



WE WHO HAVE KNOWN TIDES

Indigenous Art from the Collection

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE
WINTER 2026

Vancouver
Artgallery

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Cover: Installation view of Beau Dick, *Undersea Kingdom*, 2017, in *We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection*, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, November 6, 2025 to April 12, 2026, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

Above: Tanya Lukin Linklater, *Quiver*, 2025 (video still), three-channel video installation, Courtesy of the Artist and Catriona Jeffries

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMS

We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection is an examination that unveils the ways in which the ocean and living in proximity to it have shaped the work of Indigenous artists, as well as their relation to territories across land and water, and their connections to communities that have witnessed the tides change for thousands of years.

Drawn primarily from the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection, the exhibition invites audiences to reflect on place, presence and transformation, presenting the ocean not just as a source of inspiration but as a lens through which to understand the ever-changing world around us.

DEAR TEACHER

This teaching guide will assist you in preparing for your class tour of the exhibition *We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection*. It provides activities to facilitate discussion before and after your visit. Engaging in the suggested activities will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require very few materials and are able to be easily adapted to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Glossary section.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection takes place on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

WE WHO HAVE KNOWN TIDES HAS 3 MAIN GOALS:

1

TO INTRODUCE

STUDENTS TO THE ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION

2

TO CONSIDER

THE WAYS THE OCEAN HAS SHAPED THE WORK OF INDIGENOUS
ARTISTS LIVING NEAR IT

3

TO EXPLORE

INDIVIDUAL ARTWORKS IN THE CONTEXT OF IDEAS,
TECHNIQUES AND PROCESSES



GLOSSARY

COLONIAL(ISM)/COLONIZATION A process that occurs when settlers arrive at a place in order to establish political control over it. Colonization “is done by creating new governing systems and ways of living, being and doing that make the ways of those who were there before, inferior. This creates unequal relationships between the colonizer and the Indigenous people.”¹

CONSUMERISM The idea that we need to keep getting new things. Consumerism causes people to think that it is important to have many, many things, even if they don’t use them or need them.

CONTEMPORARY ART Artwork that has been created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists. Many contemporary artists use a limitless range of materials and ideas to reflect, explore and comment on today’s world and challenge traditional boundaries. Contemporary art defies easy categorization in its rejection of historical definitions of what constitutes art.

CURATOR A person who works in a gallery or museum and is in charge of building art collections, researching art information, writing about art and placing artwork in gallery spaces.

FORMLINE Formlines are the connected pattern of painted or carved positive space that creates and defines Northwest Coast images. Formlines alter their thickness, usually as they bend around a corner, which introduces tension and release in traditional design.

INSTALLATION ART A term used to describe large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY An artist’s practice that combines a variety of disciplines together (think sculpture, installation and sound, for example).

OVOID One of the basic shapes of traditional Northwest Coast art. Ovoids are building blocks that form visual centres from which design patterns or movements flow or emanate. They are thickest on the top, thinner on each side and thinnest on the bottom. They can change orientation, but their characteristics remain the same. Ovoids are used to represent joints, eye sockets or non-specific anatomical parts that help create the flow of the overall design.

POP ART Art based on modern popular culture and the mass media, especially as a critical or ironic comment on traditional fine art values.

SUPERNATURAL A being, creature, individual or life form that exists beyond the natural world. These entities can include gods, spirits, ancestors and otherworldly creatures, and they play significant roles in rituals and symbolism across cultures.

UNCEDDED A term for a relationship between the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples when no treaties have been established. In general, “unceded” means the lands and waters of the Indigenous Peoples were never surrendered and were taken without permission.

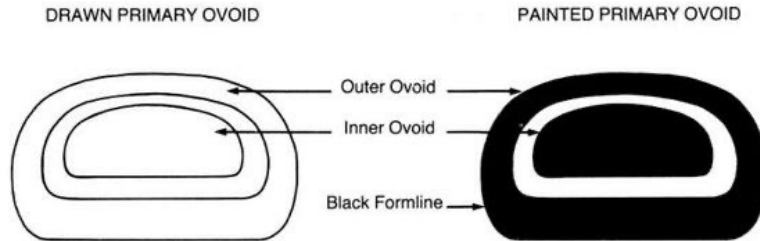
WORLDVIEW A collection of attitudes, values, stories and expectations about the world around us, which inform our every thought and action.

