

Documentary Lens Lesson Plan for *The Living Stone*

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Curriculum Connections

The Living Stone is a 34-minute documentary from 1958 that features an Inuit artist, a stone carver of Cape Dorset, Baffin Island. According to the film credits, the people in the documentary are from Kingait (the Inuit name for Cape Dorset) and Kangiyak (an Inuit village on the Aliulik Peninsula).

The stone carver is the storyteller. He is inspired by Inuit legends to carve the image he “sees” hiding in the piece of rough soapstone pulled from the sea before winter. He shares with his family the story of the imprisoned sea spirit who needs to be released in order to bring forth the seas’ bounties. Through the storytelling, the carving takes on a life of its own, giving personality, empowerment and voice to all that lies hidden.

This beautiful film reveals the role documentary can play in preserving the folklore, history and voices of a society in transition. But the film is also a work of art, transcending cultures, time and space, as cinematography integrates with the spoken text.

Lesson Objectives

This lesson is appropriate for high school to encourage students to appreciate various themes in current Canadian Native Studies, Social Studies and History courses (for example, multiple perspectives; identity; the land: people and places; economics and resources; and culture and community).

In the activities, students explore how the stone carver and the filmmaker both work with their materials to produce a work of art. Students go on to analyze the imagery in the film and the ways that the filmmaker enables us to see the Inuit world from a fresh perspective. In the final activity, students create a concept web to show the different ways that the film portrays the importance of the sea and its resources to the people of Kingait and Kangiyak.

Canadian Social Studies Themes in *The Living Stone*

Theme/Strand/ Key Concept	Connection to <i>The Living Stone</i> –Applications and Discussion Points
Multiple Perspectives	<p><i>The Living Stone</i> shows students something about how people used to live on Baffin Island.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we cultivate multiple ways of seeing? • How can we learn to view a personal or historical issue through someone else’s eyes? • How can art—such as documentary films, storytelling and stone carving—help us see the world from different points of view? • What role does dialogue in film play in opening our minds and our worlds to each other? • How do multiple perspectives define us?

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Identity	<p>In this film, the Inuit carver, his family and his art reveal a cultural identity as well as a personal identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the stone carver and his family influenced by their geographic location? By Inuit culture and history? By Canadian identity? By personal experiences? By sustained skills in storytelling and carving? • Whose story is the Inuit carver telling? Why is he telling this story? • How is the viewer influenced by the film’s images? • What lessons can one learn from the carver’s words, “we take what we have been given and gift to each other what we have”?
Power, Authority and Governance	<p>In <i>The Living Stone</i> the Inuit carver has authority over the land, the sea and the natural resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the governance and leadership of the Northern Inuit differ today from that of 1958, when <i>The Living Stone</i> was filmed? • How do the Inuit carvers of today protect their economic rights? • What decision-making roles did women play in the Inuit carver’s Northern community and culture of 1958? • Are the decision-making roles for Inuit women in Baffin Island different today?
The Land, Places and People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What questions does <i>The Living Stone</i> raise about the Inuit carver’s relationship with his environment and natural resources? • What relationship do the family members in <i>The Living Stone</i> have with their environment? • How did the environment affect their economic livelihood? • What impact did the family have on the environment? • How might the Baffin Island Inuit families’ relationship with the environment be different today?
Culture and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the values, beliefs and language of the Inuit carver and his family formed by the Baffin Island community where they live? • What are the values and beliefs of the carver and his wife? • Which of the traditions practised by the Inuit family did you appreciate most? • Which traditions in your family do you value and hope to sustain? • How many and which communities is the carver part of? • How many and which communities are you part of? • What cultural and/or community connections can you make with the individuals in the film?
Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What rights would Inuit Canadian citizens have today that were not available to them in 1958 when <i>The Living Stone</i> was filmed? • What rights, as a Canadian citizen, would the Inuit stone carver feel a special ownership of? • What are the challenges and responsibilities that accompany those

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	<p>rights?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think might be some challenges faced by women as citizens living in the North? How might those challenges be different from those faced by men?
Global Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does learning to see the world through multiple perspectives help to build bridges among people from different traditions? • How does dialoguing on global issues and global connections help to establish an expanding community? • What global connections can you make to any of the issues experienced by the characters, or to the life emerging from the soapstone carving, in <i>The Living Stone</i>? • What are some of the commonalities you share with any of the characters in the film?
Economics and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the economics of Inuit soapstone carving different today than what they were in the days of the film? • How do you think the work histories of the adults in the film compare to the work histories of their parents in the past? How do you think they will compare to the work histories of their children in the future?

