

Study Guide:

“The Enchanted Owl” (1960)

by Kenojuak Ashevak

About the artwork: *The Enchanted Owl* is a fantastical, rather than realistic, representation of an owl, composed of pleasing, simplified forms, with long, whimsical feathers. It is removed from any background. The work displays compositional balance; the tail feathers occupy roughly the same space as the bird’s body. It is one of the most recognized works in Canada. The artist was greatly inspired by the animals and flowers of her Arctic landscape. Initial printing included two colour variants:

25 in red and black and 25 in green and black. Iyola Kingwatsiak cut the stone for *The Enchanted Owl* as well as many of Kinngait’s other famous prints. Eegyvudluk Pootogook was its printer.



About the artist: Kenojuak Ashevak was born in a camp on the southern coast of Baffin Island in 192. She grew up on the land, following the migration of food sources. Kenojuak was a talented garment maker, decorating handbags, parkas and amautis with pictorial and graphic designs. Kenojuak was the first woman to join the printmaking shop in Kinngait. The Kinngait artistic community in Cape Dorset continues to be an important centre for Inuit art makers today. *The Enchanted Owl* appeared on the 1970 Canada Post stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Northwest Territories, and other works by Kenojuak have been reproduced on Canadian stamps and bills.

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:

- Kenojuak Ashevak famously said, “There is no word for art. We say it is to transfer something from the real to the unreal. I am an owl, and I am a happy owl. I like to make people happy and everything happy. I am the light of happiness and I am a dancing owl.” How does this reflect the artist’s relationship with her art and her world?
- Sixty years ago, printmaking was not an Inuit tradition, but today, it is. How have Inuit people reclaimed their stories, histories and identity through art?
- What story does this artwork tell about the Inuit relationship with the Government of Canada?
- In what ways is Canadian identity tied to our natural landscape and our relations with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities?
- What might an examination of Kenojuak Ashevak’s artworks reveal about the northern geography of Turtle Island?

- How can art making and art works promote renewal and healing in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities as well as reconciliation and dialogue with non-Indigenous communities?
- Kenojuak Ashevak designed the owl. Iyola Kingwatsiak cut the stone. Eegyvuuluk Pootogook was its printer. How does this challenge notions about the role of the artist?
- *The Enchanted Owl* was printed in 2 different colour schemes. What effect do these colour choices have on the artwork?
- In what ways have traditional forms of cultural production (beadwork, needlework, applique) influenced the design of the artist's prints?
- What animal from your culture or heritage might you represent through line and pattern?
- Create a 6-10 frame comic to tell the story of another Canadian artist.
- In what ways is *The Enchanted Owl* symbolic?
- How does Kenojuak Ashevak uphold or push the role of women?
- Kenojuak Ashevak said that the owl "drives away the darkness." Create- through a monologue, dialogue, dance, artwork, poem, or song- an artwork to drive away the darkness.

Supporting Links:

- [Examining *The Enchanted Owl*](#)
- [Artist Profile and Interview](#)
- [Heritage Minute on Ashevak](#)
- [Article examining the life & work of Ashevak](#)
- [Inuit Icons in Comics](#)

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;

C3. Responsible Practices: demonstrate an understanding of responsible practices related to visual arts.

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 artworks;

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;

C3. Responsible Practices: demonstrate an understanding of responsible practices associated with producing, presenting, and experiencing media art works.

The Arts - Dance

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;

B2. Drama and Society: demonstrate an understanding of how societies present and past use or have used drama, and of how creating and viewing drama can benefit individuals, groups, and communities;

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;

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)

B2. Significant Interactions: analyse the impact of significant interactions, including interactions with the environment, on the selected ethnic group's country or region of origin

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

English:

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

Writer's Craft:

B: Practising Writing: 1. Exploring Ideas, Forms, and Styles: generate and experiment with ideas about writing content, forms, and styles;

Communications Technology:

A1. demonstrate an understanding of the core concepts, techniques, and skills required to produce a range of communications media products and services;

C2. demonstrate an understanding of the social effects of current communications media technologies and the importance of respecting cultural and societal diversity in the production of media projects.

Communications Technology: Broadcast and Print Production

A1. demonstrate an understanding of the core concepts, techniques, and skills required to produce a range of audio, video, broadcast journalism, graphic arts, and printing and publishing products or services;

C2. demonstrate an understanding of social effects and issues arising from the use of communications media technologies and the importance of respecting cultural and societal diversity in the production of media projects.