Documentary Lens Lesson Plan for
Inside Fighting Canada

By Peter Flaherty
Ph.D., Department of Education, York University, Toronto, ON
Curriculum developer for CBC and Maclean’s magazine

Curriculum Connections

These lessons are based on the 1942 NFB documentary Inside Fighting Canada, directed by Jean Marsh. It was part of the series Canada Carries On, commissioned during the Second World War by NFB founder and director, John Grierson.

Lesson Objectives

This lesson is appropriate for high school courses on 20th century Canadian history. Cross-curricular opportunities include media studies, economics, politics, sociology, filmmaking. The activities focus on the role documentary films played in Canada during the Second World War, when they were used to shape public opinion. Students will gain an understanding of how the Canadian government wanted ordinary citizens to view their role in the war effort on the home front as essential for the victory of the Allies over Nazi Germany. The film also emphasized that Canadians, through their collective effort during the war, were laying the foundations for a better society.

Students will gain a deeper awareness of wartime propaganda, develop multiple perspectives for viewing and interpreting this film, recognize how it would have shaped citizenship and national identity during wartime, and gain a deeper understanding of how participating in WW II defined Canada as a nation and served to promote national unity.

Fundamental Concepts in Canadian Social Studies Curricula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Strand/ Key Concept</th>
<th>Connection to Inside Fighting Canada – Applications and Discussion Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Citizenship               | • How would this film have promoted citizenship among Canadians living in different regions of the country?  
• Why would it be important for the Canadian government to encourage, during wartime, a greater awareness of citizenship?  
• In what ways would their participation in a major collective undertaking like a national war effort raise Canadians’ awareness of themselves as citizens? |
| Multiple Perspectives     | • As a Canadian living in the early 21st century, how do you react to the information, images and messages of this film from the Second World War era?  
• How do you think Canadians would have responded in 1942?  
• Do you think a film such as this would have the same impact if it were made today?  
• How would this film have promoted a greater sense of national identity among Canadians?  
• Why would it be important for the Canadian government to promote a sense of national identity during wartime? |
<p>| Identity                  |                                                                                     |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Strand/Key Concept</th>
<th>Connection to Inside Fighting Canada – Applications and Discussion Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power, Authority, and Governance</strong></td>
<td>• What role did the Canadian government play in the overall direction and organization of the war effort during WW II?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film promote the idea of a partnership between the government and ordinary citizens in the war effort on the home front?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film convey the idea that government is a positive force for organizing an economy and society, during wartime and in the post-war era?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Land: Places and People</strong></td>
<td>• In what ways might this film familiarize Canadians with the various regions of the country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What specific and important roles did different regions of the country play in the war effort?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film convey a sense of unity or inter-connectedness among people living in different regions of the country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film convey a sense of the vastness of Canada and its geographical or natural barriers to settlement and development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In what ways does the film present the concept of the struggle between people and nature in the development of a society and economy in Canada?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Connections</strong></td>
<td>• How does the film present the message that Canada’s war effort during World War II was an important part of the overall Allied struggle against Nazi Germany?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In what major battlefronts were Canadian forces active? How is this involvement portrayed in the film?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How would this film have fostered a greater awareness of Canada’s role in the world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics and Resources</strong></td>
<td>• What important natural resources from Canada helped the war effort?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film convey the idea that Canada was blessed with natural resources that could be used to help in the Allied war effort?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film link our major natural resources to different Canadian regions and to the national war effort during the Second World War?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film convey the idea that Canada’s economy was growing for the benefit of ordinary people during the Second World War?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What messages does the film convey about the prospects for economic and social development in Canada once the war had been won?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film portray the role of government in the direction of the Canadian economy during the war?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the film emphasize that Canadians formed the country’s most important and valuable natural resource during the Second World War?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment Strategies

- **Activities 1 and 2**: Assessment of student answers to pre- and post-viewing questions (see worksheet 1), or short written response report on their viewing of the film.
- **Activity 3**: Worksheet 2, a quiz, will help determine students’ understanding.
- **Activity 4**: a) Evaluation of group presentations of critical analyses of the film as an example of wartime documentary propaganda and b) written report summarizing the group’s main ideas about the film and their reactions to it.
- **Activity 5**: Peer and/or teacher evaluation of student presentations of a particular example of wartime propaganda.
- **Extension Activities**: Evaluation of any of the suggested activities.

