



# A Local Canvas: Art & Society

Image: Patti Jack, "Burning of Houses during the Great Fire of 1900", 1900, watercolour on paper, Bytown Museum, P494

This program allows students to explore the Bytown Museum's *A Local Canvas* virtual exhibit, exposing them to unique paintings highlighting Ottawa's local sites, people, and artists. Students assess their reactions to various art pieces, and investigate the ways in which art reflects the society in which it was created. Students are also given the opportunity to produce a unique art piece of their own, and to share this piece with the Bytown Museum.

**Program Duration:** 90-120 minutes

**Grade Level (Ontario):** Grade 9 (AVI10), Grade 10 (AVI20)

# Curriculum Connections (Ontario)

## AVI10 | Grade 9 Visual Arts, Open

During this program, students will:

- B1.1 identify and describe their initial reactions to a variety of art works
- B1.2 identify, on the basis of examination, elements and principles of design used in various art works, and describe their effects
- B1.3 interpret a variety of historical and/or contemporary art works
- B2.2 identify ways in which various art works reflect the society in which they were created

## AVI20 | Grade 10 Visual Arts, Open

During this program, students will:

- B1.1 identify and describe their initial reactions to a variety of art works, and explain the reasons for their reactions
- B1.2 identify and describe the elements and principles of design used in their own art works and the works of others, and describe their effects
- B1.3 explore and interpret a variety of art works, both historical and contemporary, to identify and describe their purpose and style, the materials used, and the meanings the works convey
- B2.2 identify and describe ways in which various art works reflect the society in which they were created

## Delivery Details

This program consists of independent and exploration-based study, best suited to individual or small-group work. Students will require access to the Bytown Museum's website in order to view the virtual [A Local Canvas](#) exhibit. If students choose to complete the extension component of the program, they will require access to materials with which to produce art, as well as a camera and internet access to [share](#) their piece with the Bytown Museum.



Image: W. Chesterton, "Ottawa Locks at Entrance Bay", 1895, oil on canvas, Bytown Museum, P330

# A Local Canvas: Art & Society



## How does art reflect society?

Visual art is a powerful medium used throughout history to express ideas and values, and to document events relevant to artists and their communities. As such, art pieces often reflect the societies in which they were created. For example, art can reflect:

- Beliefs, religions or spiritual practices
- Cultural practices and social norms
- Available materials or technologies
- Government, institutions, and censorship
- Artistic trends and styles
- Major events (e.g. wars, disasters)
- Location, landscape, and geography

## About this Program

This program explores the Bytown Museum's newest temporary exhibit, *A Local Canvas: Paintings from the Bytown Museum Collection*. This exhibit features a broad mix of paintings from the museum's collection, and covers a variety of topics from the region's history.

During this program, you will explore the Bytown Museum's virtual exhibit, where you will explore the paintings, discuss your reactions to them, and dig deeper into the ways that they were influenced by the societies in which they were created.

The exhibit can be accessed here:

<https://bytownmuseum.com/exhibitions/temporary-gallery/>

After your analysis, you will have the opportunity to create an art piece of your own, inspired by the *A Local Canvas* exhibit. You will then be able to share this with the Bytown Museum, for a chance to have your work featured on its social media pages!

Image: J. Goodall, "Nature in 1857, Bytown", c.1857, oil on canvas, Bytown Museum, P560

## Part A: Exploring the Exhibit

Visit the Bytown Museum's website and explore the [A Local Canvas](#) exhibit using the virtual tour.

**Choose any one of the non-portrait paintings for your analysis, and answer the following questions.**

Which painting did you select?

What is the subject of the painting?

What emotions and mood are conveyed by the painting? What strategies does the artist use to convey these feelings? (e.g. colour, use of space/shape/lines, etc.)

What do you think was the artist's intent when making this painting? Why?

What is your overall opinion of the painting? Do you have any personal experiences that affect how you feel about this painting?

## Part B: Research

In order to understand your chosen painting more thoroughly, it is important to understand its historical and societal context.

Using details from the exhibit and your own research, consider:

- What is the setting (time and place) of the painting? What major historical events occurred at this time?
- What social groups and trends were present during the painting's time period? Did cultural practices, social norms, or popular beliefs have an effect on this painting?
- What were the major artistic trends and styles when the painting was created? What materials and technologies were available? How is this reflected in the painting?

## Part C: Discussion & Reflection

Discuss your research with a group or partner.

- Did your research help you to understand the context in which the painting was created?
- What are the most significant ways in which the painting has been influenced by the society in which it was created?
- Do you think that the painting is perceived the same way by society today as by society when it was created?

After your research and analysis, what do you think is the purpose/function of this painting? Has your interpretation of the painting changed since your initial impression of it?

## SAMPLE: Painting Analysis

### Part A: Exploring the Exhibit

Painting selected: C.W. Jefferys, "The First Lumber Raft down the Ottawa River, 1806", n.d., ink on paper, Bytown Museum, P750.

This painting depicts a lumber raft on the Ottawa River. There are 12 men on the raft, and the raft appears to be in motion.



The painting conveys an energetic **tone**. This is created through many of the artist's **strategies**. Firstly, the artist has created movement in the painting through the raftsmen's body language, the perspective of the painting, and contrast of sharp and flowing brush strokes in the water. As well, the artist has used a wide palette of colours, with a dark value throughout. This draws the **audience's attention** to the entirety of the painting, capturing the energy and vastness of the scene, rather than directing focus to one stationary point.

