



Roughing It in the Backwoods

Student Handout

Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill are two of Canada’s most important 19th-century writers. Born in England, the two sisters became professional writers before they were married. In 1832, they emigrated with their Scottish husbands to Canada and settled in the backwoods of what is now Ontario, near present-day Lakefield. Their experiences as pioneers gave them much to write about, which they did in their books, articles, poems and letters to family members.

This activity will give you the chance to view primary source materials online and learn about aspects of life as an early settler in the backwoods of Upper Canada.

Introduction: Primary Sources

A **primary source** is a first-hand account, by someone who participated in or witnessed an event. These sources could be: letters, books written by witnesses, diaries and journals, reports, government documents, photographs, art, maps, video footage, sound recordings, oral histories, clothing, tools, weapons, buildings and other clues in the surroundings.

A **secondary source** is a representation of an event. It is someone's interpretation of information found in primary sources. These sources include books and textbooks, and are the best place to begin research.

Primary sources are considered more reliable than secondary sources in historical research. As such, you should learn to use them as soon as possible. The letters you will be looking at today are primary sources -- the words of people who were there.

However, this does not mean that they are the “perfect source”: all writers have a bias, whether intentional or unintentional. You must ask yourself: **Does this person have any reason to lie, to misrepresent or misinterpret?** Consider bias that might come from a writer’s gender, class, religion, ethnicity, nationality or political views.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Primary and Secondary Sources

| Primary Sources | | Secondary Sources | |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Advantages | Disadvantages | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| | | | |



Essay Instructions

Navigate the various sections of the *Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* site: Biographies, Life in England, Emigration and Bush Life, etc. Take a look at the Letters Index. Read the secondary sources on the site that relate to your topic before reading the letters.

Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/

Letters Index

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-4000-e.html

Your essay should include:

- A title page with title, your name, course name, teacher name and date submitted.
- A clear introduction with a thesis statement.
- A body with proper citation (footnotes/endnotes or APA/MLA style, as determined by your instructor).
- A conclusion that follows logically from the thesis and ideas developed in the body and makes a thoughtful generalization.

Date due: _____ **Length of paper:** _____

Topics

Your essay should develop one of the following topics, or one approved by your instructor:

- 1. (Argument) Life for settlers like the Moodies and Traills was easy/difficult. Look at all aspects of life (see question 4 for suggestions).**
- 2. (Compare and contrast) Compare and contrast the life of Susanna Moodie and/or Catharine Parr Traill in the 1830s to your life today. Look at all aspects of life (see question 4 for suggestions).**
- 3. (Descriptive) Describe in detail the conditions that Susanna Moodie or Catharine Parr Traill faced in the 1830s. Look at all aspects of life (see question 4 for suggestions).**
- 4. (Investigation) Investigate/research a particular aspect of the life of Susanna Moodie and/or Catharine Parr Traill. Some suggestions:**
 - Work (type, amount)
 - Entertainment (what kinds)
 - Living conditions (housing, clothes, food)
 - Medicine (availability, home remedies, types of illness and injury that had to be treated)
 - The economics of farming and emigration (costs of labour and clearing land, uncertainty of harvests, etc.)



Secondary Sources

Biographies

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-2000-e.html

Emigration and Bush Life

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-3100-e.html

Town Life

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-3200-e.html

Primary Sources

Susanna Moodie: *Roughing It in the Bush*, Volume 2, Chapter 10

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-5000-e.html

Catharine Parr Traill: *The Backwoods of Canada*, Letter IX

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-5001-e.html

Letters Index:

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-4000-e.html

Letter from Susanna Moodie to John Moodie, March 6, 1839

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/t1-116-e.php?uid=23&uidc=ID&anchor=t1-6020.1-e.html

Letter from Catharine Parr Traill to Susanna Moodie, July 26, 1849

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/t1-116-e.php?uid=44&uidc=ID&anchor=t1-6020.1-e.html

Letter from John Moodie to James Traill, March 8, 1836

URL: www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/t1-116-e.php?uid=51&uidc=ID&anchor=t1-6020.1-e.html

Other Sources

Early Canadiana Online (has many digitized versions of the works of Moodie and Traill)

URL: www.canadiana.org/

The Canadian Encyclopedia Online

URL: <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/>

Essay-Writing Sources

About: Writing: Essays, Paragraphs and Papers

URL: <http://7-12educators.tqn.com/education/7-12educators/msub57/litsourcesessays.htm>

Bowdoin College History Department

URL: <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>

Capital Community College

URL: <http://webster.commnet.edu/mla.htm>

URL: <http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>