

# Lest We Forget Project Extension

## What's in a Name?

### Introduction

This document offers an extension to the [Lest We Forget project](#) hosted by Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

**Learning Objective:** Students can assist municipalities to name the streets, roads, and buildings of newly constructed housing developments through evidence-based research of local cenotaphs and commemorative plaques. This decision-making exercise fosters an active citizenship learning and working partnership between students and their communities.

Students can participate by submitting their proposals for names to municipal government officials. As part of the exercise, teachers and students will employ the [historical thinking concepts](#) to justify the names submitted. To create a list of names, the students must research and discover the contributions of citizens to Canada's history on a local, national, or international level. Several possible extensions emerge from this exercise.

Many individuals who served in the First and Second World Wars made significant contributions to Canadian history and are deserving of commemoration. Students can collect their names by investigating the inscriptions on local cenotaphs or examining wartime commemorative plaques displayed in prominent places in communities. Once the names are collected, teachers can access the individuals' digitized military service files on LAC's website, or contact LAC to order the required service files. For more information on how to search the service files of military personnel for this project, please visit [Selecting Military Service Files](#).

### Background

We often take street names for granted. Many of us know of a street named after a British monarch, a former prime minister, or an early explorer. To help us choose the person we would like to commemorate in this way, we need to consider the following types of questions:

- Who is the person we would like to commemorate?
- Why name a street, road, or building after this person?
- How did municipal government officials name streets in the past?
- What were the criteria for naming streets?

To answer the above questions, students must first perform research (**Primary Evidence**) to create a list of individuals who served during wartime who would be excellent candidates for having a street named after them. From this list, students must then create criteria to determine



the degree of significance (**Historical Significance**) that justifies why each individual is included on the final list. Finally, if desired, students can create and submit a presentation to convince municipal government officials to consider the proposed names in the process of naming new streets, roads, subdivisions, and so on (**Communication**). By working through this layered process, students become active participants in community building and contributing members to local issues (**Citizenship and Civics**).

## Starting Point

To begin this extension ask this simple question: How did the street you live on get its name? Whether we walk to school, bike, drive, or take a bus, we travel on roads and streets every day. As students begin to consider the origin of their street names, ask them the following types of questions:

- What justified the naming of a road in the past?
- Who or what was the street named after? Why did this person, place, or thing merit recognition?
- Is there a specific significant event that justifies having a street named after this person? For example, was this person involved in a battle in the war, killed while at the front, or ill during service and died as a result?
- When was the street named?

For example, several dozen houses were built on a network of streets in Smiths Falls, Ontario, shortly after the Second World War (1939–1945). These houses are on streets named after significant figures of the Second World War. They include Churchill Crescent, Roosevelt Avenue, Mackenzie Street, Queen Street, and King Street. These street names tell a story of a time when community leaders wanted to commemorate Western political leaders in some permanent and meaningful way. Interestingly, there is no Stalin Avenue, although Joseph Stalin was an Ally of the West in the Second World War. Why were there no streets named after him?

## Significance Criteria

Through class discussions, students work to develop an understanding of significance criteria. Three aspects to consider include:

- the number of people affected by the issue or event,
- the impact on a region or country, and
- the enduring impact of the issue or event.

For example, many characterize the Battle of Vimy Ridge as a nation-building moment for Canada. This battle is significant for many communities across Canada because it affected a

great number of soldiers and their families. As well, the exploits of the soldiers coupled with the significance of the battle itself suggest that those who participated in it are significant in Canadian history. Therefore, the actions of local soldiers who fought at Vimy Ridge would be important enough to justify having a street named after them.

Students also have to consider if there is a particularly significant individual who merits having a main street named after him rather than a secondary street. Students have to justify who should have what in terms of major street-name designations. Using the example above, if a soldier received a military award for bravery, is it justified to treat his name with more prominence?

If students are successful in creating their justification, they can present their research to a municipal committee or organization responsible for making decisions on the naming of streets in the school's community.

Potential guiding questions to help students establish historical significance:

- How many people were affected by this individual's participation in the event?
- Does the event(s) have local, national, or international implications?
- Has this individual's participation, or the event itself, had an enduring impact?

**Shared Assignment Component (if possible):** Teachers and students work together to present their justifications to municipal government officials to name new developments after local individuals who participated in the First or Second World War. Depending on the province, students are crossing subject boundaries bridging Civics and Citizenship with Canadian history curriculum expectations.