



### Wilmer Gold

**Film Summary:** The images of talented logging and working life photographer Wilmer Gold provide a powerful record of the lives of Vancouver Island's loggers and fallers. This film captures the challenges he faced in documenting their lives.

**Curriculum Application:**  
Social Studies 11

**The Essential Question:** How effective is photography in capturing moments of history; in particular the social/economic role of lumber and forest workers in British Columbian society?

### Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provides a short lesson option. ( 15 Minutes )
2. Learning activity on the key vocabulary of the logging and lumber industry.
3. Small group activity that leads into a class discussion on the vignette.
4. Small group activity to explore and analyze photographs of the depression era Logging Industry in British Columbia.

### Learning Objectives

1. To examine the portrayals of ordinary working peoples in British Columbia's coastal logging industry and to explore aspects of their work and camp lives.
2. To explore the community and social meanings of these portrayals.
3. To examine the nature of working lives as defined by, and captured within, the photographs of Wilmer Gold.
4. To examine the working life of photographer Wilmer Gold, and the challenges he faced alongside the loggers he photographed.

### Materials and Resources Provided

- [“Wilmer Gold” Episode 2- Working People – A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Lesson Activity 1: Discussion Questions
- Appendix 1: Wilmer Gold Biography
- Extension Activity 1- Photographic Analysis

### Additional Suggested Materials

- [“These were the reasons....” Chapter 6 BC Lumber Workers Story](#)
- [Edge of the World: B.C.’s Early Years- Felling Giants](#)
- [“Ocean Falls” Episode 3- Working People- A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- [“Mayo Singh” Episode 2- Working People- A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Check out the Ocean Falls and Mayo Singh Lesson plans on [Teach BC](#)

### Vignette Questions

1. In which part of British Columbia did Wilmer Gold capture his images of life in the forestry industry?
2. What economic crisis was occurring during the time Wilmer Gold was setting up his photography business?
3. Who were his primary customers? Who else did he sell his photographs to?
4. What innovation did Wilmer Gold create to help him produce his photographs? Why would this be helpful to both Wilmer Gold and his customers?
5. Why do you think his photographs were popular in this time period? What did photography bring to the “story” of logging that words could not effectively match?

### Lesson Activities

1. Students should have some previous teaching on the subject of working during the Great Depression, and the dangers of working in the woods. They should have had some previous teaching about the extraction of lumber from the forests, including: Scouting – finding suitable trees & valuable trees, Scaling – climbing the tree (inspection & preparation for felling), Topping – removing the unprofitable top of the tree, Felling – sawing the tree down, Skidding—chaining up, and pulling the trunk out to prepare delivery to the mill.
2. Brainstorm a list of common themes, words, and images under headings such as:
  - a. “Seasonal Work in the Woods”\_“Forest Worker’s Tasks On the Job”\_“Dangers On the Job”, “Individual & Team Work”, “Life in the Logging Camp”, “Life and Employment in the Off-Season”
3. Show the Vignette Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia-“Wilmer Gold”.
4. Distribute the Handout “Wilmer Gold: Biography” and read it to the class, or have them read it individually, or in groups. Follow-up with Lesson Activity 2 “Discussion Questions”
5. Distribute Extension Activity 1: Photographic Analysis and questions to consider and the companion set of 10 Historic photographs.

### Lesson Activity 1: Discussion Questions

### Lesson: Wilmer Gold

Following the watching of the vignette; Wilmer Gold read the biography of Wilmer Gold (Appendix 1) and answer the following question in small groups or as assigned by your teacher. Be prepared to discuss your answers with the rest of the class.

1. What challenges and dangers did workers in the logging industry face in the working woods in the 1930's?
2. Which of these were faced individually and which were faced collectively?
3. What features of workers and their lives in the working woods of the 1930's are portrayed in the images and common stereotypes of lumber workers?
4. What aspects of the workers and their lives are not portrayed in the stereotypes?
5. Do Wilmer Gold's images, and the reality of his working life, show more of the authentic life of the workers and their work?
6. To what degree might Wilmer Gold's images be influenced by his need to sell the images to make a personal living?
7. What is missing from Wilmer Gold's images, and why might these images be excluded?
8. Which type of images might the forestry company wish to purchase from Wilmer, and which types would they not be interested in acquiring, or in being recorded?
9. Which type of images might the forestry workers wish to purchase from Wilmer, and which types would they not be interested in acquiring, or in being recorded?
10. Which type of images might the woodworkers' union International wish to purchase from Wilmer, and which types would they not be interested in acquiring, or in being recorded?



Yarding Operation with a steam driven “Donkey” engine in the background  
photo courtesy of Kaatsa Station Museum & Archives KSM-A-N00893-nd-NIS

**Wilmer Gold** was born in Victoria, B.C. in 1893 but was raised in Alberta. He was bitten by the photography bug at a very early age, his first photo was taken at the age of 9! As a young man, he eventually apprenticed as a photographer in Edmonton.

In 1915, he moved to Banff where he met his future wife Margaret. While living in the Canadian Rockies they also had a son, Holt. In 1934, at the age of 41, Wilmer, along with his family, moved to Vancouver Island and settled in Youbou, on Cowichan Lake, where he continued as a professional photographer focusing on the logging industry of Vancouver Island.

### **Wilmer’s Two Cameras:**

Manufactured in the early 1900s by Century Camera Company of Rochester, NY, this camera took photographs on glass plates measuring 5 by 7 inches. The camera itself is 8 1/2 inches tall & wide, and 12 inches long.

