

# Representing Birds: Mixed Media Paintings Inspired by Kenojuak Ashevak

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**TOPICS:** Watercolour painting; Texture application; Simplifying imagery; Layering; Depicting a bird

**SUBJECT(S):** Visual Arts

**GRADE(S):** K-3

**UNIT DURATION:** 3 lessons

**OVERVIEW & CULMINATING TASK:** Kenojuak Ashevak, one of Canada's most revered Inuit artists, was born at the South Baffin Island camp known as Ikirisaq in the fall of 1927. She grew up travelling from camp to camp on south Baffin and Arctic Quebec. Like many Cape Dorset artists, Kenojuak spent most of her life living on the land in a manner not unlike that of her ancestors. Her imaginative drawings, prints and carvings are sought the world over and reflect her experiences and life in the North. While her imagery is varied, she is best known for her eloquently designed animals and birds, especially the Owl.

In this unit, students will explore how to simplify and abstract a bird using watercolour and ink. Students will experiment with a variety of techniques including simplifying complex forms and figures, as well as watercolour painting and texture application. This unit teaches students to create a dynamic composition and to use layering in their art.

## **BIG IDEAS (What students will understand):**

- Creative experiences involve an interplay between exploration, inquiry, and purposeful choice. (Arts Education 3)
- People connect to the hearts and minds of others in a variety of places and times through the arts. (Arts Education 2)

## **CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES (What students will do):**

- Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences
- Explore elements, processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, and techniques of the arts

## **CONCEPTS & CONTENT (What students will know):**

- Image development strategies
- Elements of visual art; principles of design



Kenojuak Ashevak, *Radiant Owl*, 1996, two colour stonecut print, 24.5 x 27 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

- Traditional and contemporary Indigenous arts and arts-making processes

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) (What students will keep considering):**

- What are the basic shapes needed to represent a bird?
- What techniques can be used to represent texture using ink and watercolour paint?

## **FIRST PEOPLES' PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:**

Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.

## **MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES:**

- digital images of artworks by Kenojuak Ashevak (see end of document)
- digital projector/computer
- 11.5"x15" pre-cut thick white paper (i.e. cardstock or opaque vellum) (1 per student)
- pencils
- small sticks (1 per student)
- watercolour paint
- brushes
- water pots
- black ink
- printed images of birds

## VOCABULARY:

pattern, repetition, colour blending, stippling, abstraction, texture, simplification, printmaking

## RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

- <http://www.dorsetfinearts.com/kenojuak-askhevak/>
- <http://www.afkeditions.com/artists/kenojuak-ashevak/>
- <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/>

## ADAPTATIONS & MODIFICATIONS:

Children with hand function difficulties may need thick handled brushes and sticks.

## DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES (Teacher Action/Student Action):

LESSON #1 (intro, sketching):

- View Kenojuak Ashevak's prints *Radiant Owl* and *Loons Feeding* with students. Share the titles of the artwork and information about the artist.
- Pose the following discussion questions: What methods has Kenojuak used to represent feathers in these artworks? Are the feathers realistic?
- Pose the following discussion questions while viewing *Radiant Owl*: How do the radiating feathers reflect the title? What other elements and principles have been used to indicate the sun? Why has Kenojuak made her owl at sundown and not sunrise? What animals in your local environment are active when the sun goes down?
- Ask the students to choose an image of a bird and look at it in terms of its basic shapes.
- To plan a composition, students will simplify and draw the bird, scaling it up to fit the paper. Using pencils, students will generalize the details of the bird into simplified, basic shapes. Students will simplify a tail or a crest feather to a basic shape and repeat it around the bird's rump and head.
- Students will leave the background white (the white of the paper represents the snow).

LESSON #2 (watercolour painting):

- Watercolour is used for painting the bird's body. Students will imagine a light source (perhaps the sun), behind the bird's head. Remind students that the top feathers on the head and the tail of the bird should be in

warmer and lighter colours. The rest of the feathers would be coloured in darker colours.

- Watercolours should be used really wet so that the colour application would be translucent. Teacher needs to provide the specific colours that are used for the different sections of the bird's body, separately.
  - Warm/light colours: Ochre, light brown, and orange would be used for the top feathers.
  - Red is used for the chest.
  - Dark colours: Dark Red, dark brown and black would be used for the bottom feathers.

LESSON #3 (adding texture with ink):

- Once the watercolour is completely dry, students will use a stick to cover the outline of the bird with black ink.
- Students will use a wooden stick to fill in the feet, beak and eyes in black ink.
- Students will create a textured surface on the bird's body, using black ink.
- Instructions on how to create and maintain the same texture: Using sticks, students will create a small mark, then repeat and overlap it in different directions. The background colours should not disappear.

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

At the end of Lesson #1 pose the following reflection questions: What are some strategies that you can use to simplify an object? Why might an artist choose to simplify an object (i.e. a bird) in their artwork?

## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After students complete their collages pose the following reflection questions: How did you use layering to develop your paintings? How did you use texture and pattern to develop your paintings? What is a new artmaking strategy that you have learned in this process?

