

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

BIG IDEAS WITH FILM

— TEACHER'S GUIDE

Unit Title: Circle of Interconnection

Film: *Sigwan* (13 min)

Time required: 10-12 lessons

Grades: 3-5



Unit Overview:

This guide has been designed to connect Alanis Obomsawin's film to learning across multiple subjects within the BC curriculum for grades 3-5. Teachers are invited to use this resource as a stepping stone into learning about Indigenous Peoples, the importance of oral history, Indigenous Peoples' interconnectedness with the land and the value of diversity within our communities and within our surrounding environment. This guide is an interdisciplinary resource linking Social Studies, Language Arts, Art Education and Science Curricular Competencies within classroom learning.

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About the Film:

Sigwan tells the touching story of a young girl who is comforted and counselled by the animals of the forest. Written and directed by award winning Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, the film addresses issues of exclusion and prejudice that exist within many communities worldwide. *Sigwan* is a simple, transformative parable of acceptance.

Subject	Curriculum Big Ideas	Inquiry questions
Social Studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning about Indigenous People nurtures multicultural awareness and respect for diversity. 2. Indigenous knowledge is passed down through oral history, tradition and collective memory. 3. Indigenous societies throughout the world value the well-being of the self, the land, spirit and ancestors. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is it important to learn about Indigenous Peoples of Canada? 2. How have Indigenous People recorded and expanded their knowledge throughout the years? 3. Who are Indigenous Peoples in Canada and what are some common characteristics between nations?
Science	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Living things are diverse, can be grouped, and interact in their ecosystems. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How are living things compared to one another?
Art Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creative expression is a means to explore and share one's identity within a community 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can a creative experience contribute to one's identity?

Alanis Obomsawin's short film *Sigwan* tells a story of a little girl who finds solace with bears, away from bullying and isolation within her own community. She finds comfort in her encounter and relationship with the creatures of the forest. Through this film we can introduce



our students to various aspects of the spiritual and practical ways of living of Indigenous people. Students see a story that blends modern life with a story told through the voices of forest animals who come to comfort a child. Films like this can contribute to student understanding of diverse and multicultural world views and help teachers and students learn from Indigenous ways of living that contribute to sustainable community living.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to record the course of events in the movie
- Students will be able to explain the importance and the contributions of storytelling within Indigenous cultures
- Students will be able to formulate ways to remedy the negative implications of exclusion within their classroom community
- Students will be able to research the diversity of plants and animals in their local environment and identify at least 10 plants and animals and include their contribution to the surrounding environment
- Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of their local biodiversity by creating an image (drawing, etc.) of a local animal with whom they feel a personal connection

Social Studies:

To prepare students for learning, teachers can start by asking students about what they already know about Indigenous Peoples in Canada, or there may be Indigenous students in the class. Teachers may use other resources such as storybooks and available online resources (see resources at end of this guide) prior to the watching *Sigwan*, so that students have more background understanding and context.



Alanis' words about Indigenous Peoples:

"Our past, our peoples' history was vanished...Not only that was vanished, they had books that were written by the Catholic Church to tell the history of Canada and in those books, it was designed purposefully to create a lot of hate towards our people and that went on for hundreds of years. So, all those things have created more than racism. They created a very bad life for our people and when you are in it, you don't realize it. You think life is like that, but when you grow older and by the time you are 16, 17 you start to feel that there is something terribly wrong. And when you understand the whole story then you start to fight to make changes. That's what I have been doing for a very long time." (Obomsawin, 2016)

Activating Questions to be asked before and after watching the film:

- Who are Indigenous Peoples?
- How have Canadian government decisions and policies impacted the lives of Indigenous people?
- How has the circumstance changed today and what is the effect on Indigenous peoples?
- Who is Alanis Obomsawin?
- Why does she make films?

Acquiring information after watching the film:

Prepare flashcards with simple drawings drawn from different moments in the film, i.e. kids sitting in a circle and listening to stories, Sigwan feeling lonely and crying in a corner or the bear looking at Sigwan through the three branches, etc. Ask students to put the flashcards in the order.



Ask students if they have been part of a storytelling circle? Ask them to recall what stories are meant to do according to the film? And why? Divide the class in groups of 4 and provide paper where students can write their answers.

On a different day/lesson ask this question: What would you do if Sigwan was in your class? How can we use the film we watched to help Sigwan?

Science

Activation:

Take a walk to the local parks with your class and look at the different kinds of plants, insects and wildlife. Draw, describe or take pictures of different kinds of plants, insects or animals seen on the walk. Teach new vocabulary to specify the characteristics of the plants such as deciduous, evergreen, flat, lobbed so that they can notice those qualities, learn to compare and contrast, then group species together.

Teachers may use insect viewer containers to help students have a closer look at the insects. These containers may be found ordered online from [here](#).

Inquiring activity:

Identify 10 plants and 8 animals (including insects) and ask students to research at least one plant or animal to learn more about their contributions to the local ecosystem. You can offer bonus points for students who research about more than one.

Have students work together to group the student findings in larger groups, such as vascular plants or nonvascular plants, or if all vascular then you can group them by flowering plants, cone-bearing plants, etc.

Class discussion:

Have students comment about the species living here in the ecosystem where we live. Have students share their insights and observations about the types of species we have here.

Art



While students are learning about a range of plants and animals in their local environment, it is a good time to bring in a touch of creativity and imagination in order to engage with this film in a different way. After watching Sigan's friendship with the bears, students may be asked about their thoughts about this relationship in the film. Teachers may share insights about how Indigenous Peoples view their relationships to the non-human beings surrounding them.

Consider showing students ideas from several regions of Canada, as different First Nations have different traditions and perspectives with regards to animals, spiritualism and their significance in the community structure, one's personal or family identity. An example of this is the animal crests and clans that play a key role in social structure in the Haida nation in BC.

Then, students are asked to choose one of the animals from their list with whom they would like to have a friendship. Students will be making an artwork of their chosen animal. Have them choose their favourite media, including drawing, painting, collage, clay sculpture, etc.

Resources:

What is the Relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Animals:

<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-is-the-relationship-between-indigenous-peoples-and-animals>

Learning with the Natural World

<https://firstnationspedagogy.com/earth.html>

Pacific Northwest Poles

Animals play an important role in First Nations stories, histories, and family identity in Pacific Northwest coast nations. Students may have seen or hear of poles. Here is a resource about why Northwest coast nations carve them:

https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/totem_poles/



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Sigwan film

https://www.nfb.ca/film/sigwan_en/

Learning First Peoples series -- Teacher resources to support English Language Arts, Science Social Studies and Mathematics courses.

<http://www.fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples/>

Videos and interviews from the NFB with Alanis and Canadian students

https://www.nfb.ca/film/alanis_obomsawin_virtual_classroom/

Guide to history and teaching about the residential school system in Canada:

http://education.historicacanada.ca/files/32/ResidentialSchools_English.pdf

To order more books on animals and stories by indigenous authors:

Strong Nations is an Indigenous owned publishing house here in BC and is a good resource.

www.strongnations.ca

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