

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
agnes.queensu.ca

The power of colour and line

Agnes Learns

2023

SPEAKERS

Ilinca Stingaciu

KEYWORDS

Agnes Learns, Grade 9–12, School Resource, Contemporary Art, Indigenous Art, Painting

FEATURED WORKS

Norval Morrisseau (Copper Thunderbird), *Sacred Medicine Bear*, 1974, acrylic on canvas. Gift of Guardian Capital Group Limited, 2020

TRANSCRIPT

Ilinca Stingaciu: In this lesson, we will look at *Sacred Medicine Bear* by Norval Morrisseau and consider Morrisseau's use of two elements of art: colour and line. These two elements can be used in art to convey emotion and meaning.

Norval Morrisseau, also known as Copper Thunderbird, was a self-taught Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek First Nation artist who interpreted Ojibwe culture and heritage through his work. Morrisseau is also known as the founder of the "Woodland School of Art".

Inspired by Indigenous symbols, motifs and petroglyphs, Morrisseau created highly emotional and personal works. In *Sacred Medicine Bear*, a large white bear takes up the majority of the composition.

A blue medicine pouch is attached to the bear's neck. Above the bear we see a blue line connecting two divided circles.

Morrisseau is known for using bright, bold colours in his works. The colours draw attention, evoke emotion and often have a personal symbolic meaning. Primary colours of blue and red are used in the bear's skeleton, the medicine pouch and the circles above the bear. Yellow eyes, like this bear's, are an identifiable element in many of Morrisseau's works.

How do the colours in *Sacred Medicine Bear* make you feel?

Various types of lines, characteristic of Morrisseau's art, are seen in this painting. The lines used in the work may capture our attention, but also can represent connections, relationships and energy. Bold black lines outline the forms in the painting. Lines make up the x-ray or skeletal-looking forms inside the bear's body, which can symbolize inner spiritual life. A thick blue line connects the head and the body of the bear with two divided circles. The circles often represent duality, or a connection between two elements.

As we end this lesson, let's take a moment to consider the power of colour and line for conveying emotion and symbolism. How can our personal interpretation of these elements of *Sacred Medicine Bear* change or deepen the way each of us sees the work?