The Arts and the Teaching of History

Historical F(r)ictions

Penney Clark · Alan Sears

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CHAPTER 1

The Place of the Arts in Teaching History

In the mid-eighteenth century Aminata Diallo, a West African girl of about 11, was kidnapped from her family. After enduring days of forced march to the coast and months of a horrific voyage on a slave ship she arrived in the British colony of South Carolina where she was sold into slavery. Years of misery followed, including forced labour on a plantation, rape, and permanent separation from her husband and child. Eventually, Aminata managed to escape slavery and make her way to the British colony of Nova Scotia as part of the Loyalist migration of the mid-1780s and from there she joined the migration of former slaves to Sierra Leone.[1]

Just thirty years before Aminata arrived in Nova Scotia, Evangeline Bellefontaine, a young Acadian woman, was forcefully deported from the colony along with other French-speaking inhabitants of her village of Grand-Pré and other Acadian settlements across the region. A popular monument at the Grand-Pré National Historic Site evocatively portrays the stricken young woman whose father died of distress on the eve of the deportation and whose fiancé, Gabriel Lajeunesse, was sent out on a different ship (see Fig. 1.1). Evangeline spent most of the rest of her life searching the vast Acadian diaspora for Gabriel, only finding him years later close to death in a poorhouse in Philadelphia. A second monument in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, one of the stops in her quest, also commemorates her faithfulness and persistence.

On the other side of the world in 1765, just about midway between the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia and the arrival of Aminata

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Fig. 1.1 Statue of Evangeline at Grand-Pré (*Source* Rob Crandall/Alamy Stock Photo)

Diallo in that colony, representatives of the British East India Company received the Diwani, later to be called the Treaty of Allahabad, from Shah Alam the Mughal Emperor over much of the territory of modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In effect, the Emperor was giving the company effective economic control, including the power to levy taxes, over most of what is today northeast India and Bangladesh. The event is commemorated in a painting by Benjamin West which shows the Emperor on a

Fig. 1.2 *Shah Alam conveying the Diwani*, painting by Benjamin West (*Source* The picture art collection/Alamy stock photo)

raised throne, in a grand palace, dressed in a robe and turban of gold brocade handing the document down to the British representative Lord Clive who is standing on the ground beside the raised dais (see Fig. 1.2). The scene shows the two men flanked by grandees from both sides turned out in their best finery.[2] The impression given is of the granting of the treaty as an act of benevolence by a great Emperor to British supplicants.

Aminata Diallo, Evangeline Bellefontaine, and Shah Alam are compelling historical characters and as history teachers and educators of history teachers we see all kinds of ways to use their stories with students. The first two are quite ordinary folk, not the "great men" who so often dominate the textbooks. Our students can relate to them. Further, a substantial part of their story takes place when they are young, and this also provides a potential connection with students. The third, while an important national leader, comes from a part of the world and an historical context often ignored or downplayed in history classes in the West. While they are not the type of people who often appear in history curricula, their lives touch on great historical events and themes: slavery,

the Loyalist migration to Canada, forced migration/ethnic cleansing, and the processes of intercultural contact and colonization. Finally, their stories deal with aspects of history and particular populations that are often left out of school history courses. They open up important parts of the history of African Canadians, Acadian refugees, and the diverse peoples of the Indian subcontinent.

While these historical stories are gripping and have great potential to interest students in key events and processes in world history, what we know about them is shaped more by artistic imagination than historical investigation. Both Aminata Diallo and Evangeline Bellefontaine are fictional characters, products of the imaginations of the Canadian novelist Lawrence Hill, the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and the sculptors who created the statues of Evangeline at Grand-Pré and St. Martinsville.[3]

While Shah Alam and Lord Clive were historical personages and the Diwani was actually given by the former to the latter in 1785, Benjamin West's iconic painting of the event that still hangs for public view in the museum at Powis Castle and Garden in Wales, significantly distorts the event in order to present a more positive narrative of Mughal–British relations. As historian William Dalrymple points out,

