

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

BIG IDEAS WITH FILM

— TEACHER'S GUIDE

Unit Title: Narrative Drawings, Exploring Traditions

Film: Six Short Films from the L'il'wata and the Manwan series

Time required for: 8-10 lessons

Grade(s): 4-7



Unit Overview

This guide has been designed around six of Alanis Obomsawin's short films to introduce students to practices from two different First Nations in Eastern and Western Canada. Students learn about technologies and ways of living that these Indigenous communities have practiced for many years as part of culture and also to live sustainably and resourcefully. Depending on the age of the class, this can lead to a deeper exploration of resourcefulness, sustainable living and resiliency that can be learned from many different cultures and world views.

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In these short documentaries, Obomsawin highlights different aspects of Indigenous experiences, ways of living and their interconnection with the land they live on. Obomsawin's lens offers an insider look into Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, as a powerful counterpoint to many narratives in Western popular culture that are usually told from a settler perspective. In this unit, students will view these vignettes of Indigenous life in Canada, then inquire about their own cultural practices, and find those practices that are intergenerational, connected to land and sustainable. Finally, students will be encouraged to reflect on how and why these practices may have changed through time.

Note that these films are narrated in the Indigenous languages of these nations, giving students the opportunity to hear these languages while still understanding what is happening thanks to the images in each short film. This unit offers interdisciplinary learning connections, linking Social Studies, Language Arts with Art Education.

About the Films:

Selections from the L'il'wata series:

In the early 1970s, at the outset of her documentary career, Alanis Obomsawin visited the Líl'wat Nation, an Interior Salish First Nation in British Columbia, and created a series of shorts that provide personal narratives about Líl'wat culture, histories and knowledge. She would later also do a shorter series featuring members of the Atikamekw Nation in Manwan, Quebec.

Basket - Lhk'wál'us.

1975 | 7 min

A series of still images follows master Líl'wat basket maker Mathilda Jim, from the harvesting of materials to the creation of a functional work of art. Told in the Líl'wat7úl language, this short



documentary evokes the powerful connection between language, knowledge and culture.

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/basket/>

Salmon - Tsúqwaoz'

1975 | 3 min

Expert fishers for their entire lives, Lífwat Elders Cora and Daniel Wells share their deep knowledge of salmon fishing, cleaning and smoking.

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/salmon/>

Xusum

1975 | 4 min

Accompanied by a song in the Lífwat7úl language, we follow a woman as she makes gwùshum, a Lífwat dessert and a very special treat. From the harvesting of the xúsum (soapberries or salmonberries) to the construction of the corn-husk whisk, a dish is created that is equal measures mouth-watering and awe-inspiring.

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/xusum/>

Farming

1975 | 2 min

The farming practices of residents of the Lífwat Nation near Mount Currie, B.C., are presented in a series of snapshots that illustrate the fertility of their territory and the people's deep connection to their land.



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<https://www.nfb.ca/film/farming/>

Selections from The Manwan Series

The Canoe

1972 | 5 min

Utilizing engineering ingenuity that is centuries old, Atikamekw elders Agatha and C zar N washish build a small-scale version of a birch-bark canoe. With their expert hands, a stunning work of art is created.

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/canoe/>

Snowshoes

1978 | 7 min

The remarkable construction of the venerable snowshoe is demonstrated from start to finish. Atikamekw Elders Mariane and Athanas Jacob take us into the forest to select the tree that will become a fresh new pair of snowshoes.

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/snowshoes/>

Big Ideas from BC Curriculum	Inquiry Questions

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<p>The arts connect our experience to the experience of others.</p>	<p>1. What is the role or purpose of Alanis Obomsawin's short documentaries about Indigenous peoples?</p>
<p>Learning about indigenous peoples strengthens multicultural awareness and respect.</p>	<p>2. How can we learn about Indigenous peoples of Canada in truthful, respectful ways?</p>

Curriculum Competencies

(SWBAT)	I will know because students can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect on creative processes and make connections to personal experiences ● Explore relationships among cultures, communities, and the arts ● Ask questions, make inferences and draw conclusions and make values judgments about the content and features of different types of sources ● Explain why peoples' beliefs, values, worldviews, experiences and roles give them different perspectives on people, places, issues or events ● Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and make meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explain what is going on in the films and how those compare to students' personal experiences ● Compare and contrast different cultural practices ● Identify the main topics of the short films, the setting, the characters, and the purpose of the films ● Create a drawing or an image that elaborates on a personal cultural practice



Content Objectives

(SWBAT)	I will know because students can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Process, material, technologies, tools and techniques to support arts activities ● Personal and collective responsibility associated with creating, experiencing or sharing in a safe learning environment ● Aspects of life shared by and common to peoples and cultures ● Relationship between humans and their environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using drawing or found images, students will create an image or series of images ● Students will share their personal experiences/knowledge related to Obomsawin's films ● Inquire about their own cultural practices that involve intergenerational, food preparation or traditions of making ● Identify any of these cultural practices that involves interacting with nature

