



Maritime Museum of British Columbia Teacher's Lesson Plan

Hardtack and Marlinspikes: Life and Work Aboard Ship

Overview of Lesson:

In this program, students will learn about the intricacies of daily life aboard a 19th century sailing vessel of the type that would have been taking goods in and out of Victoria's harbour. The division of labour aboard a typical merchant vessel will be explained in terms of hierarchical divisions, the watch system, and specialized duties aboard. Specific conditions will also be pointed out, with food, clothing, pastimes and superstitions used to give a picture of sailors' lives.

Time Required:

75 minutes

Essential Questions:

Who was a typical sailor using the port of Victoria in the 19th century, and what contributions did he make? How was work aboard ship then different than typical work now? How was it different than typical work ashore during the same time period? What would have made sailors choose a life at sea? How has technological progress affected the work and the life of the sailor?

Rationale:

Shipping was a vital component in the development and growth of the Pacific Northwest. Victoria and Vancouver, along with the other ports of British Columbia, provided (and continue to provide) a locus for the exchange of imported and exported goods. The ships that facilitated such trade were largely sailing vessels until well after the turn of the twentieth century. This program will examine the lives and living conditions aboard for the crews of such vessels. Sailing ships were rigidly hierarchical in structure, and while valiant captains may get the glory from dangerous or fruitful passages, it is the crewmen who did the work. Students will learn about the hardships endured and the camaraderie that developed within a crew. Sailors had a unique culture that has been shaped by the hardships of the sea and the international character of most crews, which will be examined through songs and superstitions. Students will come to understand the changes in work and lifestyle that accompany technological change.

Curriculum Connections:

It is expected students will:

- Identify and clarify a problem, issue or inquiry.
- Identify alternate interpretations from specific historical and contemporary sources
- Analyze how people interact with their environment, in the past and in the present

Social Studies, Grade 5

- Explain ways people preserve and transmit culture
- Analyze the relationship between development of communities and their available natural resources
- Analyze the influence of technology on life and work

Social Studies, Grade 6

- Assess the relationship between cultures and their environments
- Describe the daily life, work, family structures and gender roles in Canada and the world.
- Assess effects of urbanization and technology on lifestyles and environments

Pre-visit instructions:

- Please have an overhead projector and screen set up for this program. If one is not available, please contact the museum's programming department ahead of time.
- Set up a table or desk large enough to hold a box with a $\frac{1}{2}$ m by $\frac{3}{4}$ m base at the front of the room

Procedure:

Introduction: 5 minutes

The Crew & Their Roles: 25 minutes

- Ditty bag demonstration
- Chantey activity

Conditions Aboard: 25 minutes

- Food & weevil demonstration
- Clothing demonstration

Conclusion: 5 minutes

Introduction:

This section introduces the importance of merchant shipping to Victoria's development as a commercial and political centre. Students will be asked to consider what kinds of goods might be coming in and out of Victoria's harbour in the late 19th century and the means by which they were moved around, bringing up railways as well as ships.

The goal of the introduction is to communicate to students the importance of shipping to the economy of BC in its early days. This introduces the idea of the vital role played by ordinary sailors in the development of Western Canada. History is usually written about the great leaders, but in this case it is the ordinary seamen whose stories we tell.

WORK

The Crew & Their Roles

In the era this program deals with, the age of sail is beginning to give way to the age of steam. This meant big changes in the world of sailing ships and their crews. Sometimes this meant even harsher working conditions, and sometimes it meant valuable labour-saving devices (steam winches, for instance) were available. Some of the common types of ships from the time will be shown and explained.

Crew categories and duties will be explained to the class. The watch system will be explained, as well as some of the specialized occupations aboard, such as carpenters, sailmakers and cooks, who worked as "idlers" outside the watch system.

LIFE

Conditions Aboard

Food & Illness: The food demonstration is intended to convey the monotony and limited quantities of food available to sailors. Variety is not possible on long voyages, as refrigeration was not available. The interpreter will explain the ways this food was distributed, who cooked it, and how they might try to make it more palatable – making lobscouse or dandyfunk, for instance. These amounts are what were given to a sailor for an entire week. The same rations were repeated for the whole voyage, which could be months or even years long. Beer is included because alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, brandy, depending on the crew's nationality) generally kept better than water did aboard.

Closely related to a discussion of food aboard is the problem of disease, particularly scurvy. Scurvy is an ideal example because of its complicated history and the difficulty in discerning its causes and cures. By the time period being examined in this program,

the causes were well established, but some ship owners were still unwilling to provide citrus juices for their crews.

Weather: This section outlines some other hazards that may be faced by a crew on the voyage from Europe or Asia to the West Coast of North America. The experience of ordinary sailors in bad weather will be examined, as well as some of the specific areas (near Cape Horn, for instance, or the coast of Vancouver Island) where storms and other hazards might be encountered. These experiences of constant work and worry will be contrasted with times when the ship is caught in a calm & windless sea. This allows for the interpreter to examine some of the ways sailors might amuse themselves in such times.

Conclusion

The presentation will finish by asking the students, based on what they've heard in the program, why anyone would have chosen to be a sailor in this period. Here the interpreter can speak to the various reasons sailors might have had and whether the job was entered into on purpose or not. Some of the essential questions should be brought up in this section, particularly those pertaining to changing technology, which of course fundamentally changed the average sailor's life. At this point, the interpreter will open the floor for any questions.