

Canada Arrives in a Splash of Colour

Developed By	Victoria Baldwin - Thomas
Suggested Length	2 – 3 classes for each lesson
Suggested Grade Level(s)	10, 11, 12
Subject Areas	Social Studies, Language Arts, Visual Arts

Overview

This unit focuses on the transformation of Canadian society and culture from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s as the new Canada emerged as an independent nation.

Links to Curriculum Outcomes

Students will (be expected to)

- analyse and compare events of the past to the present in order to make informed, creative decisions about issues (social studies)
- interpret and predict patterns of causality and change over time (social studies)
- understand the influence of the visual arts , their impact on daily life, and their power to create, alter, and reflect culture (visual arts)
- use the cueing systems and a variety of strategies to construct meaning in reading and viewing complex and sophisticated print and media texts (language arts)

Links to Telling Stories: Themes / Key Words

- Group of Seven

Art Works

- *Church - Gaspé*, Robert Harris, CAG H-235
- *Bas Mendon, Paris*, Robert Harris, CAG H-106
- *From Rectory, Port Medway, Nova Scotia*, Robert Harris, CAG H -8006.9
- *Tent in Rectory Grounds Port Medway N.S., 1st Position*, Robert Harris, CAG H -8006.6
- *Medway N.S. Under Railroad Bridge*, Robert Harris, CAG H -8006.3
- *Landscape*, Robert Harris, CAG H -67
- *In Charlottetown, Falconwood Park*, Robert Harris, CAG H 2154

- *Tea Lake Dam*, 1917, Tom Thomson
- *Forest Interior*, c.1912, Tom Thomson
- *Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay*, 1914-15, Tom Thomson
- *The Sumacs*, c.1915-16, Tom Thomson

- *Autumn, Algonquin Park*, 1916-17, Tom Thomson
- *Artist's Home and Orchard*, 1927, J.E.H. MacDonald

Context

Even with the overlap in the time of Harris' work and that of the Group of Seven, Harris as the predecessor paved the way for these artists to uniquely represent Canada and help form our identity. Harris, as the first Canadian artist to secure commission contracts with the government, showed that the government was hungry for a new image of our new nation, yet Harris' works did not stray far from colonial art, which probably contributed to their immediate public approval.



Lesson #1: Who We Were – Who We Are

Objective Students will investigate social and political issues surrounding the founding of Canada, and compare their relevance to Canada today.

Materials

- pen
- paper

Activities

Begin with a class discussion on the founding of Canada.

1. As a class, view only the Harris pieces in this unit. Analyze the delicate, detailed manner in which the sketchbook pieces were done. Does this evoke a colonial style? Analyze the landscapes and comment on the colors used and the conservative style of the work. Remind students that Harris was very popular during his time and was the first artist to be commissioned by the Canadian government. His role was to paint the new Canada.
2. With students, consider the following:
 - How do his landscapes differ from those of the British?
 - What did it mean to be under British rule?
 - Differentiate between a colony and a nation.
 - List British customs that were followed (clothing, gardening, architecture, interior décor).
 - Did individuals rebel against, or embrace British culture?
 - Compare America's perspective on freedom from British rule in 1776 to Canada's at the time of Confederation.
 - After Canada became a nation and the industrial era was upon us, did Canadians abandon British culture for the relatively newly established American culture?

- How did Canada populate and build the country?
 - Was the government's policy on immigration widely accepted?
3. Compare the occupations and roles of Chinese, European, and Caribbean individuals in the new Canada. (Why were some Caribbean and Africans already here?) Note comments on chart paper.
 4. Small groups of students share thoughts and compare notes on the chart (Canada in the past) with present day Canadian political and social opinion.
 5. Students write a brief reflection paper concerning the views of today's Canadians on issues discussed in their group.



Lesson #2: Canada Gets a Makeover

Objective Students will interpret art works representing Canadian identity in the past and compare that identity to how Canada is perceived globally in the present, speculating visually on perceptions of Canada in the future.

Materials

- paper
- colored pencils

Activities

1. Students analyse all works in this unit, comparing the Harris pieces to Group of Seven pieces.
 - Why do they think the Harris pieces were readily accepted while works by the Group of Seven were widely criticized?
 - Why are the Group of Seven's works considered nationally and internationally as a valid representation of Canada? Has the landscape changed since then?
2. List some things internationally associated with Canadian culture (moose, beaver, Mounties in serge, hockey). Consider:
 - Is the Canadian identity still defined internationally as a vast, cold, sparsely inhabited land? Do you think this view of Canada is antiquated?
 - Toronto has tried to establish itself as a "world class" city in the last century, have they succeeded?
 - What factors now contribute to dispelling the myth of Canada as a wilderness (sound stages, popular singers and actors, the

Governor General's international promotion of Canadian culture)?