¹ Monica Gray Smith, *Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation* (Victoria BC: Orca, 2017), 144

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

NORTHWEST COAST DESIGN ELEMENTS

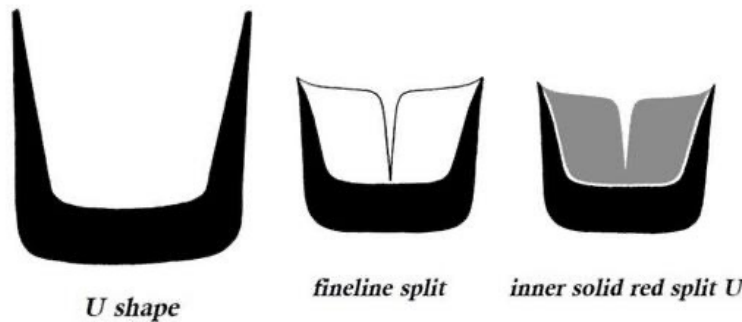
Northwest Coast art and artists are known for a bold style. Northwest Coast art tells stories that teach history and pass wisdom from generation to generation. Artists use formline, ovoid and U-forms to create their designs, adhering to principles of composition that are passed down from generation to generation. The principles that guide formline design are consistent whether the subject is a human or an animal form, on a monumental totem pole or a goat-horn spoon handle.



Ovoid

in
Pacific Northwest Coast Art Style

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U Shape

in
Pacific Northwest Coast Art Style

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PRE- AND POST-TOUR ACTIVITIES

GRADES 2-12

GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

Grades 4–12 | Pre-Tour Activity

COMMON GROUND

Grades 6–12 | Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

STYLIZED SALISH SEA LIFE

All Ages | Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

I SENSE THE OCEAN CLASS EXHIBITION

All Ages | Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY



OBJECTIVE

Students are introduced to the lives, artistic process and works of artists in the exhibition *We who have known tides: Indigenous Art from the Collection*.

MATERIALS

- Writing materials
- Access to the internet
- Artists Information Sheet (p 12) and the Student Worksheet (p 13)

PROCESS

- Divide the class into small groups.
- Give each group one of the categories from the Artists Information Sheet (p 12).
- Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (p 13) and ask them to consider what they need to find out to complete their section.
- Have them conduct research using the internet, either at home or at school.

- Ask each group to find and describe a piece of work by the artist and add it into the space provided on the Worksheet.
- Have each group present their information while the rest of the students fill in their worksheets.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What were some of the most interesting things students learned or discovered?
- Which pieces are students curious about seeing in the exhibition?
- Does one of the artist's work connect to or resonate with the student's life? Why or why not?
- What else are students interested in finding out about the artists?

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

SONNY ASSU

Sonny Assu is a contemporary Ligwilda'xw artist from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations. He currently lives and works in his home territory, ʔam'ataxʷ (Campbell River, BC). Raised in North Delta, BC, he didn't discover his Indigenous heritage until he was eight years old. This discovery became a pivotal inspiration during his studies at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Assu's multidisciplinary art practice includes painting, sculpture, installation and digital media. He often combines traditional Kwakwaka'wakw designs with elements from pop art, science fiction and activism. His passion for Star Trek, animation and comics is evident in his work, which merges these interests with West Coast formlines and ovoids. Assu's art explores colonialism, consumerism and Indigenous identity. By blending humour with thoughtful commentary, he highlights realities faced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada, which mirrors the plight of Indigenous and colonized peoples around the world.

BRACKEN HANUSE CORLETT

Bracken Hanuse Corlett is a multidisciplinary artist from the Wuikinuxv and Klahoose Nations, known for his innovative and experimental approach to art that spans from mural painting to sculpture to digital media. A graduate of the En'owkin Centre of Indigenous Art and Emily Carr University of Art + Design, his practice blends traditional forms with contemporary techniques, drawing inspiration from his background in theatre and performance. He has said: "I've been told that it is our job as artists to record the time and space we live in. I was given the responsibility to be our family's researcher/ knowledge keeper by my Uncle Dennis Hanuse." Influenced by street art and graffiti, his work embodies a unique narrative that reflects his cultural heritage and showcases his ability to connect with audiences both locally and internationally.

