

# The Northwest Passage and National Identity

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## Learning Objectives

Students will...

- Identify various locations of transit routes through the Northwest Passage.
- Speculate about the types of people who crossed the Northwest Passage and the methods used to travel this region.
- Appreciate the variety of perceptions about the Arctic and Northwest Passage and make connections to Canada's national identity.
- Create an artistic interpretation that reflects a) the benefits and challenges of transit through the Arctic, b) the connection between the Arctic and Northwest Passage to national identity or c) the past, present, future exploration of this region.

## Time required

One 60 - 90 minute period

## Suggested Grade level

Secondary (Grades 9-12)

## Materials

- Map: Potential New Shipping Routes
- Passage from *Polar Imperative* (Appendix A)
- Northwest Passage Timeline (Appendix B)
- Ranking Activity sheet (Appendix C)
- Access to the internet to watch three short video clips of music connected to the Arctic and Northwest Passage as part of national identity. Clips include:
  - ▶ Stan Rogers' *Northwest Passage* song to a slideshow of Arctic images

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMtufHOWQKk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMtufHOWQKk)

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## Introduction

Project the Potential New Shipping Routes map for the class to examine. (If students have completed the introductory lesson in this resource package, they will already be familiar with the map.) Ask students to identify the route that goes through Canadian territory. Where does it begin in the east, west? Label some of the islands as you 'travel' the route with the class.

Ask the class if they know of any groups in the past or present that have travelled/crossed the Northwest Passage. Inform students that there have been a variety of groups over time who have travelled through this region, using many different forms of transportation. Distribute the ranking activity sheet and ask students to connect the group to the method travelled and then rank them in order from earliest to most recent travel of the Northwest Passage.

Project the Northwest Passage Timeline to assess responses together. Are there any differences? Students complete a quick write-up of one or two sentences at the bottom of the activity sheet.

## Development

Share the passage from *Polar Imperative* (Appendix A) that discusses the connection between the Northwest Passage and national identity (read aloud, read it together, or ask students to read it individually). Tell students that they are going to watch and listen to three examples of artistic creations that reflect the Arctic and national identity. Ask them to think about the perspective presented in each clip. Introduce the clips:

1. *Northwest Passage* by Stan Rogers: This song ranked 4th in a CBC Competition in 2005 to determine the 50 most essential Canadian songs in music history. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has referred to it as 'Canada's unofficial national anthem.'
2. Throat singing as part of indigenous identity in the Arctic. Watch Nukariik (Inuit) Sisters Karin and Kathy Kettler demonstrate traditional Inuit throat singing practiced by women in their community.
3. *Ilititaa*, is actually an Inuktitut-cised version of an old and well-known French sailors' song "Il était un petit navire," or "There was a little boat." This is just one example of the long history of contact between Inuit and francophones in Nunavut, as the legacy of the Arctic explorer, Capt. Joseph Elzéar Bernier, becomes better known.

### After watching each clip, pause and discuss:

Whose perspective was presented in the clip? How does this clip affirm the message from the passage in *Polar Imperative*? How are the Arctic and the Northwest Passage connected to national identity?



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- ▶ Throat singing as part of indigenous identity in the Arctic. Watch Clip 03: Nukariik (Inuit) Sisters Karin and Kathy Kettler demonstrate traditional Inuit throat singing practiced by women in their community.

[http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore\\_folkways/throat\\_singing.aspx](http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/throat_singing.aspx)

- ▶ *Ilititaa*, is actually an Inuktitut-cised version of an old and well-known French sailors' song "Il était un petit navire," or "There was a little boat".

[http://www.ilititaa.org/\\_fr/main.html](http://www.ilititaa.org/_fr/main.html)

- Lyrics to *Northwest Passage* by Stan Rogers (Appendix D)

## Set-up

Read the passage from *Polar Imperative* to understand the context of this lesson in relation to the topic of Arctic sovereignty. Consult the Potential New Shipping Routes map, Timeline and the Glossary to equip yourself with the spatial relationships, facts and vocabulary used in the lesson. Make copies of the ranking activity sheet, *Polar Imperative* passage and timeline as necessary. Preview the video clips.

