

# EXPANDED LANDSCAPES: A LEARNING MODULE



OTTAWA ART GALLERY

## Summary

**Activity Length:** 1 hour

**Age Group:** Grades 6-8

**Related Collection:** Firestone Collection of Canadian Art

## Workshop Synopsis

What lies beyond the frame of a Group of Seven landscape painting? Students will examine famous artworks and imagine scenes beyond the confines of the canvasses. While thinking about climate change and experimenting with perspective and colour, they will create an expanded landscape and add their own point of view to these iconic works of art.

## Learning Outcomes

- ➔ To learn more about Canadian art and the Group of Seven's impact and legacy in today's context
- ➔ To think about the natural landscape of Canada and how it may have changed over time due to human intervention and climate change
- ➔ To think about the impacts of climate change and how they can be prevented

## Ontario Curriculum Links

### Grade 6

#### D1. Creating and Presenting

**D1.1** create two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and multimedia art works that explore feelings, ideas, and issues from a variety of points of view

**D1.2** demonstrate an understanding of composition, using selected principles of design to create narrative art works or art works on a theme or topic

**D1.3** use elements of design in art works to communicate ideas, messages, and understandings

**D1.4** use a variety of materials, tools, techniques, and technologies to determine solutions to design challenges

#### D2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

**D2.1** interpret a variety of art works and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey

**D2.2** explain how the elements and principles of design are used in their own and others' art work to communicate meaning or understanding

**D2.3** demonstrate an understanding of how to read and interpret signs, symbols, and style in art works

**D2.4** identify and explain their strengths, their interests, and areas for improvement as creators, interpreters, and viewers of art

#### D3. Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

**D3.1** identify and describe some of the ways in which art forms and styles reflect the beliefs and traditions of a variety of communities, times, and places

D3.2 demonstrate an understanding of key contributions and functions of visual and media arts in various contexts at both the local and the national levels

## Grade 7

### D1. Creating and Presenting

D1.1 create art works, using a variety of traditional forms and current media technologies, that express feelings, ideas, and issues, including opposing points of view

D1.2 demonstrate an understanding of composition, using multiple principles of design and the “rule of thirds” to create narrative artworks or art works on a theme or topic

D1.3 use elements of design in art works to communicate ideas, messages, and understandings for a specific audience and purpose

D1.4 use a variety of materials, tools, techniques, and technologies to determine solutions to increasingly complex design challenges

### D2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

D2.1 interpret a variety of art works and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey

D2.2 explain how the elements and principles of design are used in their own and others’ artwork to communicate meaning or understanding

D2.3 demonstrate an understanding of how to read and interpret signs, symbols, and style in art works

D2.4 identify and explain their strengths, their interests, and areas for improvement as creators, interpreters, and viewers of art

### D3. Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

D3.1 identify and describe some of the ways in which visual art forms and styles reflect the beliefs and traditions of a variety of cultures and civilizations

D3.2 demonstrate an understanding of the function of visual and media arts in various contexts today and in the past, and of their influence on the development of personal and cultural identity

## Grade 8

### D1. Creating and Presenting

D1.1 create art works, using a variety of traditional forms and current media technologies, that express feelings, ideas, and issues and that demonstrate an awareness of multiple points of view

D1.2 demonstrate an understanding of composition, using multiple principles of design and other layout considerations such as compositional triangles to create narrative art works or art works on a theme or topic

D1.3 use elements of design in art works to communicate ideas, messages, and understandings for a specific audience and purpose

D1.4 use a variety of materials, tools, techniques, and technologies to determine solutions to increasingly complex design challenges

## D2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

D2.1 interpret a variety of art works and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey

D2.2 analyse ways in which elements and principles of design are used in a variety of art works to communicate a theme or message, and evaluate the effectiveness of their use on the basis of criteria generated by the class

D2.3 demonstrate an understanding of how to read and interpret signs, symbols, and style in art works