NICHOLAS GALANIN

Nicholas Galanin is a multidisciplinary artist of Tlingit and Unangaʔ heritage who lives in Sheet'ka (Sitka), Alaska. Drawing on his experience as a totem carver and jeweler, he explores Indigenous identity, culture and representation in his work. Using sculpture, installation, photography, video and textiles, he challenges Indigenous stereotypes and misrepresentations while reclaiming control of storytelling. Galanin's art connects cultural traditions with global conversations about Indigenous experiences. Galanin writes: "My work is deeply connected to my culture, to land, history, the present moment, and future possibilities—envisioning new futures." Galanin is also a dedicated mentor, working with young artists in his community. His work and advocacy have made a profound impact, earning him recognition and respect both within the Indigenous community and the broader art world. In addition to his visual art, he has pursued a music career under the alias of Silver Jackson, blending Indigenous sounds with contemporary influences. Through his work, he addresses important issues around Indigenous culture and the lasting effects of colonialism.

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.



ELLEN NEEL

Ellen Neel is often described as the first Northwest Coast woman carver. Centuries ahead of her time, the late Kwakwaka'wakw artist was a fierce advocate for the value of artistic work by Indigenous people and paved the way for woman-identifying carvers to take up more space in a practice typically dominated by men. Neel gained widespread recognition for her skills and pushed boundaries by bringing more contemporary approaches to what was then known as "traditional practice." While many of her works were painted, Neel also carved masks to show the depth and distinct colour of the red cedar she used. The technique Neel often used to achieve this effect was to burn the work's surface, then scrub the charred area to create a distinct contrast in the wood grain. Her poles can be found throughout the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, including the Kakaso'las pole that stood in Stanley Park's Brockton Oval for forty years before returning to the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.

TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER

Tanya Lukin Linklater is a multidisciplinary Alutiiq artist and performer from Alaska's Kodiak archipelago, homeland and territory of the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people. Now living in Ontario, Canada, in the Nbisiing Anishinaabeg territory, she is recognized for her innovative work in video, installation, dance and writing. Her practice centres on exploring and sharing important Indigenous knowledge and stories through themes such as weather, the body and connections to ancestors. Through her art, she honours the lived experiences of Indigenous people while acknowledging the challenges impacting their cultures and histories due to colonialism. Her work often involves relational gestures like conversation, movement and touch, encouraging viewers to engage with the layered histories and issues that shape Indigenous lives and lands today.

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

ARTIST INFORMATION SHEET

SONNY ASSU

- Ligwilda'xw artist from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations
- Discovering his Indigenous heritage at eight years old became pivotal inspiration
- Art practice includes painting, sculpture, installation and digital media
- Known for combining traditional Kwakwaka'wakw designs with elements from pop culture, science fiction and activism
- Uses humour and thoughtful commentary to showcase realities faced by Indigenous Peoples

BRACKEN HANUSE CORLETT

- Artist from the Wuikinuxv and Klahoose Nations
- Art practice includes mural painting, sculpture and digital media
- Was named the family's researcher/knowledge keeper by his Uncle Dennis Hanuse
- Known for innovatively blending traditional forms with contemporary techniques
- Influenced by street art and graffiti

NICHOLAS GALANIN

- Artist of Tlingit and Unangax̂ heritage who lives in Sheet'ka (Sitka), Alaska
- Art practice includes sculpture, installation, photography, video and textiles
- Known for addressing issues around Indigenous culture and effects of colonialism
- A dedicated mentor, working with young artists in his community
- Creates music blending Indigenous sounds with contemporary influences

TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER

- Alutiiq artist from the homeland and territory of the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people from Alaska's Kodiak archipelago
- Recognized for her innovative work in video, installation, dance and writing
- Shares important Indigenous knowledge and stories through themes such as weather, the body and connections to ancestors
- Honours experiences of Indigenous people while acknowledging the challenges impacting their cultures and histories due to colonialism
- Work often involves relational gestures like conversation, movement and touch

ELLEN NEEL

- Artist from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations
- Often described as the first Northwest Coast woman carver
- Paved the way for woman-identifying carvers in a practice typically dominated by men
- Pushed boundaries, inserting contemporary approaches to long-standing ways of making
- Carved masks to show the depth and distinct colour of the red cedar by burning and scrubbing the wood

