

Kent Monkman

History Is
Painted by
the Victors

Educational Sheet – Grades 9-11

Invite your students into the captivating world of **Kent Monkman**, where they'll discover iconic and monumental paintings by this major Canadian artist and member of ocêkwi sîpiy (Fisher River Cree Nation). Through his subversive lens, Monkman revisits history painting to challenge colonial narratives and offer new perspectives on the past and our present.

History painting is a term that was introduced by the French Royal Academy in the 17th century to describe large-scale paintings with historical, mythological or biblical subjects. Representing the peoples and territories that have shaped the Turtle Island (North America) of today, Monkman's works both draw on and subvert the conventions of this genre to address contemporary societal concerns. Central among them are: the climate crisis and environmental protection, the impact of government policies on Indigenous communities, intergenerational trauma, and the affirmation of Two-Spirit, queer and trans Indigenous communities' identities.

Notice to teachers and accompanying adults

This exhibition features depictions of:

- acts of resistance
- bodily violence by authority figures
- environmental exploitation
- frolicking and leisure
- loss and grieving
- love and compassion
- mischief and humour
- nudity across the gender spectrum
- queer visibility and pride
- resilience

Curriculum connections with the Arts Education Program – Grades 9-11

Competency 1: Creates personal images (p. 12)

- Uses ideas to create a personal work
- Uses transforming gestures and elements of visual arts language

Competency 3: Appreciates images (p. 27)

- Analyzes an image
- Constructs their interpretation of the image

Curriculum connections with the Secondary Culture and Citizenship in Québec Program

Competency 2: Reflects on ethical questions

Secondary IV

- Justice and the law - Justice; Injustice (Main concepts, p. 41)
- Culture and symbolic productions - Material and non-material culture; Cultural transformation; Indigenous cultures; Representations of sexuality (Specific concepts, p. 43)

Secondary V

- Social groups and power relations - Racism and colonialism; Reconciliation (Specific concepts, p. 49).

Curriculum connections with the History of Québec and Canada Program – Secondary III and IV

Competency 1: Characterizes a period in the history of Québec and Canada (p. 11)

Competency 2: Interprets a social phenomenon (p. 14)

Secondary III

- The experience of the Indigenous peoples and colonization attempts (p. 19)

Secondary IV

- Indian affairs (p. 44)
- Indian residential schools in Québec (p. 56)
- Self-determination of Indigenous nations (p. 57)
- Indigenous rights (p. 62)

About the artist

Kent Monkman (born 1965) is a Cree interdisciplinary visual artist. A member of ocêkwi sîpiy, Fisher River Cree Nation in Treaty 5 Territory (Manitoba), he lives and works between New York and Toronto.

Known for his thought-provoking interventions into Western European and North American art history, Monkman explores themes of colonization, sexuality, loss and resilience – underscoring the complexities of historical and contemporary Indigenous experiences – across painting, performance, film/video and installation.

**“It was my role to help human beings love one another.”
— Miss Chief Eagle Testickle¹**

Monkman’s gender-fluid alter ego, **Miss Chief Eagle Testickle**, often appears in his work as a time-travelling, shape-shifting, supernatural being who reverses the colonial gaze to challenge received notions of history and Indigenous peoples.

Exhibition themes

Territory: Monkman’s art critically examines the effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples, including themes of displacement and cultural loss.

Queer Visibility and Resilience: Monkman brings attention to 2SLGBTQIA+ identities within Indigenous contexts. The abbreviation “2SLGBTQIA+” is used here in place of many genders, sexualities and kinship structures spanning Indigenous Confederacies and Nations of North America: Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Agender and More.

Intergenerational Trauma: Monkman explores the lasting effects of policies like the *Indian Act* and residential schools on Indigenous communities as well as ongoing colonial violence such as the traumas surrounding the disappearance and murder of Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit persons.

Climate Crisis and Environmental Protection: Monkman’s works address environmental concerns and highlight Indigenous land and water protectors.

1. K. Monkman and G. Gordon, *The Memoirs of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle: A True and Exact Accounting of the History of Turtle Island*, Vol. 1, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 2023, p. 13.

Art appreciation



Kent Monkman (1965-), *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People): Welcoming the Newcomers*, 2019. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, Donald R. Sobey Foundation CAF Canada Project Gift. © and image courtesy Kent Monkman

Set aside time with your students to observe and discuss what is going on in this image. Start by inviting them to look closely at this image for one minute. Next, ask your students the following open-ended questions to start a discussion allowing them to share their opinions on what they see and what it might mean.

- What is going on in this image?
- Monkman is known for referencing European and North American historical paintings in his work. Compare and contrast this painting with Eugene Delacroix's painting [The Natchez](#) and Emanuel Leutz's painting [Washington Crossing the Delaware](#).
- In your opinion, why does Monkman make use of the genre of history painting for his work?
- What visual elements does Kent Monkman use to convey conflict, hope or love in this painting?
- What historical events are being depicted or reinterpreted? What do you see that makes you say that?
- How has Monkman centred Indigenous perspectives and challenged the dominant historical narrative of colonization?
- What details can you find in the painting that add to the visual narrative?
- What is the relationship that each group has to the land? What do you see that makes you say that?
- In what way does Miss Chief Eagle Testickle challenge gender stereotypes?
- What more can we find?
- Choose two people in the painting and describe the scene depicted from their point of view.
- Write a personal response to this artwork and the contemporary issues it addresses.

[See the exhibition guide:](#)