- Are we partly responsible for the outdated image of Canada?
 - Is Canada the only young country that suffers from stereotyping due to our vast landscape? (Consider Australia and what comes to mind, and question the validity of these images.)
3. Have students predict the future of Canadian identity (since they will be the ones creating that identity), considering the power of visual messages on foreign audiences. Ask about what are we doing that has international impact (Canada Arm, cancer research, entertainers, digital media animation).
 4. Encourage students to use images that have meaning to their generation while considering future generations. Students draw a montage of Canada's new image for an intended national and international audience.



Lesson #3: The Mighty Brush

Objective Students will recognize the motives of the Group of Seven within the context of Canadian history, question if their art reflects or creates culture, and paint a piece in their style.

Materials

- canvas board
- acrylic paints
- brushes
- pallet knife
- pencils
- paper

Activities

The class analyses all pieces in this unit, taking into account their historical context.

1. Discuss how Harris paved the way for the Group of Seven. Question why the works of the Group of Seven received negative reviews, while Harris' works were praised.
2. Have students compare the following works:
 - *Tea Lake Road* and CAG H-106
 - *Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay* and CAG H-8006.3

- The Sumacs and CAG H-64
 - *Autumn, Algonquin Park* and CAG H-2154
 - *Artist's Home and Orchard* and CAG H-235
3. Guide students to consider the differences in use of color, composition, treatment of the subject, technique, motion (or lack thereof), and visual impact.
 4. Remind students that the proponents of Victorian Classical realism felt that the uncultivated Canadian wilderness could never be successfully painted. Consider:
 - In a historical context, why was this view popular?
 - Did the members of the Group of Seven consider this a challenge – to create a new method of painting for a newly formed nation?
 - Were they reflecting or creating a uniquely Canadian identity?
 - History shows that the negative reaction to their work ultimately served to validate it. Why?
 5. Students choose photo references of contemporary Canadian landscapes and draw preliminary sketches.
 6. Students block out their sketches on the canvas.
 7. They create movement by applying paint in thick loose strokes, painting the emotion they wish to express, ignoring details.
 8. Encourage them to have a classmate hold their paintings at a distance, so they can evaluate the composition and focal point, and make necessary adjustments.
 9. Students circulate during the art making process to discuss and view classmates' work.



Lesson #4: Visions of Grandeur

Objective Students will derive a concept of Canadian identity and expound upon the historical importance of the referenced art works, read visually descriptive text, and translate the writing into a pastel piece.

Materials

- colored construction paper

- sketching pencils
- oil pastels
- paper

Activities

1. The class views all pieces in the unit, questioning the historical factors surrounding the pieces. What was the motivating factor for the works? Discuss Confederation, British influence on art, and what makes the work of the Group of Seven distinctly Canadian.
2. Have students read a visually descriptive piece of writing from any time period that concentrates on the Canadian landscape. (This might be done outside class time.) Suggest representative works by Canadian authors or those writing about Canada. Depending on the time frame, it might be a novel, short story, poem, or travel journal. Students choose a passage that has impacted them with the clearest visual and emotional mental image.
3. Provide students with copies of the Group of Seven pieces in the unit (and others if available).
4. Students sketch their own image on paper. They determine a light source and proceed to shade the sketch defining the flat shapes into forms with light, mid and dark values.
5. Students decide on the color scheme and translate the values into tints, tones, and shades (by testing the colors on a piece of scrap paper).
6. Students choose a piece of colored pastel paper closest to the mid value of their color scheme and block out the major elements of the sketch, using a light pastel. They apply the color in chunks to mimic the painting style, blending with their fingers or a lighter pastel over a darker one. Students fill the entire paper with color, leaving no empty spaces.

Ideas for Assessment

Display works and provide the related descriptive writing. Challenge students to match the writing to the art works. Have them comment on the visual representation of descriptive passages. What is revealed in the art work that is not present in the writing and vice versa?

Suggested Resources

- *The McMichael Canadian Art Collection* (Jean Blodgett, Megan Bice, David Wistow, and Lee-Ann Martin, 1989) Note: Referenced Group of Seven works are taken from this book.

- *The Group of Seven: A Northern Shore* (AGO, video, 1991) 30 min. colour
- *Group of Seven Video*, (Outreach Services, McMichael Canadian Art Collection) 15 min. colour
- Complete visual references may easily be located with an online search engine (e.g., Altavista) by entering Artist's name or the Galleries: AGO, McMichael Gallery.

