



Is Tom Thomson Popular Because He Died Mysteriously?

This MysteryQuest examines the extent to which circumstances surrounding the death of famous Canadian artist, Tom Thomson, influenced his popularity. Would he be nearly as popular had his death not been surrounded with such mystery?

A critical thinking challenge to accompany

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History
Death on a Painted Lake: The Tom Thomson Tragedy

<http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/34/indexen.html>

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based on an approach developed by The Critical Thinking Consortium
www.tc2.ca

Ages

14-16

Courses

Canadian history, social studies, Fine arts

Key topics

- Tom Thomson's art, death and legacy
- factors affecting artists' reputations

Critical Challenges

- Look for relevant evidence on influences on Thomson's reputation.
- Assess the extent to which the circumstances surrounding Tom Thomson's death have influenced his popularity.

Broad Understanding

- Students will learn that the circumstances surrounding the death of Tom Thomson have influenced his popularity as an artist.

Requisite Tools

❖ **Background knowledge**

- knowledge of the details of Thomson's death
- knowledge of influences affecting Thomson's popularity

❖ **Criteria for judgment**

- Criteria for judging influence (e.g., intensity, frequency and breadth of interest)

❖ **Critical thinking vocabulary**

- evidence of influence

❖ **Thinking strategies**

- data charts

❖ **Habits of mind**

- attention to detail

Independent Study

- This lesson can be used as a self-directed activity by having students work individually or in pairs through the guided instructions and support material found on [MysteryQuest 34](#).

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 procedures are linked next to the relevant suggestions for whole class instruction.

Suggested Activities

Set the context

- Display images of Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Monroe, Amy Winehouse and Michael Jackson. Ask students what makes these people famous, and prompt students to consider one characteristic that these figures share in common. Explain that public interest in artists sometimes increases after their mysterious deaths. Display an image of Tom Thomson. Indicate to students that they will determine whether this Canadian artist belongs in the company of the above artists.
- Using [Introduction](#) as a guide, explain to students the incident that is the mystery surrounding Thomson's death.

Discuss the challenge

- Use [The Task](#) to explain to students that their challenge is to determine the extent to which Tom Thomson's popularity as an artist has been influenced by the circumstances surrounding his mysterious death. After learning about Tom Thomson, students will explore evidence of influence by examining Michael Jackson's death and popularity as a point of comparison. Finally, students will gather and evaluate evidence of the extent of influence of Thomson's death on his popularity.

Learn about Thomson

- Using [Step 1: Learn about Tom Thomson](#) as a guide, show the two videos found in the Secondary Source section of [Evidence in the Case](#). Ask students to observe aspects of his art and of his death that may have contributed to his fame. After viewing, encourage students in pairs to list their ideas. Create a class mind map of student responses.
- Continuing in pairs, ask students to read the Web article [Tom Thomson's Biography](#) in the Secondary Source section of [Evidence in the Case](#). Ask students to record any new details. Add responses to the class mind map.

Recognize evidence of influence

- Use [Step 2: Learn to recognize evidence of influence](#) to introduce students to the concept of evidence of influence, and how to recognize such evidence when examining the death of Michael Jackson. Direct students in pairs to complete the activity sheet, [Exploring Michael Jackson's Popularity](#).

Consider various factors

- Using [Step 3: Consider the factors that influence](#) as a guide, explain the criteria for judging whether or not an influence is significant (e.g., intensity, frequency and breadth). Explore with students what each criterion entails.

Gather evidence of influence

- Using [Step 4: Gather evidence of influence](#) as a guide, direct students in pairs to examine the seven documents describing Thomson’s art and legacy in the Primary Sources section of [Evidence in the Case](#). Ask each pair of students to record the evidence it gathers on the activity sheet [Evidence of Influence](#). You may prefer that students individually examine three or four documents and compile results with their partner.

Judge the overall level of influence

- Using [Step 5: Judge the overall level of influence](#) as a guide, ask each pair of students to decide whether Thomson’s death influenced his popularity a lot, some, or very little. Direct students to the activity sheet [Summary of Evidence](#) to assemble the main pieces of evidence for and against. Ask each pair of students to indicate and explain its overall assessment.

Share finding with other groups

- Arrange for students to organize into three groups to coincide with their overall assessment of the influence of Thomson’s death on his popularity as an artist. Provide students with time to compare their results. Ask representatives from each group to present a summary of the reasons for their conclusion. Encourage the class to discuss each assessment and to reconsider their views based on the discussion.

Evaluation

- Use the rubric [Assessing the Evidence, Explanations and Conclusions](#) to evaluate how well students were able to identify relevant evidence from the documents, explain their implications, and offer a convincing explanation of the extent to which Thomson’s mysterious death has influenced his fame.

Extension

- Invite students individually or as a class to pursue the suggested activities listed in [Extension](#).