

Lesson Plan: Family Spirits

(A documentary by Lysanne Thibodeau, Canada, 2007, 62 min)

Montreal-born Lysanne Thibodeau has been an independent filmmaker for over 20 years. From 1982 to 1996, she lived in Berlin, working as a journalist and director for various European production companies and television networks. In addition, she directed and produced profiles of many artists, as well as shooting independent short and medium-length films. Since returning to Montreal in 1996, she has produced, directed and written screenplays for several films with *Les Productions des films de l'Autre*, including UN JOUR, LA NUIT (2003, 3 min), ELOGE DU RETOUR (2001, 16 mm, 43 min) and MA CHUTE DU MUR (2001, 5 min), all of which have been screened at various international festivals. She also co-directed L'ECOLE À L'HOPITAL (2005, 41 min) for *Les Productions Virage* with Dominique Parent (SRC, RDI, CBC). In 2000, she obtained a Master of Arts in Film Studies from Concordia University in Montreal.

Five special features:

MEETING WITH PIERRE THIBODEAU GRAVEL 10'12"

Pierre's great passion is genealogy and in this special feature he describes how he went about researching his ancestors on both his mother's and father's side of the family.

POUTINE RAPÉE 3'12"

A bit of fun while stopping at Lafiouk, a small roadside restaurant in New Brunswick, on the way to Nova Scotia.

SHAW AND THIBODEAU FAMILIES 8'56"

In Windsor, formerly known as Pisiguit, the same plot of land has been home to only two families since the 17th century. We see their descendants getting to know one another as Sarah Beanlands and Dick Thibodeau explain why archaeologists have begun to dig on the land of their ancestors and how their two families are connected.

PRE-RONDE: Pierre's stone (millstone?) 3'39"

Humorous sketch using repetition of names.

RICHARD LAURIN: landscape archaeologist 8'49"

Richard Laurin, a Quebecer, adopted Acadia as his home over twenty years ago. He has long studied the legendary sea walls built by the Acadians along their rivers and coastlines. Criss-crossing them endlessly, he loves to share his passion for these ingenuous fortresses—signatures of a wise people—still standing three centuries later and still offering resistance to the most powerful tides in the world.

Total duration of the special features: 34'28''

Family Spirits is a documentary film that will appeal to everyone. It shows a Quebec family meeting its distant Acadian cousins and becoming captivated by the spirits of their ancestors. Narrated by a child, this film aims to encourage a closer look at the origins of the French-speaking population of North America from its very beginnings right through the fabric of Acadian history to today.

The instructor can accompany the film and selected segments with an oral presentation about history or genealogy. Another possible approach is to begin a group discussion after the film has been shown. These teaching activities will make viewers aware of the French fact in North America and, more specifically, of contemporary Acadian culture and its history, still a vital part of francophone culture today.

GOALS

- Begin discussions about the history of French-speaking America
- Research the way of life of our ancestors
(Study the way of life in the 17th and 18th centuries and today)
- Take a closer look at our origins
Stimulate an in-depth examination of the traces that we leave behind us
- Discuss the lives of our ancestors
- Consider the concepts of voluntary simplicity
- Encourage genealogical research among members of the family

ENRICHMENT

Begin a discussion with your students and ask them to do research on the film's themes: suggest they begin creating their family tree by getting information from their family members. They can depict their results in the form of a diagram, drawing, chart or table.

ACTIVITIES

- Create and fill in your family tree
- Contact family members who might have knowledge of the family's past history*
- Study different types of family trees: (Stradonitz method, ascendant and descendant charts)
- Try out different methods using your computer: visit different genealogy web sites
- Organize different activities with genealogy experts
Create theatre sketches based on historical events
- Show the film to primary and secondary school students; also to college and university students
- Do research about study methods at genealogy associations, historical societies, libraries and centres of Acadian studies.

SKILLS ACQUIRED

Verbal expression and dialogue, communication, discussion of research methods. Understanding the organization of a family tree.

SUBJECT AREAS

History, genealogy, family, family portraits, ancestors, Acadia and Acadians, New France, francophonie, filiation, identity, stories, memory, society, cultural heritage, culture, generations, intergenerational ties, family ties, parent-child relationships, family relationships, life and death, existence, way of life, future, future societies, voluntary simplicity.

Director's Notes

Family Spirits came about as a result of my meeting Pierre Gravel. His great passion for history and genealogy led Pierre to trace his entire lineage back through his parents and grandparents, including the female side of the family. My very first meeting with this cousin gave me the opportunity to discover the Thibodeau side of the family, all the way back to the very first Acadians who arrived here from France. Moreover, Pierre had children who were my age, and grandchildren the same age as my son. I liked him immediately.

And that is how he became the adopted grandfather of my son Zakari, who was the reason I made this film.

* Note: We suggest that adopted children trace their adoptive parents' lineage if they have no data about their birth parents.

Zakari was my inspiration throughout the entire project, from the first research attempts right through the film shoot. Through his questions that went right to the heart of the matter, he ended up becoming the film's main character and narrator.

I believe that during this whole process, all of us—Pierre, Zakari and I—found what we were looking for. Zakari was able to meet his Acadian ancestors who revealed family secrets and he now knows where he comes from. Pierre, for his part, was able to find out more about the history and way of life of our ancestors and, along the way, meet other 'archeologists of time' intent on searching and discovering. As for me, I had wanted to give my son some roots and I found that I succeeded as I became acquainted with our large and far-flung Acadian family.

Since children have most often taken their father's name, the patriarchal side of a family has always been easier to trace than the matriarchal side, that of the mother. Today, traditions are changing; Zakari has my name, given to me by my father. Other people have adopted other models. Whatever your name might be, I sincerely hope that you will follow your own path and that you will be able to identify with us, as you watch the film or when you are conducting your own research into your own ancestors' lives.