

## Aboriginal Perspectives Unit Guide for the Theme The Arts

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### Overall Objective

This unit is designed to develop an awareness of and an appreciation for Aboriginal art. The focus is on individual artists and their creative processes. A strong representation of work from a variety of First Nations artists is included in this unit.

### Grade Levels

7-12

### Content Areas

Visual Arts

Language Arts

Career Guidance

Social Studies

History

### Films (and excerpts used)

*Bill Reid*, 1979 excerpt 1 (3 min 15 s – 5 min 33 s)

*The Living Stone*, 1958 excerpt 1 (18 min 18 s – 21 min 48 s)

*Kanata: Legacy of the Children of Aataentsic*, 1999 excerpt 4 (12 min 15 s – 14 min 38 s)

*Kwa'nu'te': Micmac and Maliseet Artists*, 1991

Excerpt 1 (27 min 32 s – 29 min 10 s)

Excerpt 2 (38 min 09 s – 39 min 50 s)

NB: The excerpts and related films can be viewed online free of charge at  
<[www.nfb.ca/aboriginalperspectives](http://www.nfb.ca/aboriginalperspectives)> in The Arts theme.

### Material Required

Internet access, data projector or overhead, art materials, a large rough stone.

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### Summary

The spirit of every Aboriginal culture can be observed through its art. Certain symbols have become associated with a particular people or culture, for example the totem of the Haida, carvings of the Inuit, or paintings of the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet. Artistic expression is second only to language as an indicator of a people's vitality and cultural well-being.

### Introduction Activity (7 minutes)

With the class, brainstorm examples of symbols associated with the past and present of various cultures and countries, e.g., France (and Quebec), *fleur de lis*; Egypt, *great pyramids*; Inuit, *stone carving*. Discuss the significance of these symbols and how we come to perceive various cultures through them.

**ACTIVITY 1: Understanding Identity Through Cultural Symbols** (20 minutes)**Step 1:**

- Have students write down a list of symbols associated with their own cultural identity.
- Encourage them to think about how those symbols help to shape their perception of self and the perceptions of others.

**Step 2:**

- Watch the film excerpt *Bill Reid*, paying close attention to the significance of the totem in Haida culture.
- Watch the film excerpt from *The Living Stone*, noting the importance of stone carving to the Inuit.

**Step 3:** Have students write a personal response about the importance of cultural symbols in their own lives, comparing their own experience to those of the people portrayed in the film clips.

**ACTIVITY 2: Talking Circles** (45-60 minutes)

**Step 1:** To help create a classroom climate where everyone's views and opinions are respected and listened to, use the talking circle. (See the notes below for more details.) After showing *The Living Stone*, have the students form circle and take turns sharing their thoughts on the film.

**Step 2:** Project an image of an uncarved stone to the class. You can use a still image from the film clip, if you like. Focus attention on the general shape of the stone and elicit ideas on what might be revealed by carving it. Showing an actual uncarved stone would be ideal since students could view it from many perspectives.

**Closure Activity** (2 minutes)

Ask students to begin noticing the vast array of cultural symbols around them and to reflect on how those symbols shape their perceptions of themselves and the world.

**Check for Understanding**

Ask students to comment on why they were asked to sit in a circle and the possible significance of this shape in Aboriginal cultures.

**Evaluation rubric**

See the appendix for:

Talking Circle Rubric

Journal Writing Rubric

**References and Resources**

*Sacred Tree Teachers' Guide*, 1982. Four Worlds International, Lethbridge, Alberta.

