

INDEPENDENT STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITY
FOR GRADES 7-12

Decolonization

through the art of

Robert Houle

MAKE A CREATIVE
RESPONSE TO A
TREATY TEXT

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TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Using Robert Houle’s art as a starting point, this independent activity will examine treaty texts and decolonization in art. This activity has been written to complement the Art Canada Institute online art book [Robert Houle: Life & Work](#) by Shirley Madill and adapted from the Teacher Resource Guide “Learn about Decolonization through the art of Robert Houle.” For additional learning materials, please see the Art Canada Institute collection of [Teacher Resource Guides](#).

In this activity, students will research a treaty that is relevant to their local community and create an artwork to demonstrate their reflections on their personal connections to the treaty. Students will need previous experience in analyzing a variety of primary and secondary sources and synthesizing this knowledge.

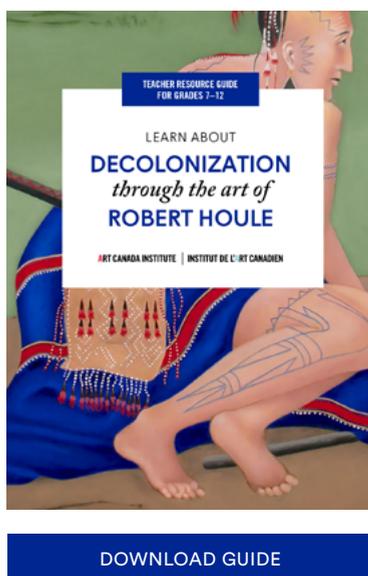
The activity requires copies of a treaty text for students to read, analyze, and respond to. If your school does not have a copy of a text to work with, please consult the Teacher Resource Guide “Learn about Decolonization through the art of Robert Houle” or your local school board for suggested resources.

Within this activity, your students will have the opportunity to engage in critical discussion. Several platforms, such as Jamboard, Parlay, and Flipgrid, may be used to help foster rich dialogue among students throughout this activity.

Students will also have the opportunity to share their work with their peers at the end of this activity. Applications for creating a communal gallery space include CoSpaces Edu, Google Classroom, and Seesaw.

Curriculum Connections

- Grades 7–8 Social Studies
- Grades 9–12 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies
- Grades 9–12 History
- Grades 9–12 Visual Arts



ADAPTED FROM

Learn about Decolonization through the art of Robert Houle

Grades 7 to 12

THEMES

- Creative responses to historical events and treaties
- Decolonization
- Importance of treaties nationally and within students’ communities
- Indigenous experiences of major historical events



Robert Houle is the oldest of fifteen children.



BORN: March 28, 1947
PLACE OF BIRTH: St. Boniface, Manitoba

While working as a curator, Houle travelled across the country to meet other Indigenous artists, and he championed their art.

GET TO KNOW THE ARTIST



BEST KNOWN FOR:
Powerful artworks that challenge viewers to reflect on the history of Indigenous Peoples and colonial oppression in Canada



“It was an aspiration of mine to be an art teacher as well as an artist. When I decided to be an artist, my mother told me to paint only what I know.”

In high school, Houle played football and hockey, and he was the editor of the school yearbook and newspaper.

ROBERT HOULE



In 2015 Houle received a Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, one of the most prestigious arts awards in Canada.



NOTABLE ARTISTIC INFLUENCES:
Saulteaux culture; the New York School of Abstract Expressionism; European Romanticism

INDEPENDENT STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITY

MAKE A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO A TREATY TEXT

Robert Houle (b.1947) is one of the most celebrated contemporary artists in Canada. He is of Anishnabe-Saulteaux heritage and a member of Sandy Bay First Nation, Treaty 1 Territory, in Manitoba. Houle's work examines colonialism in Canada, from events that took place decades ago to ongoing practices, and he has described his work as a form of decolonization. Decolonization has been defined in different ways, but fundamentally it is about confronting colonialism by challenging it and undermining it, a process that can be empowering.

In this activity, you will research a treaty that is relevant to your local community and create an artwork to demonstrate your reflections on your personal connections to the treaty.

Materials Needed

- Colour medium of choice (oil pastels, coloured pencils, markers, etc.)
- Computer, iPad, etc.
- Paper
- Pencils



Learning Goals

1. I can explain the importance of treaties for all people in Canada.
2. I can express my personal understanding of a treaty and my connection to it.
3. I can use a visual medium to respond to important social/historical/cultural events and ideas.
4. I can describe my ongoing responsibilities to participate in treaties.
5. I can participate in learning and discussion of other cultures and peoples in a respectful and constructive manner.
6. I can work co-operatively and collaboratively with my peers.

