

CURRICULUM THEMES

Sculpture; Indigenous; Community; Feelings and Emotions

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

GRADE 2 | CP2.7: Inspired by how Faye HeavyShield's artwork communicates ideas about her community, students will create a mobile that abstractly represents their communities, thinking about who makes up that community and how those people are connected to each other.

FAYE HEAVYSHIELD: AAPASKAIYAAWA (THEY ARE DANCING)

In this installation, HeavyShield suspends twelve canvas forms of various sizes from the ceiling of the art gallery. They are placed in a soft half-circle shape to suggest a family gathering or a community of all ages engaged in conversation. While minimalist in shape and form, these folded monochromatic yellow canvas sculptures are representational of individuals wearing hooded garments. They move softly with the air currents around them. The top of the forms are pointed and conical, similar to a tipi. The installation is dramatically lit with a single light source, creating many shadows on the ground and strong shadows in the 'faces' of the forms.

According to curator Lee-Ann Martin:

Faye HeavyShield's installation masterfully integrates complex and intertwined notions of family, home and history. *Aapaskaiyaawa* is inspired by HeavyShield's personal recollections of the lives of her parents and other old people. HeavyShield states: "They dance. They wear their finest: their home, they're home." Critical of Euro-centric history lessons that define the nomadic lifestyle of Aboriginal people of the Plains as nomadic, a "more or less aimless wandering"; she provides a conceptual manifestation of a life where home was unbound, guided by the seasons. In fact, she points out that the highly organized life of her ancestors was so close to their home (land, teepee and family) that it became part of their skin. . . . HeavyShield was inspired to create *Aapaskaiyaawa* by memories of her parents who lived their lives with grace. They were "grace-full" because of the imprint of the environment, culture, community and language that they and others carry with them. "They dance for many reasons . . . because they feel great about where they are, they are grateful to the maker, they are moved by the wind." This is not a closed circle – all will be part of this dance eventually. (*Mapping Our Territories*. Banff: WPG Publications, 2002, pp. 8, 10).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Why do you think the figures are dancing? What reasons do people in a community have for dancing?

HeavyShield's artwork is quite minimal; it uses simple shapes, few colours, and doesn't overwhelm the viewer with details. She says she doesn't want to "try to dress a memory because that would just weigh it down" (*Bone Things: The Art of Faye HeavyShield*, 1992). Why do you think HeavyShield keeps her shapes so simple? How do artists say more with less?

This work is charged with lots of different feelings, even some that are opposites. When you look at it, what feelings do you feel?



Faye Heavyshield, *Faye Heavyshield: Aapaskaiyaawa (They are Dancing)*, 2002, acrylic paint, beads, plastic filament on canvas. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program.

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ACTIVITY

Who makes up your community? Who surrounds you and moves through your life? Create a mobile to represent the significant people and elements in your life.

- Make a list of the 5-10 most important people and elements to you in your community. This could include family, friends, elders, teachers, neighbors, the land, objects or anyone/anything you are close with.
- Think of a shape and colour that represents each of those people/items. The shapes and colours could relate to something that person likes, something they do, something they wear, where they live, something they like to eat, or a specific memory you have about that person/item. Cut that shape out from the corresponding coloured paper. Punch a hole in the top of that shape.
- Make the base for your mobile. Use a hole punch around the edges of a paper plate or piece of recycled cardboard to make places for each item to hang from. Punch a hole in the middle for a large loop of yarn to go through for hanging your mobile, and tie a large bead to the underside so that it won't fall off. You may need some help from a parent/teacher with making the hole in the middle.
- Attach each shape to a string by tying it to the hole punched in the top. Attach those strings to the holes around the edges of the paper plate so that they hang down from it. How can you represent the connections and relationships between people in your community with how you hang your shapes? Play with which shapes are placed beside each other, and how long you make each string.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper plate/recycled cardboard
- Coloured paper
- Yarn and/or string
- Scissors
- A large bead
- Paper for list
- Pencil and eraser

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Faye HeavyShield is of the Kainai (Blood) Nation, which is a member nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy. She was born and raised on the Blood Reserve in Southern Alberta, where she grew up learning the Blackfoot language and experiencing her family's traditional ways of life. This traditional Indigenous upbringing was mixed with the influences of attending a Catholic residential school and the Catholicism in her community. HeavyShield uses her memories and knowledge of her heritage and combines them with present day concepts to produce her highly acclaimed minimalist objects and installations. The land itself plays a large role in many of HeavyShield's works, influencing her choice of materials as a theme in her artworks, and even as an active participant. She once recalled, "One of my earliest and strongest memories is that of my father skinning a deer... the beauty of the animal's eyes, serene in death, the smell of blood, the crackle of fat as the hide was peeled away, and the great taste of the meal my mother cooked. This image and others I saw later in statues of Jesus on the cross, in the architecture of the old homes – tepee poles before the skin/canvas [covered them] and structures left over from the Sundance, in the bodies of the old. When I began my formal art training, these influences surfaced in the form of biomorphic images, skeletal armatures with vestiges of 'flesh,' using architectural and figurative language. Monochromatic, after the solitude and simplicity of the prairie. Sometimes building the surface up and then working back from there, peeling the layers." (HeavyShield, 1992)

HeavyShield studied art at the Alberta College of Art and Design and at the University of Calgary, both in Calgary, Alberta. Her works have been exhibited widely and can be found in numerous collections.