NORVAL MORRISSEAU: STORYTELLING THROUGH PAINTING

RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: Grades 1 to 3

SUBJECT: Visual Art

Suggested time: 120 minutes

Essential Question: How can stories be told through art??

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

• Learn about Ojibwe artist Norval Morrisseau and the style of painting called Woodland School
• Discuss storytelling and the ways in which stories are usually told
• Apply their learning in their own Woodland School style painting

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

• Images of Morrisseau’s work, either from a print book or pulled from the Internet
• Sheet of thick paper OR canvas board for each student, 16” x 20” (“tape off a border on each one, taping down onto a newspaper placemat)
• Tempera or acrylic paints (black and a variety of bright colours)
• Brushes: thin and medium sizes
• Painters’ tape or masking tape
• Pencils and erasers
• Scrap paper
• Smocks
• “Boy with Fish.” Art Gallery of Ontario. www.ago.net/boy-with-fish
• Art Canada Institute: Norval Morrisseau: www.aci-iac.ca/content/art-books/39/Art-Canada-Institute_Norval-Morrisseau.pdf

EDUCATOR’S NOTE: A list of wordless picture books has been provided for you to share with your students. For the purpose of the activity below, any wordless book you have can be used.

WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS

• Fox and Hen Together (2011) --- Beatrice Rodriguez
• Chaik (2010) --- Bill Thompson
• A Boy, A Dog and a Frog (2003) --- Mercer Mayer
• Free Fall (2008) --- David Wiesher
• Pancakes for Breakfast (2011) --- Tomie dePaola

1. RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: Share a wordless picture book with your students. Ask the students to think about the story being told through the pictures. Who are the characters in the story? What is the story about? Ask students to think about how the story is told through the pictures? How can the picture tell a story?

2. Show an image of Man Changing into Thunderbird. Norval Morrisseau, 1977. Inform students that it is a series of paintings that fit together in a specific order to tell a story. Instruct students to study/look at each painting in order. Ask students:

• What do you see in this work?
• What differences do you see between each painting?
• Can you see a story being told?

3. RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: Allow enough time to let students share their thoughts and observations.

4. Introduce the artist:

• Norval Morrisseau was born in a Ojibwe community in Northern Ontario in 1931. He died in 2007.
• He was a self-taught artist. Ask students: what does it mean to be a self-taught artist? Have you ever taught yourself anything? What was it?
• Morrisseau’s paintings tell stories from his Indigenous culture Ojibwe-Anishnaabe.
• He became famous in the 1960s when he used a unique painting style called the Woodland School.
• Morisseau’s work was especially important because usually Anishnaabe stories were related in the oral tradition, passed down from one generation to the next.
• He wanted to use his work to share parts of Anishnaabe spirituality in a visual way, not only with other members of the Ojibwe community, but also to share with non-Indigenous people in a way everyone could understand.

5. Show students images of other Morisseau works, focusing on animal motifs (find these on the Internet; suggestions: eagle, bird, fish, turtle, moose)
   • Morisseau’s work often depicts what he imagined to be the souls of humans and animals, through a unique style that has been described as x-ray like.
   • What do you notice about these paintings? What is similar in the paintings?
   • What is an x-ray? How are these paintings x-ray like? (E.g., the black outlines form a kind of skeleton of the animal/figure)

6. Now that students understand Morisseau’s Woodland Style, inform students they will create a painting in the Woodland School style. Keep some images of Morisseau’s work up on a PowerPoint, or leave books open for them to reference.

7. Each student should choose an animal or figure/self-portrait to paint. Emphasize that to paint like Morisseau, their chosen figure should be outlined with black lines and the spaces inside will be filled in with many different bright colours.

8. Give each student a piece of scrap paper for them to first sketch their idea with pencil. When they are ready, on their large paper or canvas, have students lightly sketch their design before painting, to plan exactly where their shapes are going to be.

9. If students begin with black outlines, let the lines dry for a few minutes before using the brighter, inside colours to avoid colours mixing. Make sure students add a colourful background (Morisseau typically chose a single bright colour for the whole background).

10. **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING:** At the end of the lesson or in the next class, have students do a gallery walk of their paintings. Ask students to share what they painting and why.