

# Song of Spring: Mixed Media Paintings Inspired by Kenojuak Ashevak

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**TOPICS:** Watercolour painting; Simplifying imagery; Depicting animals; Predator/prey relationships

**SUBJECT(S):** Visual Arts, Science

**GRADE(S):** 4-7

**UNIT DURATION:** 4 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 create simplified and abstracted renderings of animals using pencil, watercolour, oil pastel, and sharpie. Students will experiment with depicting animals in profile using fluid lines. This unit teaches students to create a dynamic composition and to depict the predator-prey relationship.

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

- Works of art influence and are influenced by the world around us. (Arts Education 5)
- All living things sense and respond to their environment. (Science 4)

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

- Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences
- Connect knowledge and skills from other areas of learning in planning, creating, interpreting, and analyzing works of art
- Demonstrate curiosity about the natural world

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

- Image development strategies



Kenojuak Ashevak, *Song of Spring*, 2006, lithograph on paper, 33 x 23 inches (each print). Image courtesy of the artist.

- Elements of visual art; principles of design
- Traditional and contemporary Indigenous arts and arts-making processes

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

- What techniques can an artist use to create flow and a feeling of connectivity in a composition?

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

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

## **MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES:**

- digital image of *Song of Spring* by Kenojuak Ashevak
- digital projector/computer
- pre-cut 11"x17" white watermedia or watercolour paper (1 per student)
- 11"x17" white printer paper (1 per student)
- pencils
- fine sharpies (1 per student)
- watercolour paint
- circle templates, approximately 9" in diameter (class set)
- brushes
- water pots
- printed images of birds, fish, and other Arctic animals (for students to use as visual references)
- oil pastels

## VOCABULARY:

balance, rhythm, unity, complimentary colours, positive/negative space, abstraction, simplification, printmaking, ecosystem, prey, predator, fluid lines, framing

## RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

- <http://www.dorsetfinearts.com/kenojuak-askhevak/>
- <http://www.afkeditons.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.

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

LESSON #1 (intro, sketching, research):

- View Kenojuak Ashevak's print *Song of Spring* with students (see large image at the end of this document). Share the title of the artwork and information about the artist.
- Pose the following discussion questions:
  1. What would this image sound like? What sounds make you think of Northern Canada? How might this image be different if it were called *Song of Winter*?
  2. Why has the artist used a circular composition? What can this symbolize?
  3. How does the artist's use of negative and positive space reflect elements of an ecosystem?
  4. In a different ecosystem what animals would be represented?
  5. Explain to the students that the artist has depicted the animals from the side or in profile (rather than front-facing). Ask the students: Why do you think the artist chose to depict the animals in profile?
  6. How would you describe the lines that Kenojuak has used to represent the animals in this print? Discuss the difference between fluid and rigid lines, using Kenojuak's work as an example of fluid lines. Why do you think Kenojuak chose to use fluid lines in her composition?
  7. Look closely at the animals in this print. Would you describe them as realistic? Why or why not? How has the artist simplified these animals?

Discuss with students the meaning of abstraction in art.

8. How has Kenojuak created a dynamic sense of flow in this composition? Point out how the shapes flow out from one another, interconnect, overlap, and spread across the paper.

- Have students choose one of the animals from Kenojuak's print to copy and sketch. Ask the students to depict the same animal using rigid, rather than fluid lines.
- Have the students independently research and then brainstorm as a class a number of predator/prey relationships that occur in the Canadian Arctic. Write a list of these relationships on the board.
- Have students choose one predator/prey relationship to depict in their own painting.
- Have students find and print reference images of their chosen animals (in profile) to use for creating their paintings.

LESSON #2 (sketching):

- Project Kenojuak Ashevak's *Song of Spring* print and review with students the discussion from the previous lesson about fluid lines, abstracted animals in profile, and creating flow in composition.
- Review the previous discussion about predator and prey relationships.
- Have each student cut out a circle template (approximately 9 inches in diameter) or distribute pre-cut circle templates.
- Have students position circle templates in the middle of their 11" x 17" white printer paper and trace the outline with pencil.
- Instruct students to draw (using pencil) 5 to 8 eyes on their page. Refer to Kenojuak's print for ideas regarding the size and shape of the eyes. Two eyes should be located outside of the circle (one to the left and one to the right of the circle). The remaining eyes should be located inside the circle.
- Have students connect the eyes together by drawing animal heads and fluid bodies. Students will either depict their chosen predators on the outside of the circle and the prey on the inside, or vice versa. Students will draw 2 large versions of the same animal on the outside of the circle.
- Students may use their reference images as they draw, with reminders to use fluid lines and to create abstracted versions of the animals.
- Have students refine their composition and then transfer it to the 11" x 17" watercolour or watermedia paper

### LESSON #3 (watercolour painting):

- Discuss with students the differences between warm and cool colours and create a list of warm and cool colours on the board. Explain that using warm and cool colours together creates high contrast and helps imagery to stand out.
- Have students use watercolour paints to add colour to their compositions.
  - Have students choose either warm or cool colours to paint the animals inside their circles. They will then choose the opposite to paint the background within the circle (i.e. warm reds and yellows for the animals and a cool purple for the background within the circle).
  - To paint the animals in the area surrounding the circle, again have students choose either warm or cool colours. Student will choose the opposite to paint the background surrounding the circle.

### LESSON #4 (outlining with sharpie and adding oil pastel details):

- Once the watercolour paint is dry, have students go over all pencil lines with sharpie.
- Have students use oil pastels to add highlights and shadows to their composition (see student examples at the end of this document).

### **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. an animal) in their artwork?

### **SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:**

After students complete their collages, have them complete a written statement addressing the following reflection questions: Describe the predators and prey that you depicted in your painting. What strategies did you use to give a feeling of flow and interconnection in your art work? What is a new artmaking strategy that you have learned in this process?

### **EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:**

Students may further their learning about predator/prey relationships in the Arctic. In connection to their discussions of Kenojuak Ashevak's print, students may continue to learn about Inuit culture, history, and artistic practices.

### **AFK RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:**

Looking for more art lesson ideas? Looking for ways to connect art to other areas of the curriculum? Visit the AFK Resources page to find lesson plans for all grade levels!

<http://tiny.cc/AFKResources>



Student Artwork, AFK Gallery Program



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