Teachers’ Notes

*Wild Wires*
Teachers’ Notes for
School Program, Winter 2016

Wild Wires

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Cover image: Brendan Fernandes (born Nairobi, Kenya 1979), 1978.412.367, 2010, Glass; neon; clear Plexiglas; transformer; wires, 129.5 x 53.3 x 3.8 cm. Collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen’s University. Purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Grants program and the Donald Murray Shepherd Fund, 2013 (56-019)

Introduction

Our school programs challenge students to develop critical thinking skills. We ask questions and set tasks requiring students to:
- Observe
- Interpret
- Compare
- Create
in order to support acquisition of flexible and imaginative thinking skills. These skills are paramount for student development and are an integral part of the 21st-century learning framework.

A recent study by the University of Arkansas found that art gallery field trips are valuable for the development of critical thinking skills, historical empathy and tolerance of other viewpoints. For more information please see: www.educationnext.org/the-educational-value-of-field-trips/

The first half of the Wild Wires program, which takes place in the gallery space, establishes key ideas. These ideas are developed in the second half of the visit through a creative hands-on project in the studio. We encourage you to use this booklet to prepare your students for their visit to the Agnes, and to extend the experience in your classroom. For large groups, one half does the studio project first; we adapt the program content accordingly.
Focus Exhibitions Winter 2016

Renew: Indigenous Art from the Collection

This exhibition digs into the vault to showcase a selection of works from the Agnes Etherington Art Centre’s collections of Indigenous arts of Canada. Innovative, politically charged, and challenging contemporary works—including recent acquisitions—are brought into conversation with historical pieces. Renew demonstrates the vibrancy, creativity and continuity of visual traditions, while raising questions about the colonial entanglements that influenced arts of the historical and modern eras.

The exhibition includes works ranging from pieces by Haida, Anishinaabe, Métis-Cree and Mi’kmak artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to contemporary works by Jane Ash Poitras, Rebecca Belmore, Michael Belmore, Bob Boyer, Wally Dion, David Garneau, Robert Houle, Brian Jungen, Shelley Niro and Edward Poitras.

Brendan Fernandes: Lost Bodies

Lost Bodies brings a world-renowned Canadian artist’s work into dialogue with two of the country’s best collections of African art: The Justin and Elisabeth Lang Collection of African Art at the Agnes and the collection of the Textile Museum of Canada. Starting with the body as a place of knowing, Fernandes offers multiple points of connection that draw upon traditional costume, gestures of ballet and the choreographies of the vault. The exhibition includes video, collages that mesh African art with dancers’ gestures, and objects from the Lang Collection and the Textile Museum. We are used to seeing African masks without the bodies that once animated them in their original contexts; Fernandes re-introduces the body in order to raise questions about the visual and discursive habits that shape understandings of African art within Western museums.

Program

Curriculum Connections:

Education in the arts is essential to students’ intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth and well-being. Experiences in the arts—in dance, drama, music, and visual arts—play a valuable role in helping students to achieve their potential as learners and to participate fully in their community and in society as a whole. The arts provide a natural vehicle through which students can explore and express themselves and through which they can discover and interpret the world around them. (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2009)

In *Wild Wires*, students will discuss traditional and contemporary works of art in * Renew*; participate in a small-group scavenger hunt; discuss Brendan Fernandes’ work and African masks in *Lost Bodies*; and sketch a mask. In the studio, they will create non-wearable masks using wires and beads.

**Visual Arts:**
Students will:
- interpret a variety of works of art.
- identify and analyze the social contexts of works of art.
- create an object that expresses a personal response.

**Social Studies:**
Students will:
- understand heritage and identity among Aboriginal peoples.
- examine Canada and the global community.
- discuss traditions, celebrations and ritual, identifying ways heritage is passed along.

**History:**
Students will:
- analyze the impact of European settlement on traditional Aboriginal art.

Before the Visit

The following are suggested discussion topics and activities to help prepare students for their visit. **Please note:** we ask that students wear name tags during the program.

**Gallery Visit**
Discuss the nature of a public art gallery with your class. Art galleries collect, research, protect, preserve and display original works of art for the benefit of current and future visitors. Ask your students if they have been to an art gallery before. What types of art did they see at the art gallery? Why is it important to visit original works of art, instead of viewing reproductions or images on the Internet?

