

CURRICULUM THEMES

Community, Saskatchewan Voices, Place, Elements of Art

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Grade 2 | CR2.1: Students will learn about self-taught prairie artist Jahan Maka. They will learn about how his artwork tells us about immigrant life on the prairies in the early 1900s, with the purpose of preserving and sharing those stories.

Grade 4 | CR4.1: Students will learn about self-taught prairie artist Jahan Maka. Maka lived in Saskatchewan before settling in Manitoba. Students will learn about how his work reflected the lives of immigrants in the 1900s to the prairies, and about the artistic elements and techniques that made up his unique art style.

Grade 7 | CH7.1: Students will learn about self-taught prairie artist Jahan Maka. They will learn how his artwork contributes to a cultural/historical record of immigrant life on the prairies in the early 1900s.



Jahan Maka, *Untitled*, 2007, pastel, mixed media on paper. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

JAHAN MAKA: UNTITLED

Jahan Maka often made artworks that blend together two different perspectives or viewpoints. Some things in this artwork are portrayed from a bird's eye view, as though we are floating above the depicted mine and looking down at it. Other things are portrayed as though you were looking straight at them while standing on the ground.

This untitled artwork takes us down into a mine. It has lots of soft pastel colours that stand out against the dark background. Despite the soft colours, this artwork feels busy and tense; perhaps similar to how working in a mine might feel.

Looking at this artwork, you might be able to follow the process of what is happening to the minerals in different stages. These stages seem to make a circle on the page, encouraging our eyes to follow and learn the story that this artwork tells.

Maka was known to use many different materials including chalks, crayons and even things he found or mixed together himself! You might notice that he's used some interesting mark-making techniques in the bottom left of the page. He uses little uniform circles that look like they might be made by twisting a flat piece of chalk, or by dipping the blunt end of a pencil into something.

By breaking many traditional art "rules," Maka created an art style that was entirely his own.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jahan Maka was born in Lithuania in 1900, and immigrated to Canada in the 1920's. He worked many different difficult jobs that brought him to different places in the prairies. These included working as a farm hand, a coal miner, and a hard-rock miner. He eventually settled in Flin Flon, Manitoba.

When Jahan Maka retired, he was encouraged by his godson, Tony Allison, to take up artmaking. Most of his artworks tell stories about his life experiences. Some tell stories related to life in Lithuania. These include stories about the difficulties of war and famine, but also stories about Lithuanian culture. Some of his artworks tell stories of living in small communities in Canada, or of the hard work he did as a labourer working on farms or mining. Artists like Maka who record their personal stories are also helping to record the history of their communities. Historians of the future might look back on his artworks to learn about what life was like in the mid 1900's on the Canadian prairies for immigrant families.

Maka was a self-taught artist. He didn't study art, so you might notice that his artwork doesn't necessarily look like other famous artworks from his lifetime. Yet that means he often made really unique choices in his artworks that make them even more interesting. Self-taught artists put just as much thought and meaning into their artworks as those who study art formally. Often, because they aren't always trying to fit into the art styles of their time, these artists create new and inventive ways of using the elements of art to express themselves.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Looking at this untitled artwork, what story do you think is being told about this scene and location?

What community is this artwork teaching us about? Did you learn anything new about that community that you didn't know before?

What things in this image look like they are seen from above? What things look like they are seen from the side?

ACTIVITY

Try your hand at a Jahan Maka drawing challenge!

Create a drawing that uses as many techniques inspired by Jahan Maka as possible, and see who can check off the most techniques in one artwork.

Each of the techniques in the list below is inspired by the artworks of Jahan Maka. Find a classmate to try this challenge with, and see who can check off the most techniques in one drawing. After you're done, discuss with each other which techniques you found hard or easy, and which techniques taught you something new!

Make a drawing that:

- Tells a story;
- Uses pastel colours;
- Has some things arranged in a circle;
- Has two different perspectives or viewpoints in the image (Examples: seeing things from above, the side, underneath, really close up, or really far away);
- Uses flat shapes that don't look three dimensional;
- Uses symbols (images that represent bigger ideas, and are often easy for others to recognize; Example- using hearts to represent love);
- Uses one of your drawing materials in a new way;
- Uses a material you've never made art with before;
- Has a person or animal making an interesting facial expression;
- Will tell people in the future about what it's like to live today.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper
- Drawing materials of your choice