

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS ARTS IN THE CLASSROOM



OTTAWA ART GALLERY

**CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS ARTS
IN THE CLASSROOM**

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Edited by Stephanie Nadeau and Doug Dumais

Texts by David Garneau and Wahsontiio Cross

**OAG
GAO**

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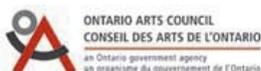
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Cover: Barry Ace, *Anishinabek in the Hood*, 2007, acrylic on vinyl screen, 147.3 x 127cm,
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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

ttawa Art Gallery's mandate is to be a vital and responsive arts institution that serves diverse communities and helps to reflect and shape important cultural conversations. OAG has demonstrated throughout the years a strong commitment to producing socially relevant educational programming with a particular focus on connecting students with contemporary art practices and ideas, and providing teachers with tools that help them facilitate meaningful arts education experiences in the classroom.

Contemporary Indigenous Arts in the Classroom is one of what we hope to be many contributions to the calls to action from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. In this landmark report, artists (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) are called upon to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process. Through the lens of contemporary art and through the act of art-making we can discover the depth and complexities of Indigenous histories and cultures in Canada and, perhaps, shift the way we view the world.

On behalf of the OAG, I would like to thank the artists Barry Ace and Jamie Koebel for their guidance and important contributions to this publication. Further thanks must be extended to essayists David Garneau and Wahsontiio Cross for their significant insights. The book would not have happened without the leadership of Stephanie Nadeau, Head of Public, Educational and Community Programs, and the hard work of Doug Dumais, Educational Assistant and Publication Coordinator. We must also acknowledge Joi T. Arcand for her thoughtful design.

Finally, the ongoing support we receive from our members, donors, volunteers as well as the City of Ottawa, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts is gratefully acknowledged.

Alexandra Badzak

Director and Chief Executive Officer
Ottawa Art Gallery

INTRODUCTION

This project came together in Ottawa, on unceded Algonquin territory, in 2017. In the midst of spectacle, celebration and ubiquitous Canada 150 narratives commemorating the country's sesquicentennial, cultural conversations across artistic disciplines have focused a critical lens on the values and histories upheld by Canadian nationhood. It is in this spirit of reflection and criticality that we hope *Contemporary Indigenous Arts in the Classroom* will contribute to the legacy of this anniversary.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* (2015) call on all levels of government, in full "consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students."¹ It also calls for "an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect."²

Contemporary Indigenous Arts in the Classroom aims to provide elementary and high school-level teachers with curriculum-linked lesson plans designed by contemporary Indigenous artists. The goal is to build students' cultural competence and respect for diverse Indigenous peoples, while encouraging critical thinking about colonialism in Canada.

Why bring contemporary Indigenous arts into the classroom?

Bringing contemporary Indigenous arts into the classroom disrupts the all too present curricular narrative that positions Indigenous cultures and contributions to Canada as historical and static. First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists are at the forefront of the Canadian contemporary art world. The work of artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Shelley Niro, Brian Jungen, Edward Poitras, Faye Heavyshield, Sonny Assu, Jeneen Frei Njootli, Dayna Danger, Annie Pootoogook, Bear Witness, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Christi Belcourt, Maria Hupfield, Kent Monkman, Barry Ace, and Jaime Koebel, to name but some, is being highlighted in contemporary art circuits nationally and internationally. Their work offers poignant critiques of colonialism, reveals powerful strategies for reclamation, and participates in a global discourse on Indigeneity.

Ottawa-based Jaime Koebel (Métis, Cree) and Barry Ace (Anishinaabe) are two practicing artists who respond to contemporary experiences and maintain strong connections to their respective cultural teachings and relationships to the land. Experienced educators in their own right, Koebel and Ace have each developed an art lesson for the classroom based on the visual language of their creative practice.

Each artist developed the content for their lesson with the following framing questions in mind:

- How do we structure a lesson for teachers to pass on to their students, without setting the conditions for an intermediary to transmit Indigenous traditional knowledge or material techniques?
- How do we also avoid cultural appropriation, and discourage mimicry of Indigenous art forms in the classroom?

Jaime Koebel's *Superhero Plant Trading Cards* is designed to teach elementary school-aged students about herbal medicines and the traditional uses of plants. Relating to Jaime's practice as a storyteller and maker of floral and plant drawings, the lesson teaches children to identify with the natural environment. It encourages them to develop an awareness of their own personal strengths and a respect for the strengths of others, planting a seed of mutual respect and anti-racist thinking and being in the world.

Barry Ace's high school lesson, *(re)Mapping Place*, delves into the politics of map-making. Students learn about the role of maps in the colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples from Canada's history. By deconstructing the map of where they live, and re-creating it using symbols from their own cultural heritage and lived experiences, students learn the importance of continually questioning and challenging the established authority of historical knowledge.

How to use this book

This book is organized into two main sections, each structured to give an overview of one of the artists' work, followed by a general lesson plan. The first section is devoted

to Jaime Koebel. An essay written by artist and scholar David Garneau (Métis) contextualizes her creative practice. Following Garneau's essay is a glossary of terms that teachers may find helpful for unpacking the themes in Koebel's work. Following this, there is an image section and a general lesson plan for teaching *Superhero Plant Trading Cards* to elementary school aged students. Finally, a student handout complements the lesson plan, which teachers are free to copy and distribute to their students as a worksheet.

The second section is similarly organized with a focus on Barry Ace. It opens with a contextualizing essay on Ace's work by artist, art historian and educator Wahsontiio Cross (Kanien'kehá:ka). Cross's essay is accompanied by a glossary of terms and image section, and a general lesson plan and worksheet for teaching *(re)Mapping Place* to high school-aged students.

