

the
Cinematheque
presents



Indigenous Voices

Digital Study Guide

Introduction

A customized curriculum guide outlining activities for students and educators accompanies each Canada On Screen digital study guide. Each written guide has specific activities that expand on central ideas explored in the accompanying video.

Focusing primarily on the representation of Canadian Indigenous voices in film, and media, **Indigenous Voices** provides an interactive, and collaborative resource for anyone wishing to develop critical thinking skills in the classroom, and beyond.

General Viewing Resources



First, a note on language:

For the purposes of this Film unit we will be using as specific a vocabulary as possible to honor the 3 distinct Indigenous populations in Canada; Inuit, Metis, and First Nations.

Resource: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEzjA5RoLv0>

What makes a Film Production distinctly Indigenous?

- Why is a film labeled Indigenous?
- What makes it distinct from other films made in Canada by other identifiable groups and/or cultures?
- Is it the actors being First Nations, therefore the film “qualifies” as Indigenous?
- Is the director Metis?
- Is the Producer Inuit?
- Is the writer First Nations?
- Are these key creative and crew roles filled by a person who can identify as one of these Indigenous cultures of Canada, and therefore have it categorized as Indigenous?

OR...

- Do all 3 of these key creative roles (director, producer, writer) need to be filled by an Indigenous person to be a viable film?

Discuss: Telefilm Canada states that any 2 out of three of these roles (director, producer, writer) need to be fulfilled by a certain group to qualify for special consideration for distribution. It is argued that all 3 of these creative roles must be Indigenous for it to be considered an Indigenous film. What is the role of the director, writer and producer and why would it be argued that all 3 must be Indigenous for authenticity?

General Viewing Resources



The following is an excerpt from Telefilm Canada's website with regards to the Indigenous screen based media industry in Canada:

Dear Canadian Broadcasters, Funders, Directors and Producers,
If you're making a film and your key cast members are all white, you're part of the problem. If you're making a film and all your key creatives and key crew are white, you're part of the problem. If you're part of the problem, you have no right to act as though you're an ally to people of colour out in the real world. Canadian film has a Whiteness problem. Whiteness contributes to systemic discrimination. Whiteness takes up space and leaves little to no room for any voice that is not white. Whiteness has very real impacts on people of colour. If you don't want to be part of the problem, the solution is simple. Stop taking up space with films rooted in Whiteness.' - Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, July 11, 2016

This plea to broadcasters, funders, directors and producers speaks to the very real need for authenticity in filmmaking in Canada. Very often, the people in power get to make the decisions and all too often those people in power do not represent the people who are trying to create authentic awareness.

Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner, (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001) is an excellent example of an Inuit film that is internationally identified as an authentic representation of traditional Inuit culture. The writer, director, actors, producers --- the creators; creatives & crew --- all identify as Indigenous, as Inuit. In fact, they have their own production company called Isuma. They have the power to make creative and productive decisions around the authenticity of the story they want to tell. They have cultural sovereignty in representing their story. It is the difference between a story about a culture vs. a story by a culture. There is value and immense power in being in charge of the story you want to tell.

Isuma branches out to Haida Gwaii:

Resource: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/the-fast-runner-haida-film-1.3935746>

Activity 1: Getting Comfortable with Storytelling

It is sometimes difficult to start anything. Humans are born to have experiences and to share these experiences and make sense of the world around them through these experiences. We all wake up in the morning and start. Making films is about bringing these experiences that we want to share to larger audiences, to create awareness, to entertain, to instruct and educate. Good filmmakers are good storytellers, so we all need practice.

This activity is meant to start the spark of storytelling.