> The painting of Clive and Shah Alam at Powis is subtly deceptive: the painter, Benjamin West had never been to India…In reality there was no grand public ceremony. The transfer took place privately, inside Clive's tent, which had just been erected on the parade ground of the newly seized Mughal fort at Allahabad. As for Shah Alam's silken throne, it was in fact Clive's armchair, which for the occasion had been hoisted on to his dining-room table and covered with a chintz bedspread.[4]

While these narratives are not often the stuff of textbooks or academic history articles, they are powerful accounts that capture public attention and help shape people's, including the students in our history classes, views about the past. Hill's novel was a bestseller in several countries and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the American Black Entertainment Television (BET) collaborated in producing a six-episode television mini-series of the novel. Longfellow's poem became his most influential publication and the historic monuments of Evangeline are visited by tens of thousands every year. The one at Grand-Pré is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site commemorating Acadian history. It is no

exaggeration to say that Evangeline is the central symbol of the horrors of what Acadians call Le Grand Dérangement (The Great Upheaval). Finally, West's painting distorted history in order to appeal to Victorian sensibilities. "[Victorians] liked to think of the empire as a *mission civilisatrice*: a benign transfer of knowledge, railways and the arts of civilization from West to East, and there was a calculated and deliberate amnesia about the corporate looting that opened British rule in India."[5]

There is significant evidence to show that artistic representations of the past are both popular and influential in shaping people's sense of history and collective memory. We see this in, for example, the increased popularity of visits to museums and historic sites, historical documentaries by Ken Burns in the United States and Mark Starowicz in Canada,[6] non-fiction books on historical topics, historical Hollywood films, historical novels, and historical graphic novels. We note that Charles Frazier's immensely popular American civil war novel *Cold Mountain* sold 1.5 million copies in the first nine months after its 1997 publication.[7] The controversies in nations around the world over public commemorations and representations of historic figures and past events in historical monuments also attest to a vibrant interest in history.

Historian David Harlan has acknowledged the abundance and popularity of historical forms beyond the academic:

> We assume that our primary responsibility is to convey this professionally certified knowledge to our undergraduates, and the techniques for producing it to our graduate students. In other words, we teach them how to read and write academic history. But a new history is being produced, outside the academy, by novelists, memoirists, autobiographers and filmmakers. If we intend to meet the challenge of this new history, if we want our students to develop historical imaginations that are morally sustaining and politically relevant, we must teach them to be thoughtful, reflective and resourceful readers of all the forms in which their society represents the past to itself. Academic history is one of those forms, of course, but it is only one, and it is neither the most interesting nor the most important.[8]

This is a thoughtful remark for an academic historian to make and one to take seriously. As authors, we presume that the prime audience for this book will be academic and public historians, history educators who prepare teachers, and practicing history and social studies teachers, and it is important for all these groups to acknowledge that artistic representations from the past, such as historical fiction, historical visual art, and

commemorative art, surround students in their daily lives and to recognize the place of artistic representations as a source of history. It is useful to consider the possibilities for introducing these art forms into history courses and a significant pedagogical mistake to allow them to remain unexamined either as historical sources or historical accounts.

Historians as Artists and Artists as Historians

It is almost a tautology to state that artists are producers of creative products. Historians, on the other hand, are not typically viewed in this way. The uninitiated may assume that historians simply make forays into dusty archives where they gather old records of various kinds and subsequently use what they have collected to construct a historical narrative—one that was, presumably, just waiting for the opportunity to reveal itself. Canadian literary critic, Renée Hulan, contends that a historian may also be an artist. We agree with Hulan. In fact, we see the historian as no less an artist than is a novelist. As historian Hayden White so aptly put it: "Novelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation, is a poetic process."[9]

