

HBC Calendar Art

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Grade Level: 9/10, 11/12

Subject Area: Social Studies/ History/ Art

Themes:

- Arts, Sports & Culture
- Canadian Identity
- Media and Communications

Lesson Overview: In this lesson, students explore the calendar art that HBC commissioned from 1913 to 1970. Using guidelines, they interpret the art and conduct research into one of the pieces.

Time Required: Two to four 60-minute lessons

Associated Resources:

HBC Sources:

- [Calendar List](#)

Other Online Sources:

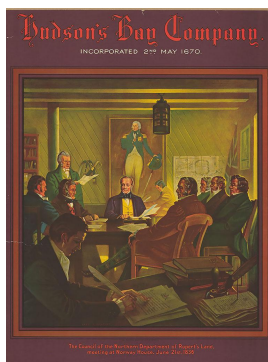
- [HBC Gallery, Manitoba Museum](#)
- [Andrea M. Paci, "Picture This: Hudson's Bay Company Calendar Images and their Documentary Legacy, 1913-1970", MA thesis, University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 2000](#)

Historical Thinking Concepts:

- Establish *historical significance*
- Use *primary source* evidence
- Identify *continuity and change*
- Analyze *cause and consequence*
- Take *historical perspectives*
- Understand the *ethical dimension* of historical interpretation

Learning Outcomes:

- Define and apply concepts of explicit and implicit messages, reinterpretation and historiography with respect to art.
- Explore HBC calendar art.
- Consider historical perspectives when interpreting art.
- Conduct research on an HBC art piece/artist.



The Council of the Northern Department of Rupert's Land, meeting at Norway House, June 21st, 1836 by Charles Fraser Comfort, 1936. HBC Corporate Collection.

Background Information:

One doesn't often think of a department store as a patron of the arts, but Hudson's Bay Company is just that. From 1913 to 1970, HBC produced annual calendars that included artwork by renowned artists who were commissioned to produce original paintings illustrating notable events drawn from its past. These images created a unique documentary and artistic record of the company's history. The distribution of calendars fit into a broader marketing strategy that promoted business interests and celebrated HBC's past. In fact, the company was very much involved in the creation process - it chose the artist, kept a list of approved historical subjects, provided reference material, negotiated details with the artist, and approved the final painting.

To see a timeline of the calendar images see:

<https://www.hbcheritage.ca/things/art/calendar-list>

These art pieces are not only about HBC history as they also reflect how HBC and the artists viewed the past and the distinct moments within the company's history. These paintings can provide an opportunity for students to evaluate, contemplate current historical narratives and ultimately reinterpret these "notable events" from a 21st-century perspective.

The Lesson Activity

Set up:

- o Before class, set your classroom up for a gallery walk using the [HBC Calendar List](#).
- o You may opt for a digital gallery walk or an in-person gallery walk. Prep and/or print images from the HBC Calendar List as required.

Activating: *How will students be prepared for learning?*

- Invite students to take part in a gallery walk. Have them move about and study the images you have posted around the room (or engage the students with a digital gallery walk).
- Ask: What is the overarching theme of these images? Who do you think produced them? What timeframe do they cover? What types of people are common in the images? How do they make you feel? What do you think is missing? What would you like to know more about?
- Invite the students to take their seats. Provide an overview of the images, HBC as a patron of the arts, the value of the images today, etc.
- Note that Hudson's Bay Company, as part of their advertising, used to offer calendars to customers. The calendars included an image that was commissioned by a well-known Canadian artist. This was also an opportunity for Hudson's Bay Company to document and record its history; that is why the images are about events or individuals that worked for the company. Explain that the images around the room were once displayed on one of the HBC calendars.
- Encourage dialogue and questions.

Acquiring: *What strategies facilitate learning for groups and individuals?*

- Explain that viewing art is not passive and that it is an act in interpretation and analysis.
- Explain that art is a valuable source of historical evidence.
- Introduce these terms:
 - REINTERPRETING ART: to place or view (a work of literature or art) in a new or unfamiliar context, especially in order to suggest a different interpretation.
 - EXPLICIT MESSAGES: describes the clear or obvious aspects of an art piece.
 - IMPLICIT MESSAGES: describes the underlying or implied messages about the artist's meaning and relies on the viewer's interpretation of the art.
 - HISTORIOGRAPHY: is sometimes called "the history of history". Historiography involves exploring *how* history was told by exploring authors, historical sources, interpretation, style, bias, and audience. In this context, historical representation in a painting reflects the artist's historical perspective and the specific context surrounding the creation of the artwork.
- Check for understanding. Lead a class discussion

Applying: *How will students demonstrate their understanding?*

- Distribute Student Resource: Re-/Interpretation Toolkit, one per student.
- Read over and check for understanding.
- Instruct them to complete.

