



Group of Seven

Exploring Identities Through Landscape

KEY CONCEPTS & ISSUES

The landscape art of the Group of Seven functioned as a powerful political unifier that helped consolidate the drive toward national sovereignty. Students will examine how the Group of Seven became entrenched in Canadian society and how they are associated with Canadian nationalism and Canadian identity. Students will learn about the concept of personal and Canadian identity and be asked to paint a place of personal significance using colour theory and basic acrylic paint techniques.

- Cultural Identity
- Concept of Canadian Identity
- Concept of Personal Identity
- Personal Identity & Place
- Places of Personal Significance

SUBJECTS: Visual Arts, History

DURATION: 4 to 6 classes

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

- History of the Group of Seven
- Analysis of the Group of Seven's work and significance
- Colour Wheel and Colour Theory
- Colour Mixing
- Basic Acrylic Paint Techniques

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- *Mystic Learnings: The Group of Seven* graphic novel
- Group of Seven PowerPoint presentation (teacher led) and supplementary handout
- Sketchbook
- Access to device with basic photo editing software
- Printer
- Acrylic paints
- Palettes
- Palette knives
- Paint Brushes
- Individual prepared canvases (sizes may vary)
- **Optional:** 10 small covered containers for each student to mix their own colours

EXPECTATIONS/OUTCOMES

The overall expectations listed below serve as an entry point for teachers. Students will:

- Increase their knowledge of the Group of Seven and their importance to Canadian history;
- Analyze the social and political importance of forging a Canadian art movement that represented Canada's national identity;
- Demonstrate an understanding of Canadian identity through the creation of their own painting;
- Be able to document the process of developing ideas to create their own artwork;
- Describe their relationship with Canadian identity in a critical reflection.

SKILLS ACQUIRED

- Application of Colour Theory
- Basic Photo Editing
- Grid Technique
- Colour Matching & Paint Mixing

BACKGROUND

The Group of Seven believed that the European-oriented view of the painter's profession was doing little to foster cultural awareness of Canadian society. When the Group of Seven first formed, Canada was still associated with its Imperial history. Canada and its art scene was in need of signs and symbols with which to assert its own distinctive national identity. With the support of the National

Gallery of Canada and some private patrons, the Group of Seven focused on making landscape paintings for the purpose of forming a national art. They focused on creating art free of foreign influence that used nature as a form of Canadian identity.

This Canadian movement was clearly established by 1913 with the stated intention by the group to focus on exploring the landscapes of Canada's North. The group mainly focused on landscapes in Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park, and the Laurentians. All of the members of the Group of Seven except for Lawren Harris, had formal training in the business of commercial art. This background knowledge of design can be seen in the stressing of large, bold forms and movements with an emphasis on colour and contrasting tones.



Tom Thomson
The Jack Pine (1916–1917)



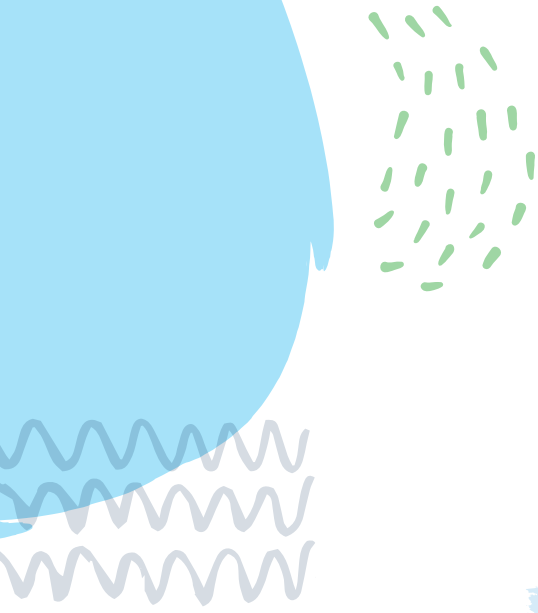
Franklin Carmichael
Bay of Islands from Mt. Burke (1931)