We are also aligned with historian Barbara Tuchman, who sees the historian as "a creative writer on the same level as the poet or novelist."[10] Tuchman goes on to explain her position. She says: "As I see it, there are three parts to the creative process: first, the extra vision with which the artist perceives a truth and conveys it by suggestion. Second, medium of expression: language for writers…Third, design or structure."[11] By "extra vision," she means the sympathy and imagination that she maintains is necessary in order to fully understand the evidence and convey its meaning: "Without sympathy and imagination the historian can copy figures from a tax roll forever […] but he [*sic*] will never know or be able to portray the people who paid the taxes."[12] With regard to language, she says "it takes hard work, a good ear, and continued practice, as much as it takes Heifetz to play the violin."[13] As for structure, her choice of form was narrative:

> Narrative history is neither as simple nor as straightforward as it might seem. It requires arrangement, composition, planning just like a painting—Rembrandt's "Night Watch," for example. He did not fit in all those

> figures with certain ones in the foreground and others in back and the light falling on them just so, without much trial and error and innumerable preliminary sketches. It is the same as writing. Although the finished result may look to the reader natural and inevitable, as if the author had only to follow the sequence of events, it is not that easy.[14]

The historian has to "exercis[e] the artists' privilege of selection"[15] by asking thoughtful questions of sources in order to make meaning from the disparate and sometimes conflicting pieces of information she is able to collect. Hayden White endorses this point when he refers to "the unprocessed historical record [where] the facts exist as a congeries of contiguously related fragments"[16] until the historian shapes them into a meaningful narrative.

Tuchman points out that there are other challenges for historians: "how to explain background and yet keep the story moving, how to create suspense and sustain interest in a narrative of which the outcome (like who won the war) is, to put it mildly, known. If anyone thinks this does not take creative writing, I can only say, try it."[17] Renée Hulan captures this idea exquisitely when she states, "historical writing that renders an aesthetic experience of the past" is "the dialectical relation of material evidence and imagination."[18]

Now, we will turn to the idea of the artist as historian. As Hulan puts it, with reference to novelists, "a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, and expounder of human experience."[19] We make a distinction between period novels, which are written in the time period of the novel itself and historical novels, which are about an earlier period. Period novelists are, in a sense, inadvertent historians, if there is such a thing, in that they are not writing in the role of historians. Their novels are not works of history, but rather, can serve as primary source documents for future historians. They are sources of information about what life was like where and when the events of the novel occur. Historical novelists, on the other hand, can be considered to be historians, although this depends on the extent to which they adhere to primary sources and consult secondary sources in constructing their accounts, that is, their novels. There is a huge variation in terms of historical novelists' sense of responsibility to adhere to the historical evidence. These ideas are discussed in Chapter 3.

The concept of artist as historian is not as applicable to commemorative art or to historical paintings as it is to historical novels. In the case of

commemorative art, there is an "artist for hire" element, since it is art that is typically commissioned by individuals or government bodies that want to represent an event or people from the past in a particular way. It is also less straightforward in the case of historical paintings, since they are typically more like period novels, in that they are painted in a particular time and depict that time and can be used later as primary sources in order to learn about that time.

Visual art is a primary source of information about the past, and it is particularly useful when written sources do not exist. We explore the potential of certain visual art, in particular the *Bayeux Tapestry*, *The Death of General Wolfe*, and the *First German Attack at Ypres* as both primary sources and primary accounts. These examples of visual art are primary sources that can be used to gather evidence about the events they depict, but they are also constructed accounts that are designed to convey particular messages.

Visual art can also provide a revisionist history by presenting counter narratives to existing constructed accounts. We see this in the work of Canadian Indigenous artist, Kent Monkman who has transformed the famous painting, *The Fathers of Confederation* by Robert Harris into *The Daddies*, a startling critique of the values embodied in the original painting. Visual art is discussed in Chapter 4 of this volume.

