

WATER

The theme is inspired by work with Kapapamahchakwew – Wandering Spirit School at the Toronto District School Board.

KIM ONDAATJE HEARN PLANT, TORONTO HARBOUR



JOYCE WIELAND BOAT TRAGEDY



As one of the basic elements that are essential for life, water has provided inspiration to artists around the world. In many cultures, water features in creation stories, and symbolizes purity and healing. When it takes the form of storms, floods, and turbulent seas, water can represent danger; in landscapes with lakes, rivers, waterfalls, or even clouds, it is a source of beauty. What does water mean to you?

We have selected two artists from our collection who respond to the theme of water: Kim Ondaatje, who explores water through her stark mixed media landscape; and Joyce Wieland, who takes a cinematic approach and creates a narrative around water.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do you think of when you hear the word water?
- Take a moment to think about water security. Who has access to water and who does not? Where do these different groups live?
- How has water been depicted in visual culture, such as film, sculpture and other artworks?



SPOTLIGHT I

**KIM ONDAATJE, *HEARN PLANT, TORONTO HARBOUR*
1974**

In this painting, Canadian artist Kim Ondaatje shows how water serves industry and commerce, and explores the possible consequences of using water in this way.



Kim Ondaatje. *Hearn Plant, Toronto Harbour*, 1974. Acrylic, masking tape and mixed media on canvas, Unframed: 163 × 214.2 cm. Gift of David L. McQueen, Uxbridge, Ontario, 2005. © Kim Ondaatje 2005/115

GUIDED OBSERVATION

ELEMENTARY

- List five things you see in this painting.
- What animals do you think live in this water?
- If you were standing on the pier, what sounds would you hear? What would the air smell like?



GUIDED OBSERVATION

SECONDARY

- What are your first impressions of this work?
- Describe the overall mood of this painting. How has the artist created this feeling?
How does water contribute to the atmosphere of this painting?
- Research the *Hearn Plant*. How has the artist interpreted real-life subject matter for this work?

CONTEXT

Kim Ondaatje (born in 1928) is a painter, printmaker, and filmmaker living in Ontario. In the 1960s she helped to found CAR/FAC, an organization intended to support Canadian artists. *Hearn Plant, Toronto Harbour* is one of a series focusing on factories that Ondaatje made in the 1970s. The series was inspired by her visit to a cement factory. She says: “The air was hazy with dust from the factory, and berry bushes and tree leaves, were coated in a film of white powder.” Her paintings present subtle criticisms about the effects of industry on the Canadian landscape.

Ondaatje’s choice of media in this work is very interesting. While most of the canvas is painted with oil, the artist also creates details using cut-outs made with masking tape and other materials. The result is a delicate relief—with a raised, textured surface that encourages viewers to look closely.

CREATIVE RESPONSE

What would this work look like if the artist had chosen to represent water using different media?

ELEMENTARY

What colours could you use to change the mood or feeling of this painting? On a sheet of paper, use coloured pencils, markers, crayons, or paints to reimagine this work. How are the colours that you have selected similar or different from Ondaatje’s?

SECONDARY

Imagine if this painting were an installation—a three dimensional environment which occupies a physical space. How do you think it would look? What materials would you use to build individual elements in this environment? What mood would your installation convey?

SKETCH YOUR IDEAS



SPOTLIGHT 2

JOYCE WIELAND, *BOAT TRAGEDY*
1964

Joyce Wieland combines her passion for filmmaking and visual art to create this painting of water.



Joyce Wieland. *Boat Tragedy*, 1964. Oil on canvas, Overall: 50.2 x 121.9 cm. Gift from the Toronto Dominion Bank, 1965. © Art Gallery of Ontario 64/23

GUIDED OBSERVATION

ELEMENTARY

- Look closely at this work for 30 seconds. What is happening in this work?
- What visual elements does the artist emphasize in order to tell a story?
- What do you think happened before this scene captured in the painting?

SECONDARY

- What are your first impressions of this work?
- How has the artist arranged elements on her canvas to create a narrative?
- If you could add a song or soundtrack to accompany this image, what would it be?



CONTEXT

Joyce Wieland (1931–1998) was an influential experimental filmmaker and multimedia artist who was particularly active between the 1960s and the 1980s. She was an important pioneer in Canadian arthistory, as the first living female Canadian artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in 1971. She was also the first woman to have a solo exhibition at the AGO, in 1984.

Boat Tragedy, was part of a series of disaster paintings that Wieland made, exploring her fascination with the relationship between tragedy and spectacle. The series represents the narrative of this sinking sailboat, and Wieland even laid out a storyboard in order to organize the different parts of her story.

Wieland was an early environmentalist concerned with water and human impact on the planet. In *Boat Tragedy*, however, the sea is the dangerous element, threatening the inevitable tragic ending for this boat.

CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW

to hear Interpretive Planner Gillian McIntyre speak about *Boat Tragedy* and Joyce Wieland.
<https://www.facebook.com/AGOToronto/videos/with-the-5womenartists-challenge-were-celebrating-women-artists-in-our-collectio/545503229403503/>

CREATIVE RESPONSE

With her cinematic eye, Wieland composed *Boat Tragedy* as a storyboard narrative. Storyboards are graphic organizers that help to push a narrative forward. Create your own storyboards using the prompts below.

ELEMENTARY

Three-Frame Storyboard:
In three frames, can you create a story with a beginning, middle, and end?
For an additional challenge add more frames to your story.

SECONDARY

Nine-Frame Storyboard:
Divide your paper into 9 equal squares. Fill in each square with a different part of your plot, moving from beginning, to middle, to end. Consider the essential elements of stories including character, plot, and setting. If you can, take this storyboard and transform it into a flip book or into a small animation on your mobile device or camera.



Create your storyboard



Share your storyboard at #AGOfromHome #AGOmakes @AGOToronto

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