A.Y. Jackson
Vimy Ridge from Souchez Valley (1917)

Tom Thomson's tragic drowning in July 1917, occurred at the moment when his art was in full blossom and resulted in a state of despondency for the other members of the group. His death also occurred at the same time as the tragedies of the war were very much present in everyday life. During the First World War, two members of the group, Jackson and Varley became official war artists. After the end of the war, the group reunited and travelled throughout Ontario, Muskoka, and the Algoma regions. They also ventured to other areas of Canada including British Columbia, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and the Arctic. In the fall of 1918 the group took a box-car trip to Algoma and focused on creating plein air sketching that stressed the use of colour and light to capture the essence of a scene. These sketches and paintings created during this trip were showcased in an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in April 1919.

In 1926, members of the group began to travel further across Canada. They visited the West Coast and the Arctic. The Group of Seven were the first documented artists of European descent to paint the Arctic. By the end of 1931, the Group of Seven were well known and decided it was no longer necessary to continue as a group. The Group of Seven subsequently announced they had disbanded and a new association of painters would be formed called the Canadian Group of Painters. The Canadian Group held their first exhibition in 1933 and continued to showcase their work until 1967.



In 1955, Robert and Signe McMichael began to collect and exhibit works from the Group of Seven at their home in Kleinburg, ON. In 1965, the McMichael family formally reached an agreement to donate their collection and their Kleinburg property to the Government of Ontario for the purpose of establishing an art museum. In addition to housing a collection of works by the Group of Seven, the museum property also contains the burial ground for six members of the group, including Jackson, Lismer, Varley, Harris, Johnston, and Casson; along with four of the artists' wives. The Group of Seven introduced Canadian art to the international stage and for many, their work continues to represent the Canadian national identity.

STEP ONE

TEACHER DIRECTED DISCUSSION

- Students begin by reading the Group of Seven graphic novel and discussing their work and its significance;
- Teacher guides students through analysis of the Group of Seven artwork, focusing on colour theory, elements and principles of art found in work (information in PowerPoint);
 - Analysis ends with touching on the concept of Canadian cultural identity and the Group of Seven's role in bolstering Canadian identity through art
- Teacher leads class discussion on the concept of Canadian identity and the various lenses that we typically apply to the concept of that identity (eurocentric, colonial, etc.) and discuss alternative points of view to that identity;
 - This could be done as group activity; the teacher has student groups present their ideas to the class to facilitate further discussion and gauge student understanding

STEP TWO

STUDENT LED EXPLORATION

- Individually, students are then asked to reflect on their own concept of cultural identity, drawing parallels from the class discussion; students are asked to think of specific places that come to mind that solidify the connection
- Students then use their sketchbooks to explore landscapes of personal significance to them; students can use devices to find images of these specific locations

STEP THREE

CREATING LANDSCAPE REFERENCE IMAGE

- Once students have picked a landscape of personal significance to them and their identity, they will digitally manipulate the image with teacher guidance
- Ensure the image ratio is the same as that of available canvas; if not, crop the image before editing

- Students will use the free version of a basic photo editing app, PicsArt, to simplify the shapes in their image: smoothing out edges and blurring out small details using the Oil Painting filter
- After the image has been simplified, students will break their image down into no more than 10 colours using the Poster filter
- Students download their edited landscape reference image
- These ten colours and the simplified landscape will be the reference point for the student's painting; have students print a minimum of 2 copies of the reference image, ideally in colour if available

STEP FOUR

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Please refer to **LM #2**

1. Prepping the Painting

- Students will begin by using the grid method and transferring the basic lines of their chosen landscape's edited reference image to the canvas
- After the outlines of the landscape have been transferred to the canvas, students will begin mixing their ten colours as per their reference image
- Using their colour reference image (or the final reference image on their device if colour printing is unavailable), students will mix each of their ten individual paint colours using the colours generated in creating the reference image;
 - Colours can be isolated using the eyedropper function in software such as Photoshop; alternatively, an app such as Color Hunter can aid students in creating a separate palette of their 10 generated colours