D2.4 identify and explain their strengths, their interests, and areas for improvement as creators, interpreters, and viewers of art

## D3. Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

D3.1 identify and explain some of the ways in which artistic traditions in a variety of times and places have been maintained, adapted, or appropriated

D3.2 identify and analyse some of the social, political, and economic factors that affect the creation of visual and media arts and the visual and media arts community

## Meet the Group of Seven

### What is the Group of Seven?

The Group of Seven was a cohort of Canadian artists that was formed in 1920. They were active as a group for 13 years and disbanded in 1933. Throughout this time, they had many shows at the Art Gallery of Toronto, now known as the Art Gallery of Ontario, as well as throughout the rest of the country. Eventually, they became known internationally as leading artists in the Canadian art scene.

Most members continued to make art and to show their work in galleries across the country after the group parted ways. To this day, works by the Group continue to attract collectors on an international scale. A number of paintings and sketches by these artists can be found in the Firestone Collection of Canadian Art at OAG.

### Who was in the Group?

The original members were Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Franz Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley. As members left the Group or died, other artists joined, such as A.J. Casson of Toronto in 1926, Edwin Holgate of Montreal in 1930 and L.L. FitzGerald from Winnipeg in 1932, making the group truly a national phenomenon.

Many of the members met through Tom Thomson who is frequently associated with the Group. Thomson was never officially a part of the Group due to his mysterious death in 1917, three years before its formation. MacDonald, Lismer, Varley, Carmichael, Johnston and Thomson first met and worked together at Grip Limited, a graphic design firm in Toronto. Jackson and Harris became acquainted with the Group when Lismer befriended them at the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto.

### What and where did they paint?

Members of the Group of Seven refused to accept that European art was innately superior to Canadian art. They insisted that Canadian artists should break away from traditionally European styles and paint their country in a new way.

Inspired by nature and a shared vision of Canada, the artists sought to capture the unique diversity of the landscape by travelling all over the country, even to remote locations. Like explorers and adventurers, the Group of Seven had to use all sorts of different modes of transportation to get to the places they painted. They did so by canoe, cargo ship, hiking, and rail, among others.

Members painted from coast to coast to coast, but sites in Ontario proved to be their favourites. They were particularly attracted to Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park and the North Shore of Lake Superior where they visited and painted frequently.

In the era of the Group of Seven, not everyone had quick access to a camera like we do today, instead, they used paint to capture what they saw by producing small paintings, called sketches, *en plein air*. *Plein air* refers to the act of painting outdoors, which allowed them to capture the

natural light and colours of a landscape. No matter the season, Jackson, Carmichael, Harris and other members could be found taking in fresh air and being creative.

Once back in their studio, they would pick their best sketches and base their final large paintings on these. Their paintings were colourful snapshots of the landscapes they admired. Despite the artists often being thought of as a collective force, it is important to remember that all members maintained individuality in their style, making their works distinguishable from one another.

The Group's first exhibition in 1920 put forward their vision for a national art movement grounded in the Canadian landscape. Despite some early critics calling their work unrefined, many Canadians who had never seen the vast landscapes of Canada were excited about the colourful and lively brushstrokes that appeared on the canvases before them. As years went by, criticism turned to praise making the Group of Seven Canada's most recognized group of visual artists of the 20th century.

### Modern Day Criticism

While the Group of Seven holds an important role within the development of Canadian art, their mythic status warrants critique. To promote nationalism with empty landscapes excludes Indigenous rights and perspectives, while to brand all of their painting expeditions as ventures into the "rugged wilderness" is not entirely accurate. In recent decades, overshadowed artists of diverse backgrounds have been recovered from history, while contemporary artists continue to counter the nationalist narratives surrounding the Group.

