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PUSHING THE LINE: ART WITHOUT RESERVATIONS



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PUSHING THE LINE: ART WITHOUT RESERVATIONS

Directed by Lisa Jackson

Canada | 2009 | 48 min

TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of documentary film by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their classes, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some web links that provide starting points for further research or discussion. In separate packages, there will also be support materials available with information regarding general viewing and teaching principles for documentary film and the fundamental aspects of making documentary films.

The Film

Pushing the Line: Art Without Reservations features the art and words of West Coast artists, including manga artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, carver Dempsey Bob, graffiti artist Andrew Dexel and visual artist Marianne Nicolson. Although Aboriginal art is often seen as relics from the past—totem poles and masks sold in tourist shops, for example—it is changing in response to a changing world. These artists carry the weight of history. Yahgulanaas recalls his involvement in logging protests on Haida Gwaii in the 1980s, while Marianne Nicolson speaks about the Canadian government's crackdown on potlatch ceremonies in the 1920s. But they create art that brings forward the traditions of the past, telling the story of how ancient values can inform contemporary issues.

The Filmmaker

Award-winning director Lisa Jackson's *Suckerfish*, an autobiographical short that examines the filmmaker's relationship with her mother, a residential school survivor, aired on CBC Newsworld in 2006. Her film *Reservation Soldiers*, a one-hour documentary on Aboriginal youth being recruited by the Canadian Armed Forces, screened on CTV's *W5* in 2007. Jackson has also directed *Our First Voices*, a series of four films on Aboriginal languages, and *The Visit*, an animated short based on a true story. An Anishinabe (Ojibwe) who grew up in Toronto and Vancouver, Jackson took part in the Canadian Film Centre's Directors' Lab in 2010. Her latest film is *Savage*, which she bills as a "residential school musical."

Educational package written and compiled by Suzanne Methot suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca

VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

There are important themes in this film that have broad implications for students and their futures.

Take time to activate your students' background understanding of these themes before viewing.

This will help them as they come to their own understanding and develop their critical abilities.

The following three subsections, on this page, are intended to provide you with a range of pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. They are followed by a set of questions based upon the film's larger thematic domains, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes, and a page of web links for further investigation.

Pre-Viewing Activities

View the film trailer on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbwsSPu9FBg). Have students work in small groups to make predictions or answer the following questions:

- Who is the target audience for this media text? How can you tell?
- How and why does this media text appeal to its target audience?
- How does this media text appeal to you?
- What are the themes of this film?

Play the first minute of the film (the opening sequence with the black-and-white archival footage followed by the shots of the cityscape). Alternatively, take a screen capture of the mid-film shots featuring archival and contemporary footage of Aboriginal people in canoes. In a large-group discussion, ask students why the filmmaker uses this technique. What is it about the juxtaposition of images that might attract a viewer? How does the juxtaposition of archival and contemporary images convey the theme of the film? What effect does black-and-white footage have on the viewer? What effect does colour have on the viewer?

Print several of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or in pairs to discuss the ideas in the quotations. Then ask them to share their conclusions with the large group. As they discuss the quotations, ask students to think about the following:

- What is the main conflict in this film? How do you know this?
- From whose perspective is this story told? How do you know this?
- What values are being promoted? How do you know this?

- Whose point of view do the values represent? Are your values represented? Why or why not?

Host a large-group discussion about one of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide. Ask students to structure their questions and responses around the themes of identity, relationships, sovereignty and challenges.

Viewing Activities

Have students take notes on the connections they see between the issues in this film and the ones stated in The Big Questions/Ideas/Themes section of this guide.

Have students describe what they see in the film. Ask them to withhold judgment and observe carefully. They can write notes or give an oral description.

Ask students to create a mind map as they watch the film. The mind map should contain the following key words: conflicts, techniques, purpose and perspective. To get students started, use the following prompts:

- What are the main conflicts we encounter in this film? Were the conflicts resolved at the end of the film? Why or why not?
- How was the film made? What conventions or production techniques are used? How do these techniques attract the viewer?
- Who produced this media text, and for what purpose? Who profits if the message is accepted? Who may be disadvantaged?
- How would this story be different if told from the perspective of another character in the film?

