

# Contemporary Native Arts

A unit in 8 lessons, grades K-12

## Stage 1 – Desired Results

<p><b>ESTABLISHED GOALS</b></p> <p><b>Content Standard:</b> - Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary practices to plan works of art and design.</p> <p><b>Cultural Standards:</b> -make effective use of the knowledge, skills, and ways of knowing from their own cultural traditions to learn about the larger world in which they live.</p>	<i>Transfer</i>	
	<p><i>Students will be able to independently or collaborative use their learning to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- create artistic work that is both rooted in tradition and contemporary.</li> </ul>	
	<i>Meaning</i>	
	<p><b>UNDERSTANDINGS</b> <i>Students will understand that...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All contemporary art is an assemblage of previous artistic influences</li> </ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS</b> -What makes art original?</p>
<i>Acquisition</i>		
	<p><i>Students will know...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Students will be able to identify art from their heritage.</li> <li>- Students will describe specific traditional art from their heritage and their cultural significance.</li> <li>- Students will know how to communicate about their own artwork and the work of others.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Students will be skilled at...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating from reference and/or imagination.</li> <li>- Drawing from traditional art elements and utilizing the elements of art and principles of design to create works of contemporary art.</li> </ul>

## Stage 2 – Evidence and Assessment

<b>Evaluative Criteria</b>	<b>Assessment Evidence</b>
	<p><b>PERFORMANCE TASK(S):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- listen respectfully to tradition bearers/artists from the community</li> <li>- journal on questions related to art and culture</li> <li>- create a portfolio of art</li> <li>- provide constructive criticism to peers during art circles</li> </ul>
	<p><b>OTHER EVIDENCE:</b></p>

## Stage 3 – Learning Plan

*Summary of Key Learning Events and Instruction*

**Preparation:** Two-three **months** prior to the launch of the unit.

- Understanding the Native Alaskan connection to art requires deep study. Art is an expression of relationship to the land, animals, and spirit. Art is a vehicle for the transmission of culture and tradition and a vibrant, evolving form of identity and expression. This unit provides a means for students to create contemporary, native-rooted art. As an art instructor striving to be culturally responsive, there are two essential actions necessary to show the respect and understanding this study deserves.
- First, ask to observe a local elder/artist in the preparation and production of a traditional art form from the community. Native pedagogy is rooted in careful observation. Lengthy, detailed narrations may or may not accompany the production of the art. Sit quietly, observe closely, and speak little unless spoken to. At the end

of the session thank your host and ask if you can observe again. If invited back, offer to bring an item of food, perhaps some cookies. Between your first and second visit try to do some background reading on this art form, especially if you have questions about the preparation of materials, uses of this type of item, and how the form of art has changed with contact with Western culture. There are a few questions that are usually appropriate to ask: *who did you learn this from? Who did they learn from?* These questions show respect for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Listen closely and don't fill the silence with follow-up questions. Thank your host and ask if you can visit again. If at any time after the first visit you are invited to participate humbly accept the offer. In a slow, organic manner build a relationship with this artist and the art form. Respect for the community, its elders, and traditions is the most important work that an outsider has to develop. It is ongoing and must not be rushed.

- Second, it is essential to engage in extensive background reading to contextualize the issues facing Native communities producing contemporary art. In addition to reading about the specific history and traditions of the community, it is important to zoom out and understand the issues of [cultural appropriation](#) and the return of Native American [burial items](#) and [cultural artifacts](#). These are issues that affect all Native communities and are a source of continuing frustration with and a sense of betrayal by Western culture. Knowledge and respect are the only tools to help you build bridges.
- Become acquainted with the framework called [Teaching Artistic Behaviors](#). Art education is moving away from project-centric lessons - everyone makes a bentwood visor - to teaching students how to become artists ([Video](#) of one teacher's transition to this style of teaching). This entails generating ideas, experimenting, and problem-solving, as well as instruction in the use of media and exposure to a wide variety of artists and genres. Central to this unit is the work of Native Alaskan and Native American artists who are creating contemporary art. This unit, like most multi-graded classrooms, is organized around teaching artistic behaviors and is structured by theme. Thematic teaching is a mainstay in multi-graded classrooms, however, some customization may be required if this unit's themes don't align with your theme.
- One to two weeks before the unit, make art portfolios to house each student's work.

