Background
The first French visitors to what is now Vermont came with Samuel de Champlain in 1609. Early on, the French made settlements at Montreal in Canada. French trappers traveled into Vermont, where they lived alongside and traded with the Abenakis, adopting Abenaki-style clothing and survival skills and living off the land. French Catholic missionaries also came to bring their religion to the Abenaki. The French also began to move more permanently into in Vermont. In 1731, they began to build a fort at Crown Point. By 1755, as many as 200-250 soldiers, former soldiers, and civilians lived there. The land and the furs of New England proved attractive not only to the French, but to the British. Clashes between the groups and their Native American allies erupted throughout 1740s and 50s as they struggled for control of territory and trade routes. The English, French, and Indian War (1754-1763), decided the conflict in favor of the British, prompting English settlers to move north into Vermont. But in Quebec and other parts of eastern Canada, a distinct French culture remained. In the second half of the 19th century, descendants of Vermont’s original settlers began to leave the state in search of opportunity, lured away by better farmland in states to the west and to factory jobs in other parts of New England. These emigrants left farmland behind, and immigrants moved in to fill the gap. Among them were French Canadians.

From 1840-1930, about 900,000 French Canadians migrated from Québec to the United States. Most came to New England, and many of those who came to Vermont were farmers. Land had become scarce in Québec due to dramatic population growth.

French Canadians also found work at textile mills such as the American Woolen Mill in Winooski, Vermont and the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington, as well as in the quarries of Barre and the Rutland area. Children as young as eight years old worked in the mills, putting in long hours under very dangerous conditions for pennies per hour. Photographs of children at work helped reformers establish child labor laws. In 1916, Congress passed the Keating-Owens Act, which set a minimum working age of 14 for industrial jobs and 16 for mining, and set a maximum 8-hour day for children.

Throughout Vermont, French Canadians formed vibrant cultural communities. In homes, businesses, and churches, French Canadian food, music, traditions, and the French language formed the cornerstone. The French Canadian influence in Vermont also helped change the state’s political landscape. As of the 1950s, Vermont had been a rock-solid Republican state for nearly a century. But French Canadians, most of whom supported the Democratic Party, play a critical role in the election of Democrat Phil Hoff, first as a Vermont representative in 1960, and two years later as Vermont’s first Democratic governor since 1853.

Despite their work ethic and their cultural contributions, French Canadians in the 18th and much of the 19th century faced discrimination in Vermont. One reason was that most practiced the Catholic religion, and most of the people who already lived in Vermont were Protestant. While discrimination caused some French Canadian Vermonters to hide their cultural roots, many refused to do so. Today, discrimination against Vermonters of French Canadian descent is largely a thing of the past, and many Franco-American Vermonters are proudly displaying their heritage.

About This Segment
Produced by Michael Couture with the assistance of Louise Michaels, Kenneth Peck, and Nora Jacobsen, this segment includes commentary by Yvan Plouffe of Charlotte about his life as a farmer and musician by the Beaudoin family of Burlington, a group known for its performances of traditional French Canadian music.

Before Viewing
• What components make up a culture?
• Who were the first French people to come to Vermont? Why did they come here?
• What are some examples of the French Canadian influence on Vermont?

Vocabulary
French Canadian: a person whose ancestors were French colonists who came to live in what is now Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries
immigrant: a person who moves into one country from another country

After Viewing
• How have French Canadians contributed to Vermont’s culture and economy?
• Why did French Canadians face discrimination?
• How is your childhood different from that of Yvan Plouffe? In what ways is it the same?
• How do cultural traditions such as music, food, and religious beliefs help to hold an immigrant community together?

Children at Work In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children as young as eight years old worked in Vermont’s textile mills—and in mills throughout New England. Documentary photographers recorded some remarkable images of these young workers. Doing online and library research, find some of these arresting images. Print them out or photocopy them, and hang them in a classroom gallery. To accompany your photo show, write a short essay about young workers in the mills.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations
Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Design research (3-4:3; 5-6:3); Conduct research (3-4:4; 5-6:4); Make connections to research (3-4:6; 5-6:6); Communicate findings (3-4:7; 5-6:7); Connect past with present (3-4:8; 5-6:8); Understand how humans interpret history (3-4:9; 5-6:9); Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13); Understand issues of human interdependence (3-4:16; 5-6:16); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (3-4:17; 5-6:17); Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (3-4:18; 5-6:18)
A Classroom Concert Today, many people across Vermont play traditional French Canadian music. With the help of your music teacher, bring one or more of these musicians to your classroom for an interview and live performance. To prepare for your interview, make a list of questions that will help you to find out more about French Canadian music. Conduct your interview first, then enjoy a short concert. Be sure to record both on digital video to share with others in your school.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations
Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Communicate findings (3-4:7; 5-6:7); Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13)

