

# Emily Carr, Totem Poles, and Vultures: The Artist vs. the Charge of Cultural Appropriation

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## **Description:**

This lesson plan is for a university course and is intended to introduce students to the work of the Emily Carr as well as to the current debated over cultural appropriation.

## **Grade Level:**

Freshman University

## **Subject(s)**

International Studies, History.

## **Duration:**

2 classes

## **Goal:**

Students will have leave with some knowledge of Emily Carr's life and her work as an artist.

## **Objectives:**

- Students will be introduced to Carr's paintings from both significant periods in her artistic career: the Aboriginal artifacts paintings from early in her career and the landscapes from late in her career. It is quite likely that most students in the class will not have heard of Emily Carr previous to this lesson.
- Students will be introduced to the issue of cultural appropriation in reference to Emily Carr and on a more universal basis.
- Students will explore the issue of cultural appropriation in their own lives.
- Students will have an opportunity to explore their reactions to the work of a significant Canadian artist. Those with background in the visual arts may want to compare Carr's work with that of other artists they know.

## **Standards:**

Meets standards for special topics in international studies.

## **Materials:**

### **Video:**

*Emily Carr: A Woman of All Sorts*

### **Journal articles:**

Bennett Schiff, "Canada's National Treasure." *Smithsonian* 29/12 (1999):102-111.

Robert Fulford, "The Trouble with Emily: How Canada's Greatest Woman Painter Ended Up on the Wrong Side of the Political Correctness Debate." *Canadian Art* 10/4 (1993):32-39.

### **Website:**

[www.tbc.gov.bc.ca/culture/schoolnet/carr](http://www.tbc.gov.bc.ca/culture/schoolnet/carr)

### **Texts:**

Emily Carr, *Klee Wyck*

Peter Macnair. *To the Totem Forests: Emily Carr Contemporaries Interpret Coastal Villages*

### **Prints of Emily Carr paintings:**

"Blue Sky"

"The Great Eagle"

"Old Time Coast Village"

## **Procedures:**

### **Class Session #1:**

- Show a portion of the video.
- View paintings on the Web Site and through prints.
- Read aloud two sections from *Klee Wyck* to class:  
Chapter 8: "The Stare"—pages 43-44  
Chapter 6: "D'Sonoqua"—pages 32-33
- Assign the two journal articles listed above.
- Additional assignment: further viewing of the video (on reserve in library) and of the web site

### **Class Session #2:**

- Discuss Emily Carr and her work—based on questions and comments from students regarding their response to Carr and her work.
- Discuss the cultural appropriation issue with the whole group.
- Break class into small groups (3-5 per group).
- Small groups discuss cultural appropriation, Emily Carr's "guilt" or "innocence," and other examples of cultural appropriation they may have heard of or read about.
- Small groups report to the whole group on the topics of their discussions.

- Whole class discusses cultural appropriation, particularly in reference to Canada, including: Is cultural appropriation real? Is it a problem? How can we absorb/appreciate other cultures (particularly aboriginal cultures) without cannibalizing?
- Assign a two-page written response to one of the following:
  - the discussion in class (small or large group)
  - the issue of cultural appropriation in general
  - the artist Emily Carr, and/or the artwork of Emily Carr
- This paper will be due at the next class meeting.

**Assessment:**

In-class discussions, both in small group and in whole group (instructor travels from small group to small group to “eavesdrop” and help direct discussion) paper (content which reflects understanding of the issue of cultural appropriation or of Emily Carr and her artwork)

**Student Rubric:**

- Attendance and participation in small group and whole group discussions.
- Evidence (through discussion) of viewing the video and the web-site.
- Evidence (through discussion) of having read the two assigned articles.
- Assigned written response: Content must reflect class discussion, material from videotape or website, and any other references which the student wishes to include. It is expected that the paper will be word-processed or typed and that it will not be a first draft.