The Power of Art

The arts can engage students in a range of ways. Cultural scholar Ann Rigney contends that fiction (defined by her as "a general umbrella term to designate cultural practices that are governed by the principle of 'poetic licence'"[20]) "is a stepping-stone medium for encouraging people to look beyond their present social frame of reference."[21] History educators Evelyn B. Freeman and Linda Levstik point out that fiction, for example, "presents history in a subjective form that is closer [than didactic historical accounts] to the way in which young children explain themselves and understand the world.... They will also discover the consequences of human failure in relationships, both personal and historical."[22] Freeman and Levstik further explain that historical fiction supports a range of common social studies knowledge and skill goals. Student interest in compelling fictional historical characters stands in stark contrast to research findings about the teaching of history in schools, which is

often described as dull, boring, and disconnected from students' lives and interests.[23]

Historian John Demos uses the novel *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier as an example of the power of a novel to bring history to life. He says, "to follow Frazier's central character on his journey home from Civil War soldiering is to know the life of that time and place in a wholly immediate way."[24] Frazier provides details about the devastation of war, including the general disorientation, the destruction of homes and livelihoods, the subsistence level to which the rural poor were reduced, and the prevailing racism. Tuchman highlights the importance of such corroborative details and their role in "keeping one grounded in historical reality."[25]

We suggest that there are ways to engage the power of fictional accounts to enliven and enrich the more formal study of history in schools and universities. History education scholar Peter Seixas makes the same point. Seixas uses Canadian novelist Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*[26] as an example of a useful source for wrestling with the implications of ethical questions in history and the present. He acknowledges the power of the novel in encouraging readers to "imagine themselves into the consciousness of [Hill's] protagonist,"[27] but describes that power as "a double-edged sword."[28] The narrative force that draws the reader in and connects him or her to the experience of the characters also mitigates against alternative readings of the situation and "can trump our attempts to historicize and take into account the foreignness of the people of the past."[29]

While double-edged swords are dangerous because they can cut both ways and wound the bearer rather than the enemy, they were developed because, used skilfully, they are a more powerful weapon than a blade with a single edge. We contend that in the hands of an effective teacher the double-edged sword of fiction can be a powerful tool in the teaching of history.

As Canadian literature scholar Herb Wyile has put it: "*Both* history and literature, then, make meaning of the past, and any attempt to see the one as 'science' and the other as 'entertainment' is reductive to say the least – especially when it comes to a genre like historical fiction."[30]

The Value of History Education

Canadian historian and history educator Ken Osborne has offered three arguments that can be made to students about the importance of history education. The first is that history is "gripping, as it deals with what has actually happened and how we find out about it."[31] He suggests that the best way to approach history in a way that will arouse students' interest is to present problems that they can explore. The focus is on human agency as students consider the problems which people in the past confronted, the limited information with which they had to work, and the values and expectations of the social, economic, and political contexts in which they operated.

Osborne's second argument is that history provides a "form of intellectual self-defense."[32] He offers seven ways in which this argument could be developed:

> First, history armours us against all those people who claim to know it and are only too anxious to tell us what it proves. Second, it releases us from the grip of the past which so easily holds us captive and shapes our lives. Third, it teaches us how to be constructively sceptical (but not cynical or blindly rejectionist) when faced with appeals and arguments. Fourth, it protects us from being misled by the taken-for-granted conventional wisdom of our own times. Fifth, by showing us a wide variety of alternative belief systems, social practices, cultural norms, and the like, it enlarges our awareness of alternatives and choices. Sixth, it helps us understand and take part in the debates that are going on around us about the future of Canada and of the world more generally, debates that are going to affect us whether we like it or not. And, finally, it makes us less short-sighted and narrow-minded than we would otherwise be by helping us situate the present in the context of the transition from past to future so that we are not governed solely by the short-term imperatives of the here and now.[33]

Osborne's third argument is that history "enlarges our experience by showing us a wide range of human institutions and behaviour, thereby freeing us from the constraints of the present."[34] Eminent British historian of education, Richard Aldrich would agree. He has pointed out that history affords:

> an acquaintance with a much greater range of human experience than would be possible simply by reference to the contemporary world; an enlarged understanding of that experience which may promote a richer

understanding of one's own potential and possibilities; opportunities for creating interpretations of human experience which may be of interest in themselves and which, though not directly transferable from one situation to another, may promote the capacity better to interpret other situations – both historical and contemporary; a more sophisticated awareness of the nature of knowledge and of truth.[35]