The book concludes with a bibliography, a list of suggested further readings, and a page describing the free online resources associated with this project that can be found on the Ottawa Art Gallery's website, which include video interviews with each artist and an extended list of online educational resources.

The lesson plans included in this book give step-by-step instructions and materials lists, and propose question topics for further reflection and class discussion. The lessons have been linked to the Ontario Arts Curriculum and may be adapted for use in other provinces or educational contexts outside of the classroom. Free, downloadable lesson plans articulated by grade level can be found on the Ottawa Art Gallery's website.

Education for reconciliation

Teachers play an essential role in reconciliation. The experiences and discussions that teachers facilitate in the classroom are among the most important socializing forces in a student's life. Although the *Contemporary Indigenous Arts in the Classroom* project amounts to only a small gesture towards education for reconciliation, we hope teachers will find these classroom tools useful and easy to implement.

To any educator looking to adopt reconciliation as a core tenet of their teaching philosophy, we encourage you to supplement provincial guidelines with experiences and lessons that go further than teaching the history of colonial violence in Canada. As educators, you have the power to build your students' understanding of the interconnectedness of colonialism, racism, ableism, sexism, gender violence and other ongoing systems of oppression.

Education for reconciliation includes teaching about feminism, non-violent communication and inviting your students to reflect critically on their own privilege. It means inviting your students to reflect on the classroom itself as an instrument of colonial rule. It means recognizing that your students are powerful, and encouraging them to imagine the potential futures they can and will create. Education for reconciliation means hiring Indigenous people whenever possible to share cultural knowledge and tell their own stories. It means being aware of cultural appropriation and teaching respect for Indigenous art forms, not mimicry.

As teachers embracing education for reconciliation, you can inspire a generation to be led by compassion and understanding to defend all people's right to live freely and thrive.

Stephanie Nadeau

Head of Public, Educational and Community Programs
Ottawa Art Gallery

1 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action, last modified June 25, 2015. http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf, 7.

2 Ibid.

ON JAIME KOEBEL

David Garneau

Jaime Koebel makes contemporary art that is influenced by her Otipemisiwak (Métis) [Oh-tee-pem-ee-see-wak (Meh-tee)] and Nêhiyaw (Cree) [Ne-hee-aou] ways of knowing and being. Her traditional beading, plant drawings and performance artworks are each infused with her experiences of growing up on a farm in northeastern Alberta and in the community of Lac La Biche. She absorbed Indigenous teachings and aesthetics from the land and from traditional knowledge keepers. Listening to Indigenous storytellers and musicians and watching dancers also inspired her.

Koebel walks with purpose. Her walks are not ends unto themselves but rather immersive encounters with Indigenous spaces, things, beings and knowledge that lie beneath and within the city.

One of Koebel's Indigenous Walks is a tour of downtown Ottawa.¹ She leads Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to landmarks that have special meaning for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Another walk leads people to experience the National Gallery of Canada collection from an Indigenous point of view. This includes sharing knowledge about objects and the communities they come from that goes beyond what can fit on a label and may even be unknown to the curators of the exhibition. And a third, more recent walk, explores trees, shrubs, flowers and other plants that are hidden in plain sight within the city.

Koebel describes herself as an “Indigenous arts activator.” The emphasis on activating, on doing, is familiar to Indigenous people since Indigenous languages emphasize verbs over nouns. As Cree teacher Ralph Morin explains: “Cree is organized around verb-based descriptive phrases. Cree places an emphasis on relationships—rather than floating alone as separate units of meaning, the words for people, animals, and objects are embedded with narratives about how these things interact with each other and the environment.”

1 Jaime Koebel, *Indigenous Walks*, Downtown Ottawa, online video, 6:33, date N/A, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/fjyhababb-k02zfs/Jaime%20Koebel%20V2.mp4?dl=0>.

For example, what in English is a chair (noun) in Cree is “tēhtapiwin—tēhta is ‘on top’ —apiwin is ‘where you sit.’ So ‘you’re sitting on top’... you describe the function of the object.”² Indigenous pedagogy, then, is learning through doing. A single concept is always understood as existing within a network of relationships and meanings—one that includes nature as a relation rather than something we have dominion over.

Art begins with “noticing” and involves what anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake describes as “making special.”³ “Noticing” is about looking for—looking for patterns, beauty, difference, something interesting, pleasing and meaningful. “Making special” is transforming a noticed thing or relation to a new thing, action or display. This is most often done by decoration and novel design. Indigenous art begins with noticing the world via an Indigenous sensibility. Indigenous art embodies this noticing and knowledge. While beading is primarily about making a vest, for example, more beautiful, some Indigenous artists will also incorporate medicinal plants in their designs. In this way, an ordinary object is made not only visually interesting but also functions as a mnemonic device for teaching.

Why turn plants into super heroes? All cultures have stories about super(natural) beings. When Jaime Koebel asks students to take special notice of the plants in their world, she is using hyperbole and personification to encourage children to observe the otherwise invisible power and value of plant-based medicines. Just as these plants have hidden potential, so do the children.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its *Calls to Action*.⁴ These recommendations help us understand and acknowledge what happened to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children who attended residential schools and the generations that followed them. Reconciliation is about our shared pasts and futures. It is about working together toward better relationships as people who share a common environment.

2 Linda Besner, “In Their Own Words,” *The Walrus*, last modified March 25, 2016, <https://thewalrus.ca/in-their-own-words/>.

3 Ellen Dissanayake, “The Ore of Art: Making Special,” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 1, no. 2 (1992, 2003): 13-38, <http://jcacs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jcacs/article/view/16856/15662>.

4 “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission, last modified 2015, http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.