#### **Day 1: Theme - The Land**

- *Prepare:* [Read](#) and [view](#) this retrospective and video of artist Ron Senungetuk. Neither of these sources notes that the artist died in 2020. Download this [free](#) art process poster.
- *Hook:* Today you will create a piece of art that reflects your understanding of or your relationship to the land.
- *Discuss:* What does the land mean to you? Is there a color or shape that comes to mind? (turn and talk? or the whole group? what would feel most natural in these classroom settings?)
- *View:* The gallery [images](#) from the Anchorage Museum.
- *Discuss:* What is the artist showing? What materials are used? How are shapes and colors used?
- *Explain:* The artist was creating contemporary native art. Contemporary means "in this time". How is this art both Native and contemporary? During this unit, you will create contemporary Native art. You will think about the theme of the lesson - the land - and think, plan, and create a new piece of art. You will be free to use any of the media that we have available for your art. At first, you may not have your own idea and you are welcome to borrow ideas from Ron Senungetuk.
- *Survey:* the art media that are available. Discuss [rules](#). Talk about the art process from the poster.
- *Organize:* students get the materials they need. Announce how much time remains for work time. Students should have the opportunity to work on a piece over multiple sessions if they choose.
- *Clean-up:* Use established procedures. Begin 5 minutes before the end of the session.
- *Journal,* when work, is complete: "In this art, I am showing... I chose to show... because... When people look at this I hope that they think about... My inspiration was..."

#### **Day 2: Art Demonstration by Elder/Community Artist**

- *Prepare:* ask local elder/artist in advance. Arrange space and prepare students for a visit by an elder (expectations for respectful listening, a comfortable chair, a hot beverage, a student greeter—perhaps someone who already has a relationship with the elder).
- *Hook:* Invite the elder to introduce themselves in the way that feels most appropriate to them.
- *Watch:* Stay with class and model expected behavior and respectful listening. .
- *Ask:* does the Elder want to take any questions?
- *Invite:* elder/artist to view the student's work from the previous lesson..

- *Journal:* “Today, we learned from...who gave a demonstration of ... . While they worked I noticed...I can recognize their work because...”

### **Day 3: Theme - Patterns**

- *Prep:* Look through the catalog in the kit called Abstract Expressionism. This lesson features several Native artists from various tribes who were trained in Abstract Expressionism at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe. There they learned to pull from their different cultures, patterns, and colors to inform their art.
- *Hook/Discuss:* Imagine an art school where all the other students are Native. There is such a school in New Mexico. We’re going to watch video clips of some of the students who went there in the 1960s and 1970s. What do you notice about their work? What do they have in common? What makes them unique?
- *Watch:* [Anita Fields](#) until 1:42. Watch [Earl Eder](#) until minute 2:32. Watch [Linda Lomahaftewa](#) until 3:32. Watch [Neil Parson](#) in entirety, 6:07. Neil was an art instructor at IAIA.
- *Technique mini-lesson:* [Tempura](#) paint. This video should help you prepare for instruction.
- *Survey:* the art media that are available. Discuss [rules](#).
- *Organize:* students get the materials they need. Announce how much time remains for production. Students should have the opportunity to work on a piece over multiple sessions if they choose.
- *Clean-up:* use your established procedures for putting names on art, placing in portfolio (if dry and complete) or “To be finished” area (if wet or needs to be completed), and cleaning supplies on chart pack paper or Google slide for reuse. Begin 5 minutes before the end of the session.
- *Journal:* when work is complete: “In this art, I am showing... I chose to show... because...When people look at this I hope that they think about.....I think this connects with traditional art because...”

