

Study Guide

Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole

and

Totem: Return and Renewal

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CURRICULUM LEVEL EQUIVALENTS

The following study guide meets certain study requirements of the core, senior-level curriculum areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies, as outlined in the Alberta Education Curriculum:

- English Language Arts,
 - ELA 10-1, 20-1, and 30-1
 - Analyze, respond to and create complex texts
 - Identify and examine ways in which cultural and societal influences are reflected in a variety of Canadian and international texts
 - ELA 10-2, 20-2, and 30-2
 - Develop a variety of reading, comprehension, and writing strategies
 - Respond to texts at a variety of levels of sophistication
 - ELA 10-4, 20-4, and 30-4 (knowledge and Employability)
 - Read and write for specific, concrete purposes
 - Speak clearly and confidently
 - View and demonstrate understanding
 - Engage in active listening
- Social Studies
 - Social Studies 10-1 and 10-2
 - Exploration of multiple perspectives on origins, impacts, and possible responses to globalization
 - Development of the understanding, appreciation, values, and skills required for engaged, active, informed, and responsible citizenship
 - Social Studies 20-1 and 20-2
 - Exploration of the complexities of nationalism in Canadian international contexts and the influence of nationalism on regional, international, and global relations
 - Development of the understanding, appreciation, values, and skills required for engaged, active, informed and responsible citizenship

- Social Studies 30 and 33
 - Examination of political and economic systems and the motives and consequences of global interaction

DOCUMENTARY FILM SYNOPSES

Totem: Return of the G'psgolox Pole (2003)

In 1929, the Haisla people of northwestern British Columbia returned from a fishing trip to find a 9-metre-high totem pole, known as the G'psgolox pole, had been severed at the base and removed from their village. The fate of the 19th-century pole remained unknown to them for over sixty years. In this film, director Gil Cardinal reveals the Haisla's 1991 discovery of the pole in a Stockholm museum, where it was considered state property by the Swedish government.

From the lush rainforest near Kitamaat Village, British Columbia, to the National Museum of Ethnography in Sweden, Cardinal's documentary traces the fascinating journey of the Haisla to reclaim their traditional mortuary pole. Bringing to light a powerful story of cultural rejuvenation, this film raises provocative questions about the ownership and meaning of Aboriginal objects held in museums.

Cardinal skillfully layers compelling interviews, striking imagery and rare footage of master carvers creating a replica pole. The Haisla have fulfilled a promise to the museum to replace the original totem. Now, having honoured their side of the bargain, they await the return of the G'psgolox pole.

Totem: Return and Renewal (2008)

The metal shackles restraining the totem have been removed. The G'psgolox pole is free. After 77 years in a Swedish museum, this 19th-century mortuary totem is finally returning to its ancestral lands in Haisla territory. Filmmaker Gill Cardinal updates the story he first chronicled in 2003, capturing the final chapters of this historic event: the first ever repatriation of a totem pole from overseas by a First Nation.

This sequel to *Return of the G'psgolox Pole* follows the totem pole's emotionally charged journey home – from the long-awaited moment when it's taken down at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm to the official handover ceremony in Vancouver, where the museum transfers ownership of the pole to Chief G'psgolox and the HaNation. This momentous journey culminates in exhilarating celebrations marking the pole's homecoming to Kitamaat village, in northwestern B.C.

Exploring the vibrant cultural revival sparked by this repatriation process, as well as the diplomacy and friendships across oceans that made it happen, *Totem: Return and Renewal* is an inspiring portrait of determination, reconciliation and forgiveness.

PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS

Who are the Haisla?

These questions, which should be discussed in small groups, will help students to identify and understand the culture and traditions of the Haisla people.

- **Language**
What is the Haisla language? What family language group does it come from? What are examples of Haisla words and phrases?
- **Haisla Relations**
Who are the Haisla's closest neighbours? How are they related to other groups? What other associations or relationships existed or continue to exist between the Haisla and other indigenous people in their area?
- **The Importance of Totem Poles**
What is the significance of totem poles in the Haisla culture? How are totem poles used to identify clans, families, and individuals? What are some of the key symbols used in totem poles?
- **The Potlatch**
What was the central role of the potlatch in a traditional Haisla community? How did it keep the community together? When was the potlatch outlawed and when did it return?
- **Haisla Art and Symbols**
List five or six key cultural symbols of Haisla culture, defining what they are.
How do they compare to cultural symbols of other nearby indigenous nations?

EXPLORING THE ISSUES AND CONCEPTS IN THE FILMS:

The Talking Circle

The “Talking Circle” can be used as a way to encourage dialogue and exploration of the concepts and issues brought up in the two documentaries. It ensures that all students have the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion.

How to Use the Talking Circle

Simple rules for creating a good flow of dialogue and sharing in the classroom:

1. The classroom teacher acts as the Circle Facilitator and should remind students that opinions must be shared with “good spirit and fairness.”
2. The sharing starts to the left of the Facilitator and continues around the room.
3. Every voice in the Circle is to be respected, even if someone disagrees with another speaker. Tell students: “Wait your turn, be patient, and you will be able to address your point of view.”
4. When somebody is speaking, no one else talks. As they listen, students may think about what to say when it is their turn.
5. A person in the Circle can choose whether or not to contribute to the dialogue. They can simply say “pass” if they are not ready to talk.
6. Speakers should be clear, to the point and respectful of others’ time.
7. Each discussion question will circulate once, or twice if need be.
8. Once the first Circle is completed, the Facilitator can ask if anybody wants to make final comments in relation to the discussion question. The Facilitator can allow people to share their thoughts if just a few volunteer; however, if many students want to speak again then another round can begin.
9. If someone is not being respectful, they will be asked to leave the circle.

Circle Size: The Talking Circle should consist of no more than 12 participants, plus the Facilitator. If there are more students, several Talking Circles can be created. Identify Facilitators for each Circle and brief them on the “Talking Circle Rules.” Circles should be spaced far enough away from one another that participants can hear each other well, and a Note Taker should record the thoughts and ideas expressed. The classroom teacher can act as a Coordinating Facilitator to arbitrate and ensure things run smoothly. After the questions have gone round the circle, each group presents a summary of their discussion to the whole class.

Discussion Questions:

The Return of the G'psgolox Pole (2003)

- Why would someone assume that the G'psgolox pole was abandoned when it was first seen in 1929?
- Do you think that the G'psgolox pole should be returned? Why?
- Do you think that the “conditions” set for the return of the totem pole to the Haisla Nation were fair?
- Traditions of the Haisla People dictate that the totem pole should be returned to nature where Mother Earth can reclaim it. In this case, do you agree or disagree?
- Why are culture and cultural symbols like totem poles so important to Aboriginal people and their societies?
- What would you say are important Canadian cultural symbols or artifacts that you, as a Canadian, would demand to have returned? And why? (Example: Stanley Cup)

Return and Renewal (2008)

- How did you feel about the return of the G'psgolox pole to the Haisla Nation?
- What do you think was the motivating force(s) in having the G'psgolox pole returned?
- Considering the amount of time it took for the Haisla Nation to get back the G'psgolox pole, what other benefits of this extended relationship now exist between the Haisla and the Swedish peoples?
- What effect has the return of the pole had on the Haisla people that will continue to be felt in their communities?
- What do you think the Canadian government should do to protect cultural items from being taken from indigenous nations in Canada?