Historica Canada Education Portal

Inukshuk

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Inukshuk Heritage Minute, which depicts an RCMP officer watching a group of Inuit build an Inukshuk in the year 1931.

Aims

Students will learn about the "traditional" Inuit way of life and cultural expression.

These activities are intended to give students an appreciation and understanding of the Inuit culture and "traditional" way of life, as well as an understanding of how new technologies might alter Inuit culture.

Activities

1. Looking at the Minute

Watch the Minute for clues about Inuit life.

- After reading the account of Inuit life and watching the Minute, speculate

about what the Inuit family is doing? During what season does the Minute take place? Describe the location. What might the family be doing at that site? What signs are there that the Inuit and European Canadians have been in contact with each other for some time?

- Look closely at the clothes the Inuit characters are wearing. What do you think they are made of? Is there any evidence of skill in their workmanship or of artistry in their decoration?
How does the Minute reinforce the article's statement about Inuit social life?

2. Cultural expression

Inuit prints and sculpture have become famous throughout the world for their beauty and their expressiveness.

- Collect examples of Inuit art from books and magazines. Discuss the many ways the artwork reflects the traditional life of the Inuit, as well as the impact of "Southern" culture on that tradition.

- Have students do some research about Inuit myths and spiritual beliefs. Find examples of artwork that reflect religious beliefs. Students may want to tell some Inuit stories and illustrate them with prints or sculpture.

3. Contact with the south

The Minute takes place in 1931, after the Inuit have had years of contact with Canadians of European ancestry. In fact, it uses the contact between the Inuit family and the RCMP officer as the means of explaining the custom of building the inukshuk.

- From reading the story and watching the Minute, what are some of the most obvious differences between "traditional" Inuit life and the way most of us in "southern Canada" live? Think about some of the basics of shelter, food, clothing, work, and travel as starting points.

- Imagine what the impact of new technologies might be upon people living the traditional life. What might occur if they receive snowmobiles? Televisions and satellite dishes? Prefabricated houses? Frozen food?

- Is it possible to preserve important traditions under the impact of modernization? What might the Inuit do to keep the best of their ancestral customs and beliefs, while still benefiting from what the modern world has to offer?

- Learn more about the actual impact that "westernization" has had on Inuit life. One interesting source is the National Film Board documentary, *Magic in the Sky,* which shows the effects of television on the Inuit communities and the establishment of the Inuit's own television network.

- Nunavut is the name of the Inuit homeland that became a Canadian Territory on April 1, 1999. How might this recognition of the Inuit self-government contribute to the preservation of their cultural identity.

- What similar cultural crises have occurred with other aboriginal groups in Canada? What means might they take to preserve and enhance their traditional cultures? What changes have occurred in the government's position toward aboriginal people and in the public's appreciation of their history?

- As another extension, look at the conditions of indigenous cultures all over the world.

Resources

- Heritage Minute: Inukshuk

- Aboriginal Arts & Stories
- The Canadian Encyclopedia: Inuit