### **Day 4: Theme - Animals**

- *Prepare:* Styrofoam trays are needed.
- *Review:* Students have the choice of subject and media. In each lesson, an artist and medium will be introduced for the student’s exposure. Students are always welcome to draw ideas from the artists that are featured.
- *Hook/Discuss:* Brainstorm a short list of local animals as a group, or show a few pictures for inspiration, or tell a short story and show a picture of the animal that means a lot to you (the teacher). What is an animal that means a lot to you? What is your connection? How could you show that connection? Which features are most important? What would the animal look like if you exaggerated it, or changed its shape, color, or location? What is the least important feature? Could you change it? Leave it off?
- *Featured artist:* Kenojuak Ashevak, whose animal was the owl. This 8-minute [video](#) can be shared with students. A short biography and gallery slideshow of her major work are available at this [link](#).
- *Technique mini-lesson:* [Printmaking](#)
- *Survey:* the art media that are available. Discuss [rules](#).
- *Organize:* students get the materials they need. Announce how much time remains for production. Students should have the opportunity to work on a piece over multiple sessions if they choose.
- *Clean-up:* Use established procedures. Begin 5 minutes before the end of the session.
- *Journal:* “In this art, I am showing... I chose to show... because...When people look at this I hope that they think about...Something new I tried today was...Something that felt hard for me was...I’m proud that I...”

### **Day 5: Theme - Identity**

- *Prepare:* Gather objects that could be used in a collage. Read background [article](#) on featured artist.
- *Review:* Students have the choice of their subject and media. In each lesson, an artist and medium will be introduced for the student’s exposure. Students are always welcome to draw ideas from the artists that are featured.
- *Hook:* In some form, at some time, we ask ourselves, “Who am I?” For some, the question seems to ask, “How do I fit into my family, community, or tribe?” For others, the question opens up into, “What am I lead to do? What gifts do I have to give?” Each person’s journey for identity, finding out who we truly are, is different. Art is one tool that helps us give expression to who we are. Consider telling a personal story about this, or reminding students of the story of the elder or another featured artist.

- *Featured artist:* Holly Mititquq Nordlum. You could share this short [video](#) of the artist speaking about art. Alternately, show the first 3:21 minutes of this [video](#), which has the most examples of her art including two highly stylized, monochromatic nudes.
- *Technique mini-lesson:* [Collage](#)
- *Survey:* the art media that are available. Discuss [rules](#).
- *Organize:* students get the materials they need. Announce how much time remains for production. Students should have the opportunity to work on a piece over multiple sessions if they choose.
- *Clean-up:* Use established procedures. Begin 5 minutes before the end of the session.
- *Journal:* “In this art, I am showing... I chose to show... because... When people look at this I hope that they think about... Something I’d like to try next time is..”

#### **Day 6: Theme - Indigenous Futurism**

- *Prepare:* put this link <https://skawennati.com/imaginingindians/timeline.htm> on your homepage/learning management system so that students can access on their laptops or iPads
- *Review:* Students have the choice of their subject and media. In each lesson, an artist and medium will be introduced for the student’s exposure. Students are always welcome to draw ideas from the artists that are featured.
- *Hook:* What do you think or hope the future will be like? How would you show that in art? There are Native artists producing art called Indigenous Futurism. What could that mean? Why do you think they might focus on the future instead of the past? They work in a variety of media, including video games, web pages, digitally edited photos, as well as sculpture, painting, and printmaking.
- *Featured artists:* view this [slideshow](#). What do you notice? What do you think it might mean? What do you wonder?
- *Technique mini-lesson:* [digital arts](#).
- *Survey:* the art media that are available. Discuss [rules](#).
- *Organize:* students get the materials they need. Announce how much time remains for production. Students should have the opportunity to work on a piece over multiple sessions if they choose.
- *Clean-up:* Use established procedures. Begin 5 minutes before the end of the session.
- *Journal:* “In this art, I am showing... I chose to show... because... When people look at this I hope that they think about... In the future, I want to... I think it’s important to make art about the future because...”

