

LESSON PLANS

HONOURING TRADITIONS: THE LAND, COMMUNITY, AND STORIES

Recommended grades: 1 - 5

Time required: 3 – 30 minute class lessons

Materials: Paper and pencils or student sketchbooks, printed images

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students will explore the role of art in Aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal people view art not as a separate practice, but as something that is integral to everyday life. Art is incorporated into everything to remind them of their relationship to the land and community. While making connections to their own community, students will learn about the different ways Aboriginal people honour community and the environment their art and designs.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of these lessons, students will be able to:

- Define the terms “honour” and “tradition.”
- Understand how Aboriginal people view art as part of their daily life and not as a separate practice.
- Understand the role of Aboriginal art as being used to honour their community and environment.
- Create an ecologically-inspired artwork.

IMAGES

Artifact Images for use in Activity – Please print in colour if possible



Girl's Coming of Age Outfit

Deh Gah Got'ine, Fort Simpson

ca. 1890s

moosehide, glass beads, wool, porcupine quills, velvet, cotton, aluminium, bone, sinew

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 494, AC 495, AC 496, AC 497 A-B



Man's Shirt

Na Dené

early 20th century

hide, porcupine quills, glass beads, feathers, paint, thread

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 1



Drum

Siksika

early 20th century

hide, wood, paint

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 515 A-B



Mossbag

Deh Gah Got'ine, Hay River

ca. 1890s

glass and metal beads, velvet, cotton, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 343



Allen Sapp

Néhiyawak (Plains Cree) (b. 1928)

Traditional Pow-Wow, 1991

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Gift of Dr. Allen Sapp, R.C.A, O.C., S.O.M., 1998

998.021.001



Basket
Na Dené
mid 20th century
birchbark, root
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 484



Basket

Tsilhqot'in (Chilcotin)

early 20th century

cedar root, spruce root, cherry bark, willow, bulrush, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AD 42



Mukluks

Deh Gah Got'ine

late 20th century

caribou hide, wool stroud, wool yarn, rabbit fur, moose hair

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 318 A-B



Bison Figure
Northern Plains
ca. 1200
green quartzite
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AX 70



Mrs. Tashoots
Tahltan
Dance Shirt
ca. 1920s
caribou hide, glass beads, wool, cotton
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 57

ACTIVITY PROCEDURES

HONOURING COMMUNITY

Recommended grades: 1 – 3

Time required: 30 minute class lessons

Materials: Images and image descriptions, paper, pencils

Please print the following images:

- *Girl's Coming of Age Outfit (AC 494, AC 495, AC496, AC 497 A-B)*
- *Man's Shirt, Na Dene, early 20th Century, AC 1*
- *Drum, Siksika, early 20th Century, AF 515 A-B*
- *Mossbag, Deh Gah Got'ine, ca, 1890s, AC 343*
- *Traditional Pow-Wow, Allen Sapp (Néhiyawak), 998.021.001*

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students to think about where they see art in their community. We might see art in galleries or museums, hanging on a wall at home or in a business, at a park, or even on our fridge! Now ask students how many of them have made their own art. What type of art have you created? (drawings, paintings, etc.) What have you drawn or painted? (maybe landscapes, their family, etc.) Many times we are inspired by the world around us. Have you ever given your art to someone? Sometimes when we give something to someone we are honouring that person. Discuss the term **honour** by using the following suggested questions:

How can we honour someone? Is it a big gesture or can it be something as simple as giving someone a high five and telling them they did a good job? Think about maybe a handmade card for Father's Day or creating a drawing for someone special. Can you think of any other examples?

2. Aboriginal people also created art. Their designs honoured their community. However, the idea behind art was different. Rather than seeing art as something separate, Aboriginal people incorporated art into everything they made. Tipis, clothing, tools, etc. were all carefully designed and decorated to show honour to both people and environment. Some garments were also passed down and added to with each generation, honouring both the people from the past, as well as those in the future.