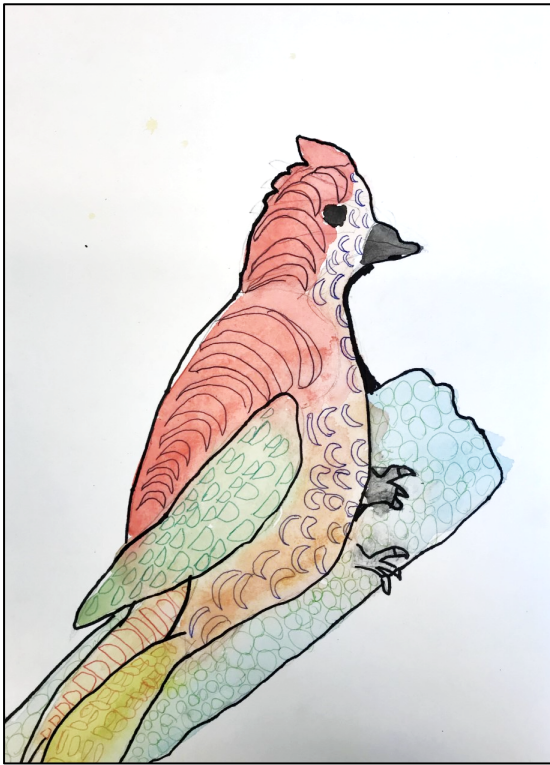
## EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Students may research and learn about local birds and other animals who are active when the sun goes down. Students may also learn about birds and animals who live in the Arctic as well as Inuit stories and oral histories featuring animals such as owls.

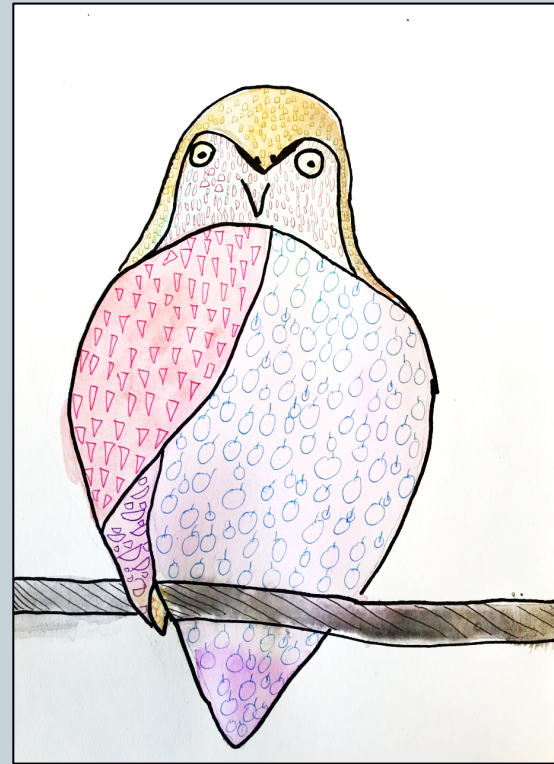
## AFK RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Visit the AFK Resources page to find lesson plans for all grade levels!