I think that the **artist's intention** when creating this painting was to capture the significant historical event (first lumber raft on the Ottawa River), but also to convey the effort and strategy involved in the lumbering industry. Overall, I think that this painting is effective in its use of techniques to convey its message. I feel that it is very vibrant in its tone, and the artist has done a great job of capturing the event and its emotions. This painting brings back **my own memories** of white-water kayaking – I think that the artist's portrayal of the water is very realistic, and as such, I have a better **connection** with and understanding of the realities of life in this setting.

### Part B: Research

This painting takes place on the Ottawa River in 1806, and depicts the first lumber raft to travel on it. This raft was conducted by Philemon Wright, and traveled from Hull to Montreal. The timber trade began to grow along the Ottawa River as the United Kingdom required a new source of lumber for shipbuilding during the Napoleonic Wars. Lasting until about 1900, the timber trade was instrumental in the growth of the region, contributing to the development of population, industry, and economy along the river. Philemon Wright, who is steering the raft depicted, was a major lumber baron at the time, and founded Wright's Town, which became Hull. (Source: C.W. Jefferys)

While many workers in the lumber industry's later years were French Canadians, early lumbermen were primarily American, Scottish, or Irish settlers. One of the most significant ways that this is made evident in the painting is in the clothing of the lumbermen. French Canadian lumbermen traditionally wore the *ceinture flechée*, a long, patterned sash with many traditional and utilitarian purposes. However, this painting accurately reflects its intended time period, as the raftsmen are dressed in a more traditionally American style. (Source: Bytown Museum)

C.W. Jefferys (1869-1951) was born in Kent and settled in Toronto around 1880, shortly thereafter beginning formal artistic training. At the time, much of Canadian art had heavy European influences; however, later in Jefferys' lifetime, a more distinctly Canadian artistic style was being moulded by artists such as himself and the Group of Seven. Throughout Jefferys' time, the major artistic trends were romanticism and realism. This painting reflects the intersection of these trends. Firstly, in the nature of romanticism, it appears to glorify its subject in hindsight, particularly demonstrated through the pose and situation of Philemon Wright. The painting also strongly conveys its mood and emotion, as described above. Nonetheless, this painting is not entirely painted in the style of romanticism, and lacks many of its major traits, such as the use of imagination and "creation from nothingness". Rather, the painting also draws from the trend of realism, which focuses on accurate representation of subject matter. This is seen in the painting's detailed colour choices, as well as its foundation in real, non-speculative depiction. Overall, this painting by C.W. Jefferys is an excellent reflection of the transitional nature of art styles in Canada at the time, and thus reflects the society in which it was created. (Source: C.W. Jefferys, Encyclopedia Britannica)

### Part C: Discussion & Reflection

My research definitely helped me to understand the context in which the painting was created. Particularly, I was interested in the different styles of painting employed by C.W. Jefferys when creating this painting. I think that this is one of the most significant ways that the painting has been influenced by the society in which it was created, as the art is a unique blend of various styles and influences. I also found it interesting to research the artist, as I did not know that he was a very well-known historical painter. Therefore, it is interesting to consider his art as not only a representation of history, but also as a representation of the influences that society had had on the representation of history in the time between actual events and Jefferys' documentation of them.

I think that this painting is meant to document this historical event, and to present it as significant and as worthy of celebration. I think that at the time that it was created, it would have been well-received, particularly due to the emergence of a Canadian artistic style at the time, and given C.W. Jefferys' status as a prolific Canadian historical painter. In present day, I think that it is received slightly differently, particularly to the general public, as Jefferys' reputation and his painting's subject matter are further detached from our current reality. Therefore, I think that this painting would be viewed as interesting, but as less culturally significant than it may have been in the past. Overall, my interpretation of it has become more informed due to my research, and I think that general audiences' impressions of it would be changed with knowledge of its context as well.

Image: "Scenic View of Water and Hills", n.d., watercolour on paper, Bytown Museum, P352.



## Part D: Extension Activity

After your reflections on portraiture, we invite you to create a painting of your own! Choose a landscape or event from Ottawa or its surroundings as your subject, taking inspiration from the *A Local Canvas* exhibit. Pay special attention to techniques such as colour and space, and consider how your society and perspectives influence your art.

As you create your painting, consider some of the following features to convey your work's message and purpose:

- Use of colour, space, line, and technique
- Choice of materials
- Significance of subject

We would love to see your artwork!

If you choose, you can submit your artwork to the Bytown Museum using this [form](https://forms.gle/g3NSJS1UT5whL83DA). You may have the chance to have your art posted on the Bytown Museum's social media pages. The link to the form is:

<https://forms.gle/g3NSJS1UT5whL83DA>

You can see the Bytown Museum's current social media pages at:

[@bytownmuseum](https://www.instagram.com/bytownmuseum) on Instagram

[Bytown Museum | Musée Bytown](https://www.facebook.com/BytownMuseum) on Facebook

Image: T.E. Curry, "Image of a Shoreline", n.d., watercolour on paper, Bytown Museum, P4227



# Thank you for participating!



## About the Bytown Museum

Housed in Ottawa's oldest stone structure, the Bytown Museum explores the city's history from the early years of Rideau Canal construction, through the rough and tumble days of Bytown, to its emergence as Canada's capital and beyond.

The Bytown Museum is Ottawa's museum, exploring the stories and values of an evolving city and its residents from its First Peoples through the early days as Bytown to present day Ottawa. The Museum is committed to engaging our visitors and community in discovery and dialogue as we aim to deepen the many connections within and between our diverse communities.

