

Song of Spring: Mixed Media Paintings Inspired by Kenojuak Ashevak

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

SUBJECT(S): Visual Arts, Science

GRADE(S): K-3

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):

- Creative experiences involve an interplay between exploration, inquiry, and purposeful choice. (Arts Education 3)
- Living things are diverse, can be grouped, and interact in their ecosystems. (Science 3)

CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES (What students will do):

- Express feelings, ideas, stories, observations, and experiences through creative works
- Recognize First Peoples stories (including oral and written narratives), songs, and art, as ways to share knowledge

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 design; Processes, materials and technologies in the arts
- Seasonal changes
- The knowledge of local First Peoples of ecosystems

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

- What techniques can an artist use to create a feeling of flow as well as connections between various parts of 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 (see end of document)
- digital projector/computer
- pre-cut 11"x17" white watermedia or watercolour 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.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.

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES (Teacher Action/Student Action):

LESSON #1 (intro, sketching, brainstorming):

- 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.
- Introduce the concept of **ecosystem** to the students and have them brainstorm what they already know about ecosystems, recording their ideas on the board. Explain that an ecosystem can be described as follows: the living things in an area and the way they affect each other and the environment.
- 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. In a different ecosystem (such as your local ecosystem) what animals would be represented?
 3. Why has the artist used a circle at the center of this artwork? What might this mean?
 4. 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?
 5. Has the artist included many details inside the outlines of animals? What details has she included? Why do you think the artist created simplified versions of the animals?
 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. How has Kenojuak created a feeling 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 brainstorm as a class a number of predator/prey relationships that occur in the Canadian Arctic (or in their own local ecosystem). Write a list of these relationships on the board.
- Have students choose one predator/prey relationship to depict in their own painting.
- Print reference images for the students 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, drawing simplified animals in profile, and creating a feeling of flow in an artwork.
- Review the previous discussion about ecosystems and 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 watermedia or watercolour 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 reference images of animals as they draw, with reminders to use fluid lines and to create simplified versions of the animals (including very few details inside each animal).

LESSON #3 (watercolour painting):

- Discuss with students the differences between warm and cool colours. Create a list and visual representation of warm and cool colours on the board. Explain that using warm and cool colours together helps images and shapes stand out from a background.
- 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 and have students share in pairs: What are some strategies that you can use to create a flowing feeling in an artwork? What are some strategies that you can use to create a simplified drawing of an animal?

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After students complete their collages, have them complete a written statement (or dictate a statement) responding to the following reflection questions: Describe the predators and prey that you included in your painting. Describe a new artmaking strategy that you have learned about and used in this process.

EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Students may further their learning about predator/prey relationships in the Arctic or in their local ecosystems. 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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Kenojuak Ashevak, *Song of Spring*, 2006, lithograph on paper, 33 x 23 inches (each print). Image courtesy of the artist.