Saskatchewan Smoke Jumpers

RW8.3 Curriculum Links: Critique the approaches of Canada and Canadians to environmental stewardship and sustainability. (grade 8) S.S.

Overview: To provide students with an opportunity to learn how the historical Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers successfully parachuted into a remote area to combat wildfires.

Materials: Video link, handouts (provided)
For the activity each student will need paper, tape, yarn and a clothes pin.

Explore: What is a Smoke-Jumper?
Show the video on the history of smoke-jumping (Rookie firefighters learn how to parachute into Saskatchewan's most serious forest fires.)
http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/Environment/Natural+Disasters/Fighting+Forest+Fires/ID/1771528816/ (ctrl+ click the following link. OR copy and paste into URL) – (warn the students that there are commercials and mute the sound when they come on) Approximately 26 minutes long.

After viewing the video ask questions to show students understanding of historical smoke-jumping: “what was happening throughout the video?” “Why do you think it is important to practice jumping before going into the field?”

Have the class read the attached handout of the History of the Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers

Next read the attached handout on the SASKATCHEWAN SMOKE-JUMPERS of the Saskatchewan men their stories.
- Have student’s volunteer reading. (Make note of the timeline of events.)

There is a questionnaire handout attached for the students to complete once students are finished reading the previous handouts.

Activity:
Have volunteers hand out the materials for the Paper Parachute: paper, tape, yarn, clothes pin. In partners (groups of 2) they will design a parachute to learn how the Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers successfully parachuted into a remote area to combat wildfires. Show students the picture of the paper parachute so they have a guided visual.
The History of the Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers

- Canada’s first Smoke Jumper program started in Saskatchewan in 1947.
- The Department of Natural Resources had built its first airway strip in La Ronge where the headquarters were relocated from Prince Albert.
- Saskatchewan pioneered the use of “Smoke-Jumpers”, fire fighters who were parachuted into newly discovered fires to stop them from spreading.
- The team of eight men attended the physically demanding training schools before being deployed on fires. They were required have a high level of physical activity and the Smoke-Jumper’s were usually in their late teens and early 20’s.
- They jumped from Norseman aircraft as directed by the “Jump Master” to land as close to the fire as they could. They remained until the fire was under control, or until they were relieved by ground forces.
- In the former cases they sometimes had to walk out 25 miles to suitable pick-up spot-being a lake or the nearest road where a float plane or truck could meet them.
- The airport was used by smoke jumpers for forest fire-fighting into the mid 1960’s.
- The smokejumper project grew significantly throughout the 1950s; numbers continued to increase; reaching 398 by 1958.
- The Saskatchewan smoke-jumping unit ended in 1966. Instead of jumping out of planes, firefighters could be flown by helicopter to the scene of a fire.
- As it was a summer job, some of the Smoke Jumpers were students who later graduated to pursuits ranging from Members of Legislative Assembly and cabinet minister to a surgeon.
- Although Smoke-Jumping has stopped in Saskatchewan in 1967 it continued elsewhere in Canada. During the 1980s the smokejumper project truly became a national project in other places.
- Smoke-Jumping continued into the 1990s in places such as California. For example, during the severe summer fire season of 1994, the 391 smokejumpers available nationwide made 4,806 fire jumps on 989 wildfires. The year of 1994 was also a tragic one - three smokejumpers were among the 14 firefighters who lost their lives July 6 on the South Canyon Fire near Glenwood Springs, Colorado.
- This firefighter technique that was developed by the smokejumper pioneers of the 1930s are still employed today. The smokejumpers are, indeed, an organization with an eye on the future and its roots in the past. They continue to adapt to the ever-changing policies and environment of wild land fire suppression.
- The Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers were the pioneers they did a good job and worked very hard. These young men are now a part of Saskatchewan’s history.
- Firefighting may be different today, but protection of Saskatchewan’s forests remains very important.
They protected Saskatchewan’s forests for two decades, using men who risked a drop to the ground and water bombers and helicopters. Listen to the stories told by some of the men themselves:

“It was like a war without bullets,” recalled Bill Dupré, at the reunion marking the 65th anniversary of the jumpers’ inception on Sunday. Dupré was an active smoke jumper for three years, between 1961 and 1964. He successfully completed 53 jumps, walking away with no major injuries to speak of. “I had a badly bruised knee once, that’s all,” he said. “I was very fortunate.” “We had spent three weeks doing mock jumps and jumping off trucks and everything,” recalled Dupré, of his first jump.

“We used to have about two weeks training, sometimes three, and this included physical training … and all kinds of other things that may happen on a jump, like first aid and the whole works,” explained Frank Tomkins, former jumpmaster of the Saskatchewan smoke jumpers. “There’s always danger in jumping, you know? But you can get around that with your training. It’s really not as dangerous as people think it is.” Tomkins jumped for 17 years, completing “well over a couple hundred as a smoke jumper.”

George Cox completed 56 jumps between 1954 and 1959. “They gave you $7.85 a day, and gave you a big pair of boots and a pair of wings and made you think you were King Kong.” For Cox, it is clearly much more than the money. He got his first taste at just 11 years of age, when a fire sprang up in his home province of Nova Scotia. “I happened to be the first person on that fire, so I’m grabbing a limb from a tree, and I’m banging away on this fire, and along comes the resource people,” he recalled. “They said, ‘When did you get here?’ … When they finished they took my name down. About three months later I get a check from the Nova Scotia government (for 25 cents) … for two hours and a half of firefighting.” After his time as a smoke jumper, Cox became a pilot, and fought forest fires from the air as a water bomber. He flew until he was 77.

Alphonse ‘Al’ Freemont attended the Saskatchewan Forestry School in Prince Albert graduating in 1947. The Smoke-Jumpers had just been formed and he joined the team and earned the distinction of making the first jump in history. On his First Jump the parachute had failed to open, forcing him to deploy his reserve. He luckily landed safely with no injuries. Al enjoyed his summer with the Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers. It was a great experience with lasting memories.

The Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumping

1. When did Saskatchewan’s first Smoke-Jumping start? How long did it last? Where were the crews located?

2. What were the requirements to becoming a Smoke-Jumper? Do you think it was dangerous? Explain your answer.

3. Do we still have fire jumping today? How can you find out to prove your statement?

4. What were some ways the Smoke-Jumpers used to practice/mock Smoke-Jumping to prepare for actual fire jumps?

5. What was the paying salary for the Smoke-Jumpers during 1947-1967?

6. Would you consider the Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers a part of history? In your opinion do you think the public view them as heroes?
PAPER PARACHUTE PROJECT

Using the materials shown in the picture make a replica of this paper parachute as a visual to how the historical Saskatchewan Smoke-Jumpers successfully parachuted into a remote area to combat wildfires.