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

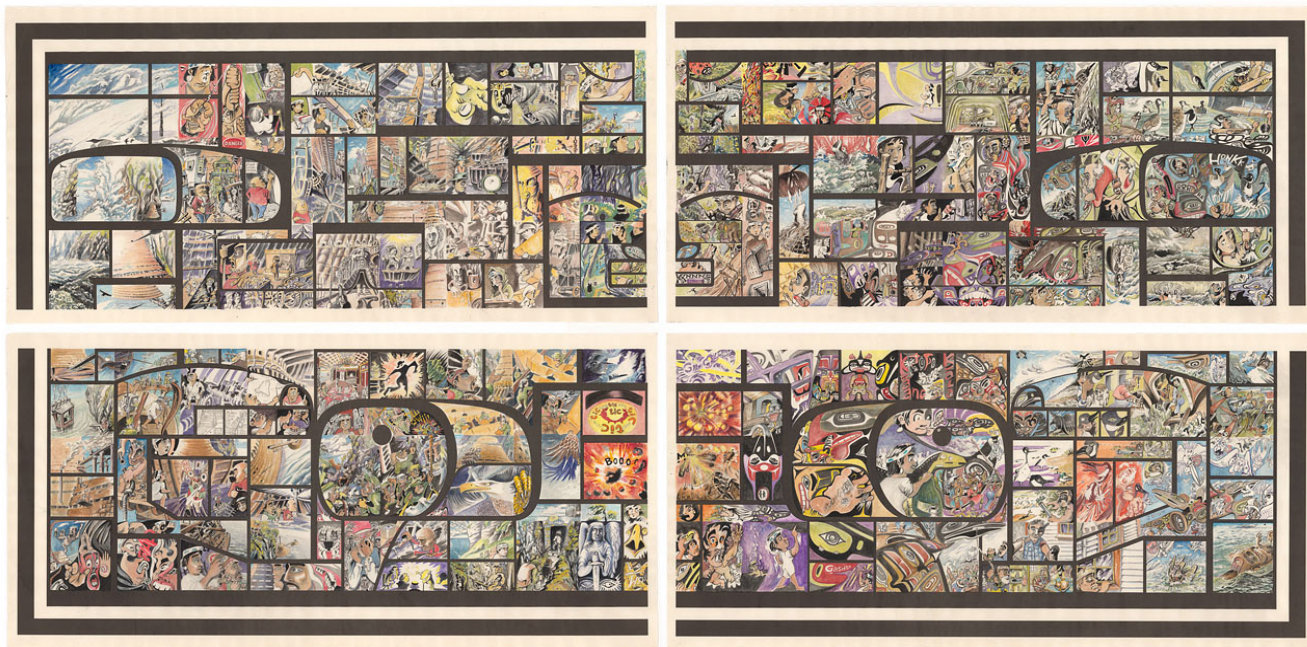
PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

STUDENT WORKSHEET (FILL IN THE CHART WITH THE FOLLOWING)

	PERSONAL INFORMATION	INTERESTING FACT	KNOWN FOR	AN ARTWORK
SONNY ASSU				
BRACKEN HANUSE CORLETT				
NICHOLAS GALANIN				
TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER				
ELLEN NEEL				

GRADES 6–12 | COMMON GROUND

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS



OBJECTIVE

To create a collaborative manga-inspired comic focusing on ocean issues.

DISCUSSION

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas is a contemporary Haida artist recognized for combining art and activism, focusing on breaking down barriers and building connections. In the late 1980s, he joined the Haida community protest efforts to protect the ancient temperate rainforest of Xaayda Gwaay.yaay, during a period marked by tension between the Haida Nation and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Yahgulanaas described it as "two groups, two boxes, and an extremely intense space between." Efforts to find common ground allowed both the Haida Nation and the Government of Canada to move outside their separate boxes, and they now share management of what National Geographic describes as North America's best-protected wildlife region.

Today, as a visual artist, he enjoys working in the spaces in between, bridging divides. Rooted in the Northwest Coast tradition of formline art and influenced by his experience with Chinese brush painting, Yahgulanaas has developed

a distinctive style he calls "Haida Manga." Since childhood, he has enjoyed comic books and now interprets the gutters between comic panels as a metaphor for how we box ourselves into states of opposition and isolation by focusing on conflict instead of common ground. In *Haida Manga*, he replaces these gutter spaces with bold, flowing lines, as seen in his painting *Clan Hat* (2021–25), commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery. Through the story of Simjuaay, who seeks to strengthen her community, he invites us to reconsider the structures we build for resilient societies, reminding us—as the artist states—"that so many of our challenges and better possibilities are all within our heads."

Just as in his experience protecting Xaayda Gwaay.yaay, Yahgulanaas encourages us to view the spaces between individuals not as divisions but as opportunities for connection and shared understanding, emphasizing the importance of Indigenous worldviews and the interconnectedness of all things.

