

CURRICULUM THEMES

Printmaking, Popular Culture

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

GRADE 5 | CP5.7: Students will create an artwork inspired by Russel Yuristy's depictions of animals through a common popular culture technique: personification.

GRADE 5 | CP5.8: Students will try new mediums by learning a simple printmaking method.

GRADE 5 | CH5.3: Students will discuss the artwork of Russel Yuristy and explore how it reflected on the time and place where it was created, often through his use of humour.

RUSSELL YURISTY: *OH NO!*

In the woodcut print *Oh No!* we see a guitar-playing figure who is seated near a fire and surrounded by a number of animals. The coyotes are howling in the distance and the figure is singing. The horse does not appear to appreciate the singer's rendition, as the cloud above his head says, "Oh No! Not Again!" Yuristy playfully gives the animals human qualities.

Russell Yuristy is clearly having fun with his choice of subject matter for *Oh No!* He uses a naïve almost child-like style of imagery, combined with a sense of humour to produce his technically astute and visibly enjoyable work. Yuristy's inspiration is based on real-life experiences with nature, animals and popular culture, as well as on an appreciation of the world around him.

This woodcut print was initially made by carving directly into a smooth flat block of wood. All areas to remain white in the print are carved away while the black areas are left untouched. The carving lines and the directions the artist carved become important textural considerations for the final image. In printing this woodblock, Yuristy would roll a thin layer of black ink over the carved surface and drop a sheet of clean white paper on top. The back of the paper is then rubbed with a baren or the artist's hands. Where the paper touches the surface of the wood block the ink is transferred. The resulting print is black-and-white with many patterns and textural components.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

The words the person is singing in *Oh No!* are similar to an early country and western hit song, "Cattle Call" with lyrics by Eddy Arnold. Who do you think the "night birds" are? Could this print have something to do with romance or could the artist be presenting a "romanticized" vision of the early colonization of the prairies? What else is going on in this print?



Russell Yuristy, *Oh No!*, 1984, woodcut on paper, edition 5/50. MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina Collection.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE IMAGE](#)

ACTIVITY

Make a simple print where you give humorous human qualities to an animal. If you don't have access to the styrofoam for printing, you could make a painting instead.

- Pick an animal that you would like to draw. Based on that animal decide what human characteristics you could add to it. Ex: clothes, human features, human actions, or having it speak. Draw the animal on your styrofoam sheet, pressing hard enough to making indents in it with the pencil, but not so hard that the pencil pokes through. Remember that everywhere you indent with the pencil will show up white in your final print.
- Gently press your styrofoam plate onto a large stamp pad to ink it before pressing onto the paper to print it. Alternatively, you could cover the raised surface of your printing plate with a broad water-based marker to ink it.
- To explore another way to print, after the plate is pressed in the ink, try laying the paper across it, and rubbing the back of the paper to help transfer the image. Which worked better for you?
- Explore making multiple copies of your image, playing with different coloured prints and paper. Be sure to clean the styrofoam plate between colour changes.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Large stamp pads or large water-based marker
- Paper, possibly varying colours
- Piece of flat styrofoam, such as a rectangle cut from a clean, flat food tray
- Pencil

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Russell Yuristy is a Saskatchewan-born artist from the town of Goodeve who uses humour and a sense of play in many of his works. He is well known for his printmaking, ceramics, and his large whimsical playground sculptures. His imagery is often selected from his immediate environment. Using his imagination, he manipulates and changes what he observes to produce works with amusing, unassuming and often spontaneous qualities. He captures a sense of honesty and innocence in his work through his masterly combinations of image, colour, line and materials.

Russell Yuristy obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Campus in 1962 and his Master's of Science in Art at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1967. He was involved in many significant artistic movements and events in Saskatchewan, such working at the Emma Lake Artist's Workshops, and also incorporating elements of the California Funk movement into his art to challenge the dominance of abstract artwork in Saskatchewan in the sixties and seventies. He taught and lived on the prairies for a number of years before moving to Ontario. He has taught at the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Ottawa and the Ottawa School of Art.