**Expectations**
Discuss proper behaviour and gallery etiquette with your class. The two main rules to remember are: Do not touch the art because oils on our hands can contain salt that can damage the surface of works of art. No running, and no food or drinks (including gum) are permitted. Pens cannot be used in the galleries.
Themes in the exhibitions and program:

The Agnes website [www.agnes.queensu.ca](http://www.agnes.queensu.ca) features works from this program in our Collections section. Choose a few to look at with your students. You can search by artist name or the name of a cultural group. Here are some examples:

Brendan Fernandes, born Nairobi, Kenya 1979, 1978.412.367, 2010, Glass; neon; clear Plexiglas; transformer; wires, 129.5 x 53.3 x 3.8 cm, Purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Grants program and the Donald Murray Shepherd Fund, 2013 (56-019)

This work by Brendan Fernandes will be installed in the tall window on the façade of the Agnes, over our front entrance. Alert your students to look at it when they come for their visit.

Inspired by an unattributed Bamana mask in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fernandes titles his work with the museum’s accession number: 1978.412.367. He translates the carved wood of the traditional work into neon, a familiar material in today’s urban milieus.

Fernandes was also intrigued by another African work at the Met, which has been attributed to the ‘Master of Buli’. This convention is borrowed from western art historical practice for naming unknown artists. The flashing lights of Fernandes’ work ask, in Morse code, “Who is the Master of Buli?,” prompting us to consider the lost knowledge of these artistic identities.
Bamana artist, *Male Chi Wara Headdress*, Mali, Wood, metal, pigment, Gift of Justin and Elisabeth Lang, 1984 (M84-183)

We’ll look at this mask in the program. Worn on the top of the head, it is used in ceremonies related to agriculture. See if your students can identify antelope features in it. Discuss the use of negative and positive shapes.

Ts’mysan (Tsimshian) Artist, Northern Coastal British Columbia, *Raven Rattle*, late 19th century, Wood and paint, Acquired through university transfer, 1969 (M69-028)

Discuss the term Aboriginal with your students. In Canada it refers to the First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit peoples. Discuss the regional differences among our Aboriginal peoples. Have students identify some west coast cultural groups and their mythology.

An important symbol in west coast mythology, the raven holds a small object in its beak, likely in reference to the story of the raven who brought sunlight into the world. A shaman seated behind the raven extends his tongue towards a mythical bird to suggest the passage of knowledge between the human and animal world. The face below is *Konankada* or *Gonankadet*, Chief of the Undersea.

The title, *Niya Nehiyaw* – “I am a Cree Person” – is an unequivocal statement of Indigenous presence. The painting reads from right to left as a picture of McMaster’s life, from the horse he rode as a child to the airplane he flies for business trips as a museum professional.

**Extending the Visit into the Classroom**

Your visit to the Agnes can be extended to your classroom upon your return. Here are a few ideas to support extension:

**Visual Art:**

The wire masks that the students will make at the Agnes are easily hung with thumbtacks on a bulletin board. Make a display of your students’ work. Have your students research masks from cultures around the world and bring photos of them to add to the display.

Gerald McMaster’s painting *Niya Nehiyaw* portrays aspects of his life and cultural identity. Your students can create a similar work using painting and collage. Ask your students to talk to their parents about images and objects that represent their cultural identity. They can bring in photographs of people, food, places; scraps of cloth; stamps. Have all students display their materials and analyze them as a class. Ask students to explain why they collected those particular objects. Then ask them to plan their composition, considering principles like emphasis and balance. They should arrange the objects on the paper and think about how they will add colour with paint before they start work.

*Brendan Fernandes: Lost Bodies* includes some African fabrics borrowed from the Textile Museum of Canada. Such textiles stimulate lessons in pattern study and printmaking; consult the website resources listed at the end of the Notes for suggestions.

**Language:**

The historical Canadian objects seen at the Agnes contain symbols from Aboriginal mythology. Students can look at the object in our online collection, research the symbolism and write a short essay about it.
Social Studies:

Discuss how a people’s environment influences the materials they use in their art. Have students identify the materials used in African masks and in the Inuit, Métis and First Nations objects seen at the Agnes.

Music:

Just as contemporary African and Aboriginal artists respond to the past in their visual art, so contemporary musicians draw on their heritage in creating music today. As some of the objects seen at the Agnes were used in traditional ceremonies, listen to examples of music from those cultures. Consult Smithsonian Folkways at www.folkways.si.edu for selections.

Listen to contemporary artists and discuss how they are adapting their musical heritage. For Canadian Aboriginal musicians, consult the Indigenous Music Awards site at www.indigenousmusicawards.ca. For contemporary African musicians, consult iTunes.

Consider bringing a musician to your school. MASC (Multicultural Arts for Schools and Communities) www.masconline.ca, based in Ottawa, is an excellent source of talented artist-educators.

