

Voyageur Canoe

Artist: Ralph Ireland



Curriculum Links

Social Studies

History

Drama

Dance

Before You Visit:

Ralph Ireland's 2,000-pound relief sculpture, with its carved crew of twelve, is a life-sized replica of the massive canoes that sailed the waters of Canada over two centuries ago, helping the young nation's vital fur trade to flourish. The artist, Mr. Ireland, here reproduces in great detail the explorer's canoe used in the 17th and 18th centuries. These canoes crossed the Great Lakes and traveled the length of the Mississippi River as far south as Louisiana. The traditional outfits and headgear are as one would find depicted in the books of history, lending great authenticity to the work.

The passengers on board are the early explorers known as "*Coueurs-de-Bois*" or runners of the woods. To these men the king entrusted the task of exploring the land later to be known as New France. Their commercial prowess and understanding of the culture of Native Americans made them the guides of choice in the exploration of the West. They also explored large parts of Eastern and Central United States, as well as other regions of Canada.

Definition

Coueurs-de-Bois:

noun, plural \koo-rœr duh bwah\

Unlicensed traders who, during the French regime in Canada, escaped to the woods and lived with the Indians. In an attempt to regulate even the trade with the Indians, the government of New France prohibited traders from going to the Indian country without a licence or conge. Licences were granted, only to a favoured few, and from an early date the young men of the colony, lured by the life of adventure in the wilds and the chances of, fortune, began to desert the seigniories of New France for the freedom and ease of the Indian villages. Toward the end of the 17th century, it was estimated that one-third of the able-bodied men of the colony were *Coueurs-de-Bois*. These "bushrangers" played an important part in the development of the fur-trade and in the exploration of Canada under the French regime.

Development in the Classroom:

Step 1: Begin a discussion by asking the students to think about something they **need** and share a few answers. Continue by asking them to think of something they **want** and share again. Discuss the difference between needs and wants.

- A **need** is something that is necessary for survival, such as food and shelter.
- A **want** is simply something that a person would like to have.

People have to make choices about what things they need and what they want. Why? (People's first concern is survival. Money is often a deciding factor as well). Think back in time when the First Nations came in contact with the European. Did they use money then? (No, they traded) What is trade? (Trade is the exchange of goods). Why do people trade? (To acquire things they do not have or can't get except through trade).

Step 2: Ask students if they think the First Nations people needed to trade? Why or why not? Why did they trade? Have a discussion about the First Nations use of what was available to them to meet their basic needs. They did some trading with other First Nations groups before the Europeans but much of this trade was for wants such as shells and obsidian. Ask the students if they do any trading? What items are traded? Do we still trade today?



Step 3: Now have students brainstorm and make a list of objects they might like to trade (5-10 items). Now ask them to decide how they are going to put a value on items (*not money but some other measure such as 1 hockey card=2 Pokémon cards or 1 Barbie=3 outfits of clothes for a Barbie*). Note: This will be challenging and is included to help students begin to consider how complicated the trading process was especially when trading is between different cultures.

Step 4: Finally, ask students whether they like the concept of trading or do they prefer using money. Why or Why not?

Step 5: After students have grasped the concept of how the Early Settlers used trading, introduce The *Coueurs-de-Bois*, or "forest runners", the men who hunted and traded furs in early Canada. Use the attached sheet to discuss one in particular.

Development in the Sculpture Park:

Dance:

While looking at the Sculpture, note the figures and the placement of their arms and hands. Notice where the artist has placed them inside the canoe and how many of them there are.

Step 1: Group students into “Voyageur Parties” of six: one student will be at the front of an imaginary canoe, one at the back, four will be in the middle in groups of two of two’s.

Step 2: Just as if they are in a canoe, imagine holding paddles by using long/short and fast/slow strokes to move the canoe down the river. Practicing symmetry and leg movement the students create their own dance, going from high to low, to mimic waves they might encounter.

Step 3: Once a pattern develops, the student in the back can hold a drum and count out time, while students in the front lead the dance. Students in the middle can show symmetrical and asymmetrical paddle thrusts and rhythms as the dance continues. This interpretive movement tells the narrative about the journeys of the *Coueurs-de-Bois*, which students in the audience can then re-tell during or after performance

Step 4: Give students lots of time and space to work together to create their dance movements to share with the class in the Park or back in the classroom. Video tape the best one for the class blog!

Teacher Prompts:

- *What changes during a storm? Did they paddle up stream? Over rapids?*
- *Did they have to get out and life (portage) their canoe over a beaver dam?*
- *Did they lose a pack and have to turn around and retrieve the valuable cargo?*

Closure:

Step 1: Print copies and read the contract below.

Step 2: Explore idea of agreements and contracts between the King and fur traders by providing students with an idea of the amount of wages and the work load of a *Coureur-de-Bois*.

Step 3: Have students fill in their name and write a short paragraph on what it might be like to become a “Forest Runner” for three years.