The Commission’s report has a whole section on the healing possibilities of art, and one of the Calls to Action (number 83) asks “Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.” At first glance, this appears awkward, difficult, perhaps even inappropriate for elementary school children. But rather than focussing on “Indian” residential schools and Indigenous people as victims, Jaime Koebel’s *Super Hero Plant Trading Cards* project is about sharing land-based knowledge across cultures. Indigenous worldviews do not center on human beings, but see people as just part of a complex web of beings. We are interrelated and depend on each other. It is important to know not only what each plant is, for example, but how they are related to their environments, how they help people and how we can help them.

This project is about reconciliation—building better relationships on shared territory by learning about what we have in common: the land. Knowing this environment, taking care of it, is in everyone’s interest. Because Indigenous people have been sustained by this land, and have cared for it for so long, they have knowledge that includes but goes beyond science; it makes sense to listen and learn from these knowledge keepers. By learning and making art with each other, we reconcile with each other and the earth.

Glossary of Terms (in order they appear in the text)

Aesthetics: The conception, or idea, of what is beautiful or artistically valid.

Pedagogy: The art or science of teaching.

Dominion: Authority or control.

Anthropologist: A person who specializes in the study of human beings, especially of their societies or customs.

Sensibility: A person’s or persons’ moral, emotional or aesthetic ideas or standards.

Embodies: Gives a tangible, or physical, expression to an idea or concept.

Mnemonic: A method used to assist with memory. For example Never Eat Shredded Wheat is used to remember the four cardinal directions.

Hyperbole: An exaggeration.

Personification: The act of attributing a human nature or characteristics to an object or non-human.

Residential school: A boarding school for Indigenous children operated or subsidized by religious orders and the federal government. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, these schools, situated mainly in the 4 western Canadian provinces, existed between 1880 or earlier, and 1996. They were established to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture. In some cases, children weren't allowed to speak their own language and suffered other forms of physical and emotional abuse, including isolation and criticism of their cultures. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, at least 3,200 Indigenous children died in overcrowded residential schools.

Reconciliation: The act of becoming friendly again after a quarrel, dispute or period of separation.

Worldview: A comprehensive view or philosophy of life, the world and the universe.

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<https://thewalrus.ca/in-their-own-words/>.

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Koebel, Jaime. Indigenous Walk, Downtown Ottawa. Online Video, 6:33. Date N/A.
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David Garneau - bio

David Garneau (Métis) is Associate Professor of Visual Arts at the University of Regina. His practice includes painting, curation and critical writing. In 2015, he co-curated (with Michelle LaVallee) *Moving Forward, Never Forgetting* at the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, and *With Secrecy and Despatch* (2016, with Tess Allas) for the Campbelltown Art Centre in Sydney, Australia.

Garneau has given numerous talks in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and throughout Canada. He is part of a research project, funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, called, “Creative Conciliation” and is working on public art projects in Edmonton. His paintings are in numerous public and private collections.



Jaime Koebel, *Untitled*, 2013, pencil crayon on paper, 11" x 8", Private collection.



Jaime Koebel, *Indigenous Walks*, 2016.



Jaime Koebel, *Indigenous Walks*, 2016.



Jaime Koebel, *Untitled*, 2014, drawing on rawhide drum, Private collection.

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CONTEXT

Jaime Koebel's contemporary art practice is inspired by where she lives and comes from. Her heritage and her experiences have shaped her identity as well as her artistic practice. Her project *Super Hero Plant Trading Cards*, the inspiration for this workshop, is meant to encourage and inspire kids to learn about the physical and medicinal properties of plants that can be found around them. Students will also have the opportunity to find out about the importance of place and traditional knowledge in Métis culture.

The workshop begins with an exploration of the medicinal uses of plants and how place is an important factor in the development of identity. Students will identify and research the healing properties of a plant, weed or flower of their choice. They will then turn these healing properties into superpowers for their own superhero plant trading card!

MATERIALS

- Business cards (or any small-size cardstock)
- Laminating machine, laminating sticker-paper or clear individual plastic baseball card sleeves. Laminating machines may prove cost prohibitive. As an alternative, the authors of this book recommend contact paper or even single-card protective sleeves for trading cards.
- Graphite and colour pencils
- Books for references about plants and their medicinal qualities
- Computers or iPads for reference if students have access to them
- Markers (optional)
- Pens (optional)

PART 1: WARM-UP AND DISCUSSION

Worksheet

A worksheet is available on page 23. You have the option to scan this page as a hand-out to your students. Feel free to assign it to them as homework after introducing the project.

Introduction

Begin by showing students the video of Jaime Koebel discussing her background and practice. This video is available in the online resources toolkit on the Ottawa Art Gallery's website.

PROMPT

- What is your initial reaction to Jaime Koebel's work?

Main question: What does “Métis” mean?

Métis means to mix. Contrary to popular belief, it is not just any individual who has mixed European and Indigenous heritage who is considered Métis. Rather, it is specifically the mix of Europeans from England, France, Scotland, and Ireland who intermingled with Cree, Ojibway, and Saulteaux First Nations in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba during the 1800s and 1900s.

The Métis people call themselves *Michif*, which is the name of their people as well as their language. They identify themselves by their floral beadwork clothing, their unique and rich artistic expression, their music and dance, as well as a traditional knowledge of plants and animals, which is the focus of our workshop today.

PROMPTS

- What is culture?
- What makes you a part of your culture?
- What is something that is a part of your culture that you enjoy?
- What is something from another culture that you enjoy?

Takeaway: The definition of Métis and culture.

Main question: What is Métis traditional knowledge?

