

Chapter 19

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· syəθ · sʰ wəŋem̄
memory · history · story



Numbered Each and Every One George Littlechild 2008

selected works from the AFK collection
and student mixed media works
based on the art of

George Littlechild and Jane Ash Poitras

*We would like to thank the Coast Salish people,
specifically the Squamish Nation and Tsleil Waututh Nation,
on whose traditional territory the North Vancouver School District
and the Gordon Smith Gallery reside.
We value the opportunity to learn, live
and share educational experiences on this traditional territory.*

Introduction

The exhibit *Memory • History • Story* provides students, educators and visitors with a resource to look at the way we, as individuals and as larger communities, learn. Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s calls to action, the B.C. Ministry of Education developed new curriculum with a focus to indigenize all areas of learning. This change means not only adding and altering content in the various subject areas but also the methods used to teach these subjects. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) has been particularly valuable in providing online learning resources to ensure that the issues and concerns of BC First Nations are meaningfully addressed.

In the process of curating this exhibit, many questions and emotions were integral to the decisions of how to organize and present these works and ideas. As curators, we settled on the understanding that art serves as a medium to record emotions, memories, stories and histories. Using the *First Peoples Principles of Learning*, available from FNESC, works have been grouped into areas that reflect the following:

- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.
- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships and a sense of place).
- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.

Text for this exhibition is a selection of key words taken from the *First Peoples Principles of Learning*, translations of this text were provided by the Squamish and Tsleil Waututh Nations. Blank spaces in the text were purposefully left, to show the loss and near extinction of the Halkomelen language (Tsleil Waututh Nation).

The art pieces exhibited provide a record of these artists’ memories, their histories, and most importantly the story of their experiences. They depict a wide array of experience; relocation, being forced to settle in a specific location, residential schools, loss of family and culture, connection to spirits and the land, discovering and reviving cultures. As viewers we are challenged to interpret, research, and question our understanding of these works and of the events that have influenced these artists’ lives.

As students and the public visit this exhibit, we hope as educators and curators, that the dialogue about the historical and current issues of Indian Residential Schools in Canada and the long work of reconciliation that is in Canada’s future expands for these visitors.

Mentors of ours have asked us as educators to “go forward with courage.” This has been a tremendous support for our work to put together this exhibition. We would like to add to this our voices and say – go forward with compassion.

Veis Dokhani and Daylen Luchsinger



Memory • History • Story



gallery installation and opening





Sisters Storm Jane Ash Poitras 1999

The Lesson

This activity is based upon the work and process of two artists, George Littlechild and Jane Ash Poitras. Both artists have used research and mixed media processes to explore topics of history, story, and memory centering around cultural loss, exploration and re-learning. Students will be asked to respond visually to Canada's historical and current issues surrounding residential schools. In the process of this response students will be asked to make emotional associations with colour, imagery, text, symbols, mark-making and patterning using the work of Poitras and Littlechild as sources of inspiration.

Indigenous principal of learning:

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Big Idea:

Art connects us by reflecting the world through time, place, culture and other contexts.

Content, Skills and Vocabulary:

colonialism, residential schools, reconciliation, discrimination, civilize, inferior/superior, symbolism and metaphor, emphasis, variety, repetition, collage, layering, pattern, mark making, painting & glazing (the TATE is a great resource for definitions of art terms:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms>)

Materials:

paper, image bank, pre-mixed tempera paint with matt acrylic medium in primary and secondary colours, scissors, white glue, brushes, oil pastels, pencil crayons and stencils

Step #1. Memory (remembering), History & Story

Introduce the unit by telling the story of *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005) or *Learning from generation to generation* (see: FNESC resources). (Remembering the past is a major theme in the story of Indian Residential Schools).

Show images of residential schools and provide context and information on Canada's history of the residential school system. Choose from the list of questions below to start a dialogue during or after the presentation, to discuss features of residential schools: i.e. travelling a great distance aboard a cattle truck, cutting off hair, regimentation of children's lives, forced use of English, dormitory situation for sleeping, enforced work by children to maintain the institution, poor food, loneliness, etc.

1. How do these images differ from the story(s) you just heard?
2. Why were indigenous children forced to attend Indian Residential Schools?
3. How were Indian Residential School buildings different from school building today?