Background

The Second World War profoundly transformed Canadian society. The economic crisis of the Great Depression came to an end. An economic boom began after Canada declared war on Germany in September 1939. The war meant full employment for Canadians on the home front and the raising of a volunteer army, navy and air force that eventually numbered 390,000 men and women (out of a total national population of 12 million). Economic growth increased dramatically as Canada provided food, lumber, minerals and other primary products to the war effort in Britain and other Allied nations. Manufacturing, construction, and skilled trades such as engineering also became more important. Canada was the main base for the training of Allied airmen through the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Canada’s relationship with the United States became closer as a result of mutual defence pacts and the construction of the Alaska Highway.

Government played a major role in the direction of the wartime economy and the allotment of resources. Wages and prices were strictly controlled. Canadians were strongly encouraged to support the war through rationing, purchasing war bonds, and compulsory savings plans. Women played a greater role in the workforce than ever before, replacing enlisted men. The war created a sense of solidarity and collective effort among ordinary Canadians, who were encouraged to view their participation in the fight to defeat Nazi Germany as the first step in building a more prosperous and egalitarian society in the post-war era. All regions of Canada played their part on the home front, and contributed their share to the overall war effort that united Canadians from sea to sea.

Activities for **Inside Fighting Canada**

Introduction

The purpose of these introductory activities is to provide a basic knowledge of the role Canada played, especially on the home front, during the Second World War. The film is only 11 minutes long, and it should be possible for students to view it twice during the lesson.

**ACTIVITY 1: Pre-viewing Inquiry**

Ask students to think about, brainstorm and discuss the first set of questions in worksheet 1. Write the answers on the board. Or, have students form small groups to prepare and present concept maps on chart paper, using “war” as the term to which they can link related concepts. Have each group present their ideas to the class.
ACTIVITY 2: Post-viewing Inquiry
After students have viewed the film, have them form small groups to discuss their initial reactions to the film. Still using worksheet 1, ask each group to record the main ideas raised in the discussion and to choose one person to present their ideas to the class. Ask the representative from each group to report to the class. You can write some of the main ideas on the board. Together, look for similarities and differences and discuss.

ACTIVITY 3: Information Gathering and Recording
Show the film again. Ask student to answer the questions in worksheet 2. (The answer sheet follows it.)

Developing Understanding

ACTIVITY 4: Critical Analysis of Inside Fighting Canada
Distribute copies of worksheet 3. Working in small groups, students will prepare and present critical analyses and evaluations of the film as wartime propaganda, and state and defend their positions on the value of such films during periods of serious national crisis such as wartime.

Applying What They Have Learned

ACTIVITY 5: Creating World War II Propaganda
Students apply the concepts and skills they have acquired by presenting their own example of a piece of WW II propaganda. Working in groups, students can choose from the following list:

- **Newscast**: a CBC radio broadcast dramatizing one or more aspects of Canada’s role in the Second World War on either the home or battlefront, as portrayed in Inside Fighting Canada.
- **Newspaper article**: an article or editorial from a Canadian newspaper published during WW II dealing with a major news story or issue arising from that conflict.
- **Interview**: an interview with a leading Canadian political or military figure from WW II or an ordinary Canadian soldier, sailor, airman, or war worker involved in the war effort.
- **Dramatic role-play**: a short dramatic presentation depicting an event or issue from World War II involving Canadians, with students acting various parts “in-role”
- **Song or music**: an original piece of music or popular song dealing with issues and/or events of the war and Canadians’ response to them.
- **Poster**: a poster designed to promote a particular aspect of the war effort to the civilian population (note: many Canadian history textbooks include examples of these).
- **Government advertisement**: a federal government advertisement designed to promote a particular wartime message to Canadians (for example, buying Victory Bonds, conserving scarce resources, being on guard for potential enemy activity).

