

BLM 3.1: Aboriginal Spirituality and Art

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Background Information

In this activity, you will be exploring the Woodland style of painting developed by Norval Morrisseau. Woodland painting is an art tradition and style practised primarily by Anishinabe and Cree artists from the northern woodlands of North America. Many paintings reflect the teachings and legends handed down from generation to generation by the elders. They reflect a deep interconnectedness of God/the Creator and all of creation and the equality of all of creation. No one member of creation is more significant or important than another.

Basic Elements of Aboriginal Art

Stylistic elements common to Aboriginal paintings include

- spirit lines, which often radiate from the spines of animals or emanate from both the interior and exterior of figures (e.g., animals, birds, humans)
- depictions of spiritual power
- the relationship of human beings to the greater world and to other beings

Elements that identify Woodland art in particular are

- figures that are outlined and look like X-rays (animals, fish, birds, plants, and humans)
- balls or seeds of spirit power, which often float within the picture
- circles, which represent the sacredness of the circle in Aboriginal spirituality
- simple forms outlined in black filled with bright colours that reflect the mood of the painting

Group Task

- Go to the Student Centre of the website to find an Aboriginal painting you would like to analyze. Be sure all members of your group are comfortable with the choice.
- When you examine the piece of art you have selected, look for the elements listed above and prepare to share with the class your interpretation of the spiritual elements it contains. Note any elements that reflect an interconnected relationship—humans to nature, animals to fish, God/the Creator to humans, etc.