2. Execute the Painting

- After paints are mixed, students may find they want to assign numbers to their paints and their prepped canvas with landscape outlines and complete their painting in a "paint by number style" using their manipulated reference image
- Students who wish to further challenge themselves can focus on blending within areas of colour; this would require the mixing of additional paints, or blending additional colours on the canvas
- For students who are confident with their painting skills, challenge them to go a step further and explore different brushwork techniques
 - Students could choose to emulate a specific Group of Seven member's painting style selected from the supplementary learning materials
- As students work on their individual paintings, consider doing one or two group critiques during the process for students to engage in constructive criticism; alternatively, have students do periodic gallery walks to see what others are creating

3. Final Critique

Please refer to **LM #1**

Ongoing Critical Reflection

- In what ways do you feel your work is successful?
- In what ways would you change the work to improve it?
- How does your painting reflect your own identity as a Canadian? How does this differ from the Group of Seven?

4. Reflection

Please refer to **LM #1, LM #3**

Ongoing Reflection

- In what ways do you feel your work is successful?
- In what ways would you change the work to improve it?
- How does your painting reflect your own identity as a Canadian? How is this similar or different from the Group of Seven?

OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- With the Multicultural Policy of 1971 came a radical shift of cultural priorities. Canada was identified as having “no official culture.” No longer was Canadian nationalism, especially iconographies of landscape produced by a single ethnic-group deemed to represent the multi-ethnic society. Have a discussion with the class about whether the paintings by the Group of Seven truly represent Canadian identity.
- Landscape painting is always tied to economic and social circumstances. Look at how landscape art has been used across cultures and societies as a means to showcase economic and social circumstances.
- Use a critical social justice lens while viewing the artwork of the Group of Seven to: 1) focus information from multiple, non-dominant perspectives, and seeing those as independently valid and not as an add-on to the dominant, hegemonic one; 2) de-centering students’ analytical frame and opening their minds to a broader range of experiences; 3) analyzing the effects of power and oppression; and 4) inquiring into what alternatives exist with respect to the current, dominant view of reality of the artwork of the Group of Seven. For this lesson, students will need to understand how non-dominant perspectives are not seen in the artworks of the Group of Seven. Students will be encouraged to analyze the effects of power and oppression on the First Nations populations and inquire into how this affects Canadian cultural identity.



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Teacher/Student Resource

THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS PROCESS

STAGE OF THE PROCESS	SAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS
INITIAL REACTION	<p>Prompt: Teacher will ask students to take notes while reading the graphic novel and to consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your first impression of the Group of Seven? • What connections can you make between the graphic novel and the history of the Group of Seven? • What questions do you have?
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	<p>In what ways is the Group of Seven identity explained through the graphic novel?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the following quote relate to the work being created by the Group of Seven: <i>“the function of artists in life he must accept in deep singleness of purpose the manifestations of life in man and in great nature and transform these into controlled ordered and vital expressions of meaning”</i>?
CONSIDERATION OF CULTURAL CONTEXT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cultural movements, historical events, and/or traditions may have influenced the Group of Seven? • What message or meaning do you think is emphasized in the work of the Group of Seven? How does this view match or contrast with your own view of Canada?
EXPRESSION OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively do the paintings by the Group of Seven convey the Canadian landscape? • What emotions do the paintings evoke?
ONGOING CRITICAL REFLECTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do you feel your work is successful? • In what ways would you change the work to improve it? • How does your painting reflect your own identity as a Canadian? How is this similar or different from the Group of Seven?

BASED ON:

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010). *The Ontario curriculum grades 9 – 10, the arts*. pp. 18 -19.

Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/arts910curr2010.pdf>

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Teacher/Student Resource

USING THE GRID METHOD TO SCALE A REFERENCE IMAGE

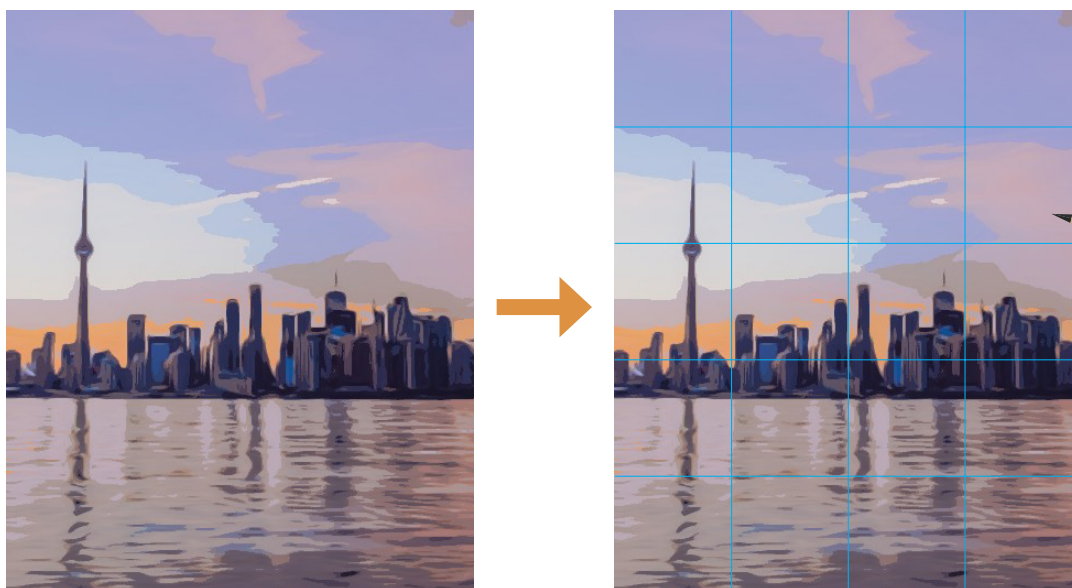
The **GRID METHOD** is an inexpensive, low-tech way to reproduce and/or enlarge an image to paint or draw. The **grid method** can be a fairly time-intensive process, depending on how large and detailed the final painting will be.

For this assignment, the grid method is used to transfer the edited landscape reference image to the canvas, while keeping it in proportion.

To do this, you will need a printed copy of the reference image, a ruler, pencil, and the final canvas.

Measure the height and width of your reference image. This will determine the measurement of the grid that will be drawn on top of the reference image.

In this example, the reference image is 8"x10". This choice was intentional as it is proportional to 16"x20" canvas for the final painting.