4. What were some of the features of an Indian Residential School?
5. How did the way children were treated at Indian Residential Schools make them feel about themselves?
6. How was daily life for student at an Indian Residential School different from daily life of students today?
7. How did students learn to survive in the schools?
8. What issues faced students when they returned home after residential school?
9. What is reconciliation?
10. What is the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Introduce the art project by showing images of contemporary indigenous art. Kent Monkman, George Littlechild, Jane Ash Poitras. Create a dialogue, asking the following questions. Here Kent Monkman's work (<http://www.kentmonkman.com>) is used to show a narrative approach to depicting events of Canada's past and and resented as showing a different artistic approach from that of Littlechild and Poitras.

1. What is the artist's intent in including collaged imagery, symbolism and text?
2. How do symbols connect with the story that is reflected in the art?
3. How do you think the artist feels about Residential Schools? Why?
4. What artistic techniques and choices does the artist use to express opinions?



Student Work Westview Elementary



Student Work Westview Elementary



Shamanic Journey
Jane Ash Poitras
1997

Step #2: Gathering imagery and text for the collage

Have students create a list of words and symbols to choose from as a resource for their mixed media works.

1. Use resources such as “Learning from Generation to Generation” and the list of words and phrases provided.
2. Referring to the selected art, find and connect symbols with meanings.

Provide the image categories (eg: group photos, maps school buildings, living conditions, school labour, classrooms, everyday life) on historical and current issues of residential schools in Canada to the students to observe and collect from.

Step #3: Creation Process

Students will be tasked with creating an art work using collage and mixed media techniques in response to their learning about the issues of residential schools, using imagery, symbols and texts.

- Explain collage as an artistic process; explain variety in composition.
- Provide instructions on how to create an overall interesting composition using: image selection, text, emphasis, repetition (changing scale).
- Demonstrate arranging images into a composition and gluing them down. It is important to encourage students to play with a variety of compositions and how images can interact with each other before they glue them down.
- Students: select and arrange their images on paper to tell a story, and paste them down using white glue.
- Discuss the impact of colours on emotion. Discuss the colours you have (possibly limit this project to primary and secondary colours); warm versus cool, subtle versus intense. Ask students to associate emotions with the different colours.
- Demonstrate painting and glazing with paint and acrylic medium. Draw students’ attention to the different qualities that can be achieved, the opaque and translucent properties of applying the paint.
- Students: paint and glaze their compositions using both opaque and translucent application of the paint, and choosing colours based upon emotion.

Step #4: Finalizing the composition

Have students add text, symbols, and patterns to their work. Their focus should be on content, mark making and adding emphasis to the composition (use oil pastels and/or pencil crayons).

We would like to thank our colleagues who have helped provide direction and refinement of this lesson; Brad Baker, Kory Bogen, Raphael Choi, Todd Clark, Stephanie Makie, Yolande Martinello, Heather Myher, Meghan Parker, and Catherine Schechter.



Buffalo Rebirth
Jane Ash Poitras
1994



Plains Cree Chiefs George Littlechild
1994



On Sacred Ground George Littlechild 1996

Resources

Grade 5 Indian Residential schools and Reconciliation

<http://www.fnesc.ca/grade5irsr/Shi-shi-etko> by Nicola I. Campbell

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Shi-shi-etko.-a0197723131> <http://ebookrich.com/book.php?id=393357&geo=zonus#>

Imagery on Indian Residential Schools taken from Library and Archives Canada

http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?form=image&lang=eng&FormName=Image+Search&PageNum=1&SortSpec=score+desc&HighLightFields=title%2Cname&Language=eng&QueryParser=lac_mikan&Sources=mikan&Archives=&ShowForm=show&SearchIn_1=&SearchInText_1=residential+schools&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Media%5B%5D=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&cainInd=&ResultCount=50

Reconciliation Pole

<http://ceremonies.ubc.ca/reconciliation-pole/>

Art Vocabulary and Definitions:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms>

Featured Artists:

Jane Ash Poitras: http://www.spiritwrestler.com/catalog/index.php?artists_id=58

George Littlechild: <http://georgelittlechild.com>

Kent Monkman: <http://www.kentmonkman.com>

Please find colour images and a slide show about Canadian Residential School on the resource page of AFK's website:

<http://www3.gordonsmithgallery.ca/Artists4Kids/Pages/default.aspx>

ARTISTS FOR KIDS was established in 1989 through a generous partnership among some of Canada's finest artists and the North Vancouver School District. Its mission, through the sale of original prints created by its artist patrons, is to build an art education legacy for the children of British Columbia. The Gordon Smith Gallery of Canadian Art is home to a stunning collection of work created by its patrons. Artists For Kids provides a variety of art enrichment program opportunities for thousands of students of all ages each year including the popular Paradise Valley Summer School of Visual Art.