**Optional:** Many educators are finding the practice of 'front-loading' and 'flipped' teaching to be very effective as a way to make the most of class time together. This could be attempted with this lesson by making the passage from *Polar Imperative*, Map, Timeline and Glossary available to students **before** the lesson activities. They would be responsible for reading and reviewing the material and come to class ready to participate in activities and discussions.

## Links to Canadian National Standards for Geography

### Essential element 4: Human Systems

- Convergence and divergence of cultures

## Conclusion

Create an artistic interpretation that reflects one of the following topics:

- the benefits and challenges of transit through the Arctic
- the connection between the Arctic and Northwest Passage to national identity
- past, present or future exploration of this region

Use information from the passage from *Polar Imperative* as well as the Northwest Passage timeline as inspiration. The artwork can take the form of a drawing/poem/story/song/video/photo exhibit/blog entry/word cloud/podcast/interactive map etc...

## Extend your geographic thinking

Here are some resources for inspiration that might be useful to create student artwork:

- Lyrics to *Northwest Passage*, by Stan Rogers (Appendix E)
- *Northwest Passage Picture Book*, by Stan Rogers, illustrated by Matt James (see more information <http://www.houseofanansi.com/Northwest-Passage-P2136.aspx> )
- Inuit Art Alive, presented by the Inuit Art Foundation [http://www.inuitartalive.ca/index\\_e.php?p=0](http://www.inuitartalive.ca/index_e.php?p=0)
- The Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio at the Uqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts <http://www.uqurmiut.com/index.html>
- "Kapitaikallak's abiding legacy"
- "Inuit and Québécois celebrate Capt. Joseph Bernier, Wilfrid Caron, and the enduring ties connecting Pond Inlet to the people of L'Islet-sur-mer, Quebec." *Nunatsiaq News* October 26, 2001 (retrieved March 2nd, 2014)
- Picture Library at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge University (photographs of the Arctic and historic Arctic voyages) <http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/library/pictures/>
- Vancouver Maritime Museum's Northern Heritage image database, lots of information about the Northwest Passage and the *St. Roch* <http://bcheritage.ca/northernheritage/home.php>
- Wordle (to create word clouds from text): <http://www.wordle.net/>

## Appendix A: Passage from *Polar Imperative*

There are two distinct images of the Arctic in the minds of most North Americans: one is largely imaginary, the other rooted in reality. Since the time of Pytheas the Greek's northern voyages around 320 BC, Europeans envisioned the polar regions as a freezing cold, pristine environment with snow-clad mountains, glaciers, frozen seas, majestic icebergs and polar bears. The Inuit and Eskimos of North America perceived – and still perceive – the Arctic as their homeland.

For European nations, the search for a northern sea route through the Arctic involved sailing in the North Atlantic, which was fraught with dangers and uncertainties for wooden sailing ships. The ability to manoeuvre around drifting icebergs and pack ice in heavy fog or stormy weather required expert navigation skills, an experienced crew, a sound ship and a measure of good luck. An experienced navigator was invaluable and timing was critical. The summer months offered periods of clear skies and calm seas, but delay in departing for home could spell disaster. Shipwrecks were frequent, resulting in major losses of investment, knowledge and expertise (Grant, 2010, p.57).

By the mid-nineteenth century the imaginary Arctic became more magical thanks to romanticized literary and artistic renditions of British polar explorations. Eventually these images were absorbed into the psyche of Canadians, in particular Anglophones, as an integral part of their heritage and identity. As a result, any perceived threat to Canada's Arctic sovereignty was met with public outrage. Danes and Americans also incorporated Arctic images into their identity, but more as part of a peripheral extension of their countries than as central to their national identities.