Beautifully constructed of wood, leather, brass and glass, this style of camera is often termed *self-casing*. This is because the entire mechanism folds into a protective and compact box that is easy to carry. Other terms used to describe cameras of this design are *field*, *view* and *folding*. *Folding* makes sense - because the camera folds up. The term *field* is used to describe a large format camera made to be easily carried outdoors for use in the *field*. *View* refers to a camera where the lens and/or back can be adjusted from

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parallel dead-center allowing the photographer to vary the scene's perspective. This Field Camera is actually very heavy, and was usually used on a tripod.

Composition and focusing was usually performed by viewing the subject on the ground glass at the back of the camera. However it was also possible to frame the scene in the waist-level optical viewfinder on the camera bed. In that case, focusing could be set by aligning a pointer to a focusing scale mounted on the front bed. The distance would need to be measured or guessed.



Century 5x7 Glass Plate Field Camera



Camera back open to show glass focusing screen



Waist-level optical view finder

Image source- <http://www.vintagephoto.tv/century43.shtml>

### Graflex "Speed Graphic" Field Camera

The Speed Graphic camera has two shutters - focal plane and in-lens; three viewfinders - optical, wire frame and ground glass. It came with interchangeable lenses, and could close up its front for portability. The bellows acted as an additional zoom function. Its patented focal plane shutter and reflex focusing were so successful as a press camera that the Graflex company marketed this camera specifically for the emerging "press" photographer.



<http://collectionsonline.nmsi.ac.uk/browser.php?m=objects&kv=15087&i=114584>

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### The Significance of Wilmer's Photos

Wilmer Gold used the latest equipment available at the time, and carried his equipment with him. Along with cameras, he also carried a tripod, light meter, focusing cloth, sensitized plates, plenty of film and developing chemicals. When the first compact camera arrived he bought a Rolieflex and used it for years. He had a portable developing lab



custom built from a Willys' Overland car chassis which he towed from place to place behind his car. This trailer has been restored and now forms part of the Kaatsa Station Museum collection.

Wilmer Gold would later go home, develop his photos then trudge back to sell them to the individuals or companies that he had photographed. He would also capture less scripted moments that reflected the working life of the loggers themselves.

His work appeared in *Time*, *Life*, *Look* and *Maclean's* magazines. He also authored the book "*Logging As It Was*" (1985), containing many of his photographs, which traced the lives of the loggers and evolution of logging on Vancouver Island.

Photo courtesy of Kaatsa Station Museum & Archives  
*KSM-A-N00656-nd-NIS*

Wilmer died on April 14, 1992, just a few weeks short of his 99th birthday. Wilmer Gold's photo collection is believed to be the largest logging and saw milling photo collection in BC. The Wilmer Gold Photo Collection, housed in the Kaatsa Station Museum, contains approximately 1000 photographic negatives. The Kaatsa Station Museum has the goal to digitize all the images to make it easier to view the collection, while preserving the negatives—many of which are on glass.

After his death, Lucille Smith, a former Youbou resident, recalled that when her family moved to Camp 6 (many decades prior), Gold came and stayed with them for a month to take pictures of logging and community life.

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“Every day, he headed out to the bush, riding on logs when there was no crummy (bus) and walking long distances, all the while taking pictures of logging and anything associated that was happening in the area” --  
**Lucille Smith**

Photo courtesy of Kaatsa Station Museum & Archives KSM-A-N00887-nd-NIS

“In his lifetime he saw the world go from horse and buggy to space travel. With his photography he created an invaluable record of the world and especially of the people around him.” --  
**Lucille Smith**

### **SOURCES:**

Gold, Wilmer. *The Golden Years: An Autobiography of Wilmer Hazelwood Gold*, (Manning Press/Tillicum Lodge, 1969).

Gold, Wilmer. *Logging As It Was: A Pictorial History of Logging on Vancouver Island*, (Morriss Publishing, 1985).

Drushka, Ken. *Working in the Woods* (Madiera Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1992).

Mackie, Richard Somerset. *Island Timber: A Social History of the Comox Logging* (Sono Nis Press, 2000).

Routley, Bill. *IWA Canada 1-80: A 60 Year History (1937-1997)*, (Duncan, BC, IWA, 1997).

“Gold’s photographs chronicle local history”, May 16, 2011, [bclocalnews.com/community](http://www.bclocalnews.com/community)

<http://www.kaatzamuseum.ca/gold.htm>

<http://www.amazingvancouverisland.com/2011/04/logging-history-comes-alive-at-kaatza-station-museum/>

<http://www.bclocalnews.com/community/121960374.html?mobile=true>



Photo courtesy of Kaatsa Station Museum & Archives KSM&A-N00673-nd-NIS.tif

## Lesson: Wilmer Gold

### Extension Activity 1: Photographic Analysis Questions

Distribute the ten photographs and discuss them in groups of three. All photographs are provided courtesy of the Kaatsa Station Museum & Archives. <http://www.kaatzamuseum.ca/>

Questions to consider:

1. Why did the photographer take a picture of this image? What was the photographer's point of view and what message was being conveyed?
2. Was it 'staged' for effect or was this a spontaneous (candid) shot?
3. What is missing, or was omitted? What lies outside the frame of the photograph?
4. Is there an event taking place? Describe, but do not interpret, what you see.
5. How does the visual make you feel? Describe your personal feelings and judgments about the image, based on what you have seen.
6. What is your knowledge of the snapshot, based on your background knowledge, studies, and experiences?
7. Can you speculate as to the geographical location of the image or the date or era in which it was created?
8. What do the images provide that is useful to the study of history?



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