

■ GRADE 4-6: THE ARTS

MOTHER EARTH AND THE NEEDS OF LIVING THINGS

Purpose: Students will deepen their understanding of First Nations perspectives by learning about the Seven Grandfather Teachings and how they have been depicted through art. Students will apply elements and principles of design found in the Woodland School of Canadian Art to create their own Seven Grandfather Teachings paintings.

Estimated time: 180 minutes, completed in stages over several days

Resources required:

- Benton-Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications, 1988. Or share with students images from the following two sites: www.davidbouchard.com/mtw/sst.pdf or www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOm0RG2oZIO
- Images of paintings in the Woodlands style (Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Blake Debassige, Kelly Church, Jackson Beardy, Roy Thomas)
- Projector and screen or interactive white board
- Variety of coloured acrylic paints (especially black paint)
- Canvas, foam core or sturdy paper

Activity:

1. Begin the lesson by telling students that First Nations People have maintained and shared their cultural identities and perspectives through teachings and histories. These teachings examine elements significant to their culture, and interactions among community members, to the land and the environment. Teachings, history and knowledge are traditionally passed down orally from generation to generation. While there is diversity in the beliefs and cultural practices among Canada's First Nations People, there is a common theme of respect for the interconnectivity and interdependence of all living things.
2. Introduce students to the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabe people. Anishinaabe means first or original people. The Anishinaabe people include Ojibway, Odawa and Algonquin people who are closely related by their use of the Algonquin language. Ideally, these teachings would be shared by an Elder or member of the Aboriginal community coming into the classroom.
3. If an elder cannot come in, read or summarize the story behind the Teachings. (See *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* or www.davidbouchard.com/mtw/sst.pdf for the ebook Seven Sacred Teachings.)

4. After students hear the story, have them retell it as a class to check understanding by asking volunteers or selecting students to share one detail of the story each. Write the story on the front board or on chart paper as it is retold by the students. Students are to identify the Seven Teachings:
 - Nibwaakaawin—wisdom—the beaver
 - Saagi'idiwin—love—the eagle
 - Dendamowin—respect—the buffalo
 - Aakode'ewin—bravery—the bear
 - Gwayakwa-diziwin—honesty—the raven
 - Daabaadendiziwin—humility—the wolf
 - Debwewin—truth—the turtle

Clarify and elaborate the meaning of the Teachings as needed.

5. Ask students to make connections between the Seven Grandfather Teachings and their own community: How do they apply the Teachings to their everyday lives?
6. Tell students to write an example of a Teaching they think is practised in their classroom. Collect and post the examples on a wall in the classroom for students to refer to later.
7. Organize seven groups, and assign each one Teaching. Give the groups 15 minutes to generate examples of how they will demonstrate their assigned Teaching at home, at school and in their community.
8. Take twenty minutes to allow each group to share the Teachings they see in practice with the rest of the class.
9. Introduce students to the work of contemporary Anishinabek artists from the Woodland School of Canadian Art. (See the resources section for selected images or Google image search "Woodland School of Art".)
10. To create a greater understanding of the art, have students conduct research on Norval Morrisseau, the subject matter depicted in his art and the initial consequences he faced for exhibiting elements of Aboriginal cultures, traditional knowledge and teachings in his public artwork. (See www.native-art-in-canada.com/norvalmorrisseau.html)
11. Display images of paintings by several artists from the Woodland School. (Use of an interactive white board is ideal).
12. Collectively identify characteristics of the Woodlands style of art (dominant, black outlines that define images of animals, people, elements from Aboriginal stories and teachings, bold,

intense blocks of colours, interior shapes outlined/found within shapes, etc.). Record suggestions on the front board or on chart paper.

13. Instruct students to select one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings.
14. Distribute the art supplies. In the style of the Woodland School of Canadian Art, have students create a painting of the animal which represents that Teaching. In addition, students are to prepare a statement about the cultural significance of the inspiration of their artwork, along with personal examples of how they demonstrate the teaching in their own lives.
15. Once all students have completed their work, form a sharing circle and allow students to share their work and statement with the rest of the class.
16. Post the paintings in the hallway to share with the rest of the school community.

■ **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

In addition to the lesson plan, share these resources with your students:

- The Anishnaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings: www.anishinaabemdaa.com/grandfathers.htm
- Seven Sacred Teachings: www.davidbouchard.com/mtw/sst.pdf
- Seven Grandfather Teachings with animal connections: www.abegweithealth.ca/
- The Art of Storytelling: www.aboriginalbc.com/stories/the-art-of-storytelling/
- Norval Morrisseau: <http://www.mcmichael.com/exhibitions/morrisseau/images.cfm> and www.mcmichael.com/exhibitions/morrisseau/about.cfm
- Woodlands Style of Art: www.native-art-in-canada.com/woodlandsschool.html