Lesson: Mayo Singh

**Activity 2 - Newspaper Assignment**

**Writing a newspaper story for the Victoria *Times Colonist*, September, 1928**.

In this activity, you must role play John Silverton, a fictitious journalist with the Victoria *Times Colonist* newspaper. In 1928, you are directed by your editor to travel to Mayo, near Lake Cowichan, a few hours’ drive north of Victoria. There you must interview what the editor has heard is a “unique” community in which the major employer of hundreds of lumber workers is not a “white,” but a Sikh man from the Punjab region of Indian. In this the “Roaring Twenties,” a year before the Great Depression, you, John Silverton, travel by road to the community of Mayo (later renamed Paldi as it now known), and find it a multicultural settlement. Mayo is thriving in a booming 1920s economy that requires lumber for building, bridges, and railway ties, among other uses. Through the use of interpreters, assume you are able to meet and talk with eight fictitious characters living in and around Mayo in 1928, including Mr. Mayo Singh Manhas, founder of the Mayo Brothers Lumber Company.

Your role is to interview and prepare notes on each of the eight characters. While this is fictional and so requires use of your imagination, there is much you can do to develop an understanding for what life was like for these characters in 1928. You should:

* View the Knowledge Networks, vignette, *Mayo Singh*
* Analyze Select Narratives regarding Indo-Canadians in the BC Lumber Industry
* Go online to the following site which provides a simplified history of Mayo Singh who established Mayo. First, skim read the article:

[Mayo Singh | The Canadian Encyclopedia](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/mayo-singh)

* Go online to get a deeper look into the life of Mayo and the unique multicultural community he founded and nurtured. This is a critical source for your assignment. Read the article:

[Paldi - Learning Portal (royalbcmuseum.bc.ca)](https://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/paldi/)

* As you read both online articles, use the following organizer, “Journalists Notes on the People of Mayo” to make notes in the space under each character profile. Ask questions from the point of view of each of the characters. For example, how do Surjit or Amerjit Singh feel about the many unmarried men in the community? How do whites such as Betty Freeman or Andrew Sawyer regard the community? What was it like in the Mayo community during the three day “Jor Mela” celebrations? Add “quotes” under each character. For example, Mr. Williams Jackson might have said, “I don’t know how they manage to keep that mill going, but they do.” You might later quote that in your article. In addition, examine the photographs as you try to imagine life in the community from the point of view of each character.
* Finally, develop your product, a newspaper article of around 250 words. Add your own title, and by-line (*by John Silverton*) in which you write about Mayo Singh and the community of Mayo, B.C. Remember newspaper articles covering communities and the individuals in them frequently include short quotes from actual individuals. You may find and incorporate a useful photograph in your story.

Important note to teacher and students: An interesting variation involving more co-operation and dialogue between students is to organize students in groups of four and break down the work into more manageable “chunks.” Perhaps make each individuals responsible for only two character profiles. Students would then contribute their thoughts to a collectively written article. Alternatively, the whole group might produce a single article. One student might write the opening paragraph, two students prepare the body including narratives, and the fourth student might write a conclusion to this piece of journalism.

**Journalist notes on Mayo and residents** (remember except for Mayo Singh, all characters are fictitious)

**(add comments and possible quotes for each resident)**

1**. Mayo Singh Manhas** arrived in Canada to join his older brother in 1906. He emigrated from the Punjab region of India and for a time worked on the railway around San Francisco before working up the coast to join his brother at the Fernridge Lumber Mill, at Rosedale, near Chilliwack, B.C. A diligent worker, Mayo Singh joined a syndicate of over thirty Sikhs and purchased the ailing mill in 1916, renaming it the Cheam Lumber Company. In 1917, this syndicate purchased another mill, the Marcum Lumber Company near New Westminster. With the assistance of the syndicate Mayo then moved to Vancouver Island, built and equipped the Mayo Brothers Timber Company. He currently employs Indo-Canadian, Japanese, Chinese, and “white” workers many of whom have worked for Caucasian mill owners. In 1925, he marries Bishan Kour in the Punjab, returns and becomes known as a simply dressed, unassuming, and very generous employer and community minded man. By 1928 Mayo is a diverse community with a school and community hall as well as an Indian and Japanese place of worship.

2. **Surjit Singh** is an Indo-Canadian who worked alongside Mayo Singh in the old Fernridge Lumber Company near Chilliwack. When Mayo and thirty five other Sikhs purchase the mill in 1916 and rename it Cheam Labour Company, Surjit remains one of their favourite and trusted employees. He moved to Vancouver and helped Mayo Singh establish the new Mayo Brothers Timber Company, in Mayo, near Lake Cowichan.

3. **Amarjeet Sangh** is Surjit’s spouse. Like other Indo-Canadian wives in the community, she married Surjit in an arranged marriage in India during his visit in 1924. She has a three year old, a toddler, and is expecting a third child. She assists newly arrived Indian women and their families. As a result of the unique cultural background in Paldi, she has learned a special “Paldi” form of English. She is sometimes visited by Ms. Freeman, the young schoolteacher, when Ms. Freeman requires advice on dealing with Sikh families in the community.

4. **Hiro Fujimura** worked as a fishermen on the BC coast before working in the Marcum Lumber Company mill near New Westminster, BC. In 1917, Mayo Singh and his syndicate of over thirty men purchased the company, and later invite him to work alongside Surjit in helping to establish the Mayo Brothers Timber Company in Mayo. Unlike the Chinese and Indo-Canadian workers, Hiro and several other Japanese men have had wives and children living with them in Canada for many years. He is happy his employer and his countrymen have also been able to bring wives into the community over the last few years. His children are doing well in the Mayo school. His wife, Ryoko, speaks good English and occasionally visits Ms. Freeman in the school.

5. **Andrew Sawyer** is 48, an older “white” Caucasian mill worker who has worked at several mills along the BC coast over the last thirty years. He witnessed the hatred and violence of the 1907 riots while working in a Vancouver sawmill. He has worked alongside Asian lumber workers for years. He moved from the Cheam Lumber Mill near Chilliwack, B.C., to work in the Mayo mill in 1925 and then began work in the Mayo company store in 1927.

6. **Ning Zhang**. Ning is a peaceful man who lived in Vancouver and experienced the violence of the 1907 race riots in Chinatown and Japantown. Like other Chinese men in Mayo, he supports a wife, children, and an extended family in China but cannot visit them because of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923 (known as the Asiatic Exclusion Act) which now prevents any newcomers from China, or prevents any Chinese currently in Canada from ever returning if they do leave the country. He welcomes the relative peace of Mayo and the Cowichan Valley.

7. **Miss Betty Freeman** is a nineteen year old unmarried schoolteacher from Victoria now teaching in the two room Mayo School. She has lived and taught in the Mayo community for two years, somewhat of a rare occurrence in the history of rural schooling. She has the unique viewpoint of seeing children of Indian, Japanese and “white” families in her mixed grades classroom. She also assists in setting up some afterschool and weekend events such as choirs and plays involving children in the Mayo community hall. She is well respected by the families.

8. **William Jackson** lives just outside Paldi. He is a retired owner of a sawmill that closed down near Duncan. He now writes columns for newspapers as well as publications such as the *Western Lumberman*, a publication which was not always kind to Indo-Canadians in the BC lumber industry. For example, when Mayo Singh took over the Marcum Lumber Company near New Westminster eleven years earlier in 1917, the *Western Lumberman* had written, “Still another coast mill has been taken over by Hindoos.” William Jackson is inclined to agree with the general anti-Asian viewpoint then alive in British Columbia.