Have students jot down three questions for discussion that the film raises in their minds.

Post-Viewing Activities

Ask students if the predictions they made in the first Pre-Viewing Activity were correct. Have them give specific evidence from the film—facts revealed in images, title cards or voiceover/dialogue—that supports or disproves their prediction.

Conduct a large-group discussion guided by student questions written during the last Viewing Activity.

Have students revisit the quotations they discussed during the second Pre-Viewing Activity. Have a large-group discussion to see whether their opinions changed after viewing the film.

Take a screen capture of the shot of artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's joker-style shoes and provide students with their own copy. Have students write a paragraph or give a one-minute oral presentation on the following: Why did the director include this image? How does this image convey the theme of the film? How might this image connect to some of the quotations in the Extension Activities in this guide?

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated sub-topics in the film. Using the conceptual map as a guide, ask students to create questions they think will represent the important issues. Then, using the questions and the conceptual map, ask students to make interconnections among elements of the film. This should take the form of an argument, including a thesis statement and evidence from the text. Have students make a final judgment about the text based on the argument they created above. Students will learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis, and interpretation.

Ask students to reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the Pre-Viewing, Viewing, and Post-Viewing activities. Did these steps help inform their ideas? Ask students to write a personal reflection to summarize what they have learned.

THE BIG QUESTIONS/IDEAS/THEMES

Multiple Perspectives

What is the subject of this film? Can you determine the filmmakers' perspective on this subject? What evidence can you find in the film to support your view?

How does this film help you analyze and interpret points of view about issues that concern people?

Does the filmmakers' perspective foster respect for diversity and an inclusive society? If so, how?

Identity

Whose story is told in this documentary? Whose story is not told? How does this story, and the way it is told, help you understand your own community/life?

How do the people in this film identify with their community? What are the common bonds among the people in this film? What challenges do they face in expressing their identity?

What film techniques do the filmmakers use to convey the identity of the people in this film?

Citizenship

What insights does this documentary offer about the ideals of good citizenship in the community depicted in this film?

How does the film deal with issues of freedom, equality, human dignity, and individual and collective rights and responsibilities?

Change and Continuity

How does this film help you understand a community's values and its attitudes towards an issue at a particular time?

What changes do the people in the film experience? What causes those changes? What are the consequences of those changes for the people in the documentary?

Culture and Community

Which aspects of a people's culture does this film focus on? Why do you think the filmmakers focused on those aspects?

How do the images, themes and message of this film help you understand the filmmakers' attitude towards the subject? What do you think might have been the intended audience's attitude towards the documentary subject?

Individuals, Societies and Economic Decisions

What economic systems are at work in this film? What are some of the causes and effects of the economic decisions made by the people in the film's community?

Does money play a part in the decisions being made in the film and what does it tell you about their local culture?

Power and Governance

What system of government control do we see in this documentary? How is power distributed within this society? What are the implications of that distribution on issues affecting the people's well-being and freedom?

Global Connections

What global issues are addressed in this film? What is the filmmakers' point of view on the opportunities and challenges of those issues?

Adapted from NFB Documentary Lens: <http://www.nfb.ca>

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Ask students to research the manga art tradition. Have students create their own manga comic book on one of the following themes: identity, relationships and challenges. The comic book must be related to something they have experienced in their own lives or the lives of people in their ethno-cultural/geographic community.

Additional Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

How does the issue of authenticity relate to the concept of identity? How might someone's personal journey of discovery and realization be affected by notions of "authenticity" in the world around them? How would it affect an artist's development?

How does the art in this film show the relationship Aboriginal people have maintained with the land? How does the art in this film show the challenges Aboriginal people on the West Coast face in reclaiming, reasserting and further developing the distinct identities and relationships they have always held?

How might the concept of sovereignty—the right to govern oneself—include the right to manage cultural or art production? What connections are there between governing oneself and taking control of artistic and cultural images?

How does this film encourage you to see the world differently?

Quotations From the Film to Explore

"Everything that was ever done was at one time contemporary."

What does this say about notions of "ancient" and "modern"? About what is "authentic"?

"My ethnicity has nothing to do with it. I'm a painter. I'm a drawer. I love to make stuff."

