

CURRICULUM THEMES

Community, Environment, Identity, Place, Spirituality

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Grade 2 | CP 2.7- Create visual art works that draw on observations and express ideas about own communities. Students will create a collage artwork about their relationship to their own nature community, considering how plants, animals and people are interconnected, and how to depict them. They will think about how visual images convey ideas about connections non-verbally.

Grade 6 | CR 6.2- Investigate and identify ways that the arts can express ideas about identity. Students will learn about how Norval Morrisseau explores his spiritual identity in his artworks.

Grade 3 | CP3.7- Create visual art works that express ideas about the natural, constructed, and imagined environments. Students will explore how Norval Morrisseau represents nature and explore their own connections to nature through a collage.

Grade 7 | CH7.2- Investigate how Indigenous artists from around the world reflect the importance of place (e.g., relationship to the land, geology, region, urban/rural environments). Students will explore how Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau depicts his connection to the land and his spirituality.

NORVAL MORRISSEAU: ANDROGYNY

This large painting is over three and a half meters tall and six meters wide, the length of a small school bus! Norval Morrisseau made *Androgyny* as a gift to the Government of Canada and its peoples in 1983. Morrisseau meant for the acceptance of the gift to be a symbol of Canada's commitment to better treatment of Indigenous peoples.

This painting shows a dome of rich red earth against a vibrant yellow sky. People are shown walking amongst hundreds of animals and plants. There are also spirits represented in the painting, such as the large thunderbird at its centre. One larger person stands at the right-most edge of the painting. Most of the subjects in the painting are outlined in black, and have pastel pinks, purples, blues and greens inside their bodies.



Norval Morrisseau, *Androgyny*, acrylic on canvas, 1983. Courtesy of the Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

Androgyny is meant to depict a shaman who is connected to all things, including people, plants, animals, the earth, the four directions and spirit beings. A shaman is a type of spiritual leader, often responsible for healing and matters related to spirits. The exact definition of what a shaman is and does can vary between Indigenous nations, and not all Indigenous people use the term shaman. The title, *Androgyny* could refer to this connection and everything becoming one. Or, it might be referring more specifically to the idea of having an androgynous gender- having both male and female qualities.

This painting is an example of Woodland style artwork- an Indigenous art style that Morrisseau helped create and popularize. This style is often defined by bold outlines and vibrant colours. It sometimes has lines that show connections and communication between its subjects. Often in the Woodland style, you can see inside the segmented bodies of animals and people. This style is inspired by the Anishinaabe paintings Morrisseau saw on rock surfaces (rock paintings are called pictographs) and in birchbark scrolls that held sacred stories.

Want to learn more about this artwork? Explore it in the online book *Norval Morrisseau: Life & Work* by Carmen Robertson: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/norval-morrisseau/key-works/androgyny/>

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Norval Morrisseau is an Anishinaabe artist who was born around 1931. He has lived in several locations throughout Ontario and Manitoba. He spent some of his childhood living with his grandparents. His grandfather, Moses Potan Nanakonagos, was a shaman of the Midewewin faith. Many of Morrisseau's paintings depict Anishinaabe spiritual stories.

When he was a young adult, Morrisseau became very sick. He went through a healing ceremony where he was given the name Miskwaabik Animiiki (Copper Thunderbird). Thunderbirds are powerful sky manitous, or spirits. To read more about the significance of copper and manitous to Anishinaabe, explore this catalogue on artist Michael Belmore [catalogue_2017_mskwi-blood-sang_michael-belmore.pdf](#) (michaelbelmore.com)

Some of Norval Morrisseau's artworks also depict Catholic subjects. His grandmother Veronique Nanakonagos taught him about Catholicism. He also would have learned about Catholicism when he attended residential schools. He was sent to St. Joseph's Indian Residential School when he was six and spent about four years in the residential school system. Norval Morrisseau has discussed abuse that he also experienced in these schools.

Later in life, Morrisseau also practiced Eckankar, a new faith that was established in the United States in the mid 1960's. Eckankar is a faith that combines many religious practices, and is thought to have roots in Hinduism and Sikhism.

Looking for more information on Norval Morrisseau, including further activities? Check out this resource from the **Art Canada Institute**. https://www.aci-iac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Norval-Morrisseau_Land-and-Indigenous-Worldviews_ACI-Teacher-Resource-Guide.pdf

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

A lot of Norval Morrisseau's artworks connect to his spirituality and beliefs. Spirituality can be hard to define; some people see it as how we connect to the world around us in a deep and meaningful way. Your spirituality may be connected to a religion- an organized group of people with a specific set of beliefs. Or, your spirituality may be centered around your personal experiences and beliefs. With that in mind, how do you think *Androgyny* relates to Norval's sense of spirituality?

What makes up your spirituality, or how do you connect with the world around you in meaningful ways? Do certain activities help you feel connected to other people or to nature?

Does anything in this artwork connect to your own spirituality?

ACTIVITY

Create a Collage Artwork

Inspired by Norval Morrisseau, create a collage artwork about how you connect to nature. Think about how you are connected to other people and the natural world around you.

1. Make a list of the ways you personally connect with nature. Think about what you like to do outdoors. List the specific plants, animals, and places you see or interact with.
2. Create a collage that shows these connections. You can use images cut out of magazines, photos, or old calendars. You can cut shapes out of coloured paper. Or, you can even add in natural materials like leaves, sticks, or dried flowers. If you do collect natural materials from outside to use in your collage, be sure to do so respectfully, and not take too much of any one thing.
3. Think about how you will show that you are connected to the things in your image, or how they are connected to each other. Here are some examples of ways to show connections in art:
 - Objects could be touching, stacked or overlapping.
 - Objects could be tied together with string.
 - Objects could be connected by conversations they are having.
 - Objects could be connected by using similar colours or shapes.
 - Objects could be connected by being on the same plane (ground line).
 - Objects could be grouped together inside other shapes.
 - Objects could have similar patterns.

Feel free to add details to your collage with markers or paints.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Scrap paper for brainstorm
- Pencils and erasers
- Large paper for base of project
- Scissors
- Gluesticks or white glue
- Magazines, photographs, old calendars
- Coloured paper
- Natural materials (sticks, dried leaves or flowers, sand, etc.)
- Optional- markers or paints to add details