Materials/Resources:

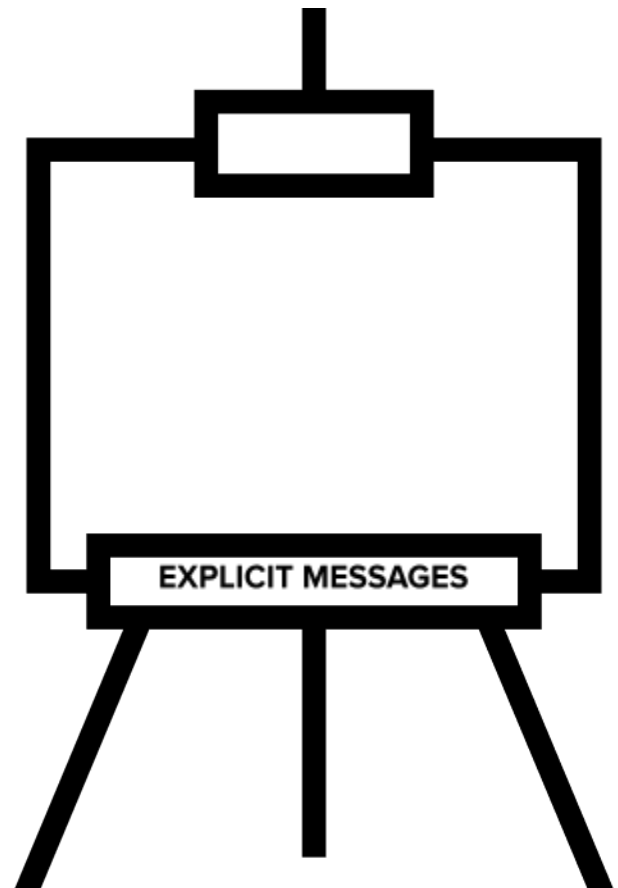
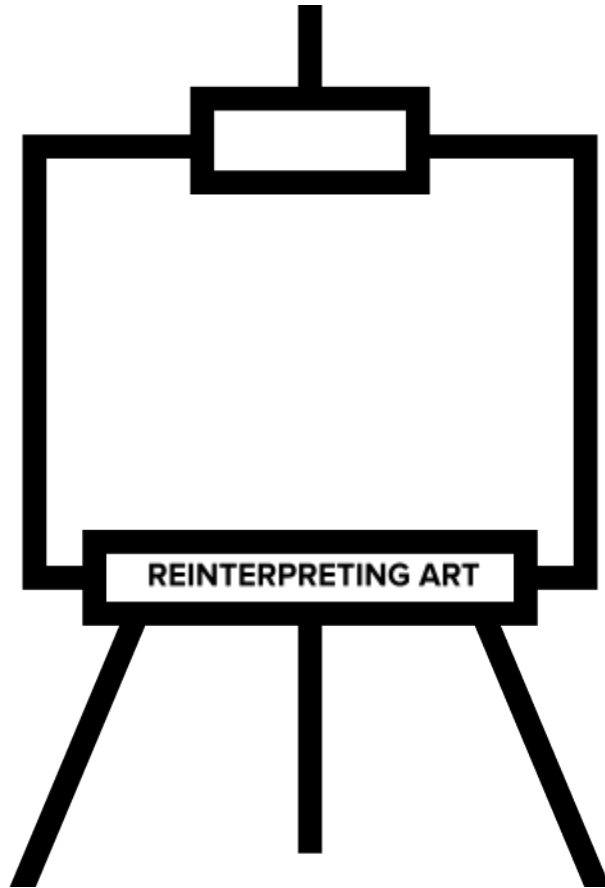
- Access to the internet for student research
- Print copies of Student Resource: Re-/Interpretation Toolkit – one per student
- Tape

