

I AM BUT A LITTLE WOMAN

Duration: 4 min 39 s



LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVE

To help students understand how identity is symbolically represented through animation.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Students in grades 1 to 3.

SUBJECT AREAS

- ◆ First Nations
- ◆ Fine Arts
- ◆ Philosophy

DESCRIPTION

This film aims to familiarize students with the notion of the cycle in the Inuit tradition, while helping them see how animation can be used to express tradition. The preparatory activity explores how cultural legacies like traditions, knowledge and strengths are handed down; the main activity and recap suggest different approaches to the question of identity and broaden students' appreciation of biographical works.

START AND PREPARATORY ACTIVITY: THE NEVER-ENDING ROUND

Approximate duration: 40 minutes

Required tools: A pen.

STEP 1

Have the students sit with you in a circle. After writing this Inuit poem on the board (underlining the same words), read it out loud:

The bird eats the worm
The fox eats the bird
The wolf eats the fox
The bear eats the wolf
The man eats the bear.

And the worm eats the man.
 And it all begins again.

The day eats the night
 The night eats the day.

STEP 2

Assign the following roles to six volunteer students, clockwise and in this order: *bird*, *fox*, *wolf*, *bear*, *human* and *worm*. Pass the pen around the circle, starting with the student on your left. Each time the pen reaches one of the six volunteers, that student must recite the sentence corresponding to his or her assigned role (e.g. "The bird eats the worm") before passing the pen on. In this way, the first six lines of the poem are recited. When the pen reaches you, you must say, "And it all begins again." Repeat the exercise at least twice more to emphasize the cyclical nature of the refrain. At the end of the

activity — you decide when to break the cycle — encourage students to reflect on the meaning of the exercise, guided by the following questions:

- ◆ Does the poem have a starting point?
- ◆ Does the cycle ever come to an end?
- ◆ Does night come before the day, or after it?
- ◆ Can you name any other cycles? (For example, the seasons, sunshine and rainfall, the school year, youth and age, moods, digestion.)

Lastly, ask students to share their thoughts with the rest of the class as to the mysterious role of the pen in the activity.

As a way of introducing the ideas in the film the students are about to see, you can underscore that the pen plays a symbolic role: that of a vehicle of "transmission." Transmission is a way of passing on traditions, knowledge, heritage or powers to keep them from getting lost over time. Like a legacy, the Inuit poem was handed down from parent to child, generation to generation, and family to family. Similarly, the life and death of every being mentioned in the poem helped keep the cycle of nature in constant evolution.

Here's a fun variation of the activity:

A student designated the "keeper of night and day" can turn the classroom lights on and off or open and close the curtains, imitating the cycle of the sun as we experience it on Earth.

ACTIVITY: KEEPING A LOW PROFILE

Approximate duration: 60 minutes

STEP 1

Tell the students they are going to see a film made in Nunavut by an Inuit filmmaker. Instruct them to get a piece of paper and a pencil so that they can answer the following question after the film:

- ◆ What does it mean to "keep a low profile"?

Students can respond by writing down key words or short phrases.

STEP 2

Watch *I Am but a Little Woman* a first time. Prompt students to observe the use of colour and line, as well as music and sound. Then have them discuss the filmmaker's choices, using the following questions:

- ◆ What has she chosen to represent in the film?
- ◆ How would you describe the film's colour scheme? Which colours has she used the most? How well do you think these colours represent the North?
- ◆ How have music and sound been incorporated into the movie?

STEP 3

Watch the film again, this time asking students to identify its cyclic and symbolic components. In the film, the filmmaker sets out to share the respect she has for her mother, tradition and nature. She does so gently, with discretion and reserve.

- ◆ How does the filmmaker portray herself in the movie? And in the embroidered cover at the very end?
- ◆ What does her mother teach her, by showing her how to embroider and to represent herself as “but a little woman” among the animals?
- ◆ Did you have a feeling of imminent winter in the film? Can you think of any clues that would indicate this?
- ◆ What are the little “objects” that appear to float through the girl’s world? (Summer berries from the tundra, carved or embroidered animals, a comb, and — at the very end — an *ulu*, a type of all-purpose knife with a rounded blade and wooden handle, traditionally used by Inuit women for skinning salmon.)

STEP 4

Ask the initial question again (“What does it mean “to keep a low profile?””), having each student answer individually. How does this expression denote respect?

Students may write down their answers and then share them with the class.

RECAP: AN IMAGE OF ME

Approximate duration: 60 minutes

Have students “portray” themselves in a collage that captures something of the spirit of *I Am but a Little Woman*. Students can use magazine cutouts and/or recycled paper to represent the things they love the most. They can then incorporate these elements into a photo or representation of themselves to express their connection to other parts of their identity. Exhibit the works in the classroom, paying particular attention to their proportions and compositional components.

REFLECTIVE SHARING

Help students understand and analyze the use of symbolism in an autobiographical work.