

### CURRICULUM THEMES

Community

### CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Grade 2 | CP 2.7 Create visual art works that draw on observations and express ideas about own communities. Students will create an abstract drawing depicting a relationship that is important to them, thinking about how visual images convey ideas about connections non-verbally.

Grade 2 | CR 2.1 Examine arts expressions to determine how ideas for arts expressions may come from artists' own communities. Students will explore artwork by Norval Morrisseau, learning about how his Anishinaabe community affects both his art style and the subjects of his artwork.

## NORVAL MORRISSEAU: OBJIBWA GRANDCHILD WITH WOODLAND FLOWER 1

In this artwork, a small child stands against a bright yellow background, with their left hand raised. Inside the child's body are bright sections of blue, green, purple, orange, red, and pink. There is a tall black stem with vibrant flowers and leaves growing on each side of the child. Two small, round birds with pink and purple bodies seem to perch on the child's head. Everything in this image is outlined in black.

This artwork is an example of the unique painting style that Norval Morrisseau created. He was a self-taught artist who learned through practice and through studying the artwork of his Anishinaabe ancestors. Morrisseau is credited with starting the Woodland School of Art, a style of art inspired by Anishinaabe pictographs (paintings on stone) and paintings of stories on birchbark scrolls. Morrisseau didn't just copy these historical artworks—he created his own abstract style based on them. This style also responded to the popularity of abstract artwork in the 1960s and 1970s. Woodland artwork is often defined by bold outlines and vibrant solid 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.

Curator Felicia Gay stated of Morrisseau that “His work reflected a worldview that spoke through stories and relationality.” ([Miskwaabik Animiiki Power Lines: The Work of Norval Morrisseau - MacKenzie Art Gallery | MacKenzie Art Gallery](#)) A worldview is how a person or group of people understands the world. It is shaped by their experiences, their culture, and their environment. Relationships, or how people, places and things are connected, were very important to Morrisseau's Anishinaabe culture. In fact, almost all of Norval Morrisseau's artworks depict relationships.



Norval Morrisseau, *Objibwa Grandchild with Woodland Flower 1*, oil on canvas, 1983. MacKenzie Art Gallery Collection.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Norval Morrisseau is an Anishinaabe artist whose work has helped shape Canadian art history. He is often considered the “Mishomis” or “Grandfather” of Indigenous art in Canada because of his major contributions to the Indigenous art community.

Besides helping to found the Woodland style of artwork, Norval Morrisseau was also a part of a group called the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (PNIAI). The other members of the group were Jackson Beardy, Eddy Cobiness, Alex Janvier, Daphne Odjig, Carl Ray and Joseph Sanchez. These artists worked together to support each other’s art careers. Often, Indigenous artists’ works were treated more like artefacts that belonged in museums rather than displayed in art galleries. The PNIAI fought to have Indigenous artists recognized by the fine art scene in Canada and across the world.

Norval Morrisseau’s career and the formation of the PNIAI were happening at a time of great change for Indigenous peoples. In 1951, the Indian Act had gone through some major changes. The ban on traditional Indigenous ceremonies was lifted, and the pass system that forced Indigenous people to request permission whenever leaving reserve land was removed, although this practice continued in some places until as late as the 1960s. Indigenous people were given the right to vote in Canadian elections in 1960. Many (but not all) Residential schools were closed in the sixties and seventies. This is not to say that all discrimination of Indigenous peoples stopped 1960’s. However, this was a time of major social change when many Indigenous people were working together to support each other’s rights. Many people were reclaiming their Indigenous identities. Many Indigenous organizations were created in the sixties and seventies. At this time, artists like Morrisseau were paving the way for future Indigenous artists to be able to express their cultural identities and their personal art styles.

Want to learn more about Norval Morrisseau? Explore this online art book by Carmen Robertson, published by the [Art Institute of Canada: Norval Morrisseau: Life & Work | Art Canada Institute \(aci-iac.ca\)](https://www.artcanadainstitute.ca/norval-morrisseau-life-work) . Parents and Teachers- this site contains some mature content- please explore before sharing with children and select appropriate pages.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Listed above are a few of the social changes that were happening for Indigenous peoples in the 1960’s and 1970’s. If you are interested in exploring more major historical events, we recommend reading the [Treaty Timeline from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner: Treaty Timeline \(otc.ca\)](https://www.otc.ca/timeline)

There are three visual subjects in this artwork: the child, the flowers, and the birds. How do you think each of these three subjects are related to each other? Do they give and take from each other, or share experiences together?

How do you connect to each of the three subjects in this picture (the child, the birds, and the flowers)?

# ACTIVITY

## Create a Abstract Artwork

Inspired by the works of Norval Morrisseau, create an abstract artwork to represent one of your most important relationships with another person.

This activity is inspired by an activity featured in this resource from the Art Canada Institute: [Norval-Morrisseau\\_Land-and-Indigenous-Worldviews\\_ACI-Teacher-Resource-Guide.pdf \(aci-iac.ca\)](#)

1. Think about one really important relationship to you. For example, this could be your relationship to a family member, a friend, or a pet. Think about each of the following things:  
What activities connect you?  
What people connect you? (Example: if you were thinking about a brother or sister, your parents would connect you.)  
What places connect you?  
Do any parts of nature connect you?  
What do you give to that person?  
What does that person give to you?
2. On a circular paper, draw a shape somewhere near the centre of the page to represent you, and colour it in your favourite colour. It does not have to be the shape of a person- since we are making an abstract artwork, you can choose any shape to represent you. Draw a second shape to represent the other important person in your relationship, and colour it in their favourite colour, or a colour that makes you think of them.
3. Draw shapes to represent each of the things you thought of that connect you and your special person. Put the shapes that represent the most important things in your relationship closest to the center, and the shapes that represent things that are less important in your relationship further from the center. Add colours to each shape that represent the thing you are connecting to.
4. Either with a ruler or freehand, draw lines to show how each of the things in your artwork are related, or connected together. You might even add arrows in as well, to show when something is being given or when something is being taken. There might be lines between the outer shapes, showing their connections to each other, not just to you. Some of the lines will overlap and cross each other- that's ok, and will make for a more interesting artwork!
5. Colour in all the spaces created by the overlapping and crossing lines.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- Circular paper, or paper cut out in the shape of a circle
- Pencils and erasers
- Rulers (optional)
- Markers, pencil crayons, or crayons