GRADES 6–12 | COMMON GROUND

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.

“I think that art has the capacity to pull us together. It’s true that a brush is more powerful than a sword”

—Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas

MATERIALS

- Large sheets of black or white paper
- Blank index cards
- Post-it notes or paper and tape
- Glue sticks
- Pencil crayons, markers or crayons
- Black tempera or acrylic paint
- Paint brushes

PROCESS

- Look closely at Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’ painting *Clan Hat*. What is happening in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Yahgulanaas enjoyed comic books as a child and creates graphic novels today. What similarities and differences do you notice to comic books in his work? What changes when he fills the spaces between the story panels with bold formlines?
- Yahgulanaas became a full-time artist after many decades working as part of the Haida Nation’s successful campaign to protect its biocultural diversity. His long history of environmental activism and political involvement are reflected in his artwork. As a class, discuss current environmental challenges faced by the Salish Sea and the greater Pacific Ocean.
- As a class, brainstorm issues about the ocean using the following three prompts on the board:
 1. What do you like best about living near the ocean?
 2. What is a threat to the ocean?
 3. What action would you take to protect the ocean?
- Use the Post-it notes or paper with tape to respond to each prompt with a word or statement. Post your responses on the board under the corresponding question.
- Share the responses and look for common themes.
- Use the responses as inspiration to create one image on an index card using markers, pens or paint.

- In groups of 8 to 10 people, place the finished cards on a large piece of black (or white, if necessary) paper and collaboratively decide on the order of placement to create a flow or a story among the cards.
- Think about how to connect the individual cards into one unified piece. It could be with words, a shape, a movement of colour or a graphic, much like Yahgulanaas does using formline.
- When all the groups are done, decide as a class how the resulting works should be placed together to be displayed in the class.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the process.

- Which elements did you consider from Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’ painting?
- What were some of the things you took into consideration when you were organizing your drawings together as a group?
- What similarities and differences did you notice in the experiences you shared?
- What happened to the artworks when you added the connecting lines or shapes?
- Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas believes art has the capacity to pull us together. After completing this project, do you feel that this is true? Why or why not?
- After completing this project, do you feel art is a powerful tool for activism? Why or why not?



Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Clan Hat*, 2021–25, watercolour and ink on paper, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Audain BC Art Acquisition Fund, Photo: Courtesy of the Artist



ALL AGES | STYLIZED SALISH SEA LIFE

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY SUSAN POINT

OBJECTIVE

Create a stylized and abstract animal focusing on shape and colour.

DISCUSSION

For Musqueam artist Susan Point, salmon is not only an important food source, but it is also a symbol connected to her community's culture and traditions. In her own words: "Salmon weave through Coast Salish culture and communities like rivers through the coastal rainforest. This is the web of life that connects the oceans to the trees of the Pacific Northwest." She describes how, even before spawning, salmon nourish entire ecosystems, and their presence signifies the circle of life and how all living things are interconnected.

Coast Salish art uses negative space to create highly stylized, abstract imagery rather than outlines. The circle is also a prominent design element, as are crescent shapes and a curved triangle called a trigon. Working to preserve this heritage, Susan Point has spent years researching and studying the few documented examples of traditional Salish designs. Her knowledge of the style and meaning behind the imagery allows her to honour her ancestors' traditions while expanding on the designs in a contemporary way. Through her powerful works, Point is helping to revive not only Salish design but also an international interest in Coast Salish culture. Her work reminds us of the deep connections between all living things and how the spirits of animals, like salmon, represent the essence of life.

MATERIALS

- Old magazines or access to the internet and a printer
- Drawing paper
- Pencils, markers or crayons

PROCESS

- Look closely at Susan Point's work *Up Stream Quest* (2016). What do you see? How do salmon connect to the Pacific Ocean and the Salish Sea?
- The Salish Sea is one of the world's largest and most biologically rich inland seas that encompasses the waters off of Vancouver, BC. The name pays tribute to the Coast Salish people who have stewarded these waters since time immemorial and continue to care for them today. As a class, create a list of sea animals that live in these waters.
- Choose one of the Salish Sea animals from the class list and find an image of it in either an old magazine or print one off from the internet.
- Look at the image as if it were a combination of simple shapes. What shapes do you see? How can you create your ocean animal using only squares, rectangles, circles and triangles?
- With a pencil, draw the simple shapes lightly in pencil on your drawing paper to create a stylized and abstract image of your animal. Try to fill up the page with your image.
- Add additional shapes of squares, rectangles, triangles and circles to provide details.
- When you are finished drawing all the shapes, go over your pencil lines with a black marker. Erase any pencils marks you decided not to use.
- Add colour using markers, pencil crayons or crayons.
- Display the finished works in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the process.