Each group should present their work to the class. At the end of the activity, ask each group what they learned about wartime propaganda.

Extension Activities
The activities here could be assigned for independent study. These activities are designed for students of different grade levels, and some could be adapted to meet the needs of ESL students.
ACTIVITY 6: Analyzing Examples of Wartime Propaganda from outside Canada

Using examples from their Canadian and/or world history textbooks, or from the Internet, students could select a particular example of wartime propaganda from WW II that was not produced in Canada, and subject it to a critical analysis similar to what they did for Inside Fighting Canada.

They should include: a) source of the propaganda (what country?) b) images conveyed c) message or theme of the piece d) why it is an example of propaganda e) effectiveness of the example at the time it was produced and f) how students today react and respond to it.

ACTIVITY 7: Viewing and Analyzing Other NFB Wartime Documentaries

Students could watch and analyze another NFB film from Canada Carries On (see Documentary Lens Web site). Students could form groups to view one of these films and prepare and present reports on them for the rest of the class, using the same critical thinking skills they applied to their analysis of Inside Fighting Canada. Or they could compare and contrast the themes, content, images, messages, etc. of these films to films produced in other countries during the same period of wartime (e.g. American director Frank Capra’s Why We Fight series, or the works of the German director Leni Riefenstahl). Students interested in how the roles of women in Canada during World War II were portrayed in film might be particularly interested in Proudly She Marches and how feminist historians have interpreted it.

ACTIVITY 8: Critical Analysis of a Current Documentary Film

Students could prepare a critical analysis of a recent documentary film, employing similar techniques that they used in their assessment of Inside Fighting Canada.
Worksheet 1 for *Inside Fighting Canada*

Pre-viewing and Post-viewing Questions

**Pre-viewing questions**

1. Based on what you have already learned about Canadian history, what impact do you think the Second World War had on Canada?
2. What methods do you think the government would have used during the war to encourage support for the war among the general public?
3. Why do you think it would have been important for the Canadian government to have public support for the war effort?
4. Can you give an example of a war occurring during your lifetime in which Canada has been involved?
5. What forms of mass media are most important in informing people about international events (such as wars) today?
6. How do you think most Canadians learned about the events of Second World War in 1942 before there was television or the Internet?
7. How do you think Canadians today would respond to a major crisis such as a full-scale war in which this country was involved?

**Post-viewing questions**

1. What are your general reactions to this film, based on what you know about Canada’s role during the Second World War?
2. How do you think an audience viewing this film as a newsreel in a Canadian cinema during World War II would have responded?
3. How effective were the techniques used in the film? How did they dramatize the conflict in which Canada was involved (for example, aerial shots, scenes of bombs falling, the movement of troops, tanks, ships)?
4. What do you think was the central theme of this film?
5. How would you express the main messages of this film?
6. What do you think were the main goals of the NFB officials who produced this film?
7. How effective do you think the images in the film were in achieving the goals of the filmmakers?
8. How do you think Canadians of today would respond to a similar film about this country’s participation in a war?
9. What important area where Canada was involved in the Second World War is not mentioned in this film?
Worksheet 2 for *Inside Fighting Canada*