Teacher Prompts:

- *What dangers might they encounter?*
- *Would they be considered wealthy when they finished?*
- *Why might some of them want to quit early*

Materials:

- Drums
- Video Camera
- Paper
- Pencils



Voyageur Contract

BEFORE THE NOTARIES of the Province of Lower Canada, at

(School Name) _____,

the Undersigned; was present

(Voyageur's name)

Who of his/her own free will has engaged and engages him/her to:

The City of Windsor agreeing and accepting, as their first command, leaving from Montreal, in the position of voyageur, in one of their Canoes, for making the voyage, going to the City of Detroit.

The details of the role of voyageur under the commission of the City of Windsor:

1. To carry two packs over the Grande Portage, and extra packs on leaving.
2. To have \$5.00 deducted from pay for each pack short.
3. To work six days a week.
4. Take good and due care of said packs upon the voyages.
5. To serve, obey, and execute faithfully all requests brought upon by the City representative.
6. To act in a lawful and honest manner at all times.
7. To avoid damages to packs and canoes.
8. To generally be a good employee and not quit before completion of the three year term or under the penalties imposed by the Laws of this Province, lose his/her wages (approximately \$200.00 for three year term).
9. Obliges himself to contribute one percent of his/her wages for the Voyageur Fund.

Signed this _____ of _____, 20_____
(Day) (Month) (Year)



Extensions

Drama: Students will develop or extend understanding of the following concepts through participation in various drama experiences while in the park or classroom.

REVIEWING THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

- **Role/Character:** adopting a role and maintaining focus in role; communicating character traits and character choices through body language/movement and gestures; sustaining belief in character (e.g., using the first-person point of view while speaking); varying voice (e.g., diction, pace, volume, projection, enunciation)
- **Relationship:** developing and analysing relationships between and among characters in a drama
- **Time and Place:** establishing a clear setting; sustaining belief in the setting

Step 1: Using the picture of **Pierre Esprit Radisson (Coureurs-de-Bois, Fur Trader)** below, guide students through an analysis of the significance of his traditional gear (e.g., feather in his hat, pouch on his belt made of hide, his necklace). Note the details that make him acceptable to the Aboriginal peoples, the French, and the British.

Step 2: Read the story on page 6. Have costume props on hand for students to take turns in wearing costumes and role playing Radisson in small groups. Emphasize the relationship with both the Aboriginals and the Europeans by having students each take a role in their relationship to the *Coureurs-de-Bois*.



Teacher Prompts:

- *Why is he standing the way he is?*
- *What does this suggest about his role in society?*

More on Pierre Esprit Radisson:

For this photo, his journey or more details on the Coureurs-de-Bois visit **Windsor's Community Museum**. Near the Sculpture Park at 254 Pitt St. W., Windsor, ON.



Pierre Esprit Radisson (Coureurs-de-Bois, Fur Trader)

A simple coureur de bois, who had lived, hunted, and killed with the Indians, he was involved in matters of international importance, moved in court circles, and conversed with kings. Sometime French and Catholic, sometime English and (probably) Protestant, he witnessed the plague and the fire of London, the coronation of James II, the founding of the HBC. He wintered in the frozen north and went campaigning in the Caribbean. Though Radisson was an opportunist and a disturbing and unreliable character, we cannot but admire his versatility and his exuberance.

To understand the fire behind exploration, one must understand the economic motivation. For the French in North America, it was the fur trade.

The French fur trader and explorer, whose reports of fur resources in North America are generally credited with the development of this industry was Pierre Esprit Radisson. Along with his brother-in-law, Menard Chouart des Groseilliers, Radisson surveyed much of the Great Lakes country in minute detail, which would be useful for scientific as well as economic development.

Each of the European powers viewed the economic development of North America in a different way. The English came primarily to establish a permanent presence on the land itself. The Dutch came as traders. The Spanish came for gold. The French also came for gold, but discovered wealth in furs. While the Spanish searched the Southwest for gold mines, the French explored the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes country. Beaver were plentiful and the French discovered that their fur was of a high quality. As they exported beaver pelts to Europe, French trappers and traders reached deeper into the heart of what is now the United States than any other nationality.

From the beginning, the French had dominated the lucrative fur trade, but in 1670, England's King Charles II (1630-1685) chartered the Hudson's Bay Company, which marked the beginning of a major British effort to exploit the resources of the territory north of the St. Lawrence River.

Radisson made four voyages into the interior of the North American continent, on one of which he was captured by the Iroquois, but later was released at Albany. His last expedition, made with his brother-in-law, took him as far west as what is now known as the State of Minnesota. He returned with a large store of furs which were confiscated by the French in Montreal, who charged him and Groseilliers with trading without a license. Radisson promptly joined the English and began his long association with the Hudson's Bay Company, which was broken only once, when he rejoined the French to plunder English forts on Hudson Bay. However, he ultimately threw in his lot with the British and later was pensioned by the Hudson's Bay Company.