



Study Guide:
“Jelly Shelf”(1999) by Mary Pratt

About the artwork: This oil painting, done in the photorealism style, captures the fleeting moments when light passes through translucent jellies, setting the containers magically aglow.

Pratt painted jelly jars often, as she loved how the light passed through them. It reminded her of the

stained-glass at church; it was almost a divine sort of beauty. As a visual symbol, jellies came to represent the interdependence of joy and sacrifice of motherhood and homemaking for Pratt. The painting’s sharp foreground and hazy, out-of-focus background mimics the way the lens of a camera sees versus our human eyes. *Jelly Shelf* was commemorated on a Canadian stamp in 2007.

About the artist: Mary Frances West was born in Fredericton, N.B., in 1935. She has had a five-decade-long career, gaining national renown for her highly realistic still lifes, capturing charged moments from her daily life. It was her mother who taught her to see a spectrum of colour. In 1953, Mary began her studies in fine arts at Mount Allison University, where her teachers included Lawren Phillips Harris and celebrated painter Alex Colville. Mount Allison is where Mary met fellow student Christopher Pratt, whom she would eventually marry and start a family with. Mary’s life shifted to domestic and caretaking responsibilities for their children and their home in Newfoundland. However, she felt called back to paint in daily moments, where light interplay captured her attention. Her process shifted, and she began to work from photographs. Mary has become a feminist icon because she made visible the often unseen and unrecognized labour of a woman caring for her family. She found moments of sensuality, magic, pain, and mortality within everyday tasks, like making dinner or canning preserves.

Please preview the short film and then share it with your students. Select one or two guiding questions that reflect your curriculum and can guide student

research and inquiry connected to the artwork, artists, and the socio-cultural context in which it was created.

Guiding Questions:

- What is significant about the success of Mary's work given the sociopolitical and historical conditions in which she lived and worked?
- How do these jelly jars and the work of the artist reflect larger social norms during her working life?
- How has society shifted between the time when this work was created and now?
- Which gender norms is Mary Pratt upholding, and which is she pushing against? How does this reflect contemporary experiences of women?
- What other symbols could be used to depict joy and sacrifice?
- How did photographic technology inform the painting technique and creative processes?
- Create a dance or drama piece or original musical composition inspired by the jelly jars.
- Create a dance drama or musical composition that brings focus to an everyday "domestic" scene from your life.
- How might the jelly jars serve as an ad campaign for a new product or restaurant?
- How might you document the process of jelly making, or other food processes, through images and depict the joy and sacrifice?
- Mary compares the light through the jars to a stained-glass church window. How might you present food in a way that represents a place that is sacred or special to you?
- Create a series of photographs where light is being refracted through a variety of objects.
- What does this image tell us about the properties of light? What does this image tell us about the properties of color?
- Depict a moment of everyday magic in one or more art forms.
- Examine how light is refracted through various substances.
- Use this image to inspire your writing. What happened before this moment where the light came through the jelly jars? What happened after?

Supporting Links:

- [Mary Pratt | National Gallery of Canada](#)
- [Women in Canadian History: A Timeline - Women and Gender Equality Canada](#)
- [Women's History Milestones: A Timeline](#)

Ontario Secondary Curriculum Connections

The Arts- Visual Arts

B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by examining, interpreting, evaluating, and reflecting on various art works;

B2. Art, Society, and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how art works reflect the society in which they were created, and of how they can affect personal values;

C1. Terminology: demonstrate an understanding of, and use correct terminology when referring to, elements, principles, and other components related to visual arts;

C2. Conventions and Techniques: demonstrate an understanding of conventions and techniques used in the creation of visual art works;

A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create a variety of art works, individually and/or collaboratively;

A2. The Elements and Principles of Design: apply elements and principles of design to create art works

for the purpose of self-expression and to communicate ideas, information, and/or messages;

The Arts - Media Arts

B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by using it to monitor the creative process, and by examining, interpreting, assessing, and reflecting on media art works;

B2. Identity and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how media art works reflect personal and cultural identity, and affect personal, cultural, and community values and their awareness of those values;

C2. Contexts and Influences: demonstrate an understanding of the sociocultural and historical contexts of media arts;

A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create media art works, individually and/or collaboratively;

A2. The Principles of Media Arts: design and produce media art works, applying the principles of media arts and using various elements from contributing arts (dance, drama, music, visual arts);

A3. Using Technologies, Tools, and Techniques: apply traditional and emerging technologies, tools, and techniques to produce and present media art works for a variety of audiences and purposes.

The Arts - Dance

A1. The Creative Process: use the creative process, the elements of dance, and a variety of sources to develop movement vocabulary;

A2. Choreography and Composition: combine the elements of dance in a variety of ways in composing individual and ensemble dance creations;

The Arts - Drama

A1. The Creative Process: use the creative process and a variety of sources and forms, both individually and collaboratively, to design and develop drama works;

A2. Elements and Conventions: use the elements and conventions of drama effectively in creating individual and ensemble drama works, including works based on a variety of sources;

A3. Presentation Techniques and Technologies: use a variety of presentation techniques and technological tools to enhance the impact of

drama works and communicate for specific audiences and purposes.

The Arts - Music

A1. The Creative Process: apply the stages of the creative process when performing notated and/or improvised music and composing and/or arranging music;

A2. The Elements of Music: apply elements of music when performing notated and improvised music and composing and/or arranging music;

History:

A1. Historical Inquiry: use the historical inquiry process and the concepts of historical thinking when investigating aspects of Canadian history, with a focus on the development of identity and culture (CHI4U)

B3. Culture and Identity: analyse ways in which various factors contributed to the development of culture and identity in the selected ethnic group in its country or region of origin

D1. Social, Economic, and Political Context: describe some key social, economic, and political events, trends, and developments in Canada between 1945 and 1982, and assess their significance for different individuals, groups, and/or communities in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities (Grade 10)

E1. Social, Economic, and Political Context: describe some key social, economic, and political events, trends, and developments in Canada from 1982 to the present, and assess their significance for different groups and communities in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities (Grade 10)

Communication technology:

B2. apply a design process or other problem-solving processes to meet a range of challenges in communications technology; (Grade 10)

B3. create products or productions that demonstrate competence in the application of creative and technical skills.(Grade 10)

Hospitality and Tourism

B2. demonstrate the use of safe and correct culinary techniques in the preparation, cooking, and presentation of food, and demonstrate professional serving methods; (Grade 10)

B3. demonstrate effective use of forms of information and communications technology commonly used in the various sectors of the tourism industry; (Grade 10)

B4. demonstrate an understanding of the elements of planning an event or activity (Grade 10)

English:

Writing: use a variety of organizational structures and patterns to produce coherent and effective written work;

Science:

E2. investigate, through inquiry, the properties of light, and predict its behaviour, particularly with respect to reflection in plane and curved mirrors and refraction in converging lenses; (grade 10)

Writer's Craft:

- produce writing for a range of purposes and audiences with an emphasis on well-developed content and the effective use of appropriate forms, techniques, diction, voice, and style.