- Put a number of objects in a bag. Perhaps a dozen, or 20. Small and varied.
- Seat learners in a circle.
- Share with the learners that each of them will be reaching into the bag and taking out an object. This object will be the starting point to a story. It does not literally have to be the starting point, but it should act as the spark for a story that includes the object.
- Tell the story on the spot. If learners do not initially feel comfortable doing this, then have them participate by pulling out an object and at least holding the object and thinking about it for 20 30 seconds before placing it back in the bag.
- You can do more than one round.
- Students who are comfortable with this exercise can/may spark others into confidence.

Reflection: Write or speak (think voice memo on iPhone or some recording device) a reflection that either summarizes the story you told, or speaks to the experience of pulling an object from the bag.

Because Indigenous cultures did not have written language traditionally, the stories that have been passed down for centuries exist because of the incredible ability of Indigenous cultures to tell and pass their stories along orally, specifically and purposefully. Often inanimate objects are given life like qualities and animals have massive influence and importance in the tales. The oral tradition in First Nations culture has ownership; stories are gifted to future generations and are specific to the people giving and receiving the gift of a specific story. They are also collective and sacred, owned by a group of people, known by a group of people, and told by a group of people. Filmmakers have a duty to honor the protocol set out by the Indigenous cultures when making film.

Activity 2: Hand It Over



It is said that everyone has a story. Of course, for people to pay attention to our stories, we think that it has to be grand, excellent and exciting. It does not. It needs to be interesting. It needs to come from a place of knowing. Usually, something has to happen.

Task

Foundation:

- Write or tell a story, 6-10 sentences long, that seems authentic to you; comes from a place of knowing. Think about what you are good at, what you believe in, what you have seen and experienced personally.
- Make a note of/ brainstorm these ideas before you start. It is important that you have a clear vision of how this story looks to YOU. As the story's creator, it might help to think of this story visually, how it moves from one scene to the next, one location to the next. You are totally in charge of the telling of this story. (***** Note to teachers: some students will enjoy working individually on written accounts while other students may want to form small groups to orally tell their stories.*)
- Once you are secure in your story (confident in the telling and sharing of it) make someone else understand it. In doing this, you are releasing it from your concept, and trusting another with your creation. (**** It might help if each distinct sentence is written on a cue card.*)
- You will no longer be part of your story until you see it in performance/video/ re telling in (3) classes. (*This timeline could be short or long, depending on your group, your enthusiasm, and the "temperature" of the project.*)

Activity 2: Hand It Over

- This hands off approach is two fold. It helps learners understand the importance of clarity, scope & sequence when sharing a story. It also allows them to experience a loss of control of their story, much like the loss of control many generations of Indigenous people have experienced in watching themselves portrayed on screen. Sometimes, rarely, there is a portrayal that is authentic. Often it is a poor and insulting representation.
- Whomever you have “given” this story to, must choose a method to re tell this story independently of you. Remember, you must stay away from what they are now creatively doing with your story. (**** For film centric students: Instead of writing or telling your story, create a shotlist of at least 10 shots that you will hand off to your partner to shoot.) Again, once you hand over your concept, you will have no part in the creating the shots.
- Your partner will be in charge of interpreting your instruction and ideas.

Idea: You might want to pair up with an English, Creative Writing or Social Studies class and have them write the 6 sentence story to hand over to the film students.

Ideas for retelling: (Just because the original story was only 6 sentences long, the re-telling/interpretation could be enhanced...)

Film the story you were given.

- Create a short visual sequence on video that touches on the key visual aspects of the story, whether it be with actors or simply locations and images. (Dialogue is optional and should be minimal if used at all)
- Record the re telling as authentically as possible and play it back to the class without using words, only sound effects and music. (Use your voice memo on your iPad, or if you have a zoom microphone, even better.)
- Sing the story that was given to you. (Any genre of singing; rap, classical, jazz, hip hop) This can be live or recorded.
- Create a musical score that accompanies the story. You could create a soundscape that matches the action of the story without explicitly re-telling the story) Again, live or recorded.
- Act out the story that was given to you as a Dramatic response. You might enlist others, or create puppets that symbolize characters and events.
- Create a storyboard (series of drawings in linear sequence) for the sequence based on the re telling of your partner's /group's story.
- Sequence the story through storyboard structure, but use photographs (stills) instead of drawings to re create the intention.