The health and well-being of the land directly correlates with the health and well-being of Métis people. According to the Southern Ontario Métis Traditional Plant Use Study, “Métis live, work and harvest throughout these territories and rely on them for their individual as well as their community’s overall cultural, social, spiritual, physical and economic well-being.”¹ Traditional knowledge of plants is integral to this well-being. The information on how to use plants is passed down through succeeding generations, or shared by Elders with youth in an apprentice-relationship.²

Learning about plants and medicines takes a lifetime of observation and practice. In the traditional way of thinking, all plants have a spirit, and permission is always asked before removing a plant, flower or part of a tree. Elders and helpers only take what they need and seek never to waste anything.

The traditional knowledge of the Métis people is also shared among Elders between regions: “Whether the plants are gathered in people’s backyards, along road sides or in secret locations, many participants spoke of sharing their stories with others.”³ There is also trade between different regions in the country because not every plant grows in every region. This is so that everyone can have access to the remedies they need, when they need them.

PROMPTS

- What is something that was passed down through the generations to you?
- What is the importance of sharing in your life?
- Is there anything you know from your culture or family that you want to share with others?

Main question: What are the medicinal qualities of plants?

These plants are used by elders and healers as medicine in Michif culture.

According to Todd Paquin:

“Many of these traditional medicines and remedies involved adding ingredients to boiling water or boiling ingredients together in water (infusions and decoctions) for sipping. Other therapies simply required the ailing person to chew, swallow, breathe in or rub on the medicine. These remedies were used to treat a variety of ailments, from open wounds to headaches and pneumonia.”⁴

Example 1:

- When babies are teething, they can experience a lot of pain, and produce a lot of saliva (or drool). In order to help with the pain, caregivers would take pieces of willow branches, cut them into small beads and thread them on a necklace. The necklace would be placed around the teething baby’s neck. When the baby’s drool reached the willow-branch pieces, it would activate the natural painrelievers in the bark and help dull the pain of teeth growing in.
- Superpower example: The willow branch can heal anyone just by touching them.

Example 2:

- Three-flowered Avens, also known as Prairie Smoke or Old Man’s Beard is a plant that can be steeped in water and used as an eye-wash.
- Superpower example: Three-flowered Avens can see in the dark, or see through walls!

More examples of the healing properties of plants are available in the Southern Ontario Métis Traditional Plant Use Study, a link to which can be found in the bibliography of this book.

PROMPTS

- Do you know any plants that have medicinal powers?
- Have you seen examples in books, TV or movies of people using plants for medicinal purposes?
- Can you think of an example of a time you used plants to heal an illness?
Example: rubbing aloe vera on a sunburn.

Main question: How can you see yourself in your environment?

Think about who you are and where you come from. Your environment influences all the things you know and the person you are. As a relatable example: ask students to think of someone they know who lives outside of the city. Or if they live outside of the city, think of someone who lives in the city. Those people's lives and the things they know are completely different because of where they live!

For this activity, encourage students to try and find a plant in their neighborhood or that they know well, and encourage them to think about how that plant plays an important role within their neighborhood or city.

PROMPTS

- What do you want to change in the world or in your environment?
Write this down on your worksheet.
For example: Save the environment, make people happy, etc.
- What is a superpower you wish you had that could make this change happen? Write this down on your worksheet.
For example: Transform plastic into trees, see people's emotions, etc.

PART 2: ACTIVITY

Introduction

Students will research a plant's medicinal qualities, and turn that plant into a superhero with its very own trading card. With the two answers that the students have written in Part 1, students will either research—with the help of computers, books provided, books from the library—or use their own imagination to create a plant with healing qualities that has the power to change the world!

Activity 1: Reflection and research

Using resources available to them, students will find plants that share similar healing properties with what they want to change in the world. Weather permitting, encourage hands-on experiences with local plants growing nearby.

Example: A student wrote they wanted to make people happy. They discovered in their research that chamomile, when made into a tea, reduces stress.

Activity 2: Creation

After choosing their plant, the students will draw and colour an anthropomorphized plant on one side of their small cardstock, and write a superhero name and the plant's superpowers on the back of their card.

Encourage students to include more than one superpower. The sky is the limit! Encourage them to base their powers on the idea of healing, but be clear that students are free to use their imaginations and make whatever they want.

Optional: larger pieces of paper can be handed out in order for the students to make drafts of their plant.

Example: The student drew an anthropomorphized chamomile plant. The plant's superpower is that they can release a spray that instantly relaxes everyone around them.

The student then gives their superhero plant trading card a name:
Calmomile!

Activity 3: Laminating

Using a laminating machine or alternatives (as described in the “materials” section), the educator will laminate the learners’ creation so that their trading card feels professionally made.

PART 3: SHARING AND TRADING

In Métis culture, healers or helpers always share their knowledge so people can learn about the importance of their traditions and the land upon which they live. Helpers or healers also share their knowledge with other Elders so everyone can benefit from these remedies. In this spirit, students have the opportunity to share their superhero plant trading card in small presentations. Encourage learners to share:

- what they want to change in the world and how their superhero plant trading card helps make that change a reality;
- the name, plant, and superpowers of their design;
- any artistic decisions they made when drawing their plant (colour choice, shape, etc.).

If time permits it, and if students have the chance and the time to make multiple trading cards, encourage them to trade or share with others in small groups.

1 Métis Nation of Ontario, "Southern Ontario Métis Traditional Plant Use Study," *Métis Nation of Ontario*, 2010, http://www.metisnation.org/media/81616/so_on_tek_darlington_report.pdf, 7.

2 Christie Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007), 2.

3 Métis Nation of Ontario, "Southern Ontario Métis," 8.

4 Todd Paquin, "Traditional Métis Medicines and Remedies." *Métis Museum*, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/00721>.

WORKSHEET: SUPERHERO PLANT TRADING CARDS

1. What do you wish you could change in the world? (Examples: make people happier, save the environment)

2. What are superpowers you wish you had that would make that change easier?

3. With the help of a parent or teacher, discover the medicinal use(s) of a flower or plant. Write the name of a plant and its healing powers below.