### Reimagining the Group in 2020: Climate Change

Due to industrialization and the impact of a growing population, Canada's landscape has greatly changed from the Group of Seven's time. Glaciers are melting, rivers, lakes and oceans are polluted, species are disappearing and we are constantly seeing record-breaking temperatures in summer and winter. While there are steps being taken to reduce these impacts, it is not enough to reverse the damage that has already been done. A collective education on the subject of climate change is critical to create an awareness and understanding of what we need to do to make a change before it is too late. This can begin with the implementation of climate education in our schools and homes, not only through science classes, but also through art.

Art is a great way to start conversations about social issues. A Group of Seven member, Franklin Carmichael did this with his piece, *The Nickel Belt*. The painting displays Carmichael's affinity for Northern Ontario but also demonstrates a critique of environmental destruction through industry. In the early 1900's, pollution caused by the extraction of minerals and logging destroyed all natural vegetation in the Sudbury area. Acid rain and sulfuric acid in the smoke permanently stained the granite. In the '70s, Sudbury started an environmental recovery program, which included a large smoke stack to distribute the pollution. Since then tree planting and the growth of natural vegetation has occurred. This example shows how environmental issues can be depicted in art and offer a point of entry for important conversations about our harmful effects on the environment.

## Workshop Description

As the effects of climate change become more and more prevalent, it is important to have conversations with students about the ever-changing environment. What are some of the effects of climate change that they have seen? What kind of world do they want to live in? What are some ways they can think of that would help reduce global warming and clean up the earth? This conversation can be overwhelming, but there are small steps all of us can take to create change. For example, reducing our carbon footprint by taking public transport or biking, recycling, planting trees or a garden, picking up garbage, and using less plastic. Living a more sustainable life is good for us and for the planet. This conscious effort to think about the environment in relation to our actions can translate into art as well!

Below, you will find an activity that gives students the same opportunity that Franklin Carmichael took advantage of: a chance for them to explore and display human impacts on the environment through art. They will do so by expanding a Group of Seven landscape to reflect their opinions about climate change or their ideas on how to help solve the climate crisis. The activity is really about making a work of art that is unique to them, their experiences, and their perspectives on the changing world around us. Though we suggest drawing as the medium for this project, students should not feel limited to this! They could also use paint and collage methods to create a multi-media artwork. We encourage participants to use materials they already have to add interest to their final pieces.

### Materials

- ➔ Printouts of Group of Seven paintings (see pages 12-14)
- ➔ Large drawing paper (11" x 14")
- ➔ Coloured pencils
- ➔ Oil pastels
- ➔ Markers
- ➔ Pencil
- ➔ Eraser
- ➔ Scissors
- ➔ Glue

### Steps

#### Step 1: Choosing their artwork

The first step will be for students to choose a printout of Group of Seven landscape that they would like to work with. This is an important step, as they will be creating their own artwork by expanding upon this image. Using their imagination, students will continue the landscape beyond the borders of the original artwork. They will be drawing to fill the surrounding page with what they imagine a landscape affected by climate change looks like. Alternatively, they could take the approach of displaying their ideal world where the climate crisis is under control.

**Tip:** If students are confused about what expanding the landscape means, try to explain the activity differently. For example, have students imagine that the original painting is like looking out a window at a landscape. They cannot see what the landscape looks like beyond the window frame because the walls of the house block their view. If they stuck their heads out the window, they could see more of the landscape. What would they see? Their imagination will be their best tool!

### Step 2: Prompts for Inspiration

On pages 9 and 10, you will find a printable worksheet with the same questions as those listed below. These questions will encourage student to think critically about climate change and imaginatively about their artwork. We suggest that they complete this worksheet before starting to create. If they are stumped and uninspired, these questions should help them get started with the creative process.

- ➔ Why did you choose this particular Group of Seven painting for the activity?
- ➔ Does this painting make you think of a place you have seen before? What did you see in that landscape?
- ➔ What colours and shapes do you see in the original painting? How can you bring them into your creation?
- ➔ What are some of the ways humans are harming the environment? How can you show this in your artwork?
- ➔ What are some ways you can help protect the environment? How can you show this in your artwork?
- ➔ What will you include in your landscape that makes it unique to you and your experiences?
- ➔ Are you going to add people or wildlife in your landscape? Why are you choosing to add them or leave them out?