Although relatively few southern Canadians have travelled or lived in the Arctic, the romantic imagery is kept alive with the dramatic photographs in coffee-table books and spectacular settings for Arctic film documentaries. Recent representations have attempted to portray the realities of Inuit life, but the impression left in the minds of most southern Canadians is still one of “we and they.” Yet partly because of the uniqueness of their culture and remoteness of the Arctic, Inuit in Canada have retained their separate identity in an increasingly multicultural nation, an identity that also enhances the image of the Arctic as a distinct entity from the rest of North America. Geography created a similar experience for Greenlanders (Grant, 2010, p.8-9).

The predominant world view of the Arctic may be a romanticized one, but Inuit see it as their ancestral homeland, with their oral histories suggesting it has been so since the beginning of memory. Most consider themselves part of their environment, rather than a distinct entity as perceived by Western societies. These two very different perceptions exist alongside two different interpretations of history. For centuries, Inuit retained their history in the oral tradition through stories and songs handed down by their elders. Western civilizations depended largely on written accounts by learned scholars and more recently on archaeological research as sources for their historical knowledge (Grant, 2010, p.25).

With a note of admiration, Robert McGhee, curator of Arctic archaeology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, explains,

By approximately 2000 BC, most regions of the New World Arctic were home to small and scattered bands of Paleo-Eskimos. During the previous centuries, these people had accomplished the last major land-taking of an unoccupied region of the earth. They had explored countries that had been beyond the bounds of human knowledge and experience, had learned their secrets, and with a simple technology but with a great deal of knowledge and adaptability, had learned to live and flourish in the new lands.

They also earned the distinction of being the first to traverse the North American Arctic from west to east, on a route roughly paralleling the Northwest Passage. Unlike the Vikings thousands of years later, who travelled from east to west in search of a place to settle and carry on trade with Norway, the Palaeo-Eskimos sought no more than was necessary for their food, clothing and tools (Grant, 2010, p.31).

## Appendix B: The Northwest Passage Timeline

3000 BC – 1000 AD	Migration of Palaeo-Eskimos originally from Siberia across the North American Arctic by foot.
1100 -1250 AD	Thule Inuit move through what is now the Canadian Arctic from Alaska to northwest Greenland and eventually displace prior Eskimo populations. They travelled by kayak, large umiaks and dog sleds. (p.35)
1496	The English begin their search for a northern sea route through the Arctic to gain water access to lucrative trade with China and the East Indies. (p.59)
1576 - 78	Martin Frobisher left a stone cairn and flag off southern Baffin Island in the Arctic to signify possession by England.
1818 – 1846	Numerous British Admiralty Expeditions beginning in 1818 fail in attempts to find the Northwest Passage or reach the North Pole.
1850-1854	Robert McClure successfully reached the Northwest Passage from the west along the northern coast of the continent. Although he had to abandon his ship and cross a portion of the trip by land, he did reach Viscount Melville Sound.
1906	Norwegian Roald Amundsen successfully sails through the Northwest Passage from east to west.
1906-11	As directed by the Canadian government, Captain J.E. Bernier leads 3 expeditions to the high Arctic, wintering over on three occasions and laying claim to most of the Arctic Islands for Canada.
1940-1944	Over three years, the <i>St. Roch</i> , a Royal Canadian Mounted Police Arctic supply and patrol ship, was the first ship to navigate the Northwest Passage from west to east. In 1944 it made the return trip in one year, making it the first ship to navigate the passage in both directions.
1958-1960	USS <i>Nautilus</i> is the first submarine to travel the Pacific Ocean under the North Pole and on to England, for the most part submerged under the Arctic Ocean. In 1959, USS <i>Skate</i> successfully pushed its way through the sea ice at the North Pole. This feat was followed in 1960 by USS <i>Seadragon</i> 's submerged transit through the full length of the Northwest Passage. (p.331)
1969-1970	In 1969, Humble Oil's (now Exxon Mobile) SS <i>Manhattan</i> sailed through the Northwest Passage without asking for official permission to enter waters Canada considered sovereign. In response to Humble Oil's announcement of the ship's return journey in 1970, the Canadian government legislated the Arctic Waters Pollution Act, which set out rules for ship traffic.
1976	The United States Icebreaker, USCGC <i>Polar Sea</i> , traversed the Northwest Passage without permission from the Canadian government prompting the government to declare all waters within the Arctic Archipelago to be internal waters and subject to Canadian laws.

