

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: Grade 7 – Grade 12

CURRICULUM LINKS: Visual Arts, Science, Geography, Social Studies

ADRIAN STIMSON OLD SUN

2005

“I guess as an artist [the question is] how do we encourage people to get involved, to take action, to understand that history [of residential schools] and to move forward? It’s not about getting over it, because that’s one of the terms that I often hear. What I think myself is you never get over the abuse that occurred in those schools. You only find ways of coping with that abuse and often, in coping with it, it creates a better life for you.” —Adrian Stimson



Adrian Stimson, *Old Sun*, 2005. Steel, buffalo skin, sand and hanging lamp with glass shade. 122 x 152.4 cm. Purchased with funds donated by the Indigenous and Canadian Committee, 2018.

GUIDED OBSERVATION

- What material does the artist use to create this floor installation? How many different elements are there?
- What does this work teach us about the past? present? future?
- Why do you think the artist chose to make this work three-dimensional as opposed to two-dimensional?



CONTEXT

Stimson's installation work examines the residential school experience and speaks to the genocide, loss and resilience of Indigenous Peoples. The artist himself attended three residential schools during his early life.

This installation's title, *Old Sun*, pays tribute to a deeply respected chief of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation and distant relative of Stimson, who resisted the signing of Treaty 7 in the 1800s in hope of preserving his community's way of life. Ironically, Old Sun was also the name given to a residential school by the Canadian government and Anglican Church, who built the school on land in Siksika Nation. Today the building houses the Old Sun Community College, but the looming presence of colonialism remains.

Stimson believes that objects hold energy and here he combines a reclaimed fixture from the Old Sun residential school and uses it to cast the shadow of Great Britain's flag - the Union Jack, on a buffalo hide. To create the shadow, Stimson has constructed a metal skeletal dome. The dome echoes the shape of a sweat lodge, a place of Indigenous spirituality and healing. The steel, an industrial material brought to this land, represents colonial expansion. The metal bars suggest confinement and restriction. The structure is both a symbol of protection and captivity.

A symbol of colonial rule, the shadow of the Union Jack evokes the history of genocide that continues to haunt Indigenous communities. This shadow falls on fragments of bison fur which have been pieced together, a reparative gesture by the artist. Stimson uses bison specifically "as a symbol representing the destruction of the Aboriginal way of life, but it also represents survival and cultural regeneration. The bison is central to Blackfoot being. And the bison as both icon and food source, as well as the whole history of its disappearance, is very much a part of his contemporary life."

Stimson uses materials like buffalo hide and the remnants of the residential school that he attended in order to ground his work in an actual experience. Stimson believes that by reconfiguring the material culture that existed in these places of trauma, such materials can help exorcise that history. He also sees art as a way to create awareness about residential schools and the racism that still exists today. "It is an activism of sorts," he explains.

Stimson's work provokes us to examine the history of colonialism and the erasure of Indigenous Peoples and reminds us that these histories involved living beings, communities and spiritual realms.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Adrian Stimson was born in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario in 1964, and currently lives in Saskatoon. He is a member of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation. Before pursuing art, he served as tribal councillor for eight years in the 1990s. He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (with distinction) from the Alberta College of Art and Design and a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Saskatchewan.

He is a highly interdisciplinary artist, working in the realms of painting, performance, photography, sculpture and installation in order to address urgent issues of social, cultural and ecological justice. His performance art looks at identity construction, specifically the hybridization of the Indian, the cowboy, the shaman and Two-Spirit being. Buffalo Boy and The Shaman Exterminator are two of his reoccurring personas.

Stimson's work can be found in national and international collections. He was awarded the Blackfoot Visual Arts Award in 2009, the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal in 2003, the Alberta Centennial Medal in 2005 and the REVEAL Indigenous Arts Award from The Hnatyshyn Foundation. He is a 2018 recipient of the Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts.



EXTENDED EXPLORATION:

- How does Stimson's use of light and shadow as a sculptural element alter the work?
- What is the significance of using an actual light fixture he recovered from not only a residential school, but one that is part of his and his family's histories?
- Do you share Stimson's belief that art can be an agent for change in this world? Why or why not?

CREATIVE RESPONSE:

- Research the flag of Great Britain. What are the significance of individual elements? What does it represent?
- Using a variety of media, design a flag that represents your ideas and beliefs. What is the significance of the media you have selected? Why is a flag such a powerful symbol?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Doctrine of Discovery, 1493: <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/18-01-22-Dismantling-the-Doctrine-of-Discovery-EN.pdf>
Royal Proclamation, 1793: http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/royal_proclamation_1763/



ARTMAKING

PROJECT: VISUAL ESSAY

MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE/STYROFOAM PRINTMAKING

In this artmaking project, students are encouraged to think about their histories by creating a visual essay. The visual essay tells a story by using a combination of text and images in many different forms – it can be a group of pictures which depict or explore a topic without any text or it can be a combination of visuals or images plus text.

Elements to consider when creating an image:

- the sequence of images and how they are juxtaposed
- the layout and overlapping of images
- how are statements and quotes integrated into the visual

Have students select three major events in their life – they can represent moments of joy, transformation, upheaval, growth, etc. Guiding questions to consider:

- Why did you choose this moment?
- What does this memory reveal? What does it conceal?
- What do you remember thinking and feeling at the time of this memory?
- If you had to translate these moments into visual representations, what would they look like?

MATERIAL LIST:

- pencils, paper, erasers, sharpeners, glue stick, gel medium, scissors
- 12" x 16" canvas board
- Newspaper
- assorted magazines
- acrylic paints, palette knives, paint brushes, tubs for water
- textured materials: plastic combs, forks, popsicle sticks
- 5" x 7" Styrofoam printing plates
- 8" x 11" paper
- assorted inks, brayers, spatulas, Plexiglas plates

(This is a suggested material list. Please modify the list with any media you have available.)



Teacher Resource continued

SUGGESTED PROCESS

Step One: PLAN

Brainstorm and plan your story. Plan the elements that will be gathered from magazines, as well as the elements you would create on your Styrofoam printing plate.

Step Two: DESIGN

On your canvas board, begin by prepping the surface:

- paint the background to set the overall mood of the print
- arrange the images and quotes you have collected

Step Three: PRINTMAKING

Draw the design on a piece of paper first – this step is optional, but it means you can draw a few different designs before choosing which ones you want to print.

Trace Drawing – hold the drawing in place over the piece of Styrofoam and trace the drawing with a pencil. Press down firmly, but evenly while tracing the image.

Inking: Squeeze some ink onto the Plexiglas frame and spread it around with a brayer. Once the brayer is coated with an even layer of ink, roll it over your Styrofoam drawing.

Printing: Position the Styrofoam on top of the paper of your canvas board and or paper, then rub gently to transfer the design. You might decide to transfer onto paper first, cut and use the prints as collage elements on your final canvas board.

Pull all the elements together by gluing the quotes, magazine cut-outs and/or printmaking elements together.

- How does this contribute to the overall feeling of the essay?
- What does this say about your story?

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