The Place of Historical Mindedness

Ken Osborne has proposed a conception of history education that he calls historical mindedness. He describes this as a broad understanding of the past that "is a way of looking, not so much at history, but at the world at large, that derives from a familiarity with the past and with trying to understand and interpret it."[36]

We think of this as adding a fourth approach to history education. The first approach that has dominated history classrooms is a focus on *what* historians know (the names, dates, narratives, and counter narratives of the discipline of history—often referred to as content). This has often had a nation-building focus. Every nation has its own narratives. In the case of Canada, this has involved presenting students with a chronological framework of important events around a theme of overcoming adversity and making progress towards nationhood and greater autonomy from Great Britain, an approach that is characterized by textbook titles such as *Challenge & Survival* or *Bold Ventures*. This approach has always had an important place in the teaching of Canadian history and is certainly an important aspect of history education in the history of other nations as well. Aspects of it have persisted regardless of other influences.

The second approach has to do with developing facility with *how* historians know (the processes and procedures of doing history—often referred to as historical thinking). Historical thinking is found in most Canadian provincial/territorial curricula and authorized resources. This approach, as it is currently interpreted in Canada, has been conceptualized and guided by the work of Peter Seixas of the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia. He first articulated a framework of six second-order or procedural concepts in his article, "Conceptualizing the Growth of Historical Understanding," published in *The Handbook of Education and Human Development* in 1996.[37] The historical thinking framework has evolved over the years to its present iteration of six concepts:

- The problem of *historical significance*: From the entire human past, what is worth learning about?
- The problem of *evidence*: How do we know what we know, how can we use the traces, the leftovers, of the past to support claims about what happened?
- The problem of *continuity and change*: How are historical changes interwoven with continuities?
- The problems of *cause and consequence*: What are the layers of cause that led, over time, to any particular event? What are the consequences that rippled out afterwards?
- The problem of *historical perspective-taking*. What was it like to live in times so different from our own; can we truly understand?
- The *ethical dimension*. How can we in the present, judge actors in different circumstances in the past; when and how do crimes and sacrifices of the past bear consequences today; and what obligations do we have today in relation to those consequences?[38]

The underlying ideas are that (1) history and the past are not the same because history is a subset of everything that happened in the past and (2) history is composed of accounts developed from interpretations by historians based on the myriad of primary sources that are remnants of the past. It is important to note that this focus on the processes of doing history does not imply an emphasis on skills rather than content. As Seixas and Tom Morton make clear, "the six historical thinking concepts make no sense at all without the material, the topics, the substance, or what is often referred to as the 'content' of history."[39]

These first two approaches have dominated history education in school, and in the literature are often presented as unfolding chronologically with the former representing a tradition bound archaic approach to teaching history that is gradually being superseded by the later more progressive and constructivist approach. Ironically, this is indicative of a naïve progress-oriented understanding of history that researchers argue is often characteristic of how young children think about the past. As Osborne and others have shown conclusively, these approaches have co-existed for more than 100 years, and are not always as simplistic or antithetical as popularly presented.[40] Over time, one or the other crescendos and for a period becomes the dominant approach in the field, but not so much that the other is entirely silenced.[41]

We propose there is a third, related approach critically important to how people engage with the past that is often absent from academic history education, and it involves wrestling with the relationship between individual and collective memory, and personal and communal ways of engaging with and understanding the past, particularly in terms of how it shapes the present and the future—often called historical consciousness. As Seixas points out, attention to historical consciousness has been largely missing in history education in the United Kingdom, North America, and other regions influenced by British and American approaches.[42] We argue the arts provide a dynamic vehicle for attending to it in school history.

Osborne suggests that historical mindedness has elements of all three of the other approaches. He writes that historical mindedness,

> combines historical thinking with historical knowledge (yes, even dates and events), together with the ability to take the long view, to locate the present in the context of a transition from past to future, and, not least, to appreciate what G.M. Trevelyan described as the 'poetry of history,' a recognition that the people of the past were once as real as we are, with their own hopes and dreams, frustrations and ambitions, loves and hates.[43]

In the case of the facts-based nation-building narrative, he points out that learning narratives of Canada's trajectory does not presuppose "a return to the exclusionary nation-building narrative of a generation ago, with all its claims of definitiveness and authority."[44] Students do not need a compendium of handy facts about Canadian history, but they do need some idea of important themes that will help them to better understand the dilemmas that arise in the present. Historical mindedness includes facility with all three approaches, including the ability to reflectively assess the impact they have on shaping human understanding of, and engagement with, the past, present, and future.

