

Documentary Lens Lesson Plan for *Canadian Landscape*

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Curriculum Connections

In *Canadian Landscape*, filmed in 1941, we accompany A.Y. Jackson on painting trips by canoe and on foot to northern Canada in autumn. The artist discusses his approach to his subject matter and shows some of his paintings.

Lesson Objectives

This lesson is appropriate for middle school Social Studies and History courses with cross-curricular opportunities in Fine Arts, Language Arts, and Media Studies. The purpose is to introduce students to the first Canadian national school of painting and to show how the Group of Seven reflected changes in Canada's social, historical and cultural development. Students will also examine the influence the Group of Seven had on national identity.

These activities are inquiry based, encouraging learners to explore concepts and reach their own conclusions. Students will write poetry, make comparisons, produce art in the style of the Group of Seven, create a diary entry, write an opinion piece and respond to a variety of questions that focus on the key concepts and promote critical thinking.

The film is 18 minutes long, and the estimated time allotment for this lesson is five hours.

Outcomes/Expectations

The following specific outcomes or expectations apply in this lesson.

Students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of how diverse groups and individuals have contributed to the historical, cultural and economic development of Canada.
- communicate ideas and information for a variety of purposes (to compare, persuade, inform).
- express and respond to a range of ideas and opinions concisely, clearly and appropriately.
- contribute constructively in groups.
- analyze and interpret media works.
- produce works of art that communicate a variety of ideas, for specific purposes and to specific audiences.

Canadian Social Studies Themes in *Canadian Landscape*

Theme/Strand/ Key Concept	Connection to <i>Canadian Landscape</i> –Applications and Discussion Points
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think A.Y. Jackson saw Canadian identity? • What impact do you think the Group of Seven has had on other artists in Canada? • How did the Group of Seven’s work contribute to national identity?
Multiple Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do painters such as A.Y. Jackson and other members of the Group of Seven see Canada? • How do painters such as Emily Carr and Lawren Harris use bold shapes, landforms, colour and pattern to convey their vision of Canada?
The Land: Places and People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think A.Y. Jackson was trying to convey about the land? • Why is it important for artists to connect with their environment? • What patterns of colours and shapes does Jackson use in his paintings of buildings? How do those patterns compare with the way he paints landscapes?
Culture and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do A.Y. Jackson’s paintings of Québec reflect culture and community? Think about the motifs he chose to paint. • How does the artist picture human settlements with regard to landscape in his Québec paintings?
Global Connections Time, Continuity and Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think other countries in the world could learn about Canada from A.Y. Jackson’s paintings? • How well known around the world are the paintings of the Group of Seven? • If you had not visited or seen other parts of Canada in the early 1900s, how would A.Y. Jackson’s work change your outlook on the rest of your country? • Do you think the works of the Group of Seven remain an important part of our culture? Why or why not?

Assessment Strategies

There are a number of assessment opportunities in the lesson: a) anecdotal b) observation checklists for cooperative group work c) assessing graphic organizers (Venn diagram) d) establishing rubrics with students for formal assignments (diary entry, opinion piece) e) peer and self evaluation of discussion activities and f) assessment of creative art work (haiku poetry, artwork in the style of A.Y. Jackson).

Background

It may be helpful to familiarize the class with the story of the Group of Seven to establish a social, historical and cultural framework. The Web site of the McMichael Gallery listed below is a good place to start. Students would also benefit from some knowledge about the changes taking place in Canada in the early 1900s regarding settlement, immigration, the opening of the North’s resources, and the

establishment of the park system (Algonquin). Students should also be familiar with the vocabulary associated with painting (for example, the concepts of texture, tone, line, motif).

Materials and Resources

Internet Resources

- The Group of Seven at the McMichael Gallery
<http://www.mcmichael.com/collection/seven/index.cfm>
- CyberMUSE: Artists Gallery at the National Gallery of Canada
http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/home_e.jsp
- Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery www.tomthomson.org
- Artcyclopedia (created by John Malyon of Calgary) for links to paintings by Winslow Homer, James Whistler and Ford Madox Brown at museums around the world
<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/>

Materials

- Post-it notes
- chart paper, markers
- examples of haiku (optional)
- images of paintings by Winslow Homer, James Whistler and Ford Madox Brown
- additional examples of paintings by the Group of Seven
- coloured construction paper, scissor, glue

Activities for *Canadian Landscape*

Introduction

ACTIVITY 1: Pre-viewing

1. Have a brief class discussion about what it means to be Canadian. How does looking at the people and the land help us understand Canadian identity, for example. Have students record their ideas on post-it notes.
2. Organize the responses into the categories “people” and “land.” Post their responses on the board.
3. After reviewing all responses, ask the following questions:
 - What other categories besides “people” and “land” can we add? (For example, culture, beliefs, and language)
 - How can our impressions of what it means to be a Canadian be so different even though we all live in the same country?
 - What does it mean to have a national identity?
 - What makes Canada unique?
 - Is the perspective of ourselves as Canadians different from the perspective people in other countries have of us?

