Purpose: Students will study the distinct style of Haida art specifically focusing on the significance and purpose of totem poles. They will then apply their learnings by drawing their own totem pole.

Estimated time: 90 minutes

Resources required:
- Large blank paper
- Select art supplies (i.e. pencil crayons, charcoal, pastels, etc.)

Activity:
1. Begin the class by asking students to share what they know about totem poles (e.g., what they are, what they are made from, where they can be found, etc.).

2. Tell students that totem poles are believed to have originated with the Haida people of Haida Gwaii off the West Coast of Canada (also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands). Share with students a brief history of Haida totem poles and art:

   Haida art has distinct characteristics that can be found in the many mediums Haida art takes. The art follows similar lines, shapes and subject matter on canvas as it does on totem poles and sculptures. An image of Bill Reid's sculpture: "Spirit of the Haida Gwaii" was used on the back of the Canadian twenty dollar bill that was issued from 2004 to 2011. Two productions of the sculpture exist: one is located in the Vancouver, BC airport, made of bronze but frequently referred to as the Jade Canoe. The other production can be found in front of the Canadian embassy in Washington DC, it is also made of bronze but is known as the Black Canoe.

   The practice of carving large west coast red cedars into totem poles is believed to have started with the Haida people because of the high level of sophistication of their totem poles. Few totem poles exist from before 1900 due to natural decay but also from human destruction resulting from a history of misunderstanding the purpose of totem poles.

   An early champion of Haida art was Emily Carr. Carr, a Canadian artist and writer who was born in Victoria, British Columbia in 1871, first came upon totem poles in 1907 while on a cruise to Alaska with her sister. After travelling much of the coast in the summer of 1912 with the desire to document the totem poles in their own villages to preserve their, Carr returned to give a "Lecture on Totems." In the lecture she publicly declared the perilous state she found the totem poles in: "These poles are fast becoming extinct, every year sees some of their number fall, rotted with age; others bought and carried off to museums in various parts of the world." Carr feared for the future of this aspect of First Nations culture. Carr’s paintings are not photographic in their depiction because Carr believed it was more important to capture the spirit of the communities she visited—both deserted and populated—in order to create an accurate historical memory.

   A few Canadian artists, including Bill Reid and Robert Davidson, have revived the disappearing art style of the Haida. In 1969, Robert Davidson carved and erected the first totem pole in his hometown of Masset, British Columbia—a remote fishing village on the north coast of Haida Gwaii—in nearly a century.

   Once erected, totem poles are often not maintained, but are left to the elements to weather and age naturally. Therefore, the bright paint becomes faded and the sharp features soften as time passes.

3. Show students some examples of Haida totem poles and Haida art. Check out a few of the following links or use an internet image search engine for examples of Haida art, Haida totem poles or Emily Carr totem pole paintings.
   i. Haida totem poles:
      - Simon Fraser University: The Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Art Studies
        [www.sfu.ca/brc/art_architecture/totem_poles.html](http://www.sfu.ca/brc/art_architecture/totem_poles.html)
      - The University of British Columbia: Indigenous Foundations Arts
        [http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/totem-poles.html](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/totem-poles.html)
   ii. Haida totem art:
      - Robert Davidson art
        [www.robertdavidson.ca/earlier_works.php](http://www.robertdavidson.ca/earlier_works.php)
      - An examination of Bill Reid’s art via The Raven's Call
   iii. Other examples:
      - Emily Carr Heritage Minute
        [www.historiccanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/emily-carr?media_type=41&media_category=39](http://www.historiccanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/emily-carr?media_type=41&media_category=39)

4. Distribute supplies. Instruct students to begin their art project by listing five characteristics of people that are important to them. Next, they should connect it to a symbol such as an animal, for example, a bear may symbolize strength or a protector, a beaver may symbolize resourcefulness or industriousness, a frog may symbolize adaptability, etc.
5. Tell the class that, based on the lists they made, they will create a sketch of their own totem poles. Students should consider the perspective of their sketch (e.g., will it be a faraway look with a clear setting? Will it be a close-up examination of a section of a totem pole that has particular importance to the artist?) They should also decide if it will be a black and white sketch, brightly coloured or faded. Advise students to tell a story with their drawing. Give them 45 minutes to complete their sketches. Students may need to complete their artwork at home. If so, set a date for submission.

6. Once students have finished or on the date of submission, divide the class into groups of five or six. Instruct students to take turns presenting their art to their group. Students should explain what each part of their totem pole and picture represents essentially sharing the story orally that their drawing shares visually.

7. Post the art in the classroom or in a prominent hallway to share it with the rest of the school community. Explain to the class that while their drawings are their own, like Haida totem poles erected on the West Coast of Canada, they also belong to the community.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

- An examination of Bill Reid’s art via The Raven’s Call: [www.theravenscall.ca/en/art](http://www.theravenscall.ca/en/art)
- Emily Carr, Haida Gwaii Heritage Minute: [www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/emily-carr?media_type=41&media_category=39](http://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/emily-carr?media_type=41&media_category=39)
- Robert Davidson art: [www.robertdavidson.ca/earlier_works.php](http://www.robertdavidson.ca/earlier_works.php)
- Simon Fraser University: The Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Art Studies: [www.sfu.ca/brc/art_architecture/totem_poles.html](http://www.sfu.ca/brc/art_architecture/totem_poles.html)
- Thunderbird Park: [www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/exhibits/tbird-park/html/present/ex02/ex02.htm](http://www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/exhibits/tbird-park/html/present/ex02/ex02.htm)