### Step 3: Placement

With the options described above in mind, students will have to choose where they would like to place the printout of the Group of Seven painting they have chosen. With their drawing paper laid out before them, have them play around with the placement. Some may choose to put it in the middle of the page; however, placement in an upper or lower corner may work best for other compositions.

### Step 4: Finding the Horizon Line

Next, they will have to identify the horizon line in the painting they have chosen. The horizon line is where the sky appears to meet the ground. This will be a crucial step in deciding how to continue the landscape beyond the confines of the frame. Students can change the direction of the horizon line to create things like hills, craters, fields, lakes and cliffs in their expanded landscapes.

### Step 5: Adding to the Landscape

Finally, students can add to their landscape to tell a story about climate change. For example, they might notice that they can add to the sky, or incorporate plants, people, and animals that are not seen in the original painting that inspired their work. They can fill up the blank space on the drawing paper to make a statement in their own creative way.

[Click here to watch a video for a visual explanation of the activity.](#)



## Worksheet

1. Why did you choose this particular Group of Seven painting for the activity?

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2. Does this painting make you think of a place you have seen before? What did you see in that landscape?

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3. What colours and shapes do you see in the original painting? How can you bring them into your creation?

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4. What are some of the ways humans are harming the environment? How can you show this in your artwork?

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5. What are some ways you can help protect the environment? How can you show this in your artwork?

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6. What will you include in your landscape that makes it unique to you and your experiences?

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7. Are you going to add people or wildlife in your landscape? Why are you choosing to add them or leave them out?

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## Further Readings & Resources

Should you be interested in learning more about the Group of Seven, the following resources offer a good overview. They are listed in order of interest:

O’Brian, John and Peter White. *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

McKinley, Kelly, David Wistow and the Art Gallery of Ontario. *Meet the Group of Seven*. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2019.

“Painted Land: In Search of the Group of Seven | TVO Docs.” *YouTube* uploaded by TVO Docs, 10 July 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL6jzhsUvXA>.

Hill, Charlie. *The Group of Seven*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995.

Crawley, Radford. *Canadian Landscape*. National Film Board of Canada. 1941. 17 minutes. [www.nfb.ca/film/canadian\\_landscape/](http://www.nfb.ca/film/canadian_landscape/).\*

*\* Please note that this film was made in the 1941 and includes some antiquated language that references Canada as “settled land”. OAG underlines the importance of stating that Canada was founded on unceded Indigenous territories. This link was included to provide a historical snapshot of the Group of Seven and their artistic process.*

## Bibliography

Ontario Ministry of Education. Grades 1-8: The Arts. Ottawa, Ontario Ministry of Education: 2009 (Revised). Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts.html>.

Willick, Frances. “How climate change is taught in Canadian high schools — and how it can improve”. CBC News. Last Modified July 23, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/climate-change-curriculum-canadian-high-schools-1.5221358>.

## Artworks by the Group of Seven to Print

Please choose from the following images for your expanded landscape.



Franklin Carmichael, *The Nickel Belt*, 1928, oil on canvas, 101.8 x 122 cm.  
Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, Ottawa Art Gallery.



L.L. Fitzgerald, *Prairie Homestead*, 1925, oil on canvas, 27 x 34.1 cm.  
Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, Ottawa Art Gallery.



Franz Johnston, *Algoma Landscape*, 1923, tempera on cardboard, 98.3 x 73.4 cm.  
Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, Ottawa Art Gallery.



Arthur Lismer, *Pine at Georgian Bay*, 1959, oil on Masonite, 50.8 x 40.6 cm.  
Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, Ottawa Art Gallery.



J.E.H. MacDonald, *Thornhill - Pine Tree and Fields*, 1924, oil on cardboard, 21.4 x 26.2 cm.  
Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, Ottawa Art Gallery.