Name of plant or flower 1: _____

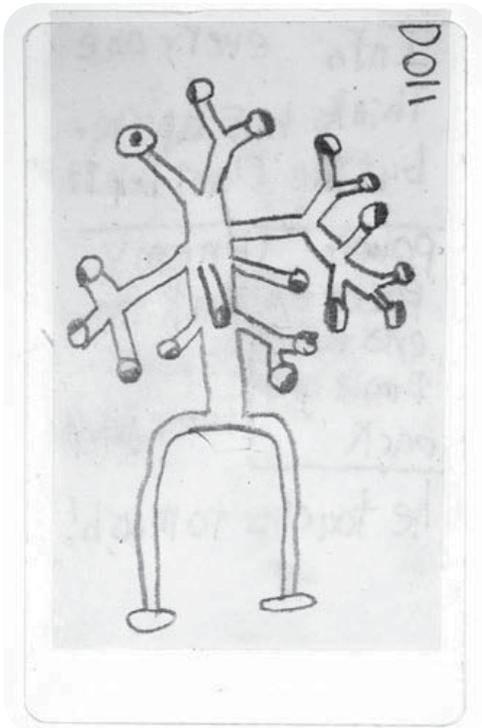
Medicinal use(s): _____

Name of plant or flower 2: _____

Medicinal use(s): _____

4. Draw some plants you can find in your school playground or in your neighborhood:

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Info everyone
 Thinks hes a perve.
 but he cant help it

powers poison eyes eyes fall off 2 more grow back	enemy Jack the devourer. Turns what he touches to mush!
---	---

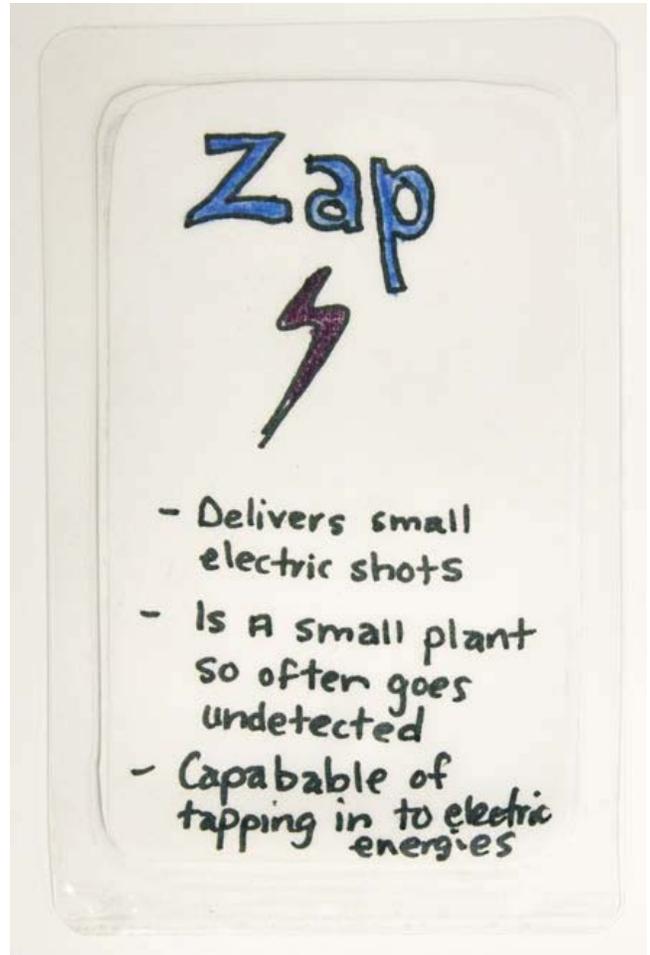
Superhero Plant Trading Card
 example (by Jacob), 2016.



Info. enjoys eating
 flies. wants a girlfriend
 but always turns them down

Powers dissolves what he touches	enemy Doll's has eyes all over his body. If a eye is touched It falls off and poisons whoever touches it. When one falls off 2 take its
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Superhero Plant Trading Card
 example (by Jacob), 2016.



Superhero Plant Trading Card example (by Hunter), 2016.

ON BARRY ACE

Wahsontiio Cross

“My work is often multi-layered with meaning and references couched in a subtle and ethereal visual landscape for personal reflection and contemplation.” — Barry Ace, artist statement

Barry Ace has a rich artistic practice that effectively remixes art forms, materials and motifs from Western culture and from his Anishinaabe (Odawa) heritage. Throughout his long career, a broad range of artists and cultural influences has inspired him—from his great aunt, to his grandmother, to Andy Warhol. Using various forms of assemblage, his work juxtaposes historical photographs, painting, digital technology and traditional Anishinaabeg techniques and materials such as beadwork and porcupine quillwork.

Employing “intentional disruption” and a “deliberate tension” in his work, Ace seeks to reconcile Western visual and popular culture with Anishinaabeg worldviews.¹ He visually reclaims the land as Anishinaabe territory in a series of mixed-media paintings created in 2007. He paints directly over large pull-down classroom maps of North America and Canada. *Anishnabek in the Hood* [Figure 1] has the word “Anishnabek” stenciled across the continent. In the margins are Anishnabemowin pictographs, words, and nindoodems represented in the form of spirit animals.² “North America” has been crossed out of the legend; the name is replaced with “Anishnabec,” land of the Anishinaabe people. In *Midewiwin* [Figure 2] the visual language of the map is reclaimed by superimposing pictographs from the Midewiwin migration teachings on top of a map of Canada. This map references Midewiwin birch-bark scrolls, upon which are recorded sacred songs, teachings, medicines, historical events and origin stories.³

1 These terms are quoted from Ace’s artist statement. This refers to the juxtapositions he employs in techniques, materials and imagery. Barry Ace, “Artist Statement,” Barry Ace Arts, accessed 2 February 2016, http://www.barryacearts.com/?page_id=2.