The Place for a Sense of Wonder

Historical thinking has been criticized for being too academic and sterile. As one scholar put it, "It is as if the historical procedures identified as relevant for student study have been extracted in labs from historians who lack hopes, fantasies, or racialized, gendered, classed, and desiring bodies and who also lack political intelligence."[45] British Columbia teacher Patrick Clarke has referred to it as a "very safe, rationalistic pedagogy that leaches

out almost all of the romance in history." He points to the danger of "unremitting pondering" that avoids what he calls the "romantic mythology" that can lead to citizens who are passionately engaged with the task of bettering the societies in which they find themselves.[46]

Historian Gerald Friesen would agree. He highlights the importance of inspiring a sense of wonder in students, something that he sees as lacking in historical thinking approaches. Friesen suggests that "Using primary sources, discussing historical context and historical significance, identifying decisive moments of change, debating evidence, uncovering uncertainty about meaning, considering morality and ethical choices will all endure. But so, too, will the teacher's obligation to inspire a sense of wonder."[47] He contends that teachers must fire students' imaginations and "kindle an infectious delight."[48] He quotes from historian G.M. Trevelyan: "The poetry of history lies in the quasi-miraculous fact that once on this earth, once on this familiar spot of ground, walked other men and women, as actual as we are today, thinking their own thoughts, swayed by their own passions but now all gone one generation vanishing into another, gone as utterly as we ourselves shall shortly be gone, like ghosts at cockcrow."[49] He wants students to wonder about the lives of people in the past and to use their imaginations, grounded in knowledge about the historical contexts in which these people lived, to develop a rich understanding of the challenges they faced, and the possibilities and limitations of their lives.

We believe engaging with the arts in history classes provides the opportunity to bring together all of these approaches to history education in ways that will stimulate students' interest in history, help them to see the connections between history and contemporary concerns and broaden their understandings of, and empathy with, historical agents' circumstances, including motives, desires, ambitions, limitations, and opportunities, and ultimately, spark a sense of wonder about the possibilities inherent in studying history.

The Value of the Arts in History Education

It is our hope that the arts discussed in this book—fiction, visual art, and commemorative art—will deepen students' historical understandings by revealing perspectives, motives, and consequences beyond those they have directly experienced, thereby giving rise to insights that broaden their

understanding of the possibilities for historical figures in the particular eras in which they lived.

We also offer three more specific reasons for teaching history in a way that includes the arts. The first and most evident reason to include the arts in teaching history is that the arts are powerfully engaging. They draw students in and add another dimension to their learning. The arts, and historical fiction, in particular, allow students to connect with people from the past in ways that are not available in the historical accounts they read in textbooks and other sources because they provide a window into people's motivations; fears; affections; social connections; economic, social, and political aspirations; and other personal aspects of their lives that students would not be privy to by simply consulting the historical record. Reading historical fictional accounts will increase students' interest in historical nonfiction accounts. Readers see historical fictional characters as real. It is difficult to imagine how a teenager who has read *Rilla of Ingleside* by L. M. Montgomery, could not find an historical account of the Canadian home front during the First World War compelling, for example. Or, students could gain deep insights about the possibilities for women in provincial life in England in the first half of the nineteenth century by reading about protagonist Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* by George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans) that would scaffold, and increase their interest in, the information they encounter in nonfiction accounts. We discuss this point in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Second, the arts help students learn to interrogate all representations for their implicit meanings. For example, a painting, or any other form of art, is a product of deliberate decisions by the artist. Students can ask who (which individuals or what type of person) was the artist trying to please and why. The arts present opportunities to closely examine how personal, social, religious, economic, and political motivations affect artistic representations. For example, students could ask why the artist Benjamin West chose not to include the people who actually did witness British General James Wolfe's death in his painting *The Death of General Wolfe* and, instead, depict people who were not present. They could ask what was the purpose of the Christian iconography in the painting: why are the people arranged like a Pieta? With some help from their teacher, students can come to understand how this painting represents the founding myth of English Canada, the victory of the British Empire over the claims of the French in British North America, and how this determined the choices the artist made. These ideas are discussed in Chapter 4.