Activity 2: Hand It Over



Continuing: Redo your story in partnership and collaboration with the original storyteller. Be part of the creation of the presentation. Basically, the opposite of what you just did.

Reflection: When your story was “given” to your partner(s) and was re interpreted without your input, did anything surprise you in the re telling. As the re teller, what were you most concerned with? If you did Extension 2, what were some of the insights you gained that you may not have been aware of in the first round of independent re telling? How would this re telling experience change if you had been able to guide your partner in the re telling. How much value is there in sharing an idea vs. relying on memory and/or blind interpretation?

In the film industry, writers have their work re interpreted all the time. Can you find examples of this kind of re interpretation in contemporary film?

Write a reflection trying to imagine how indigenous cultures felt when they saw their stories misrepresented and poorly interpreted with stereotypes and appropriation in the film industry.

Activity 3: Homage to Alanis Obomsawin



Alanis Obomsawin remains one of Canada's most Important Indigenous Filmmakers.

Resource: (Biography Information)

https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/0300011259_e.html

Watch the following clip from the CBC archives with film maker Alanis Obomsawin where she talks about documentary filmmaking and the importance of authentic listening.

Resource: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/alanis-obomsawin-passes-knowledge-to-aspiring-filmmakers-1.2953663>

Her first film, of the 40 she has made for the National Film Board, primarily documentary, is called *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971).

After going to visit and live with the children at the residential school in Moose Factory around Christmas time Obomsawin impressively creates a film that both captures the innocent storytelling of children and the profound relationship she created with them while living in a residential school.

Note: The NFB website website calls this film a “charming” account of life for these children. Yet this is historically a time when life for these children was anything but charmed. Obomsawin herself recounts her sadness at seeing children as young as 5 at the school.

The short film took the viewer inside of the northeastern Ontario residential school at Christmas time. “At night I would go and sing for the children in the dorm where the smallest ones were. Some of them were five years old,” said Obomsawin.

Activity 3: Homage to Alanis Obomsawin



Watch: (13 minutes)

Resource: https://www.nfb.ca/film/christmas_at_moose_factory/

Obomsawin is extraordinarily interested in sound in her films. She invests time and energy in collecting sound that helps tell her story. It is one of the most effective tools in “Christmas at Moose Factory”. Along with the children’s voices, there is a soundscape created that enhances the images: Dogs barking. Wind blowing. Cooking in the kitchen; pots and pans.