3. Discuss the term **tradition** using the following suggested questions:

Traditions are beliefs, values and ways of acting that are a part of a community for a long time. Can you think of any traditions in your family? School? Community? (celebrations, special events, holidays)

4. In some cultures, “coming of age” is a very important tradition. This means that in their culture, that person is now considered an adult. Some cultures, like the Deh Gah Got’ine, had a tradition where a girl would go to be by herself in a dwelling. Older women would visit and teach her the traditions of their culture and important skills like sewing, embroidery, quillwork, and beadwork. At the end of her seclusion, her mother would make her a special outfit and her father would lead her in her first drum dance, which could last all night. Show students *Girl’s Coming of Age Outfit* (AC 494, AC 495, AC496, AC 497 a-b) and ask them to describe what they see.

Suggested questions for discussion: *How does the person who made the outfit honour the person wearing it? How else does this outfit honour the person wearing it? How does it honour their community? (When someone wears an outfit like this, it shows that they are an important part of their community. Because it is made especially for that person for this important event of becoming an adult, it is showing honour to that person.)*

5. Divide the class into four groups. Explain that each group will be given an image to study carefully. As they examine it and discuss the questions, think of ways that this item or image might be honouring both traditions and the people in their community.

6. Print out the following descriptions and allow the student's time to research their artifact.

Please print me and distribute the following artifact descriptions

Man's Shirt, Na Dene, early 20th Century, AC 1

What materials do you think this is made of? Who would have made this shirt? Who would have worn it? How do you think this might be honouring the person that wore it or their community? Usually women made the clothing and men would have done the hunting. This shirt was probably made by a woman and would have taken a lot of time and careful work to prepare the hide, sew it, and to add details like the porcupine quillwork and fringes. This time and effort shows honour to the person who would have worn it. The man hunting in this shirt would have shown honour to his community by providing food and materials for clothing and tools.

Drum, Siksika, early 20th Century, AF 515 A-B

Who do you think made this drum? Why do you think they made it? When do you think a drum was used? Why would it be important to their community? Drums were often used in ceremonies and dances. Singing songs and drumming were very important to their community. This drum is a medicine pipe drum with a thunderbird and claws. The colours, green and yellow, are Blackfoot colours.

Moss bag, Deh Gah Got'ine, ca, 1890s, AC 343

What do you think this object is? A moss bag was used to carry babies and was often stuffed with fresh moss and grass to act as a diaper. Look at how this moss bag is carefully sewn and beaded. How does this honour the baby that would use it? Children were very important to First Nations. Babies grow very quickly and would not fit in a moss bag for very long, but the person that made this would have put a lot of time and effort into making this bag, showing how special children were.

Traditional Pow-Wow, Allen Sapp (Néhiyawak), 998.021.001

What do you see in this painting? Imagine that you are in this painting. What sounds would you hear? How do you think the artist is honouring his community? A pow-wow is a very important event in First Nations communities. Communities will gather for these special occasions and singing, drumming, and dancing are very important parts of their celebration. Some dances are traditional and have been in communities for hundreds of years. Sometimes new dances are introduced by visitors from as far away as Oklahoma and the southwest United States. Many of these new dances have been adopted and are now part of the pow-wow tradition.

Thinking Further

Have students find out more about a tradition or celebration in their family, school or community. Find out how it started, why it is important in their community, or what happens at this event.

Have students volunteer or get involved in an upcoming event in their school or community.

HONOURING ENVIRONMENT

Materials: All Images Printed for Part One

1. Discuss how traditions are connected to the environment in which cultures live through the following questions:

How are traditions influenced by where you live? Are there traditions in Canada that are different from other countries? How are they different? How are these traditions influenced by seasons, landscape or geography? Do you have traditions in your school, family or community that honour and respect the environment? If so, what do you do? Why is it important to honour and respect the land and environment?

