Behind the Image: Unit Overview

NBE3U, English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices, Grade 11 (University), Unit 2. 13 classes of 75 minutes (about two and a half weeks).

The big question

Who does the looking, and how have images of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people been shaped by the people who made them?

Students learn a five-question lens for any image or text, then use it on more than a century of representation. They read E. Pauline Johnson's critique of the stereotyped “Indian girl” of settler fiction (1892, summarized) beside her own heroine in “A Red Girl's Reasoning” (1893), and Duncan Campbell Scott's sonnet “The Onondaga Madonna” beside his 1920 words as head of Indian Affairs and 2021 Census evidence. They take apart staged photographs and film (Edward Curtis's retouched clock, the Department of Indian Affairs “before and after” portraits of Thomas Moore, Nanook of the North), the Edmonton football team's name change and the debate among Inuit, Hollywood's westerns through Neil Diamond's documentary Reel Injun, an old-style textbook paragraph and two news briefs about the same event. They study the contradictions in settler images, the debate over who may tell Indigenous stories, and how to write a precise analytical essay.

Lessons

#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
1	**Who Does the Looking?**	1	Who made this image, and for whom?	A2.3, C1.8, A1.6	Stereotype, representation, gaze; the five-question lens
2	**The Indian Girl in Fiction**	1	How did gender shape the stereotype?	A2.1, A2.2, C1.4, C1.8	Johnson's 1892 critique; Christine's refusal; the Indian Act and women
3	**The Vanishing Myth**	1	Who benefited from a “vanishing race”?	A2.3, A2.2, C2.1, C1.6	Scott's sonnet and its turn; Curtis's title; Scott in 1920; 2021 Census
4	**Posed and Retouched**	1	Is a photograph proof?	E1.5, E2.2, A2.1, E1.2	Curtis's clock; Thomas Moore's portraits; Nanook of the North
5	**Who Owns a Name?**	1	Who decides what a people is called?	E1.4, E1.5, A3.2, A2.2	Edmonton, Cleveland, Washington; naming and terminology
6	**Reel Injun**	1	What did westerns teach the world?	E2.1, E2.2, E1.1, A2.3	Conventions of the western; Reel Injun; Indigenous filmmakers

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#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
7	**In the Textbook**	1	What did schools leave out?	A3.3, C2.1, A2.2, D1.4	An old-style textbook paragraph; omissions; a researched rewrite
8	**In the News**	1	How does a frame change a story?	E1.1, E1.2, E1.4, A2.1	Two briefs, one event; Louis Riel then and now; Indigenous journalists
9	**Contradictions**	1	How can images contradict each other?	A2.2, A2.1, C1.8, D1.4	Noble/savage, vanishing/threatening; whose purposes; paragraph plan
10	**Whose Story?**	1	Whose story is it?	A3.3, A2.3, C1.5, B2.2	Keeshig-Tobias (1990) on story ownership; Charlie the collector; learning without taking
11	**Building the Analysis**	1	How do we turn noticing into arguing?	D2.1, D2.4, D1.4	Thesis lab; essay structure; sentence variety and transitions
12	**Editing for Precision**	1	Why does precision matter here?	D3.3, D3.4, A3.2, D2.4	Quotations, grammar, accurate terms; presentation planning
13	**Deconstruct and Reconstruct**	1	What have we learned to see?	E1.4, E2.1, B3.3, E1.5	Presentations (summative); unit reflection

Assessment

Type	In this unit
Assessment for learning	Five-question lens, formula and Christine's answer, sonnet and evidence charts, three cases, audience map, conventions tracker, textbook rewrite, frame check, contradiction pairs, thesis lab, quotation clinic
Assessment as learning	Self-checks, peer term checks, structured discussion, listening notes, unit reflection
Assessment of learning	Representation analysis essay and the deconstruct and reconstruct presentation, with rubrics in the Summative Tasks file

Texts and media

Used in this unit:

- **Public domain (on the slides and in the Unit 3 Writing Back Reader):** E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “A Red Girl's Reasoning” (1893); Duncan Campbell Scott, “The Onondaga Madonna” (1898), read critically

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- **Summarized, not reproduced:** Johnson's essay “A Strong Race Opinion” (1892); Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, “Stop Stealing Native Stories” (1990)
- **Teacher-chosen media:** excerpts of Reel Injun (2009, NFB); images shown from their holding institutions (Curtis photographs; the Thomas Moore portraits at Library and Archives Canada); a clip of Nanook of the North (1922); current news stories
- **Original model texts:** an old-style textbook paragraph and two news briefs about an invented community, written for the lessons and labelled as such

This unit studies harmful images in order to understand them; lessons quote only what analysis needs, explain period terms and let readers skip slurs. Lesson 4 includes a residential school portrait; teacher notes include support resources (the Hope for Wellness Help Line, 1-855-242-3310; Kids Help Phone; 9-8-8; the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line, 1-866-925-4419). We strongly recommend reviewing the unit with your board's Indigenous education lead and inviting an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or guest following board protocol. Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities.

What's in each lesson

- Teacher lesson plan with expectations, timed sequence, differentiation, look-fors and answer guides
- Slides with speaker notes
- Student handouts and organizers
- Editable Word and PowerPoint files, plus PDFs

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