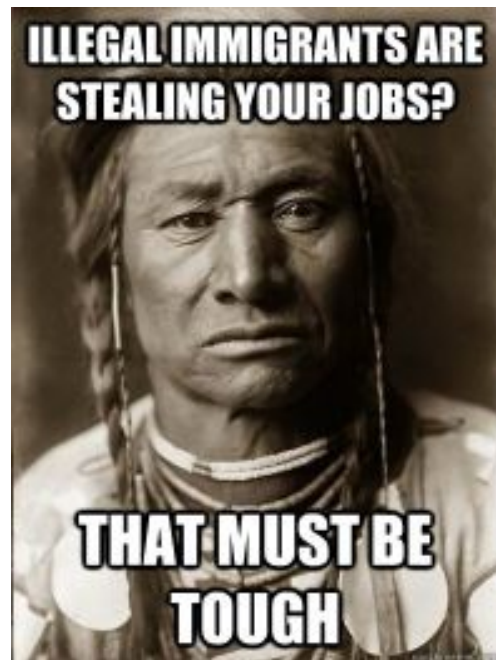
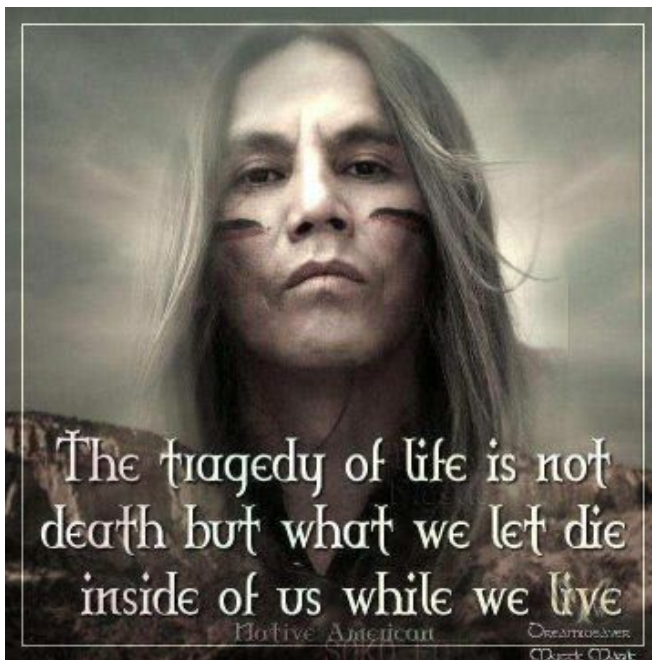
Using her technique of **panning** (moving a stationary camera’s frame vertically or horizontally across the scene) over images and coupling this image with sound, create a 1 2 minute film that uses a collection of images in quick succession, and attach collected sound to enhance the viewing experience.

Bonus: include voice over. You could use a program such as “Audacity”, <http://www.audacityteam.org/> to create sound.

Also “**Soundbible**” has royalty free sound clips to use: <http://soundbible.com/>

What images should you use? Certainly Obomsawin used collected drawings from the children to great effect. You could do the same by partnering with an elementary school or an art class on a drawing project and collecting voice recordings that describe the story of the art. However, you could also create a story from photos clipped from magazines and ordered in a certain way to tell a story. It is the technique that Obomsawin used that is being honored. How deeply you go into the source material is up to you.

Activity 4: Creating a Meme



Using images from the unit of stereotypical misrepresentations from this unit's presentation, create memes around correcting the misperception of Indigenous people.

Scaffolding this activity:

Satire is used in many works of literature to show foolishness or vice in humans, organizations, or even governments it uses sarcasm, ridicule, or irony.

For example, satire is often used to effect political or social change, or to prevent it.

This activity could be powerful or could be destructive, depending on its handling. The key is to find an example of an effective use of satire to muse on. If you don't think your class is mature enough to create memes that employ the intention of this activity (that is, to draw attention to the misrepresentations of Indigenous people in mainstream culture) then perhaps a more instructive approach where you go through the exercise together and complete as a class.

Meme that went wrong: the Johnny Depp problem:
Analyze: What is wrong with this? (There are many answers)

Analyze: What is at play here? Politically? Historically?

Activity 5: The Danger of a Single Narrative Look Again Campaign



LETHBRIDGE PROJECT, K.C. ADAMS

Resource: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/perceptions-lethbridge-indigenous-art-bias-racism-bias-stereotypes-1.3785904>

After looking at images side by side of a stereotype and a truth, create similar enlightening posters or short videos of people in your class/school/staff/community.

Bust open the assumptions we make about others by simply relying on our false perceptions.

This campaign started in Lethbridge, Alberta with an indigenous artist named KC Adams to challenge racism without bringing violence or anger to the campaign. Also, to challenge the idea that we all only have one story, when really we have many.

Activity 6: I'm Not the Indian You Had In Mind Thomas King



Watch the following video; a poem put to film.

Resource: <http://www.nsi-canada.ca/2012/03/im-not-the-indian-you-had-in-mind/>

Discuss implications of stereotyping in this video.
How does Thomas King create a space for new perspectives to be discussed?