Other Immigrants French Canadians weren’t the only immigrants to come to Vermont in the late 1800s and early 1900s. With the help of your local historical society, find out as much as you can about other immigrant groups. Where did they come from? Why did they immigrate to Vermont? What have they contributed to life in your community? Present your findings in the form of a short talk.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations
Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Design research (3-4:3; 5-6:3); Conduct research (3-4:4; 5-6:4); Make connections to research (3-4:6; 5-6:6); Communicate findings (3-4:7; 5-6:7); Connect past with present (3-4:8; 5-6:8); Understand how humans interpret history (3-4:9; 5-6:9); Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13); Understand issues of human interdependence (3-4:16; 5-6:16); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (3-4:17; 5-6:17); Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (3-4:18; 5-6:18)

A Cemetery Search One way to explore the influence of an ethnic group on your community’s history is to visit local cemeteries. To find out the influence of French Canadians in your town, visit one or more of its burial places. During your visit, do a search for French surnames. Gather evidence by photographing those tombstones. Try to estimate the numbers of French names to those of other ethnic groups. Based on those estimates, what hypothesis can you develop about the French Canadian influence on your community? What steps would you need to make to confirm or refute this hypothesis? Present your findings in the form of a photo essay. You may wish to ask a middle school French teacher for help.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations
Initiate an inquiry (5-6:1; 7-8:1); Develop a hypothesis (5-6:2; 7-8:2); Design research (5-6:3; 7-8:3); Conduct research (5-6:4; 7-8:4); Develop reasonable supporting explanations (5-6:5; 7-8:5); Communicate findings (5-6:7; 7-8:7); Connect past with present (5-6:8; 7-8:8); Understand how humans interpret history (5-6:9; 7-8:9); Understand how cultures change (5-6:13; 7-8:13)

Grades 9-12

A Change in Politics For nearly a century, Vermont’s voters almost universally elected Republicans to all major political posts. Then, in 1962, they elected Phil Hoff, a Democrat, as governor. French Canadians played a big role in Hoff’s victory—and in the political changes that gave the Democratic Party a much larger influence in the state’s politics. With the help of the group of your classmates, create a hypothesis about why this might have come to be. Then do research to find out why this transformation occurred. Present your findings in the form of a PowerPoint or slide presentation. If you can, include charts showing voting statistics.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations
Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1); Develop a hypothesis (9-10:2; 11-12:2); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4); Develop reasonable supporting explanations (9-10:5; 11-12:5); Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Understand how humans interpret history (9-10:9; 11-12:9); Understand how cultures change (9-10:13; 11-12:13); Understand various forms of government (9-10:15; 11-12:15); Understand issues of human interdependence (9-10:16; 11-12:16); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (9-10:17; 11-12:17)

The French Canadian Sound The Beaudoin Family is known for its performances of traditional French Canadian music. But they are not the only ones who can experience the fun of playing these tunes from long ago. Join together with some of your classmates who play instruments and/or sing. Collect a few arrangements of traditional French Canadian tunes. First rehearse them, then perform them for your class. Record your performance on digital video, and share it online.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations
Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4); Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Understand how cultures change (9-10:13; 11-12:13)

A Family History With the help of your social studies teacher, identify a family of French Canadian origin in your community. Then make a short documentary film about the family. Include information about the family’s arrival in Vermont, its history since then, the ways family members have made their livings, and how things have changed—and stayed the same—in recent years. Remember that family photos can be a
In Vermont, the first Tuesday of March is Town Meeting Day. On that day, “floor meetings,” Australian ballot voting, or a combination of the two decide much of the business of towns, including electing local officials and voting on town budgets.

Town meeting has its roots in the early Puritan settlements of New England, in which church authorities often governed towns, and members of the church got together on a regular basis to make decisions about town issues. The first town meeting in what is now Vermont was held in Bennington in 1762, before Vermont became a state. The tradition continues in many Vermont towns today.

Before a town meeting is held, a warning, or agenda, is published. In the “floor meeting” format, issues are publicly debated and decided by the registered voters attending. In an Australian ballot, otherwise known as a secret ballot, votes are cast anonymously in the voting booth or even by mail. Today, most towns use a combination of floor meeting and Australian ballot voting to do their business.

Exceptions to town meeting include cities, which by charter do not have town meeting, but do conduct elections to choose public officials and vote on city business. Brattleboro has a representative town meeting, in which voters form districts within the town and choose representatives to vote for them at town meeting.

Vermont town meeting is often cited as an example of pure democracy, yet it is not universally admired. In recent decades, some have argued that town meeting actually undermines democracy, as relatively few of the citizens of a town may choose or be able to attend the meeting. These citizens favor voting by Australian ballot. Supporters of town meeting argue that a floor meeting engenders a deeper investment in town issues, allows for the adjustment of a proposal rather than a simple up or down vote, and prepares citizens to decide issues with civil debate rather than acrimony.

The breadth of issues brought before town meeting has also created controversy in recent years. Issues such as global climate change, a proposal for the impeachment of President George W. Bush, and the debate over the continued operation of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power facility have all been part of Vermont town meeting discussions. Some support the inclusion of these broader issues, stating that town meeting represents the perfect opportunity for citizens’ voices to be heard, and that national issues often have local effects. Others oppose the inclusion, taking the position that only issues directly related to town business should be decided at town meeting.