How does a person's cultural background inform what they do? Does it always have to?

"Some people have the idea that one way is the right way and the only way to do things. I don't really follow any of the rules."

Why might marginalized or oppressed cultures become narrow-minded when it comes to cultural expression or cultural practices? What might an insistence on the so-called "rules" be a response to?

"Tradition is innovation."

How can something that is traditional also be different or based on new ideas?

"The commodification of indigenous art is useful for many people."

How might the commodification of Aboriginal art be useful for Aboriginal people? For non-Aboriginal people?

"We have to bring forward that which is of value from our past into our present."

How does art accomplish this?

"It's the relationship to the land that's expressed through the art."

How does director Lisa Jackson express a relationship to the land through her film? What techniques does she use?

"Art in the old days was part of our life. We lived it. It was all around us. We were part of it. We were part of the supernatural world."

How does art bring people in touch with the spirit world?

"What happens to the land is what happens to the culture."

Have changes in the way Aboriginal people relate to the land brought changes to their art forms?

"It's about the relationship between myself, which is only one small part of the bigger world, and that outside world. One of the ways I can connect to that is through art."

How might art make it possible for people to connect to the world around them? Why would this be especially important for Aboriginal cultures?

"The majority of the art made on the Northwest Coast is being made for the commercial market. ... We are not in control of that market."

If Aboriginal people aren't in control of the commercial art market, what does that mean for the types of work they produce?

"There's always been a certain idea in the mainstream society about what Aboriginal culture is... A lot of those ideas are very much locked in the past, and they're very much rooted in ideas of what is authentic. And authenticity is something that can never really be fully defined. It can never be achieved."

Why are marginalized or oppressed peoples often stereotyped by the dominant society? How do these stereotypical images/ideas benefit the dominant society?

"We had a certain way of being in the world 500 years ago. How relevant can that be today, in the modern system? We need to turn back to those teachings. They're not irrelevant at all."

How might the knowledge of Aboriginal cultures be relevant for all people living in the contemporary world?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY: HOUSE OF LEARNING, HOUSE OF CHANGE

Name: _____ Date: _____ Mark: ____ /40 (See rubric)

In the film *Pushing the Line: Art Without Reservations*, artist Marianne Nicolson describes how she transformed the Vancouver Art Gallery into a traditional Haida house by projecting Haida house poles onto the outside of the building. She described how this action was meaningful because of the fact that the gallery used to be the Vancouver courthouse, where Aboriginal peoples were once prosecuted for engaging in traditional dances and ceremonies such as the potlatch.

The class will be responsible for producing a set of house poles for the main entrance of your school. You can use any art media you wish: paint on paper, paint on fabric, digital projections, collage or anything else you think will work. You may choose representational or abstract images. Before starting your project, you must get your teacher to approve your plans. Do not copy Haida artistic forms; the house poles should be of your own creation.

Your project will need to include the following:

- Documentation of the project as it unfolds, either photographs or video, which you will use to make a presentation at the project's official opening
- A two-page statement that lists the title of the project, the names of those involved in the project, the art media used and the context and meaning of the colour and images your group chose for your house poles

Your house poles must reflect the following:

- Images of importance to yourself and your fellow students, either from your own life or the life of your community
- A "takeover" of the school building by your class or the surrounding community, reflecting the fact that schools are institutions of the dominant society and sometimes disconnected from students, their everyday life, and the life or history of the community

You may use ideas from the Pre-Viewing, Viewing or Post-Viewing activities, information from the film, the questions from the Big Questions/Ideas/Themes section of this guide, and the rubric categories to help guide your project and your two-page statement.