2 Nindoodem: the Anishinaabemowin term for clan animals. Can be translated as “my clan.” Naomi Recollet, personal correspondence, May 2016. See also Heidi Bohaker, “Reading Anishinaabe Identities: Meaning and Metaphor in Nindoodem Pictographs,” *Ethnohistory* 57, no. 1 (2010): 11-33.

3 The Midewiwin is the traditional spiritual and ceremonial practices of the Anishinaabeg culture. Birchbark scrolls and other artistic practices of the Anishinaabe are recorded by Frances Densmore in “Chippewa Customs,” *Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 86 (1929), 174-175.

Much of Ace's most recent body of work deals with memory and continuity, with inspirations taken from Anishinaabeg culture. He does so by creating and referring to mnemonic objects (those which hold memory and knowledge)—a theme that runs throughout his artistic practice.

Nigik Makizinan - Otter Moccasins (2014) [Figure 3] are constructed of otter pelts affixed to a pair of ready-made Fluevog leather shoes, linking past and present by blending modern materials with traditional ideas. The pelts act as brushes, sweeping away the tracks left behind. Modern versions of traditional trail-duster moccasins, they conceal cyber tracks, a concern in this age of electronic surveillance.⁴ The digital is conveyed by incorporating electronic components (such as ceramic disc capacitors that store electrical energy) to create a floral beadwork design, the capacitors being used in place of the multiple seed beads which would make up the petal. This is a metaphor for the animate quality of glass-beads, or manidoomenhs.

Ace recreates the bandolier bag, often gifted as a symbol of friendship, into something new with the materials he uses. In pieces such as *Digital Bandolier* (2011) [Figure 4] and *Transformation Bandolier* (2015) [Figure 5], he incorporates video and embedded electronic components, making the message the bandolier bag carries easily readable by a contemporary audience. The purpose of the bandolier bag—to enforce kinship ties between people—is here reiterated for our time, creating ties between past and present and between people of different backgrounds.

Memory Landscape (2014) [Figure 6] is a suite of thirty photographs arranged in diptychs which are digitally printed directly onto canvases with simulated birch bark backgrounds, referencing the sacred Midewiwin scrolls. The piece is dedicated to the memory of Ace's adopted brother, who has passed on to the spirit world. Ace records his memories onto the scrolls, the images side by side, inferring an absence and presence in the subject matter. The scrolls feature photographs taken during their travels together across their traditional territory on Manitoulin Island and the surrounding area. Each diptych panel is lashed together with hide and sticks to form

4 Alexandra Kahsenni:io Nahwegahbow, *Mnemonic (Re)manifestations* (Ottawa: Karsh-Masson Gallery, 2016), 2.

this dynamic visual narrative, with beadwork embroidered directly onto the canvas between the photographs. The beadwork includes motifs from Anishinaabeg visual tradition; the flowers are prevalent in the beadwork, quillwork and iconography evident in the petroglyphs found in the Great Lakes region. In this intimate format, the viewer is given the opportunity to have a mnemonic experience.

Deeply rooted in Anishinaabeg culture and materiality, Ace's work is both innovative and contemporary. By referencing Indigenous ways of life, popular culture and the confluence between the historical and contemporary, his art connects with people from diverse cultural heritages.

Glossary of Terms (in order they appear in the text)

Anishinaabe (also sometimes spelled Anishinābe): Singular term, refers to a person from the Anishinaabeg community. (Source for Anishinaabemowin terms: Naomi Recollet (Odawa), member of Wikwemikong unceded territory and University of Toronto graduate student, personal correspondence with Wahsontiiio Cross).

Anishinaabeg/Anishinaabec: Means “the people.” Not just the plural, but also referring to the entire nation. Both spellings of the word are valid. It is important to note that dialect changes from community to community, hence there are many different spellings and pronunciations of similar words. Furthermore, the language was not written down until European contact, so spelling does not only differ between communities, but also between individuals.

Anishinaabemowin: The term used for the language spoken by Anishinaabeg groups.

Assemblage: A composition of different materials, such as photographs, painting, historical objects, and textiles.

Pictographs: A figurative drawing or picture that represents a word, sound or idea. These are the earliest forms in the evolution of writing systems. For example, ancient Egyptian writing uses hieroglyphs.

Nindoodem (NIN-do'-dem): The Anishinaabemowin term for clan animals.

Ready-made (or readymade): An object manufactured for a utilitarian purpose and presented as a work of art. Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968) originated this concept. He selected and signed objects like a snow shovel, a comb and a urinal.

Fluevog (Flew-vogg): Refers to John Fluevog Shoes, a Vancouver-based shoe manufacturer.

Trail-duster moccasins: An expression, meaning footwear used to conceal the tracks of others.

Manidoomenhs (MANI-doo'-mens): Also known as “little spirits”; the Anishinaabemowin term used to describe beads.

Diptych: A pair of thematically linked paintings, photographs, sculptures etc. on separate panels.

Materiality: The quality or character of being material or made of matter. In art, this can be an object’s physicality (color, texture, temperature, etc.). Materiality can also be explored in cultural associations with a specific material (such as using a diamond in an engagement ring: the diamond itself is a durable and strong material used to represent longevity in this case).

Petroglyph: A rock carved image or symbol, usually meaning an ancient one.

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Wahsontiio Cross - bio

Wahsontiio Cross is an artist, art historian and art educator from Kahnawake Kanien'kehá:ka Territory in Quebec. She is a PhD student in the Cultural Mediations program at Carleton University, Ottawa. Her research interests centre on contemporary and traditional Haudenosaunee material culture. She is investigating how current arts practitioners and community members may benefit from museum collections in the passing down of technical and cultural knowledge.