Find a poem or a piece of writing that challenges the stereotypes held about Indigenous people in Canada. Create a video that uses these words to break down the assumptions.

Resource: <http://muskratmagazine.com/indigenous-poetry/>

Activity 7: Find the Similarities



Resource: <http://www.matikawilbur.com/>

Photographer Matika Wilbur set out to photograph Indigenous people in North America in a more useful, truthful and beautiful way in order to remove the stigma put forth by decades of racist and demeaning images from the “acid media.”

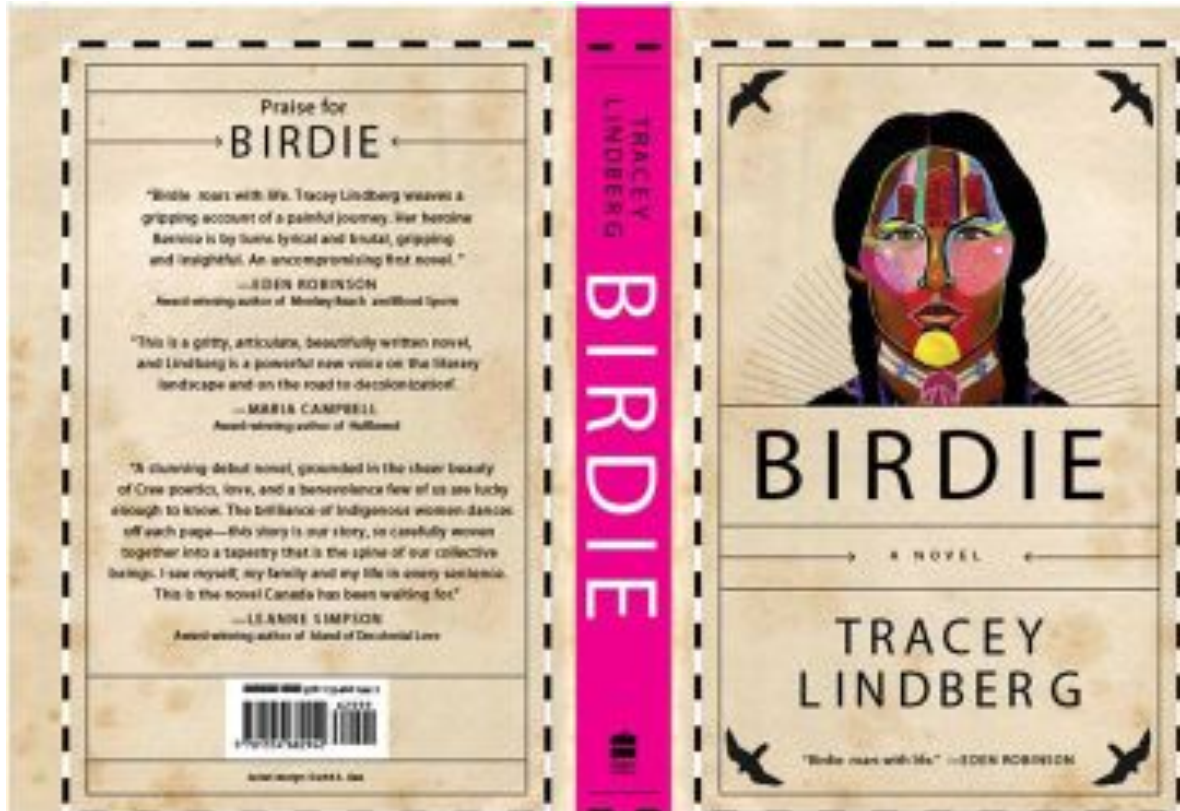
Here is her TED talk on her project 562

Resource: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlzYzz3rEZU>

Assumptions can be anything from bringing unchallenged prior ideas to new situations to deeply misunderstood stereotypes.