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning involves patience and time
- Learning involves exploration of one's identity
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story

Materials, Technologies and Equipment:

Screen, projector, computer, internet
A large map of British Columbia,

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Other relevant books and resources that may offer additional age appropriate insight about Indigenous ways of living

Suggested Sequence of Lessons

Combine lessons or adjust time as needed

	Main Questions	Main Activity	Resources
Lessons 1+2	<p>Who are Indigenous peoples?</p> <p>Where do they live?</p> <p>Who is Alanis Obomsawin and how does she tell her stories?</p> <p>Do we all have the same ways of living?</p> <p>Do all Indigenous peoples have the same ways of living?</p>	<p>Ask students if anyone is Indigenous/has Indigenous heritage</p> <p>Teachers can bring in an Indigenous guest speaker</p> <p>Show a short clip about Alanis that introduces herself, her insights and reasons for film making</p> <p>·</p> <p>Highlight the two areas of map that the unit plan is going to focus on Manawan, Quebec and Lil'Wat BC</p> <p>Make conversation about various ways that people live, eat, celebrate and dress. Use students' examples.</p> <p>Create a "think pair share" activity about what factors cause different people to live differently.</p>	<p>https://www.nfb.ca/film/making_movie_history_alanis_obomsawin/</p> <p>http://www.manawan.com/index.cshhtml</p> <p>https://lilwat.ca/</p>

	Main Questions	Main Activity	Resources
	Who are the Atikamekw Nation?	Ask students to show the geographical regions of the two	Map of Canada with Indigenous territories demarcation.

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<p>Lessons 3+4</p>	<p>Who are the Lil'Wat Nation?</p>	<p>different Indigenous nations on the map.</p> <p>Watch 4 films (2 from each of the regions)</p> <p>Debrief about the films.</p>	<p>https://native-land.ca/</p> <p>iPad/ computer and internet</p> <p>Canadian Atlas resources https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/collections/scanned-maps/royal-canadian-world-atlas-series-full-coloured-maps-index</p>
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	Main Questions	Main Activity	Resources
<p>Lessons 5+6</p>	<p>What kind of films does Obomsawin make?</p> <p>How does she make this film?</p> <p>What are some of the land-based cultural or family practices that your family enjoys? What do you do?</p>	<p>Dissect the word “documentary” and find out the meaning together with the students.</p> <p>Watch the 2 remaining short films. Thinking about the films about each of the regions, have students write down what they know about the climate, geographical region and the culture and languages that people speak, in groups of 3.</p> <p>Model doing a simple interview with one’s relatives to learn information</p> <p>Practice interviewing each other and record information through note taking, visually recording information, or by using a recorder like Voice Memo app on cell phones or tablets.</p>	<p>Our BIG IDEAS Alanis Obomsawin’s Director page: https://www.nfb.ca/directors/alanis-obomsawin/</p> <p>An inventory of possible questions to ask the interviewees – See example interview questions later in this guide.</p>

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	Main Questions	Main Activity	Resources
Lessons 7,8,9	How can we present information visually rather than in written form?	Analyze an example of narrative drawing based on real events. Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook's age-appropriate drawings can be found online. Show a few and explain how she narrates her stories visually about modern Inuit life in the north. Plan and work on narrative drawings or poster project based on interview answers	Annie Pootoogook: https://aci-iac.ca/art-books/annie-pootoogook/key-works/eating-seal-at-home

Post-Screening Activities:

After viewing and analyzing Obomsawin's films and conducting their family interviews, students can choose between doing a 3-part narrative drawing or working on a poster board focusing on cultural activities or insights from their interviews within their family setting. Present to the class or in small groups.

Interview Tips:

Some students come from a family setting with many heritage-based cultural customs, while other families may not. Encourage students to explore and value any kind of tradition in their family, whether it's cultural and traditional, or a newer favorite custom their family likes to do.

The following example interview questions may help students think of interview questions for a family member:

Is there an important day in a year that your family celebrates? Find out how your family celebrates this day by looking into following details:

- Why do you celebrate this day? What do you do to celebrate?



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- What kind of food your family prepares? How is it made and who makes it? Where did that recipe come from?
- Are there any symbolic objects that are involved in this celebration? What is the meaning or purpose?
- Who are the family members that are involved in this celebration?
- Is there an important or favorite activity that your family does?
- Are there favorite things your family does during different times of year that have become a family tradition?

Project Extension: In more senior grades, students can alternatively create a short video with their editing apps on cell phones or take pictures of their cultural or familial tradition or process.

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