Activities for *The Living Stone*

Introduction

ACTIVITY 1: What’s in a Name?

Before they watch *The Living Stone*, have a class discussion about the title of the film:

- What are some ways that stone is used in your community?
- Don’t the words “living” and “stone” contradict each other?
- What use of stone might give it life?
- What do you expect to be the subject matter of a film called *The Living Stone*?

In small groups, ask students to draft their ideas and expectations on chart paper and post the results. Once students have viewed the film, have them re-visit their ideas again.

Developing Understanding

ACTIVITY 2: Interpreting an Artist’s Voice

Step 1: At one point in the film, the Inuit carver speaks about “listening, waiting for the stone to whisper to him...so that he could lay bare all that the rough stone could offer.” Another time he refers to the pieces of soapstone in the sea as “the precious stones” held in water. What do these quotes reveal about his relationship with the resources he uses?

- What significance does the following quotation from *The Living Stone* have?

Who knows what he may find in the stone? Each piece contains a story. Sometimes there is more than one creature in the stone; then the carver must release them both.

- What techniques, knowledge, tools and skills did the stone carver need to create the stone figure?

Step 2: Ask what other art forms are evident in this film (storytelling and filmmaking). Have students focus on the different facets of these art forms and the techniques used by the artists.

- What do you think is the purpose behind the storyteller's story?
- Who is the intended audience for the story?
- What techniques does the storyteller use to create the desired effect in his audience?
- What do you think is the filmmaker's purpose?
- Who is the intended audience for the film?
- What techniques does the filmmaker use to create the desired effect?

Applying Knowledge

ACTIVITY 3: Studying the Filmmaker's Art

You may wish to have students work in small groups for this activity.

Step 1: After students have watched *The Living Stone*, ask them to reflect on the imagery that opens and closes the film: the caribou antlers on top of the blue igloo, illuminated from the light inside.

- What do you think is the significance of the image of the caribou antlers on top of the illuminated igloo?
- What statement do you think the filmmaker was making with that imagery?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to begin and end the film with the same image?

Step 2: Ask students how the filmmaker, John Feeney, helps his audience see the world of the Kingait and Kangiyak peoples from a fresh perspective. How does he achieve his goal? For ideas, students can refer to the National Film Board's "Behind the Camera" section of the Documentary Lens Web site, especially the sections on "What is a Documentary?" and "The ABCs of Documentary Cinema."

- How does the filmmaker help his audience appreciate the world through the eyes of the people in his documentary?
- How can art—such as documentary films, storytelling and stone carving—help us see the world from different points of view?

ACTIVITY 4: Connecting to the Sea and to Each Other

In *The Living Stone*, there are many references to the importance of the sea to the Inuit people of Kingait and Kangiyak. This is clear from the stories, the narration, the activities of the people and from the figure that the stone carver creates.

Give students a copy of the worksheet appended to this lesson. The task is for students to work either alone or with a partner to fill in the concept map showing some of the ways that the people interact with, and depend on, the sea and on each other for their culture and their survival.

- What knowledge of the sea and its creatures have the people of Kingait and Kangiyak passed on from generation to generation?
- Why is the knowledge of the sea and its resources so important to these people?
- What influence does their location have on the people's attitude to the sea and its resources?

- How have the sea and its resources influenced the traditions and culture of the people of Kingait and Kangiyak?
- What are the attitudes of the people in *The Living Stone* towards the animals that they hunt in the sea?
- What are some of the ways that the people use the seals that they hunt?

Note: Students may wish to view *The Living Stone* again to collect data to complete their concept web.

Worksheet for *The Living Stone* The Importance of the Sea to the Inuit People of Kingait and Kangiyak

Name: _____

Date: _____