2. For Aboriginal people living in Canada, the environment is very important to them. In the past, it influenced how they lived and the traditions they followed. The land was essential for survival, and in return, they showed respect and honour to the environment. Thinking back to the first activity and how they honoured their community, how do you think they would have shown this respect for the land? Aboriginal people used designs to honour the environment. Clothing, tipis, or tools were all made using materials from the environment, and often special ceremonies were performed before using these resources. The designs that decorated these items often represented plants, animals or other elements that have had their life cycle interrupted for human use. These designs honour this sacrifice.

3. Show **Basket, Na Dene, mid 20th Century, AC 484**. What do you think this is made of? What do you think it would be used for? Look carefully at the basket. What do you see? At first glance, this seems like a fairly plain basket. But when you look carefully, you can see a zigzag or mountain design made by carefully scraping away the outer layer of bark. The zigzag design is also repeated at the top in the spruce root edging. The artist that made this has even included a knot in the wood into their design. How do you think this was put together? Do you think it would be able to hold water? The person who made this basket carefully overlapped the seams to make it watertight, and often the

seam was covered with spruce pitch to seal it. How do you think this basket shows honour to the land?

4. Divide the class into four groups and assign one object and a description card to each group: Basket, AD 42; Bison Figure, AX 70; Mukluks, AC 318 a-b; Dance Shirt, AC 57.

5. While looking carefully at the objects, ask students to find out what materials are being used, what the materials tell them about the environment, and how the person who made or used the object was showing to the land and environment.

Please print and distribute the following artifact descriptions

Basket, Tsilhqot'in, early 20th century, AD 42

How was this object used? What is this object made of? What do these materials tell you about the environment in which it was made? What designs do you see? Along the bottom, elk or caribou are shown using dark red cherry bark. There is a checkerboard band in the middle, and a plant-like design at the top. A pale root is also used to reinforce the top edge as well as to bring attention to the upper edge. What do the materials and the design tell you about the people that made or used this basket?

Bison figure, Northern Plains, ca. 1200, AX 70

What animal is this object depicting? What is it made of? How long do you think it would have taken to make? How is it honouring the environment? Quartzite is a hard rock that would be difficult to carve. This one has been shaped into a bison. The artist that made this must have valued the bison and perhaps made this to honour the animal. For many First Nations people living on the plains, the bison was a very important animal as it was a valuable source of food and materials.

Mukluks, Deh Gah Got'ine, late 20th century, AC 318 a-b

What are these moccasins made of? How are they designed? Would they keep your feet warm? What do the materials and the design tell you about the environment? How do you think these moccasins are honouring the environment? These moccasins are made of wool, moose hair, rabbit fur, and yarn. They were made by the Deh Gah Got'ine people who live in the subarctic region of Canada. The materials and high-top design of these moccasins would have kept the owner's feet warm in the winter. The moose hair tufting would take a lot of time and skill and shows honour to the environment from the materials that are used and the flower designs.

Dance shirt, Tahltan, ca. 1920s, AC 57

What is this shirt made of? Who do you think wore this shirt? How long do you think it would take to make? What designs do you see? How does this honour the environment? This dance shirt depicts plants and animals that are found in traditional Tahltan territory in northern British Columbia. Can you see the differences between the male and female deer on top? The outlines, colours, and placement of the designs make it seem like they are moving, and seem to celebrate the environment.

6. Display the First Nations map (Appendix) where students can come and see it. Have one group at a time come to look at the map to find out where their artifact originated from. What can they learn about the environment from this knowledge and their artifact?

7. After students have had an opportunity to discuss, bring everyone back together and share as a class. Suggested discussion questions:
- How did the designs on this object honour the land and environment?
 - How does the location or geography of a culture influence objects, materials and designs?

Thinking Further

Have students research more about First Nations group they looked at and find out where they live. What kind of plants and animals live there? What is the landscape like? What is the climate like?

Take action! Have students brainstorm ways they can honour their environment. Organize a classroom clean-up or volunteer for a local environmental organization in your community, for example Green Calgary: www.greencalgary.org if you live near Calgary.