

# 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



## Assignment 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/](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/)

### **Letters Index**

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-4000-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-4000-e.html)

Your journals should include:

- A clear introduction of your character and their situation
- A body with proper citation (MLA style).
- **Researched** ideas developed in the body and makes a **thoughtful** summary of the immigrant experience.

**Date due:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Length of paper:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Topics

Your journal should develop the following topics:

**1. (Investigation) Investigate/research each particular aspect of the life of Susanna Moodie and/or Catharine Parr Traill. Invent a similar character and use your research to create a series of journal entries describing life in the backwoods of Upper Canada.**

- 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.)

**Your journal entries must give a detailed description of each of these aspects of life.**

## Secondary Sources

### Biographies

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-2000-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-2000-e.html)

### Emigration and Bush Life

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-3100-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-3100-e.html)

### Town Life

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-3200-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-3200-e.html)

## Primary Sources

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

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-5000-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-5000-e.html)

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

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-5001-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-5001-e.html)

### Letters Index:

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-4000-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/027013-4000-e.html)

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

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/027013-116-e.php?uid=23&uidc=ID&anchor=027013-6020.1-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/027013-116-e.php?uid=23&uidc=ID&anchor=027013-6020.1-e.html)

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

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/027013-116-e.php?uid=44&uidc=ID&anchor=027013-6020.1-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/027013-116-e.php?uid=44&uidc=ID&anchor=027013-6020.1-e.html)

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

URL: [www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/027013-116-e.php?uid=51&uidc=ID&anchor=027013-6020.1-e.html](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/1/027013-116-e.php?uid=51&uidc=ID&anchor=027013-6020.1-e.html)

## Other Sources

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

URL: [www.canadiana.org/](http://www.canadiana.org/)

### The Canadian Encyclopedia Online

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