Who Does the Looking? Stereotypes, the gaze and five questions for any image

NBE3U, Unit 2: Behind the Image, Lesson 1. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

For most of Canada's history, First Nations, Métis and Inuit people were described, painted, photographed and filmed by outsiders. Those images taught generations of Canadians what an “Indian” was supposed to look like. Before we can see clearly, we have to ask who made an image, for whom, and what it leaves out.

What students do: Students sort familiar images and phrases into stereotype and specific description, learn the terms stereotype, representation and gaze, practise a five-question lens on two short descriptions written a century apart, and identify the attitudes each one reveals.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
A2.3	make inferences of increasing subtlety about attitudes towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content in various contemporary and historical text forms, providing explanations that draw on a range of appropriate evidence to support their opinions
C1.8	identify and analyse the perspectives and/or biases evident in texts dealing with themes, ideas, and issues related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, commenting with growing understanding on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power
A1.6	compare multiple perspectives on themes, ideas, and issues related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities, relationships, and self-determination, sovereignty, or self-governance, as reflected in various texts from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies (2019), English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices, Grade 11, University Preparation (NBE3U). A = First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives and Text Forms in Canada, B = Oral Communication, C = Reading and Literature Studies, D = Writing, E = Media Studies.

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Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning how representations of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people are shaped by who creates them. • We are learning a set of questions to use on any image or text.	• I can explain the difference between a stereotype and a specific, accurate description. • I can use the five lens questions on a text or image. • I can infer the attitude behind a description, using evidence. • I can compare two perspectives on the same subject.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Who Does the Looking? deck.
- **Handouts:** The Five-Question Lens (page 1), Stereotype or Specific? (page 2).
- **Prepare:** Optional: two or three images you choose of Indigenous people in older advertising or tourism material, previewed for slurs.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–10	**Hook**	What do you picture?	Reflect privately.	
10–25	**Key terms**	Stereotype, representation, gaze.	Note.	Accurate definitions.
25–45	**The lens**	Five questions.	Apply in pairs.	Evidence for inferences.
45–65	**Two descriptions**	Compare perspectives.	Compare.	
65–75	**Unit launch**	Summatives.	Plan.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** A partly completed lens chart for the first text.
- **ELL:** Picture glossary of the key terms.
- **Challenge:** Find a current advertisement and apply all five questions.

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Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	The Five-Question Lens	Inferences about attitudes (A2.3), perspective and bias (C1.8) and comparing perspectives (A1.6)

Who does the looking: key points

- **Stereotype:** A fixed, oversimplified picture of a whole group, repeated until it feels true.
- **Representation:** How a person or group is shown in a text or image. Every representation is made by someone, for someone.
- **Gaze:** Who is looking and who is looked at. In most older texts, settlers do the looking.
- **Johnson's correction:** Society calls Christine “just the sweetest wildflower”; Johnson's narrator calls her “an ordinary, pale, dark girl”: a person, not a type.
- **Why it matters:** Images shape laws, schools and how people are treated, and how young people see themselves.

Teacher notes

- Start privately: students jot what they picture when they hear “Indian” in an old movie, but do not share stereotypes aloud as a list. The point is to notice where the picture came from, not to repeat it.
- Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities, to share personal or family histories, or to act as experts. Every student's participation in sharing is optional.
- Historical texts use the words of their time, including terms now considered offensive (for example, “Red-skin,” “savage,” “squaw,” “half-breed,” “Eskimo”). We quote accurately when analysing, explain why these terms are harmful, and use today's terms (First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous, or the specific Nation) in our own words. Readers may say “[skip]” instead of reading a slur aloud.
- The two short descriptions on the slides are Johnson's own (1893), from “A Red Girl's Reasoning.” Johnson is quoting what settler society said about her character, then correcting it.
- We strongly recommend reviewing this unit with your board's Indigenous education lead and, where possible, inviting a First Nations, Métis or Inuit Elder, Knowledge Keeper or guest speaker following your board's protocols (including offerings and honoraria). Local Nations' own sources come first.

Coming up

Lesson 2, The Indian Girl in Fiction.

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