**Information Gathering and Recording**

Name ______________________________________     Date _________________________

1. On what continent are the devastated cities shown at the beginning of the film?
2. On what two continents does the film portray the actions of Canadian armed forces?
3. In which of the following theatres of war–air, sea, or land–does the film show Canadian forces?
4. What is the motto of Canada? What national symbol does it appear on?
5. What geographical regions of Canada are portrayed in the film?
6. With what important wartime economic activities is each region linked?
7. When did Canada declare war on Germany?
8. How many Canadians were serving in the armed forces when the film was made? How large was the total Canadian population at that time?
9. What important contribution did Canada make to the war in the air? What countries’ airmen were trained here?
10. How long was the coastline that had to be defended in the Second World War? What kinds of naval vessels were built in Canada then?
11. During WW II, what was the major port of embarkation for Canadian troops and wartime supplies for Britain and Europe?
12. How much food per person was Canada shipping to Britain during WW II?
13. During the war, what important transportation link was Canada constructing in partnership with the United States?
14. What economic activities and industries were important to the war effort?
15. What was the annual value of Canada’s wartime production of goods and services?
16. According to the film, what was Canada’s most important wartime natural resource?
17. Who was the prime minister of Canada during WW II?
18. What roles do women portray in the film?
19. Besides winning the war, what other important national goal is referred to?
20. How is the motto of Canada referred to at the beginning of the film presented as a prophecy at the end?
Worksheet 2 Answer Sheet

1. On what continent are the devastated cities shown at the beginning of the film? Europe

2. On what two continents does the film portray the actions of Canadian armed forces? Europe and North Africa

3. In which of the following theatres of war—air, sea, or land—does the film show Canadian forces? air and sea war

4. What is the motto of Canada? “from sea to sea” What national symbol does it appear on? coat of arms

5. What geographical regions of Canada are portrayed in the film? Atlantic, Ontario and Quebec, Prairies, British Columbia, Arctic

6. With what important wartime economic activities is each region linked? Atlantic (shipbuilding), Ontario and Quebec (manufacturing), Prairies (farming), British Columbia (forest industry), Arctic (mining)

7. When did Canada declare war on Germany? September 10, 1939

8. How many Canadians were serving in the armed forces when the film was made? 390,000
How large was the total Canadian population at that time? 12 million

9. What important contribution did Canada make to the war in the air? British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) What countries’ airmen were trained here? United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand

10. How long was the coastline that had to be defended in the Second World War? 24,000 miles (about 44,500 km) What kinds of naval vessels were built in Canada then? freighters, minesweepers, corvettes

11. During WW II, what was the major port of embarkation for Canadian troops and wartime supplies for Britain and Europe? Halifax, Nova Scotia

12. How much food per person was Canada shipping to Britain during WW II? 200 pounds (90 kg)

13. During the War, what important transportation link was Canada constructing in partnership with the United States? Alaska Highway

14. What economic activities and industries were important to the war effort? agriculture, mining, manufacturing, lumber, skilled technology

15. What was the annual value of Canada’s wartime production of goods and services? $3 billion

16. According to the film, what was Canada’s most important wartime natural resource? its people

17. Who was the prime minister of Canada during WW II? William Lyon Mackenzie King

18. What roles do women portray in the film? secretarial and child care activities

19. Besides winning the war, what other important national goal is referred to? Building a post-war society that would be prosperous and fair for all.

20. How is the motto of Canada referred to at the beginning of the film presented as a prophecy at the end? Through the wartime efforts of its people, Canada would emerge from World War II as a truly united, strong, free, prosperous, and equal country “from sea to sea.”
Worksheet 3 for Inside Fighting Canada
Excerpts from National Film Board’s “Behind the Camera” and Discussion Focus Questions

1. What are the main goals of a documentary film?
   In general, documentary films educate their audiences. They share one or more of these goals: a) to document a subject in order to preserve knowledge; b) to reveal something about a subject; c) to allow the viewer to experience what it is like to be the subject; and d) to advocate on behalf of a subject.

2. What role did the NFB play in producing documentary films during World War II?
   The renowned British-born documentary filmmaker John Grierson led the NFB during World War II. He believed documentary films served an important propaganda purpose: they could demonstrate to Canadians what they were fighting to preserve and tie them emotionally to a sense of national purpose. The NFB employed hundreds of people and created over a thousand films during the war. They were shown around the world. In Canada, travelling projectionists reached the smallest farming communities and lumber camps.