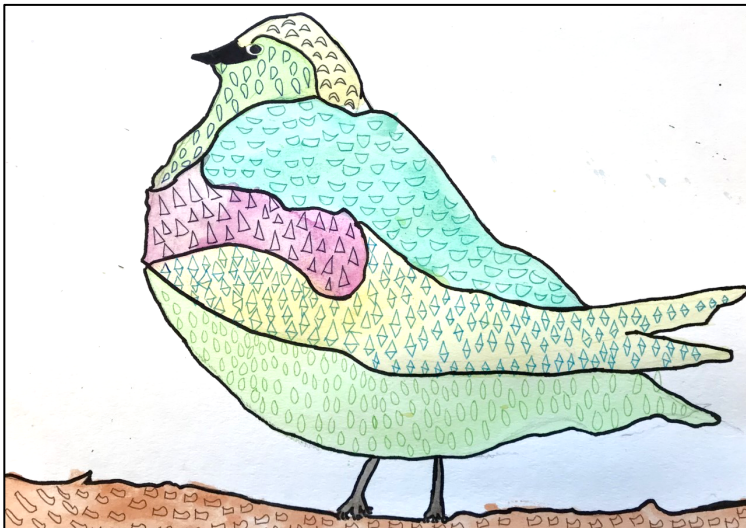
<http://tiny.cc/AFKResources>



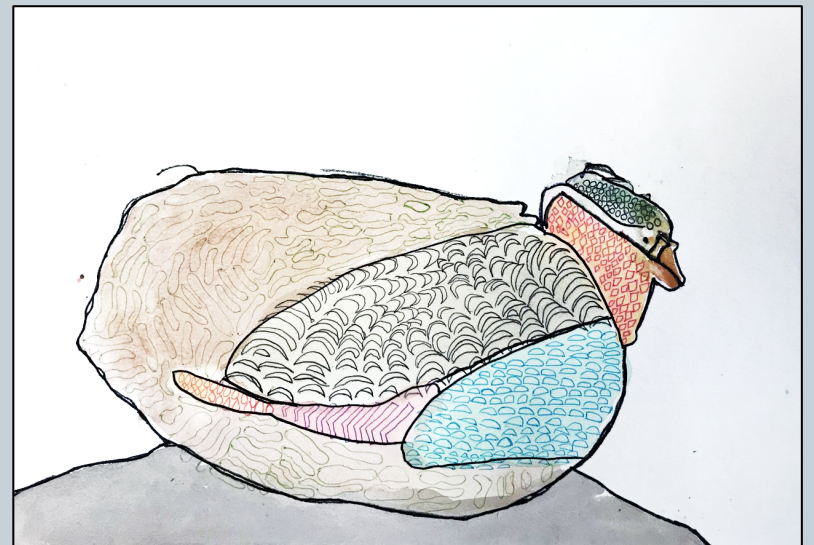
Artwork by Grade 2/3 Student at Highlands Elementary, AFK Outreach Program



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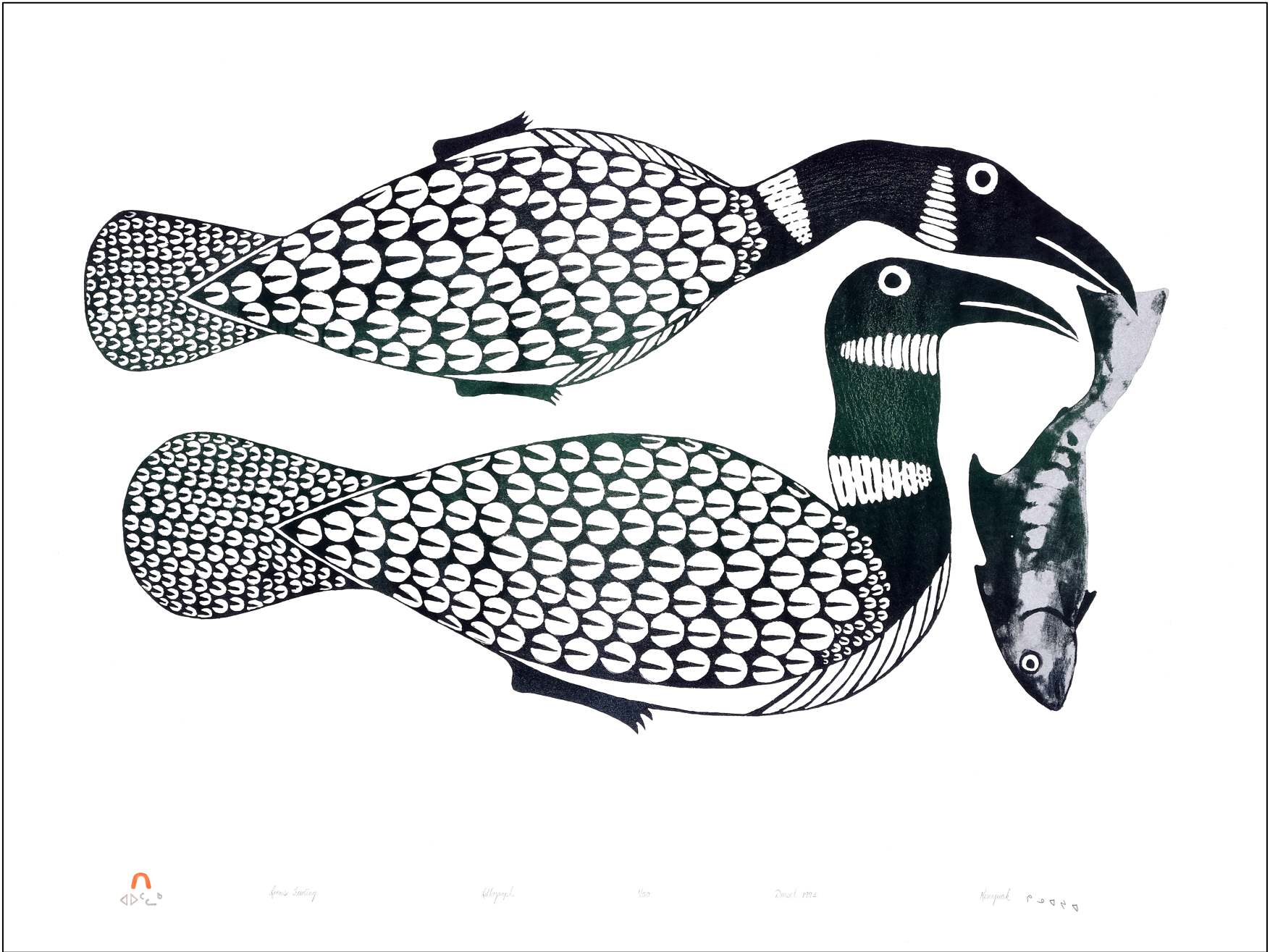


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Kenojuak Ashevak, *Radiant Owl*, 1996, two colour stonecut print, 24.5 x 27 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



Kenojuak Ashevak, *Loons Feeding*, 1994, Lithograph on Arches 88 paper, 57.5 x 76.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.