Curatorial projects include *Home Away from Home* at the Ottawa Art Gallery (2015), *Continuum: Abstraction in Contemporary Indigenous Art* at the Carleton University Art Gallery (2016) and *Convergence: Space and Time in Contemporary Indigenous Art in Canada* for Global Affairs Canada (2016).



Figure 1: *Anishinabek in the Hood*, 2007, acrylic on vinyl screen, 147.3 x 127cm, Collection of Ottawa Art Gallery.



Figure 2: *Midewiwin*, 2007, acrylic on vinyl screen, 147.3 x 182.9cm, Collection of Ottawa Art Gallery.



Figure 3: *Nigik Makizinan - Otter Moccasins*, 2014, leather shoes, otter pelts, velvet, glass beads, electronic components, each 134.6 x 15.24 x 15.24 cm.



Figure 4: *Digital Bandolier*, 2011, velvet, brass, electronic components, horse hair, wire, glass beads, cotton thread, cotton fabric, plastic and digital video screen, 233.7 x 38.1 cm.



Figure 5: *Transformation Bandolier*, 2015, mixed media on Arches Platine paper, 100 x 32 cm.





Figure 6: *Memory Landscape 1*, 2014, digital print on archival canvas, glass beads, cotton thread, wood, deer hide and metal, 33 x 81cm.

LESSON PLAN: (re)MAPPING PLACE

AGES

Level 1: 12 - 13

Level 2: 14 - 15

Level 3: 16+

DESCRIPTION

In *Anishinabek in the Hood* (2007), Barry Ace, an Anishinaabe (Odawa) artist, visually reclaims North America as Anishinaabe territory on a pull-down classroom map of North America. Ace's work responds to social issues affecting Indigenous people today.

The educator should provide some background information about Ace's exploration of mapping, symbolism and identity. This will help students understand the significance of the social commentary in his work. The goal of this workshop is to highlight contemporary Indigenous voices and enter into critical dialogue with Barry Ace's practice.

Following this, students will respond to the themes in Ace's work in their own way by creatively (re)mapping their neighborhood or city using paper maps and mixed-media art materials. The goal is to encourage students to be inspired by Ace's work without appropriating the artist's Indigenous symbolism. This will lead to fruitful class discussions about the meanings of appropriation and cultural protocol.

This workshop will give students the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural symbols, their place in their community, their sense of self and their ability to make a difference by actively challenging the stereotypes they face.

MATERIALS

- Overhead display for a video of Barry Ace describing his practice
- Large sheets of paper
- Maps of your region
- Glue
- Scissors
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- Pencils
- Markers

PART 1: WARM-UP AND DISCUSSION

Worksheet

A worksheet is available on page 46. It includes quotes from Barry Ace and additional prompts for students to think through their mapping project. You have the option to scan this page as a hand-out to your students. Feel free to encourage them to bring it home as homework after introducing the project.

Introduction

Begin by showing the video of Barry Ace discussing his background and practice. This video is available in the online resource toolkit on the Ottawa Art Gallery's website.

PROMPTS

Levels 1, 2, 3:

- What is your initial reaction to Barry Ace's work?

Main question: What is a map? Does a map mean the same thing to everyone?

When Europeans colonized North America, they brought their rigorous mapping technologies with them. To justify imposing control over the land that was already occupied by Indigenous peoples, European settlers used the myth of *terra nullius*, or “land belonging to no one.”¹ They created maps of colonized territories employing strategies still familiar to us today, using a bird’s eye view perspective to enforce rigid divisions of land that did not correspond to the established Indigenous communities and land use already in place.

Place can be mapped in many ways. The maps we’re familiar with aren’t the only way to know the places in which we live. For example, thousands of years ago, people used petroglyphs, or rock carvings, to indicate certain hunting trails or regions. In the area around the great lakes in particular, where Anishinaabe people have been for over 10,000 years, there are petroglyphs depicting symbols that were used as early maps. These symbols range from shamanic figures to images of moose, bears and beavers. The images would tell people paddling past that the area might be a good hunting area or a sacred place.

PROMPTS

- **Level 1:** How easily could you get somewhere you know well without a map?
- **Level 2:** Do you think a map represents your everyday life well?
- **Level 3:** Think of a situation in which a birds-eye view map is different than your own experience. Are maps an accurate or objective means of understanding the world?

Takeaway: Maps are only one of many ways to understand a place.

Main question: How does Barry Ace's art address the theme of mapping?

Anishinabek in the Hood (2007) is a critical “unmapping” or “remapping” of a colonial map of North America. Ace’s message is that maps are not universally true for everyone. *Anishinabek in the Hood*, as well as his other map-based artworks, including *Midewiwin* (2007), are visual representations of how he personally experiences the place where he lives. By leaving his physical presence on a map of North America, Ace is re-mapping it according to his own experience and imprinting it with his own cultural symbols.

Ace intervenes in and resists the colonial representation of North America. The artist not only questions the arbitrary nature of borders and boundaries but also demonstrates how unsatisfactory maps can be as an objective source of knowledge.² Ace’s map suggests that an alternative history of North America is possible: a history where Indigenous voices are heard and play a central role in shaping culture.

PROMPTS

- Level 1: What do you think of Barry’s symbolic use of a school map? Would the use of a different material change the meaning of the work? How so?
- Level 2: Can you think of ways that symbols are used to convey a message? Think about advertising or politics. Are symbols an effective way of communicating a message? How so?
- Level 3: What role do symbols play in your life? What is an important way that you alter and change your environment that you would like to highlight with your artwork?

Takeaway: Barry Ace’s work suggests that maps are not true for everyone in the same way.

Main question: What social issue does this work respond to?