3. How does this film reflect the times in which it was produced?
   Documentary films, like all types of media, are created by people, so they reflect the attitudes, ideas, interests, and even prejudices of the filmmakers. The films also come from particular places and moments in history, so they tell us something about the societies and even the technologies of the time. A documentary made during World War II, for instance, will look old-fashioned to us, particularly in its narration and music. We might also see that it reflects the wartime situation in which it was made.

4. What can we learn from the study of documentary films made in different periods of history?
   Learning about how people express themselves through the media can teach us to see the unstated values of our culture. We are surrounded by hidden messages that come to us from the media. Although we are not aware of most of them, these messages can influence our attitudes and behaviour. Most Canadians probably believed the inspirational messages of the NFB films of World War II. During the War, people watched the films together in theatres, school buildings, and church basements. Watching a movie was a group experience, and movies reinforced shared values. The NFB documentaries showed the war effort in a very realistic way, with all the authority that came from a government agency. Most people accepted them as realistic and true.

5. How do we react to wartime documentary films today?
   Today, we may consider these World War II documentaries as deliberate propaganda, and we might question their truth. It is often easier to recognize the values and intentions of the media in the past than of the media that surround us today. But we can apply what we learn from studying old films to become aware of contemporary media.

Focus Questions for Group Discussions

1. Refer to the chapters of your Canadian History book on the country’s role in the Second World War. Note the definition of “propaganda” given in your book, and the specific examples of wartime propaganda that were used in different countries during this conflict. As a group, discuss what you think the term “propaganda” means, and arrive at a working definition that can be applied to Inside Fighting Canada.
2. Imagine you are a Canadian living during WW II. How do you think you would respond to the content, images and messages of this film? How do you think watching a film such as this in a group situation would influence your response to it?

3. How does the fact that you are young Canadians living over half a century after this film was made influence your responses to the film? How does your knowledge of World War II and its outcome, which a 1942 audience could not have had, also influence your reactions?

4. How do you think each of the following aspects of the film reinforce the message about the importance of Canada’s war effort? a) images of wartime and peacetime activities b) images of various regions of Canada c) images of Canadians of all ages and walks of life d) images of important national symbols e) narration f) sound effects and musical score g) use of language and verbal imagery h) images of Canadians at work in different war-related industries and activities.

5. As a group, prepare a critical analysis and evaluation of Inside Fighting Canada as an example of a wartime documentary propaganda film. Based on your working definition of propaganda, discuss to what extent you think it meets the criteria of this genre of documentary film. Do you think it is an effective piece of propaganda? Why/why not? Do you think it was successful in achieving its aims? Explain.

6. Do you think that it is possible to distinguish between “good” and “bad” propaganda? How would your response as Canadians to Inside Fighting Canada and a similar World War II propaganda film produced in Nazi Germany differ? How would your knowledge of WW II, the Holocaust, and other related historical events influence your responses? Do you think propaganda can ever serve a useful or positive role? Explain.

7. What aspects of Inside Fighting Canada mark it as an old-fashioned documentary? How do you think such films differ from documentaries produced today that are advocating a political viewpoint?

8. What (if any) messages and themes from Inside Fighting Canada might still be of value in Canadian society? What vision of a post-war Canada was presented in this film, as a means of inspiring Canadians to fight for a better future? To what extent do you think this vision became a reality in the years following the end of the Second World War?

9. Do you think that Canada today achieves the ideal of the united, free, prosperous, and equal nation that is held out as the hope of the future at the end of Inside Fighting Canada?

10. The NFB as a government-run media agency produced Inside Fighting Canada in response to a specific national crisis – the Second World War. Can you think of any serious situation confronting this country that might require a similar kind of media intervention on the part of the Canadian government today? Explain.