Task: Create images and stream them in a video of people in your community that you have found the similarities with. Wilbur states that we are all the same inside. See if you can capture that essential quality of similarity from a variety of community members that speaks to this truth.

Activity 8: Create a Trailer for a Novel by a contemporary Indigenous Author



If you have not read one of the books on this list it is time that you did.

Stories get made into movies. Trailers are made to sell the movie to audiences, to entice them to watch. The really great thing about a trailer assignment is that you do not have to give the whole book away. You need to be creative in how you introduce characters and develop curiosity about plot. Below is a link to a list of books to check out. The second link is a trailer made by Sonya Ballantyne for Tracey Lindberg's book "Birdie". The third link may or may not be useful. It is a link to archival material that you could use that is copyright free.

Resource: <http://www.cbc.ca/books/108-indigenous-writers-to-read-as-recommended-by-you-1.4197475>

Resource: <http://www.nsi-canada.ca/2016/03/sonya-ballantyne-makes-birdie-trailer-for-canadareads/> + <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mw1yhr2m-sg>

Resource: <https://archive.org/details/movies>

Links to Articles, Videos, and Important Voices



Lisa Jackson

You need to check her out! Use this website to access Lisa Jackson's award winning work in filmmaking. **Resource:** <http://lisajackson.ca/>

She is Anishinaabe, has a BFA in Film Production from SFU, is completing her MFA at York University and is an alumna of the Canadian Film Centre's Directors Lab. She works in both fiction and documentary.

Appropriation

Resource: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/cultural-appropriation-1.4119849>

From the firestorm that was Spring's 2017 controversy over the "appropriation prize" and appropriation being the hot topic on every media outlet's lips, here is an article by Jessica Deer: a 27 year old Kanien'kehá:ka from Kahnawake.

Jessica Deer

This is a great jumping off point for discussions on appropriation from and ongoing struggles to defend culture. There is a great distinction in this article between appropriation and appreciation.

Here is a great example of appropriation.

Resource: <http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/toronto-gallery-cancels-exhibit-of-white-artists-paintings-over-complaints-of-cultural-appropriation>

Here the artist, Amanda PL, unapologetically steals Morisseau's style and ideas.

Links to Articles, Videos, and Important Voices

A helpful guide to good and bad stealing looks like this:



Activity 9: First truly Indigenous films

Research when the first films were made in Canada by Indigenous filmmakers. That is, the writer, producer and director all identify as Indigenous in Canada.

- Why do you think it took so long for a film to be made in this way?
- What were the obstacles to indigenous filmmaking?
- Can you think of contemporary examples where non-indigenous actors take roles of indigenous actors?
- Why do you think that actors feel comfortable doing this?
- Where are the hot spots in Indigenous filmmaking in Canada?
- How would a filmmaker's experience be different if one of the key creative roles was not Indigenous?

Watch some short clips (or entire videos) from the Production Company Isuma (or one of the Indigenous film sites below) and see if you can identify what makes the film distinctly indigenous.

Resource: <http://www.isuma.tv/>

Here are other platforms to find Indigenous Films:

Resource: <http://skinsplex.com/>

Resource: <http://www.nativeflix.com/>

Activity 10: Review

Write a review for and/or analyze a film that you watch from one of the websites mentioned above:

Movie Analysis includes research into:

- Who made this? Why?
- What can we tell about the filmmaker(s)?
- For whom was it made? How does it address its audience? What is the nature of our engagement with film?
- What outside influences can we perceive in terms of finance, ownership, institution, socio-cultural context?

PRESENTING PARTNERS / PARTENAIRES DE PRÉSENTATION



Canada



ONTARIO
150

TELEFILM
CANADA 50

CO-PRODUCING PARTNERS / PARTENAIRES DE CO-PRODUCTION



Bibliothèque et Archives
Canada

Library and Archives
Canada

cinéma
cinémathèque
thèque qc
qc

the
Cinémathèque

tiff