted.	Identifies some relevant statements in the documents but many important ones are omitted.	Identifies no relevant statements in the documents.
Recognizes possible weaknesses	Recognizes and very clearly explains the most important weaknesses in the evidence provided.	Recognizes and clearly explains most of the important weaknesses in the evidence provided.	Recognizes some important weaknesses in the evidence provided; the explanations are generally quite clear.	Recognizes some weaknesses in the evidence provided; the explanations are only occasionally clear.	Recognizes almost no weaknesses in the evidence provided; none of the explanations are clear.
Offers plausible recommendation	The recommendation is highly plausible and highly justifiable in light of the evidence.	The recommendation is clearly plausible and justifiable in light of the evidence.	The recommendation is plausible and somewhat justifiable in light of the evidence.	The recommendation is plausible but is barely justifiable in light of the evidence.	The recommendation is implausible and not justifiable given the evidence.

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Extension

- Invite students to work individually or as a class to pursue the suggested activities listed in *Extension*.

EXTENSION

Examine additional evidence

Examine the evidence presented in the Inquest and use this evidence to confirm or revise your recommendation about the value of further investigation of your chosen suspect.

Investigate other suspects

Repeat the process you have just completed for one or more of the other suspects in Verigin’s death. After assessing several documents for each suspect, rank order the suspects in terms of the likeliness of their involvement in a murder plot.

Could it have been an accident?

It was never proven that Verigin was actually murdered. Some people suggest it may have been an accident. Review the documents found in the section called Accident and reach your own conclusion as to whether it is more likely that Verigin’s death was accidental or intentional.

Explore other challenges

Apply your detective skills to other MysteryQuests associated with the murder of Peter Verigin. MysteryQuest 8 invites you to try to understand the Doukhobors’ actions from their perspective and MysteryQuest 11 challenges you to reconstruct the crime scene of Peter Verigin’s death.