Third, students can develop an understanding of how the arts can shape collective memory and historical consciousness. All art can do this, but commemorative art, with its "uplifting and sacred stor[ies]," is particularly powerful in this regard. As historians Ian McKay and Jamie Swift note about what they call "Vimyism" with reference to the Vimy Canadian National Memorial in France, "Vimyism thus offers Canadians an uplifting and sacred story of their origins—something to believe in."[50] It is important that students are aware of how commemorative art shapes collective memory and historical consciousness so that they are able to engage it as a historical source and subject it to critical interrogation. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

Navigating This Volume

In Chapter 2 we address five scholarly conversations about history, history education, and the relationship between history education and the arts. We will return to these conversations in various ways in the chapters that follow. The first conversation is about the nature of history and historical truth and the role of interpretation in history. We explore the question: Is history a science or an art? Historian Peter Novick has described the boundary between history and fiction as "fuzzier than as traditionally represented:"[51]

> What we are doing is exploring and thinking about the past with as much energy and intelligence as we can muster and then making up interesting, provocative, and even edifying stories about it as contributions to collective self-understanding(s). We would make no greater (but also no lesser) truth claims than poets or painters: no greater (but also no lesser) claim for support from society for this endeavor.[52]

The second scholarly conversation is about connections between history and the arts. This conversation considers the value of fictional representations of various kinds for promoting engagement with the past—for acquainting us with the "allure"[53] of the past, as Ann Rigney puts it. It looks at how history and the arts can be connected in order to create new and richer narrations that broaden and deepen our understandings of the past. These help us to better understand the present and, in turn, the future. The rise of cultural history is an aspect of this conversation. Cultural historians acknowledge the significant place of fictional

representations in our contemporary world and suggest that they warrant recognition as sources for engagement with, and understanding of, the past.

The third scholarly conversation is about collective memory and historical consciousness. History educator Peter Seixas says that collective memory "retains the immediacy of individual memory, but it also depends on what French historian Pierre Nora has called 'lieux de memoire,' or sites of memory. Our common, collective or public memory is built and maintained through a range of structures, symbols, and practices: statues, commemorations, place names … films."[54] Anna Clark and Carla Peck define historical consciousness as "the ways people orient themselves in time and how they are bound by the historical and cultural contexts which shape their sense of temporality and collective memory."[55]

The fourth scholarly conversation explores the question: What place do Indigenous perspectives have in history education? This question is topical in nations with Indigenous populations. We focus on the Canadian context for two reasons. We are most familiar with Canada and the question is more central here than in some other countries, for example, the United States, where it appears to be less apparent, at least to date. We review the positions of several Canadian scholars, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who have different views on this question and consider possibilities for a way forward.

The final scholarly conversation is about history education. One of the key themes addressed in this conversation deals with the ways individuals and collectives construct narratives about their place in the world and the sources on which they draw in doing so. A central finding of a large body of research in this area is that individuals and groups understand themselves and their place in the world temporally; they have a well-developed sense of historical consciousness that includes a deeply rooted sense of place as well as understandings of their past which shape their views of the present and future.[56] Whether or not we accept the arts as potential sources for historical investigation or as accounts of the past worth considering in history class, teachers are left with a dilemma: for the broader public, including many of our students, the arts, particularly in the form of books and films are a common source for the collective stories learners bring with them to class. The cognitive frames of students have been and continue to be shaped by the arts and a plethora of evidence demonstrates that failure to engage with this kind of prior knowledge renders teaching largely ineffectual.[57]