



What Caused Herbert Norman to Take his Life?

This MysteryQuest examines evidence concerning the possible explanations for the suicide death in 1957 of Herbert Norman, then Canadian Ambassador to Egypt.

A critical thinking challenge to accompany

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History
Death of a Diplomat: Herbert Norman and the Cold War

<http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/37/indexen.html>

Author: Jan Maynard Nicol
Editor: Ruth Sandwell, Ilan Danjoux
Series Editor: Roland Case

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

Ages

16 – 18

Courses

Canadian history, social studies, civics, 20th century world history

Key topics

- the Cold War period
- credible evidence

Critical Challenge

- Rank in order of plausibility the proposed explanations for Norman's decision to commit suicide.

Broad Understanding

- Students will learn about the great stress placed upon people suspected of communist sympathies during the Cold War period.
- Students will learn that evidence may support or challenge theories rendering these theories more or less plausible.

Requisite Tools

❖ **Background knowledge**

- knowledge of the conditions during the Cold War
- knowledge of events and factors surrounding Norman's death

❖ **Criteria for judgment**

- criteria for strong evidence (e.g., directly and clearly connected to a theory; credible source)
- criteria for a plausible theory (e.g., most consistent picture of events, fewest unanswered questions)

❖ **Critical thinking vocabulary**

- supporting and challenging evidence

❖ **Thinking strategies**

- data chart

❖ **Habits of mind**

- attention to detail
- full mindedness

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 on [MysteryQuest 37](#).

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

- Using [Introduction](#) as a guide, explain the focus of the investigation.

Discuss the challenge

- Using [The Task](#) as a guide, explain that students will investigate and rank in order three possible explanations for Norman's decision to end his life.

Learn about the incident

- Using [Step 1: Learn about the incident](#) as a guide, describe the events leading up to Norman's suicide. Direct students to work in groups of three to examine three documents: [Herbert Norman and the Cold War](#) and the two documents in the Background section of [Evidence in the Case](#). Assign one document to each student and invite students to share information with their partners.

Think about the possible theories

- Using [Step 2: Assess responsibility](#) as a guide, discuss the three most widely suggested theories about Norman's suicide: personal guilt or wrongdoing; despair over a destroyed reputation; a desire to protect others from harm and public exposure. Direct students to explain each theory in their own words and why each may have been a concern for Norman. To record their ideas, each group will need three copies of both pages – six sheets in all—of the chart [Assembling Evidence for Each Theory](#).

Examine the evidence

- Using [Step 3: Examine the evidence](#) as a guide, direct each group to examine the remaining ten documents found in [Evidence in the Case](#). Explain that they are to locate relevant statements from these documents and to indicate on their charts, for each statement, how it may support or challenge the theories about Norman's death. You may want to suggest that each student examines all ten documents, but focuses on one of the theories only; or that students divide the documents among themselves, and record information from their assigned documents for all three theories. Regardless of the plan, arrange for all students to discuss the information gathered by others in their group.

Summarize the most important evidence

- Using [Step 4: Summarize the most important evidence](#) as a guide, direct students to work individually to summarize in point form the strongest reasons for supporting each theory. Instruct students to record their summaries in the left-hand column of the chart [Summary of the Evidence](#). To help students in their choices, suggest the following criteria:
 - is directly and clearly connected to the theory
 - comes from a credible or believable source.

Rank order the reasons

- Using [Step 5: Rank order the reasons](#) as a guide, explain that each student is to rank each theory in order of plausibility. Explain that students are to indicate and justify their rankings in the right-hand column of the chart, [Summary of the Evidence](#). When determining and explaining the relative plausibility of each theory, encourage students to consider which body of evidence:
 - offers the most consistent picture of events
 - leaves the fewest unanswered questions.

Share conclusions with the class

- Direct all students to post their rankings for the rest of the class to see. Ask various students to explain the reasons for their rankings. Invite students to discuss whether they think we will ever know conclusively why Norman chose to end his life.

Evaluation

- Use the rubric [Assessing the Assembled Evidence](#) to evaluate how well students were able to identify relevant statements from the documents and explain how they support or challenge one or more of the theories.
- Use the rubric [Assessing the Conclusion](#) to evaluate how well students were able to summarize the key evidence and explain their reasons for the assigned rankings.

Extension

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