Ace's artwork relates to conversations that are important right now. A number of Indigenous groups across Canada today are involved in what is known as 'land claims' with the Canadian and provincial governments. Land claims are legal disputes. Some claims deal with Aboriginal land rights that were not clearly defined under law or dealt with by past treaties. Other claims relate to specific grievances about Canada's obligations to First Nations under historic treaties. Claims are not always necessarily land-related, and can also deal with how the Canadian government managed (or mismanaged) First Nations funds or other assets.³

PROMPTS

- Level 1, 2, 3: How does Barry's work respond directly to these issues? Is there an issue in your neighborhood, your city or somewhere else that directly affects you that you can base your artwork on?

Main question: What is cultural appropriation?

PROMPT

- Would appropriating the symbols Ace uses in your own artwork be problematic?

Discussion on cultural appropriation

Definition: A term used to describe the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. It is in general used to describe Western appropriations of non-Western or non-white forms, and carries connotations of exploitation and dominance.

PROMPTS

- **Level 1, 2, 3: What is the difference between cultural sharing and appropriation? What are ways that it would be incorrect to use another culture's symbols for your own artwork or message? Is there a certain protocol to follow when using symbols from your own culture or community?**

PART 2: ACTIVITY

The teacher will ask students to create their own maps depicting their neighbourhood, city or a meaningful geographic location using fragments or large sections of the maps they are provided. Students should be encouraged to cut up or tear up their map any way they wish in order to challenge the supposed authority that these maps have over the location they live in or come from. They are also encouraged to heighten their work with acrylic paint, markers, pencils and whatever is available to put themselves and their identity on the map.

The educator should encourage students to be creative and think through their decisions about which section of the city they will use, the shape of the fragment of their map, etc. Encourage the students to think of a clear message to convey with their (re)mapping project.

Here are some issues/themes/key terms to inspire students:

- Belonging
- Environment
- Family history
- Gentrification
- Accessibility
- Multiculturalism
- Safety
- Community
- Immigration

PROMPTS

- **Level 1:** What is the message you are trying to convey with your (re)mapping project?
- **Level 2:** How can you use elements of design such as colour, line and form to powerfully articulate your message?
- **Level 3:** How can you use complex elements of design to convey multiple sides of a debate or a conversation surrounding the issue or theme that your artwork addresses?

PART 3: DEBRIEF

After sharing their works with the class, encourage students to have a class discussion with the following prompts:

- What message/social issue/concern did your work address?
Did the purpose of your work change while you were making it depending on the materials/processes you used?
- What impact do colour, value, shape, proportion and emphasis have on your work? Do they effectively convey your message?
- In what way has creating this artwork enhanced your ability to express your relationships to or feelings towards the place you decided to focus on?
- Has analyzing Ace's art work affected your awareness of Indigenous culture in Canada? How so?
- Has looking at other people's (re)mapping project helped you understand more about how they understand their sense of self and community?

-
- 1 Jonathan Bordo, "The Terra Nullius of Wilderness—Colonialist Landscape Art (Canada & Australia) and the Socalled Claim to American Exception," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 15 (1997): 13-36.
 - 2 Julia Skelly, "Alternative Paths: Mapping Addiction in Contemporary Art by Landon Mackenzie, Rebecca Belmore, Manasie Akpaliapik, and Ron Noganosh," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49, No. 2 (2015): 268-295.
 - 3 "Algonquins of Ontario Land Claim Negotiations," *Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada*, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1355436558998/1355436749970>.
 - 4 *Oxford Reference*, s.v. "Cultural Appropriation," accessed June 2, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oj/authority.20110803095652789>.

WORKSHEET: (re)MAPPING PLACE

“Maps really overwrite everything, they overwrite who we are. If you hold up a map of Ottawa, for example, it doesn’t tell you anything, other than a bunch of street names. When you’re looking at a map you don’t know the history of the place, or who was there. You also don’t know the history of who is there now, like you! You’re a part of this map, but you’re invisible on this document. So today I want you to think about how you would put yourself on this map. What would you do with this map to tell your story? How would you tell people who you are and where you come from? You can talk about issues that you’re concerned about like environmental issues or other issues. But I want you to tell a story by cutting up this map and re-doing it with yourself on it in some way.”

— Barry Ace

How can you put yourself, your culture or your identity on a map?

“A lot of my work is informed by Anishinaabe culture. ‘Anishinaabe’ is what we call ourselves. You’ll see in textbooks Ojibwe, Chippewa and other names. Those names were applied to us. Anishinaabe means ‘the original people.’ That’s what we call ourselves. With those applied names comes a lot of stereotypes about who people really are ... I want you to start thinking about stereotypes in your own culture, about your own place in Ottawa — the stereotypes that you want to challenge about yourself.” — Barry Ace

What is a name or stereotype that has been applied to you?

How can your map project challenge this?

“I can remember sitting in class, and they [the teachers] would talk about North America but they would exclude [Anishinaabe people] from history. I took a map that shows all the applied names like Chippewa and I crossed them out. The map becomes more representative of my perspective. I’m overlaying my history, my knowledge and my symbols on top of a map that was created as an act of ownership. Make sure to draw from your own imagery, don’t try to replicate somebody else’s imagery. I think it’s really important that if you use a symbol, make sure you have the authority to use it or that you know about it.” – Barry Ace

Are there symbols that represent you or your culture? Draw them below and find a way to incorporate them on your map!

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SELECTED FURTHER READING

The following are resources that you can consult for further reading on topics such as reconciliation and resurgence, Indigenous identity, appropriation, education, as well as Indigenous arts and culture, generally. For an extended and occasionally updated list including videos, interactive media, and clickable links, please consult the Ottawa Art Gallery website and look for the Contemporary Indigenous Art in the Classroom page.

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