GRADE 1-3: THE ARTS

EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPE DORSET AND INUIT ART

**Purpose:** Students will increase their knowledge of Cape Dorset, an Inuit hamlet near the southern tip of Baffin Island in Nunavut. They will learn of the impact Inuit art has had on the Canadian art scene as well as how Canadians and others understand the Inuit way of life. Students will also explore the significance of self-expression through an artistic medium.

**Estimated time:** 60 minutes

**Resources required:**
- A bar of soap for every student. Children should bring a bar of soap from home, allowing them to select the colour and size. Provide a few spares for students who are unable to bring their own.
- Carving tools: spoons, popsicle sticks, toothpicks, etc.
- Old newspapers for covering desks or work tables

**Activity:**
1. **Begin the class with a discussion about art.** Ask students the follow questions:
   a. What is art?
   b. Why do people make art?
   c. Where do you find a lot of art?
   d. What are different types of art?
   e. What materials can be used to make art?
   f. What kinds of art do you like to make?
   g. What is it about making this type of art that you like?
   h. Why is art important?

2. **On the front board write the answers students provide.** Draw attention to carving and sculpture creation as an art form. Extend the conversation by asking students some of the following questions:
   a. What kind of materials can you make a carving out of?
   b. Why would you make a carving or sculpture?
   c. Why would a carving be important to someone?

3. **Bring students back to the topic of where art is found.** In the first section of the lesson, students may have answered “art galleries” or “museums”. Introduce that a lot of art can be found in other areas, such as Cape Dorset. Cape Dorset is located in Nunavut, Canada. Explain that Cape Dorset is considered the “capital of Inuit art” for the carvings and print making that has taken place there since the 1950s. Many of the residents who live in Cape Dorset are artists, making it one of the most artistic populations in Canada. Often Inuit carvings are made from soap stone, a soft rock that varies in hardness and smoothness and has been used for carvings for thousands of years.

4. **Share examples of soap stone carvings from a Cape Dorset Inuit artist:** [http://capedorset-inuitart.com/](http://capedorset-inuitart.com/).

5. **Read the following description of Inuit art to students to give them a background of its significance to their culture and history, as well as the inspiration behind the pieces they create.**

   By showing us in drawings and sculptures how their ancestors lived, Inuit artists are keeping their history alive. Art helps them remember, and treasure, the ways their ancestors hunted and made protective clothing and shelter. In their art, many Inuit are making a visual history to show how their ancestors adapted to living in one of the harshest climates on earth. Arctic birds, animals and sea mammals are another important subject for Inuit artists. Powerful polar bears, sleek seals, swift caribou, white wolves and magnificent owls are just a few of the creatures you’ll find in Inuit sculpture and drawings.

   When you look closely at the birds and animals in Inuit art, you will see that each one often has its own special character. The individual appearance of the creatures in Inuit art grows out of the respect that Inuit gave to all living things. Many Inuit myths and legends tell how humans and other living beings are all connected in a powerful universe. These legends speak of the spiritual forces that are present in the Inuit world. The stories, and the spirits they describe, continue to be inspiring sources for Inuit artists today.


6. **Tell students that they will be making their own “soap stone” carving out of the bars of soap they brought from home.** Have students cover their desks or work tables with newspaper before they lay out their soap bars and materials. Arrange students so they are sitting in groups, which will allow them to share their ideas and tools.

7. **Before students begin to carve, encourage them to sketch out the shape they plan to carve on a piece of paper that is about the same size as their bar of soap.** Students should draw the details they will carve so they have a model to work from. Once they have done an outline on paper, they can transfer the outline to the bar of soap with toothpicks.

8. **Have students carve their design or animal using the tools provided.** One technique for smoothing out rougher edges is to use water. Fill containers with water and instruct students to rub
wet paper towel or their fingers against the rough, carved edges of the soap to help smooth and round them out. Just remember to be careful since soap is slippery when wet.

9. Once students have finished their carving, encourage them to name their piece of art. Have them set their carvings on the perimeter of the room and create a label that includes the name of their piece, a few words describing why their carving is meaningful to them and their artist name.

10. Hold a gallery walk to allow students to share their work. Invite other classes and parents to join the viewing. Sharing their carvings with others is an important part of learning to appreciate their art and the art made by others.

11. Have students reconnect as a class to discuss the experience of learning about Inuit art and creating their own carvings. Have your students share their likes, challenges and areas where they learned something new.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

- Northern Images Communities “Cape Dorset, Nunavut”  [www.northernimages.ca/Artists-Communities/Communities/17748/Cape%20Dorset,Nunavut.aspx](http://www.northernimages.ca/Artists-Communities/Communities/17748/Cape%20Dorset,Nunavut.aspx)