

Heritage Minute: Wilder Penfield

What it's about:

- Neurosurgeon who founded the Montreal Neurological Institute in 1935, he was born and educated in the U.S. and England, came to Canada in 1928.
- Developed the “Montreal Procedure” for treating epilepsy (by identifying where there was scar tissue in the brain), he built very close/trusting relationships with his patients in order to allow this to work, because they were awake when he performed brain surgery.
- In the process, mapped a lot of brain functions (the seat of memory and the sensory and motor cortices), and seriously studied *deja-vu*.
- Companion of the Order of Canada in 1967, after his medical career he was dedicated to the support of university education.

What it's trying to say about Canadian identity (pick two, add one)

- Canadians are innovative and their contributions to the advancement of medicine are really important.
- Canadian hospitals are safe, innovative places where people can get excellent medical care.
- All Canadians, even poor ones, receive good medical care (i.e., ground-breaking brain surgery).
- Canadian doctors really care about their patients, and provide excellent care, including humane treatment, even in the 1930s for diseases of the mind.
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What's missing from this (pick two, add one)

- There were inequalities in the provision of healthcare in 1935, and they still exist (Indigenous Canadians, rural Canadians, Canadians living in poverty...).
- Penfield isn't “really” Canadian – geniuses might WORK in Canada, but the schools aren't good enough to train them – this is part of Penfield's later advocacy for better university education.
- The approach to this treatment is really risky – “I'm going to poke around in your brain and see what happens, hoping that I'll eventually be able to burn out the part of your brain causing seizures” – in a context where a failure could kill his patient, but isn't likely to cause the doctor any real harm – could he be exploiting his patients?
- The universal healthcare system doesn't exist until the 1940s – in the 1930s, hospitals are either private or run by the Catholic church – so not “everyone” got care, and the woman portrayed could get brain surgery, but not help controlling how many kids she had.
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How are your statements about Canadian identity linked to telling a single, coherent story?

***In your paper/presentation, you should be selecting from possible options for what your minute is saying about Canadian identity and what's missing from that, so that these are related – you're looking for what's being left out so that it is POSSIBLE to tell a particular story about Canada – not just what it's saying and facts about what's missing. ***