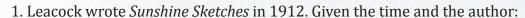# The Demographics of Mariposa

When viewed from our day and age, one of Mariposa's striking features is its lack of diversity. The town is largely white, Protestant, and British. It does not look much like Canada today: according to the 2016 Census, there are 35 million Canadians. Of that, 7.5 million of us are considered migrants and 7.6 million of us declared ourselves to be visible minorities (excluding Indigenous peoples). 1.7 million of us identified as Indigenous, including 980,000 First Nations, 590,000 Métis and 65,000 Inuit people.

Although there is a discrepancy between Leacock's Mariposa and Canada today, Mariposa did look a lot like most small Canadian towns of the early 20th century, especially in Ontario. The 1911 census recorded 7.2 million Canadians. Of that, 1.6 million people were considered migrants—half of these migrants having been born in the British Isles—and only 95,000 people were considered visible minorities. 105,000 people identified as First Nations or Inuit. So while Leacock's Mariposa is white, British, and Protestant, this can be seen as a reflection of Canada's make-up at the time.

Because *Sunshine Sketches* reflects the time it was written, Indigenous peoples are amongst the people who have limited portrayals. This is perhaps best-illustrated in "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias." In this chapter, the steamship Mariposa Belle travels towards "Indian Island," a place possibly inspired in name by Big Chief Island on Lake Couchiching. On the way to the island, the passengers turn their discussion towards Indigenous artifacts and a former canoe portage, likely inspired by the narrows where Lake Couchiching meets Lake Simcoe. It is unfortunate that the Indigenous peoples of the area are only portrayed in *Sunshine Sketches* through their artifacts and history. This marginalisation is one of the problems of not just *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* but of the overwhelming majority of turn-of-the-century and modernist Canadian literature.

As can be seen, on the whole Mariposa may be full of colourful characters but it is not a very ethnically-diverse community. This is something readers of historic Canadian literature must learn to reconcile. And this is also why books like *Sunshine Sketches* are rightly being moved to a place of less prominence and less attention today, as we diversify and Indigenise the study of Canadian literature.

Discuss

1. Leacock wrote *Sunshine Sketches* in 1912. Given the time and the author:
    a) What perspectives would be dominant in *Sunshine Sketches*?
    b) What perspectives would be left out of *Sunshine Sketches*?
    c) How would this shape the overall narrative of the book?

2. Literature, art, and popular culture reflect Canada. As our communities have diversified, so too have our artistic portrayals of them. Consider more recent comedic portrayals of Canadian communities in various mediums, such as the CBC's *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, *Schitt's Creek*, and *Kim's Convenience*, CTV's *Corner Gas*, APTN's *Mohawk Girls*, or Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass*.
    a) How do diversified portrayals help shift our centres of discourse?

Discuss ...continued

      b)   Can you think of other contemporary, humourous portrayals of Canada that reflect our growing diversity?

3. John Raulston Saul said that "Stephen Leacock set a pattern for Canadian comics and comic writers that goes on to this day"[11]. As you read *Sunshine Sketches*, think about the portrayals of Canada you listed in question 2(b).

      a)   What characteristics do your examples share with *Sunshine Sketches*?

      b)   Do the similarities between your examples and *Sunshine Sketches* tell us anything about what defines us as Canadians?

      c)   Do the similarities between characters from your examples and characters from *Sunshine Sketches* tell us anything about human nature?

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11   "Stephen Leacock." *Extraordinary Canadians*. PMA Biographies, Inc., 2011, www.cpac.ca/en/programs/extraordinary-canadians/episodes/49649320, 0:39