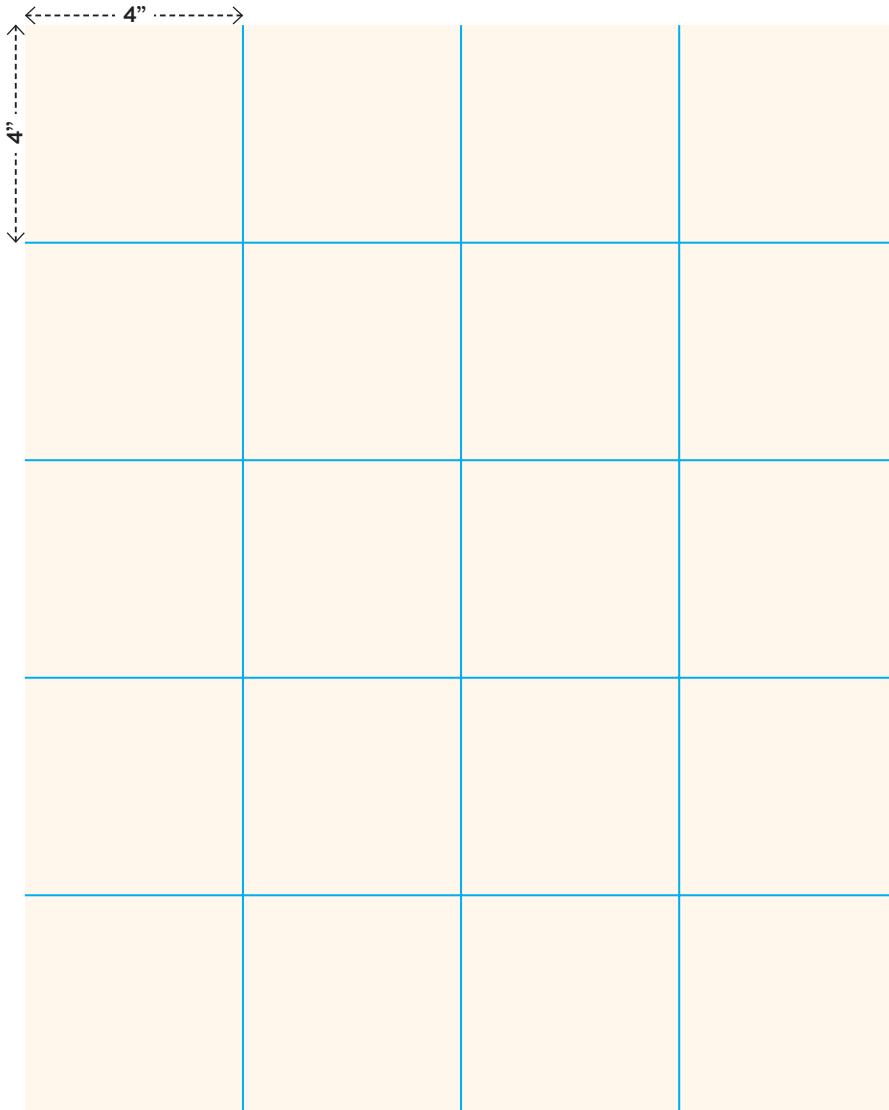
A grid of 4x5 2" squares will fit perfectly over this reference image.

On the reference image, measure and mark every 2" on each of the four sides of the picture.

Finish drawing the grid on top of the reference image by connecting the marks using a ruler and a sharp pencil.

Next, replicate the 4x5 grid on the canvas. Keep the grid increments the same along the height and width of the canvas, just as was done on the reference image.

For our purposes, the grid on the reference drawing was 2" squares. However, the canvas is twice the size of the reference drawing. This means that the canvas grid will still be 4x5, but instead of marking every 2" along the sides of the canvas, mark every 4".



Doing this will help scale the reference image up to fill the entire canvas without losing its proportion!

After the grid is drawn onto the canvas using light pencil lines, copy what is inside each grid box individually from the reference image onto the grid boxes on the canvas.

After finishing the drawing in pencil, it is time to paint!

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ASSESSMENT	LEVEL 1 (50-59%)	LEVEL 2 (60-69%)	LEVEL 3 (70-79%)	LEVEL 4 (80-89%)	LEVEL 4+ (90-100%)
KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING	Student does not demonstrate much knowledge and comprehension of the concept of identity.	Student demonstrates some knowledge and comprehension of the concept of identity.	Student demonstrates knowledge and comprehension of the concept of identity.	Student demonstrates excellent knowledge and comprehension of the concept of identity.	Student demonstrates outstanding knowledge and comprehension of the concept of identity.
THINKING & INQUIRY	Student's planning and processing skills are not very evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a small degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are somewhat evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a satisfactory degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are clearly evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a good degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are very evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to an excellent degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are extremely evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to an outstanding degree.
COMMUNICATION	Student has communicated their concept of identity through landscape painting with little degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through landscape painting with some degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through landscape painting with a good degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through landscape painting with a great degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through landscape painting with an outstanding degree of proficiency.
APPLICATION	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their landscape painting with little proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their landscape painting with some proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their landscape painting with a good degree of proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their landscape painting with a great degree of proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their landscape painting with an outstanding degree of proficiency.