## Appendix

### Rubric for TALKING CIRCLES

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Participation</b>	Actively participates, paraphrases; encourages others; is patient; is enthusiastic	Shares some ideas; requires encouragement; sometimes needs redirection; may need prompting.	Off-task; distracting; inappropriate responses or contributions.
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Clearly identifies problem; considers others' viewpoints; formulates conclusions, makes comparisons and contrasts; applies extended learnings.	Identifies the problem through restating main points, showing a general understanding; some/limited application of ideas.	Demonstrates little comprehension of the problem; comes to hasty conclusions; little or no consideration of others' viewpoints.
<b>Communication of Ideas</b>	Has a well defined position; uses questioning, paraphrasing and clarifying; uses positive body language (eye contact, posture, voice); supports others and is convincing	Demonstrates ideas in a general way; limited paraphrasing and questioning; passive interaction.	Vague positions; judgmental; confrontational; shares own point of view in a negative fashion or is non-committal/withdrawn.
<b>Use of Knowledge</b>	Shares in-depth knowledge; applies knowledge to past, present and future issues.	Shares a general knowledge of the issue.	Refrains from contributing any knowledge or denigrates others' knowledge.

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## Journal Writing

Can be used as a teacher or student rubric.

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	No attempt was made to catch the reader's attention in the first paragraph.	First paragraph has a weak "grabber."	A catchy beginning was attempted but was rather confusing.	First paragraph has a "grabber" or catchy beginning.
<b>Organization</b>	Ideas and scenes seem to be randomly arranged.	The journal entry is a little hard to follow. The transitions are sometimes not clear.	The journal entry is pretty well organized. One idea or scene may seem out of place. Clear transitions are used.	The journal entry is very well organized. One idea or scene follows another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.
<b>Requirements</b>	Many requirements were not met.	Most (about 75%) of the written requirements were met, but several were not.	Almost all (about 90%) of the written requirements were met.	All of the written requirements (date, length, effort, salutation, answering questions) were met.
<b>Comprehension</b>	The reader can understand little of what I am trying to communicate.	The reader can understand less than half of what I am trying to communicate.	The reader can understand most of what I am trying to communicate.	The reader can understand all of what I am trying to communicate.

Journals are not marked for mechanics, i.e., spelling and punctuation, because the student is **practising** language skills. Without a place to practise, risk-taking is inhibited. If a journal entry is later polished as a written piece, then the following scale for spelling could apply:

<b>Spelling and Punctuation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 8 to 10 or more spelling and punctuation mistakes.</li> <li>• Basic spelling rules are ignored.</li> <li>• Mechanics interfere with comprehension.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 5 to 8 spelling and punctuation errors.</li> <li>• Basic spelling rules are applied.</li> <li>• Mechanics occasionally interrupt the readers' attention to content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 3 to 5 spelling and punctuation errors.</li> <li>• All but complex or sophisticated spelling patterns are well handled.</li> <li>• Mechanics are not noticed by reader.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 1 or 2 spelling or punctuation mistakes.</li> <li>• Even complex or sophisticated spelling patterns are well handled.</li> <li>• Mechanics enhance comprehension.</li> </ul>
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## Teachers' notes

### • *Talking Circles*

Talking circles are useful when the topic under consideration has no right or wrong answer or when people need to share feelings. Moral or ethical issues can be discussed in a non-judgmental climate. The purpose of talking circles is to create a safe environment for students to share their points of view. They come to believe that what they say will be listened to and accepted without criticism: they gain an empathetic appreciation for opinions different from their own.

Talking circles **may** need a facilitator (especially when the process is first introduced) to ensure that the guidelines are followed. The following list is for teachers and students:

- All comments should concern the question or issue, not the comments that other people have made.
- One person speaks at a time. Everyone else should be listening in a non-judgmental way. It helps to use an object that is passed from speaker to speaker.
- Silence is an acceptable response. No one should be pressured to contribute.
- Depending on the purpose of the discussion, it is often better to hold talking circles in small groups rather than with the whole class. For students who are reluctant to verbalize their ideas, small group discussions may be less intimidating.
- No comments that put down others or oneself are allowed.

Adapted with permission from *Sacred Tree Teachers' Guide*, 1982. Four Worlds International, Lethbridge, Alberta.