

Documentary Lens Lesson Plan for *César's Bark Canoe*

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Curriculum Connections

César's Bark Canoe is a 1971 documentary, without dialogue, featuring César Newashish, a member of the Attkamek First Nation of the Manowan Reserve north of Montreal. He builds a bark canoe in the traditional way, using only birch bark, cedar splints, pitch, spruce roots, gum and animal fat. Throughout the film, text frames appear in Cree, French and English at each of the steps along the way. The film is 58 minutes long.

Lesson Objectives

This lesson is intended for junior high Social Studies courses that cover Aboriginal Culture, Culture and Change and/or People and their Culture. Cross-curricular possibilities include Canadian Language Arts curricula in oral, visual and written communication skills; and media literacy.

Canadian Social Studies Themes in *César's Bark Canoe*

Theme/Strand/ Key Concept	Connection to <i>Cesar's Bark Canoe</i> —Application and Discussion Points
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In building his bark canoe, how does César show the connections between himself, his community and the natural world? • How does César's canoe building show his cultural identity? • How do traditions such as canoe building help Aboriginal peoples teach others about their identity? • How do you think that César's identity has been shaped by the traditions of his people? • How has your identity been shaped by the traditions of your people?
Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be a member of First Nation in Canada? • Do citizens of different cultures have a responsibility to preserve their culture? Or is this a government responsibility?

Theme/Strand/ Key Concept	Connection to <i>César's Bark Canoe</i> —Application and Discussion Points
Time, Continuity and Change	<p>The film shows César Newwashish making a canoe in the traditional way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might this film help preserve the traditional skills of making birch bark canoes? • Which of César's techniques, tools and materials do you think have been used by the Attkamek people for hundreds of years? • Why do you think César chose to use only hand tools?
Culture and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the canoe represent César's culture? • What communities do Cesar and his family belong to? • How do you think César might teach young people in his community to make bark canoes? • How does this way of teaching represent the traditions of César's people?
The Land: People and Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does César use natural resources to build his canoe? • What might be some advantages of using natural materials? What might be some disadvantages? • How else do you think the Attkamek people use the natural resources of their environment? • What effect does your location and environment have on the way that you use natural resources?

Assessment Strategies

There are different points during this lesson where key assessment decisions can be made.

- Communication skills: participation in group brainstorming in Activity 1 (Brainstorming What Makes a Movie) and clear communication of ideas.
- Research skills: drawing conclusions based on research and evidence in Activity 3 (Tracking a Process).
- Media literacy skills: examining the techniques and artistry that a film director uses to enhance his or her message in Activity 4 (Exploring a filmmaker's artistry).

Activities for *César's Bark Canoe*

Introductory Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Brainstorming What Makes a Movie

César's Bark Canoe is a film without a narrative voice, dialogue or musical soundtrack. To help students appreciate the artistry of such a film, ask them to brainstorm the following.

- What different elements can a filmmaker use to create an effective story in film? Students may suggest images, narration, sound, dialogue, music, story or plot, characters, setting, camera angles and focus.
- What is the effect when a director decides not to include some of these elements?

ACTIVITY 2: What Is Needed to Build a Bark Canoe

Before you show the film, ask students to list, in small groups, what they think is needed to build a canoe out of natural materials only. Distribute copies of the worksheet found at the end of this guide. Since there are three columns—Materials, Tools and Skills—you may wish to form groups of three, assigning one subject to each member of the group. Tell the class that they will be able to compare their ideas with the information in the film in the next activity.

Developing Concepts**ACTIVITY 3: Tracking a Process**

The filmmakers' aim is to focus viewers' attention firmly on the process César follows as he builds his canoe. Encourage students to pay close attention to this as they watch. This should lead to an appreciation of the high degree of knowledge and skills that the canoe builder has.

Now, ask the groups to look at their worksheets, adding or correcting information they learned from the film.

Applications**ACTIVITY 4: Exploring a Filmmaker's Artistry and Writing a Review**

In Activity 1, students discussed the various elements a filmmaker has at his or her disposal. In this activity, students first explore the reasons for the director's choices in making *César's Bark Canoe*. Then they write a review of the film.

Remind students that though a movie review offers a personal opinion, it is also intended to inform readers about the content and artistry of a film. Ask students:

- What do you look for in a movie review?
- How much information about the film should be included?
- How much detail from the film does a reviewer need to support his or her opinion?
- Does the intended audience for such a review guide the critic?

In reviewing *César's Bark Canoe*, have students use the following questions as a guide. Of course, they should add ideas of their own.

- What sounds do you hear in this film? How does the soundtrack add to the mood and message?
- What does the camera focus on? Why?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose not to use voice-over narrative or dialogue?

ACTIVITY 5: Using Natural Resources

The purpose of this activity is to help students appreciate the technical skills and knowledge about natural materials that a canoe builder must have. As César Newashish demonstrates, a traditional canoe builder needs to know a great deal about various trees and which parts can be used to cover and shape the hull, and stitch and seal the different parts of the craft.

Ask students to make a concept web or a mind map to show how César uses trees to make the bark canoe. Their web or map should show the different kinds and parts of trees as well as the steps in collecting and preparing the materials.

Students may want to re-view parts of the film. For more information, refer them to "Wave Eaters: Native Watercraft in Canada" at the Web site of the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa: <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/watercraft/wainteng.html>.

Worksheet for *César's Bark Canoe*

Building a Canoe

Name: _____ Date: _____

Materials	Tools and Technologies	Skills and Processes