- How easy or hard was it to create the work?
- What are some of the techniques you discovered?
- Do you perceive ocean animals differently now? How so?
- If you were to do this project again, what would you do the same? What would you do differently?

ALL AGES | STYLIZED SALISH SEA LIFE

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT.



Susan Point, *Up Stream Quest*, 2016, red cedar, acrylic paint, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

ALL AGES | I SENSE THE OCEAN CLASS EXHIBITION

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY *WE WHO HAVE KNOWN TIDES*

OBJECTIVE

Create an ocean poem and drawing for a classroom exhibition.

DISCUSSION

The curator of the exhibition *We who have known tides*: *Indigenous Art from the Collection* is named Camille Georgeson-Usher. She grew up on Galiano Island, just off the coast of Vancouver, British Columbia. Growing up on the small island, she developed a strong and personal connection to the powerful waters of the Pacific Ocean that surrounded her home. When she began planning the exhibition using the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection, she wanted to connect the artworks together in a meaningful way. She chose a personal approach, focusing on how, like for herself, ideas around personal connections to the Pacific Ocean appear in many of the Indigenous pieces she found. She also included her own poetry about the ocean, written while she was studying in Montreal and Toronto and missing the waters where she grew up. The forty works Georgeson-Usher selected for *We who have known tides* highlight Indigenous joy, resilience, excitement and love for the communities living on these lands and waters, both past, present and future. She hopes visitors will leave with a sense of celebration and reflect on their own connection to the ocean and the lands we share.

MATERIALS

- Writing paper
- Pen or pencil
- Drawing paper
- Pencil crayons or markers for drawing

PROCESS

- Read aloud this poem by Camille Georgeson-Usher about the supernatural beings in Beau Dick's *Undersea Kingdom* (2017):

*Riding through this undersea kingdom
on the backs of supernatural beings
We are pulled by
indebted to
enamoured with
in awe of*

- One of the artworks Camille Georgeson-Usher chose from the Gallery's permanent collection for the exhibition is Chief Beau Dick's *Big Whale* (2017) from his series of works titled *Undersea Kingdom*. Why do you think she chose this artwork? What connections can you make to this artwork and her poem?
- Take a moment to think about what the ocean means to you. What are some of the things you think about in connection to the ocean? Share your thoughts and ideas.
- Engage your senses. On a piece of paper, answer the following questions when thinking about the ocean and your memories and connections to it:
 1. I see
 2. I smell
 3. I hear
 4. I taste
 5. I feel
- Once you have described the ocean using your five senses, take the words you wrote and put them into a poem without the prompt instructions. For example:

sparkling water
salt
laughter
juicy and sweet watermelon
sticky
- Create a drawing to compliment your poem. You may take inspiration from your entire poem or just one section, if you choose.
- When finished, lay out all the poems and artworks as a class. What connections can you make between the different artworks? As curators, how will you decide to put together the works to display in the classroom to create an exhibition?
- Once you have displayed your artworks as a class based on your curatorial decisions, together create a name for your exhibition.

ALL AGES | I SENSE THE OCEAN CLASS EXHIBITION

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY *WE WHO HAVE KNOWN TIDES*



CONCLUSION

Discuss the process.

- What similarities and differences did you notice in the poems?
- What was surprising about curating the class artworks for a classroom exhibition?
- What type of decisions did you consider when connecting the artworks together?
- What aspects were challenging? How did you resolve those challenges?

FURTHER LEARNING

TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES

VIDEOS

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas:

[Art is Not a Noun, It's a Verb: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas - SAM Stories](#)

[Art opens windows to the space between ourselves | Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas | TEDxVancouver](#)

Susan Point:

[New Musqueam Artwork at UBC Sauder](#)

Chief Beau Dick:

[Meet Beau Dick "Maker of Monsters"](#)

BOOKS

Link to Michael Nicoll Yagulanaas novels

<https://mny.ca/publications>

WEBSITES

[Northwest Coast Art: Basic Formline Elements and Shapes – Raven Publishing Inc.](#)

[New Indigenous art exhibition at Vancouver Art Gallery | The Early Edition | On Demand | CBC Listen](#)

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