HOUSE OF LEARNING, HOUSE OF CHANGE RUBRIC

Name: _____ Group: _____

Categories	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Knowledge and Understanding	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Understands the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates limited knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates some knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates considerable knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates thorough knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity
Explains the way schools are connected to the community	Explains the way schools are connected to the community with a limited degree of understanding	Explains the way schools are connected to the community with some degree of understanding	Explains the way schools are connected to the community with a considerable degree of understanding	Explains the way schools are connected to the community with a thorough degree of understanding
Thinking and Inquiry	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Uses critical and creative thinking skills to create meaningful artistic images that relate to the "takeover" theme	Applies few of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies some of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies most of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies all or almost all of the skills involved in an inquiry process
Communication	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Communicates information and ideas through the use of appropriate colour, line and/or imagery	Communicates information and ideas with limited clarity	Communicates information and ideas with some clarity	Communicates information and ideas with clarity	Communicates information and ideas with clarity and insight

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 The Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create artworks that express feelings, ideas and issues. • demonstrate an understanding of the function of visual art in various contexts today and in the past, and of their influence on the development of personal and cultural identity.
Grade 8 The Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create artworks that express feelings, ideas and issues. • identify and explain some of the ways in which artistic traditions in a variety of times and places have been maintained, adapted or appropriated. • identify and analyze some of the social, political and economic factors that affect the creation of visual art and the visual arts community.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze themes related to sovereignty, as portrayed in media works by Aboriginal creators. • use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, University/ College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of how Aboriginal identity is linked to the physical environment. • demonstrate an understanding of the influences on Aboriginal societies that have an impact on their sense of identity. • describe Aboriginal perspectives related to issues of identity and sovereignty. • demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships that characterize an Aboriginal world view. • describe how Aboriginal peoples adapt to external forces. • identify social, political and economic issues currently being addressed by Aboriginal individuals and communities in Canada.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain how Aboriginal peoples' links to the land and to a sustainable environment are part of their cultural identity. • demonstrate an understanding of the varying perspectives on Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination. • describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives. • describe how contemporary Aboriginal communities assert their autonomy through a blend of traditional and modern practices.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze themes related to sovereignty, as portrayed in media works by Aboriginal creators. • use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe how traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures influence present-day activities and behaviours. • identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. • describe Aboriginal perspectives on the contemporary cultural identities of Aboriginal peoples. • describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives.

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe images in media works related to Aboriginal identity. • identify issues of sovereignty as presented in media works by Aboriginal creators. • use a variety of print and electronic resources to gather information and develop ideas for personal, school and workplace-related writing.
Grade 12 Native Studies: Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, University/ College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe how the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples is reflected in community-based activities.
Grade 11/12 English, University Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.
Grade 11/12 English, College/Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning. • reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding media texts.
Grade 12 The Arts: Exploring the Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the concepts used in various art forms. • apply arts concepts in the creation of a production or work of art. • apply appropriate steps in the creative process in completing individual or group projects. • analyze and interpret their own and others' works of art, demonstrating an understanding of the process of critical analysis. • analyze aspects of cultural identity found in works of art.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Filmmakers

The official website for filmmaker Lisa Jackson has information on her other films, excerpts from her films and downloadable images, as well as links to television networks and various documentary film sites.

<http://lisajackson.ca/>

About Aboriginal Art and Authenticity

The website of artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas contains images and information on his artwork as well as links to his books and blog.

<http://mny.ca>

The website for Marianne Nicolson's Cliff Painting, which referred to in the film.

<http://www.themedicineproject.com/marianne-nicolson.html>

The website of carver Dempsey Bob, including his thoughts on innovation in contemporary Aboriginal art.

<http://www.dempseybob.com/home.shtml>

The Canadian Encyclopedia's entry on Native Art contains information on pre-contact, post-contact and contemporary art, including numerous links, artist bios and a long section on art from the West Coast, as well as an examination of the authenticity debate.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0003977>

Various Links for Lesson Plan Ideas, Media Awareness, Critical Literacy and Documentary Films

Using Documentaries in the Classroom: This teacher librarian's personal website contains excellent resources for teaching with documentary films.

http://www.frankwbaker.com/using_docs_in_the_classroom.htm

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet-literacy resource library.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

Center for Media Literacy: A U.S. website which provides several resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.

<http://www.medialit.org>

The National Film Board of Canada website: On this site is an area with teaching resources and short documentary films that can be used as teaching aides.

<http://www.nfb.ca>

The Association for Media Literacy: This Canadian website examines how media impacts and influences culture.

<http://www.aml.ca/home>

Hot Docs Looking at Documentaries: A teaching guide that sets out questions designed to help teacher include the study of documentary film in their curriculum.

http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs_for_schools/