

CURRICULUM THEMES

Indigenous; Community; Feelings and Emotions; Painting

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

GRADE 2 | CR2.1: Students will explore artwork of prominent Indigenous artist Allen Sapp, whose artwork depicts memories of his own community, the Red Pheasant First Nation. They will create an artwork depicting their own communal winter memories.

ALLEN SAPP: *GOING TO CHRISTMAS CONCERT IN THE SCHOOL*

In many of his artworks Sapp presents scenes of everyday activities on the Red Pheasant Reserve. In *Going to Christmas Concert in the School*, we see Indigenous families gathering together outside of a day school to take part in holiday festivities. While this image does still depict a colonial influence on Indigenous peoples, the rosy tones and the closeness of the people in the image tell a story of a warm memory. Curator Timothy Long wrote that this “stands in stark contrast with the isolated children playing in the foreground of his *Recess at Onion Lake School*, one of the most monumental pictorial expressions of residential school experience.” (mackenzie.art/walking-with-saskatchewan-about-the-artwork/) “Sometime people say I have painted too many winter scenes, but nobody says the Group of Seven painted too many landscapes,” says Sapp.

The scenes depict moments frozen in time, providing viewers with a window into specific events and a specific culture: the Woodland Cree of north-central Saskatchewan. Sapp was well-known for his ability to paint these scenes from memory. He has left out some details and fine textures to create paintings that are deliberately impressionistic. Dean Bauche, a former curator of the Allen Sapp Gallery, says Sapp has, “distilled the event down to the essential elements that resonate with us as human beings.” (Polkinghorne, 2006)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Sapp’s friend and curator Bob Boyer once said that because Sapp is so reserved, he’s an easy target for people who take an anthropological approach to his work. That is, they assess him based on his cultural background, rather than on the merits of his work. How do you personally evaluate works of art to decide what you like or don’t like? What influences those likes and dislikes?

What are your community’s winter traditions?

Allen Sapp paints primarily from memory. What different sources can an artist use to inspire and help them create their artworks?



Allen Sapp, *Going to Christmas Concert in the School*, 1993, acrylic on canvas. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of John and Monica Kurtz in Memory of James Kurtz.

CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE IMAGE

ACTIVITY

Through his artwork Allen Sapp has recorded stories and events he remembers about living on the Red Pheasant Reserve. His paintings show that he has remembered events, activities and places in great detail, and they inform us about a different time in rural Saskatchewan. All artworks are, to some degree, a record of a specific time within a community, but like Sapp's work they can simultaneously be skilled and beautiful pieces of fine art.

Create a watercolour card depicting one of your winter memories from your own community to share with a family member or friend.

- Think about a winter activity that you remember doing with your family, friends, class, or other members of your community last year. Take a moment to recall as many details of this memory as possible. Close your eyes and imagine you are seeing the memory in your mind. What do you see? Think about your other senses too. What do you hear, smell, or taste, or feel? Who is there with you in the memory?
- Select four watercolour pencil crayons in colours that reflect the mood of your memory. On the small watercolour paper, draw your memory in pencil and with the watercolour pencil crayons, trying to create a record of the event and depict the feeling that memory gave you.
- Use either a dampened paintbrush or a baby wipe to blend the colours.
- Glue your dried painting onto the front of a folded coloured paper to make a card. Think about who you would like to address it to. Is there someone who would appreciate a record of this memory as well?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Watercolour pencil crayons
- Pencils, erasers
- Small watercolour paper
- Either paintbrushes and water or baby wipes
- Glue
- Coloured paper

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Allen Sapp was born in 1928 on the Red Pheasant First Nation near North Battleford, Saskatchewan. He is a direct descendant of Chief Red Pheasant, after whom the reserve is named. When Sapp was eight, he was given the Cree name Kiskayetum, meaning “he perceives it” or “he knows it” during a traditional Cree ceremony. Sapp's grandfather, Albert Soonias, was a Cree Elder who raised cattle, seeded hay and produced wheat. As a child, Sapp worked on his grandparents' farm, and spent a lot of time with them, especially as his mother was away from home for several years recovering from tuberculosis. She passed away when he was quite young. Sapp also struggled with many health concerns throughout his childhood.

Sapp attended the residential school at Onion Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan for three years, leaving when he was about 12. He didn't learn to read or write, but he drew with a passion, using bits of charcoal, pencil stubs, wood, bark, leather and scraps of paper. His grandfather removed him from school so that he could work as a farm labourer, and his grandmother Maggie Soonias continued to encourage his drawing and painting.

Sapp married Maggie Paskimin of the Sweetgrass First Nation. In the early sixties, the couple moved into North Battleford, where Sapp's art practice was based for most of his life. As his renown grew, his work was shown throughout Canada and internationally.

Sapp is an Officer of the Order of Canada, a recipient of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and recipient of Lifetime Achievement awards from both the Indspire Awards and the Saskatchewan Arts Board. His paintings have illustrated children's books written by David Bouchard, including *The Song Within My Heart*, which depicts Sapp's childhood. This title won the Governor General's Literary Award for its illustrations. He has also received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Regina. He passed away in December 2015.