Resources

Websites

Institutions with Canadian Aboriginal Collections, by province:

British Columbia

Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art
www.billreidgallery.ca

Kitimat Museum and Archives
www.kitimatmuseum.ca

Museum at Campbell River
www.crmuseum.ca/first-nations

Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia
www.moa.ubc.ca

Museum of Vancouver
www.museumofvancouver.ca

Squamish Lil’Wat Cultural Centre, Whistler
www.slcc.ca
Saskatchewan

MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina
www.mackenzieartgallery.ca

Manitoba

Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Winnipeg
www.urbanshaman.org

Winnipeg Art Gallery
www.wag.ca

Ontario

Agnes Etherington Art Centre
www.agnes.queensu.ca/collections
Search the Collections section of our website for images and information on Aboriginal and African works of art.

Art Gallery of Ontario
www.ago.net/canadian

Bay of Spirits Gallery, Toronto
www.bayofspirits.com

Gallery Indigena, Stratford
www.galleryindigena.com

Museum of Inuit Art, Toronto
www.miamuseum.ca

National Gallery of Canada
http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/teachers/plans/activities_e.jsp?lessonid=44
This section of the website has excellent lesson plans for projects relating to Aboriginal art.

Royal Ontario Museum
www.rom.on.ca

Thunder Bay Art Gallery
www.theag.ca

Quebec

Canadian Museum of History
www.historymuseum.ca
McCord Museum

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Nova Scotia

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia – Yarmouth, NS
https://www.artgalleryofnovascotia.ca/exhibitions/contemporary-first-nations-art-permanent-collection

Artists

Rebecca Belmore
www.rebeccabelmore.com

Bob Boyer

Wally Dion
www.wallydion.com

Brendan Fernandes
www.brendanfernandes.ca

David Garneau
www.davidgarneau.com

Robert Houle

Brian Jungen

Edward Poitras
http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/poitras_edward_1953-.html

Jane Ash Poitras
http://www.artsask.ca/en/artists/jane_ash_poitras

Aboriginal Organizations

Assembly of First Nations
www.afn.ca
African Art

Art & Life in Africa
http://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/
Hosted by the University of Iowa Museum of Art (UIMA), this site is an accessible educational resource of videos and articles that concentrate on African art and life throughout history.

British Museum
http://www.britishmuseum.org/
The British Museum has an online collection of artefacts. The museum offers a broad history of Africa beginning with tools and ending with African diaspora.

British Museum: Africa Resources
http://www.britishmuseum.org/learning/schools_and_teachers/resources/cultures/africa.aspx
The resource section of the British Museum includes a wide variety of activities and resources for teachers and students who are interested in the history and art of Africa.

Brooklyn Museum
www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/african_art
The Brooklyn Museum has one of the oldest collections of African art in the U.S.A.

Fowler Museum at UCLA
http://www.fowler.ucla.edu/collections/africa
The African collection at the Fowler Museum is one of the top twenty African collections worldwide.

Indianapolis Museum of Art
http://www.imamuseum.org/interactives/cycles/
Cycles: African Life Through Art is an online resource. Their Educators’ Resources page also has a good lesson plan on African textiles.

Metropolitan Museum of Art
http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online
Search the Collections section for images and information about the African works in the collection.

National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian)
www.africa.si.edu
The website includes information and images of the collection, information about current and past exhibitions
and educational resources for students and teachers.

**PBS: Africa**  
The Africa section of the PBS website includes videos, interactive maps, images and texts for both teachers and students. There is a section dedicated to teachers titled “Teacher Tools”.

**Seattle Art Museum**  
[www.seattleartmuseum.org](http://www.seattleartmuseum.org)  
The Collections section has many images of African works with concise explanations.

**Textile Museum of Canada**  
[www.textilemuseum.ca](http://www.textilemuseum.ca)

**Books**

**Africa**

An excellent resource for students to learn more about the vegetation, wildlife and citizens of Africa. The book explores Africa’s natural habitat as well as its history of political and economic corruption and exposes the modern challenges Africa faces. It includes nineteen authentic children’s projects relating to African traditional crafts.

Describes the meaning of masks in different cultural groups.

Africa is made up of 54 independent countries.

This book is very informative because it covers a wide range of topics (wildlife, ethnic groups, ceremonies, music). At the end of every chapter, there are a couple of suggested crafts, most of which can be made with little adult supervision, using readily available materials.

Well-illustrated book that features over thirty African masks. Geared for Grade 3 and up.

**Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples and Art: A selection**

Important exhibition of art by contemporary Indigenous artists from Canada and abroad: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Finland, Greenland, Guatemala, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Taiwan and the United States.