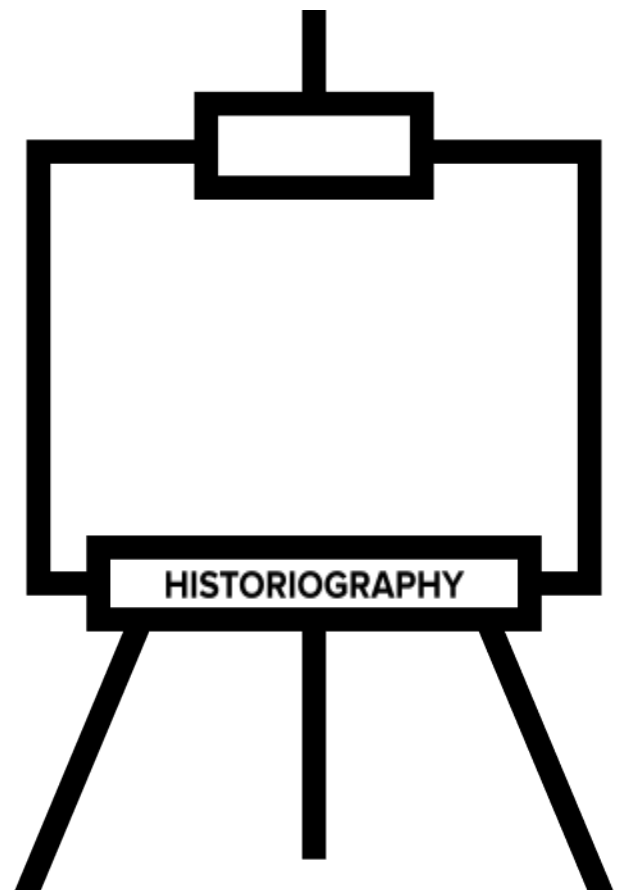
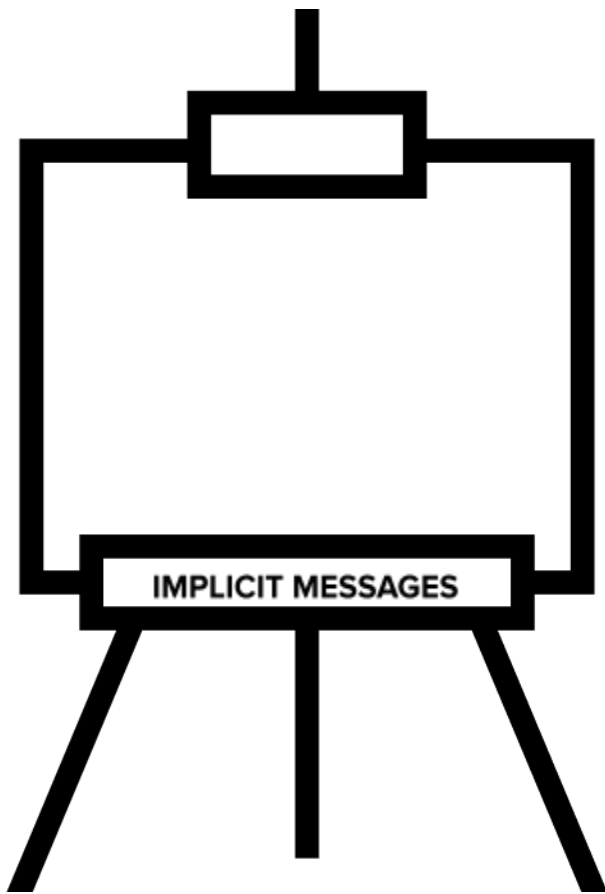
Extension Activity

- Following their research on a specific art piece, have students consider how it can better reflect history. Encourage creative options: watercolour/oil painting, collage, sculpture, photograph, short film, diorama, dramatization, poetry/spoken word. Students may also include a written piece to accompany the artwork: journal, reflection, essay, etc. and/or a presentation of their art piece with an explanation of their perspective/reinterpretation.
- For other engagement activities, see: Historical Thinking Concepts: HBC Art Gallery and Artist Bio sheet (back of the package).

Student Resource: Re-/Interpretation Toolkit

PART A: Based on what you learned, write an overview/explanation of each term as it applies to interpreting art:





PART B:

Choose one of the HBC calendar art pieces and interpret it using the questions below.

Explicit and Implicit Messages

- What is happening in the image?
- Identify the explicit and implicit messages.
- What is/are the theme(s)?
- What do you like or dislike about the image?

Historical Background Research

The Artist:

- Who was the artist of the art piece?
- What are some interesting things that happened in their life?
- Why do you think they were chosen to create a picture for the HBC calendar?
- What other paintings/drawings did they create? Choose one or two other art pieces. Compare and contrast them to your chosen painting.
- What may be the artist's HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE of the subject of the image?

The Image:

- Research the setting, time-period, event/individual in the painting? Is the depiction of the event/individual historically accurate? Why/Why not?
- Why might this event/individual be HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT? What has been written about this event/individual?
- Find another painting/image about this event/individual. Compare and contrast the painting/image with your chosen piece.

Current Issues and Perspectives:

- How are the themes and ideas about the event or individual thought about today? Find a recent news article that relates to your art piece's themes or events.
- What needs to be recognized, remembered, revisited, or repaired?
- What would you do differently if you were commissioned by HBC today to create an art piece on the same topic?

Extension Activity: Artist Bio sheet

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Place an example of their art here! </div>	Name: _____
	Date of Birth/Death: _____
	Birthplace: _____
	Other biographical information: _____ _____ _____ _____
	Most Famous Art Piece: _____

5 Facts about their life:

Highlight the most interesting thing you have learned.

Main subject/theme of their paintings:

Why do you think this artist is important?

What drew you to this artist's work?

Extension Activity: Historical Thinking Concepts - HBC Calendar Art**Name:** _____**Concept & Requirement**

Evidence: What have you learned about the historical accuracy of the art piece? What evidence did you find that proves your opinion? Give 2 points.	
Historical Significance: How is the subject of the art piece important? Did the individual/s or event result in significant change or reveal something significant about HBC? Give 2 points.	
Historical Perspective: What was the perspective of HBC and/or the artist about the topic of the art piece? Give 2 points.	
Cause + Consequence: What was/were the causes and consequences of the subject (individual/s or event) of the art piece? Give 2 points.	
Continuity / Change: How have the issues represented in the art piece stayed the same and how are they different today? Give 2 points.	
Ethical Dimension: What needs to be recognized, remembered, revisited, or repaired? Give 2 points.	