#### **Day 7: Theme - Connect and Reflect**

- *Prepare:* Make sure all the students’ work is organized in individual portfolios.
- *Hook:* Put students in groups of four: two pairs of younger/older kids. They are going to review each student’s art from this unit and support the artist as they select one piece for the art gallery.
- *Guidelines:* Viewers give specific technical feedback. “I like the way you use these strong greens to show healthy trees. It really helps create a sense of hope.” Consider modeling with a teacher-made piece of art, or with a student volunteer that you’ve checked in with before the lesson.
- *Challenge:* All group members share their portfolios and discuss. Each student will then select one that he or she thinks is their best.
- *Rotate:* “I think this is my best art because...” Group members may disagree respectfully. “That is a really great piece, but my favorite is... because...” (model for the class as needed, or use established discussion norms)
- *Brainstorm:* titles for each student’s art. The artist has the final say.
- *Journal:* “When I shared my art with my group I felt... Looking at the art of the others I thought... I think we captured the future by... Today I felt \_\_\_ during the activity because... I wish that... I’m proud that...”
- *Follow-up:* Older partners need to type labels that will hang beside the art: 1) *Title* (this should be in *italics*); 2) next line, name of the artist; 3) next line, Artist Statement (journal entry that was written with the art). Standardize formatting beforehand, for example, Arial, 24 point. Also, older students can frame artwork if needed.

#### **Day 8: Theme - Art Celebration**

- *Prepare:* hang artwork gallery style at eye level with ample blank space between each piece.
- *Prepare:* refreshments
- *Invite:* all the community

- *Decide*: will there be introductory comments, or is this more in the style of an Open House? Could a student welcome visitors and explain the unit? What feels authentic or most meaningful in your school and community setting?
- *Encourage*: viewers to write comments in a notebook at the end of the gallery (i.e. a shared journal for the gallery—could use sentence starters if helpful)
- *Journal*: “When I saw all of our artwork I thought... I felt...I was inspired by \_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_...I feel my art represents me because...I am most proud that I... I think my work is contemporary Native art because...I was more inspired by local/non-local indigenous artists because...”
- *Distribute*: all artwork to each student the next day.

## Cultural Notes

*General guidelines for school and community success  
and space to make notes specific to your community*

### Asking for help from Elders

- Ask a trusted colleague about the accepted community norms for requesting help from an Elder. These may include the following considerations: making a personal visit, using a liaison, establishing first contact via phone or email, or having a conversation about a visit while at the store, post office, or other community space.
- You are asking an elder/artist into the class and share cultural knowledge. Account for the physical demands of speaking loudly enough to be heard in the classroom with a multi-age group of children. A microphone and speaker may be necessary. Make sure that there is comfortable seating and that you prepare the space according to their needs or specifications.
- Also, ask for permission to make an audio or video recording of what the Elder/artist shares. Explain that the students will use the recording as a resource to help them learn.

## Suggested Resources

### Continuing Education:

- *For students*: [Institute of American Indian Art](#) (IAIA) offers Associate, bachelor's, and Masters's degree programs in art. [The University of Alaska Fairbanks](#) (UAF) Native Arts Center offers degree programs in Native Art.
- *For teachers*: The Massachusetts College of Art and Design offers [credit and non-credit courses](#) in Teaching for Artistic Behaviors.

**Additional Lessons:** anything by Michaela Goade Native watercolor artist (Water Protectors, Berry Song, etc)

## Extensions

*Suggestions and space to make notes.*

**High School Essay:** Analyze the following passage from the catalog on Indigenous Futurism. Do you agree or disagree with Kulchysid? Support your argument using examples from pop culture, fashion, literature, and/or your own life experience.

### THE QUESTION OF APPROPRIATION

On first view, the wide use of science fiction images in contemporary Native art may lead to the misconception that Indigenous Futurists "appropriate" sci-fi imagery from mainstream popular culture. According to Canadian Native Studies professor Peter Kulchysid, "we are in an era in which appropriation has become the dominant cultural tendency informing all relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the Americas." Dominant societies often use cultural appropriation in advertisement, fashion design, and other consumer products, and consider it "as something that happens naturally when different cultures come into contact. However, the important difference is that to Indigenous peoples, cultural appropriation poses a threat to their livelihood, sovereignty, and cultural identity and integrity. Instead of labeling Native artists' use of popular sci-fi imagery "appropriation," it should be viewed as "subversion."

According to Kulchyski, "appropriation" implies the use of cultural images and texts of the minority culture by the dominant group for its own interests. He explains, "subversion, on the other hand, involves employment of the cultural texts of the dominant group by the marginal group as a means of resistance."