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- 2012 The rapidly melting sea ice cover creates keen interest in commercial shipping through the Arctic to save billions of dollars by avoiding the Panama and Suez Canals. The Northern Sea Route over Russia witnesses the largest increase in traffic but the successful traverse by a Chinese non-nuclear icebreaker across a transpolar route further increases interest, in spite of the lack of any mandatory shipping codes to govern the traffic. There is growing support from European and Asian countries to have the Northwest Passage and Northern Sea Route declared international straits, as opposed to internal waters claimed by Canada and Russia.
- 2013 The successful traverse of the Northwest Passage from west to east by the MV *Nordic Orion* cargo ship carrying coal from Vancouver to Pori, Finland, is the first bulk carrier to navigate the passage since the trial run of the SS *Manhattan* in 1969.
- 2014 The Victoria Strait Expedition, a public-private sector partnership, locates one of Sir John Franklin's ships from his 1845 expedition to find the Northwest passage. Information on the RCGS flag expedition is found at [www.rcgs.org](http://www.rcgs.org).

FROM: POLAR IMPERATIVE, BY SHELAGH GRANT

## Appendix C: Ranking Activity Sheet

Connect the group to the method travelled and then rank them in order from the earliest to most recent (1 = earliest, 5 = most recent) completion of the journey through the Northwest Passage.

Order	Group	Travel Method
	Thule Inuit	Ship and foot
	English	Wooden ship
	Norwegian	Foot
	Canadian	Submarine
	Paleo-Eskimos	Arctic supply and patrol vessel
	American	Umiak

Compare your ideas with the facts from the Northwest Passage Timeline. Are there any differences? Respond (1-2 sentences) using one of the prompts below to jump-start your thinking:

- I learned...
- I already knew that ...
- I was wrong to think...
- A person should know...
- Something that surprised me was...
- I want to know more about...

Response:

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## Appendix D: *Northwest Passage* Lyrics

By: Stan Rogers

**chorus:** Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage  
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea;  
Tracing one warm line through a land so wide and savage  
And make a Northwest Passage to the sea.

Westward from the Davis Strait 'tis there 'twas said to lie  
The sea route to the Orient for which so many died;  
Seeking gold and glory, leaving weathered, broken bones  
And a long-forgotten lonely cairn of stones.

**chorus:** Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage  
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea;  
Tracing one warm line through a land so wide and savage  
And make a Northwest Passage to the sea.

Three centuries thereafter, I take passage overland  
In the footsteps of brave Kelso, where his "sea of flowers" began  
Watching cities rise before me, then behind me sink again  
This tardiest explorer, driving hard across the plain.

**chorus:** Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage  
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea;  
Tracing one warm line through a land so wide and savage  
And make a Northwest Passage to the sea.

And through the night, behind the wheel, the mileage clicking west  
I think upon Mackenzie, David Thompson and the rest  
Who cracked the mountain ramparts and did show a path for me  
To race the roaring Fraser to the sea.

**chorus:** Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage  
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea;  
Tracing one warm line through a land so wide and savage  
And make a Northwest Passage to the sea.

How then am I so different from the first men through this way?  
Like them, I left a settled life, I threw it all away.  
To seek a Northwest Passage at the call of many men  
To find there but the road back home again.

**chorus:** Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage  
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea;  
Tracing one warm line through a land so wide and savage  
And make a Northwest Passage to the sea.

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## Potential New Shipping Routes



**Source(s):** Environment Canada, Canadian Ice Service.  
Statistics Canada, Environment Accounts and Statistics Division, 2011.