4. Focus on “the land” category and ask students to suggest adjectives to describe Canada’s varying landscape. Compile a list of these adjectives on the board or on chart paper.
5. Create a haiku collaboratively as a class using some of the adjectives suggested.
Note: A haiku is a Japanese poem that usually reflects nature. It is three lines long and follows the pattern of 5 syllables (line 1), 7 syllables (line 2), 5 syllables (line 3).
6. Ask students to write their own haiku about Canada’s landscape.

Developing Understanding/Skills

ACTIVITY 2: Group Inquiry and Discussion/Making Comparisons/Art Work

1. View the film *Canadian Landscape*.
2. Introduce students to European and American paintings before the Group of Seven. Artists from the older tradition could be Winslow Homer, James Whistler and Ford Madox Brown. (See the Resources section for a link to Artcyclopedia where these paintings can be viewed online.)
You may also want to show the works of earlier painters by Constable and Turner, and discuss their subject matter, attention to detail as well as their use of colour and brush technique.
3. Ask students to discuss in small groups, the following questions. Have groups record their responses in jot note format. (**Note:** Have pictures of paintings available for students to refer to for this activity. The paintings could be online or copies posted around the classroom.)
 - What is the subject matter, overall mood and style of any two different painters?
 - How do A.Y. Jackson and other members of the Group of Seven use colour, texture, light and shape differently from earlier American and European artists?
 - How does the Canadian landscape differ from the landscape in other paintings?
 - What makes these paintings unique to Canada?
4. Ask students to create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast these different styles.
5. Have the groups briefly present their findings to the class.

ACTIVITY 3: Impressions and Identity

Re-direct students back to the inventive style of A.Y. Jackson and his associates. Suggest that students take a little more time to examine the painters’ work. Emphasize the fact that the Group of Seven’s style was seen as radical at the time because it was not as delicate as European art. These Group of Seven artists were not “imitating” a scene but were creating their own “impression.”

Brainstorm in groups:

- a) What do you think Jackson’s work says about Canada?
- b) What techniques does Jackson use that are most powerful? Why do you think they are powerful?
- c) Why were the Group of Seven’s paintings so important in the early 1900s?

Highlight the idea that Canada was a young country and was still searching for an identity. The work of the Group of Seven allowed Canadians to discover their own country and gave them a greater sense of self. The Group of Seven also opened parts of Canada that people living in cities were not familiar with, places such as Algonquin Park, Georgian Bay, the Algoma region, Quebec and the fishing villages along the St. Lawrence.

ACTIVITY 4: Creating an Impression of Canada

Have students create art in the style of A.Y. Jackson using construction paper. Encourage bold colours and large blocks of colour to create texture and pattern. The collages should convey energy and power in the land. The aim is to convey their own *impression* of Canada.

To conclude this activity, ask students to write a title for their painting on a small square sheet of paper. Ask them to include a description of how their work reflects Canada's national identity. These can later be used to create a gallery to display student work.

Applying What They Have Learned

ACTIVITY 5: Writing a Diary Entry in Role

Students are to write a diary entry from the point of view of A.Y. Jackson. It may help to watch *Canadian Landscape* again to get a feel for where Jackson went, what he experienced, and how he chose his subjects on his sketching expeditions to Georgian Bay or Québec. As an alternative, students may be given the option of *inventing* a journey that Jackson would have taken (for example, to the East Coast, the Rocky Mountains, the Prairies, the Arctic, Baffin Island).

The diary entry should include what he is hoping to accomplish, what he sees in nature, and so on. Students can include sketches using the shapes, patterns and motifs common to Jackson's work.

The focus should be on how this landscape painting can communicate a truly Canadian experience.

Extension Activities

Jackson and his associates formed a group as a "friendly alliance for defence" against the storms of criticism their painting was evoking." At the time, the Group of Seven received negative press in the local newspapers. These artists had developed their own style and had a different way of looking at landscape. Some people considered their style too radical. One woman remarked to Jackson, "It's bad enough to live in this country without having pictures of it in your home."

Ask students to take on the role of A.Y. Jackson (or another member of the Group of Seven) and write an opinion piece to respond to the public attacks.