Success Criteria

1. My project demonstrates understanding of the concept of treaties.
2. My research notes demonstrate learning about a treaty relevant to the local community.
3. My artwork clearly communicates a central idea about a personal connection to the treaty.
4. My written work clearly communicates artistic decisions and the rationale behind personal artwork.
5. Written work is thoughtful, clear, and edited.
6. I am respectful and use appropriate language in my responses on the discussion board.

LEARNING PLAN

Step 1: 5 min

Watch the Art Canada Institute learning video on Robert Houle. <https://vimeo.com/466951807>

Think about what you found interesting about artist Robert Houle. Post your thoughts on the collaborative discussion board or share directly with your teacher using the preferred method of communication. Treat this space as you would a class discussion. Write clearly, structuring your thoughts carefully and paying attention to proper writing conventions.

Step 2: 5 min

Look at Houle's *Premises for Self-Rule: Treaty No. 1, 1994*, and answer the following questions:

- How would you describe the approach to composition and colour in this work?
- What message do you think Houle is trying to convey through the juxtaposition of paint, treaty text and photography?

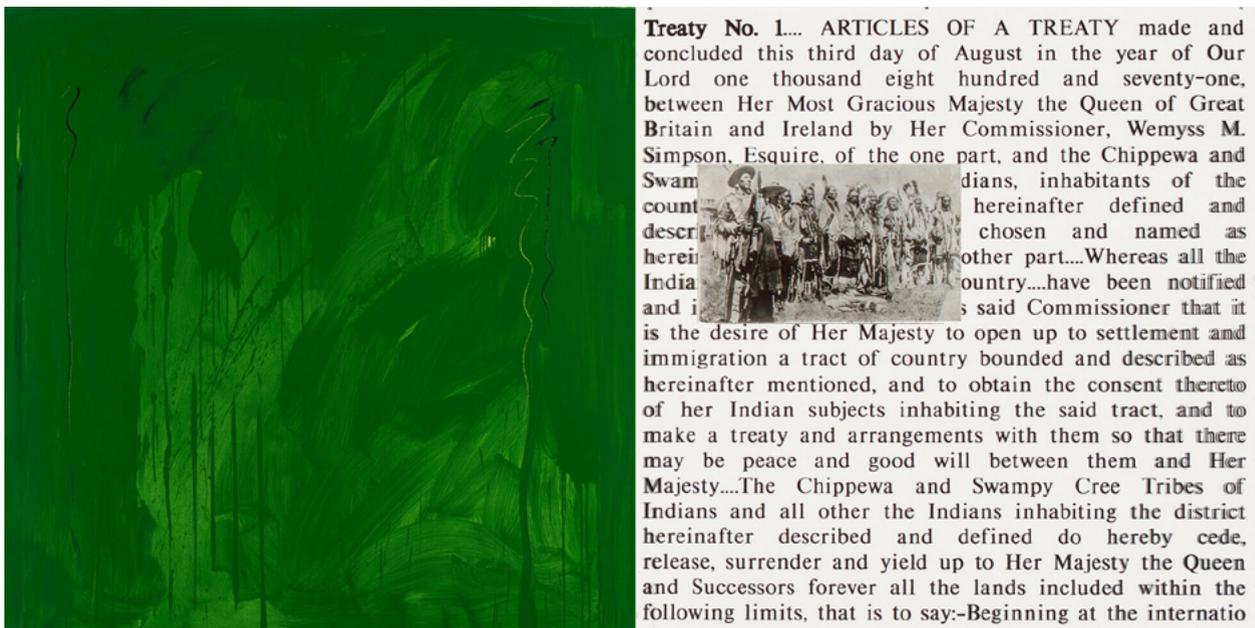
These observations may be shared with your teacher if requested or posted to a collaborative discussion board.

Step 3: 15 min

Read about [Premises for Self-Rule: Treaty No. 1](#) in *Robert Houle: Life & Work* and answer the following questions:

- What is significant about how Houle has approached history in this work? What makes you say that?

These observations may be shared with your teacher if requested or posted to a collaborative discussion board.



Robert Houle, *Premises for Self-Rule: Treaty No. 1, 1994*, oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, laser cut vinyl, 152.4 x 304.8 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery, acquired with funds from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (G-96-11 abc). © Robert Houle.

Step 4: 15 min

Read the treaty text that your teacher has provided you with. In reading it, identify and highlight phrases and other language that you think is particularly important, and write a brief statement about why the language is important.

These observations may be shared with your teacher if requested or posted to a collaborative discussion board.

Step 5: 15 min

Research the significance of the treaty using the resources that your teacher has directed you to. Answer the following questions:

- How has your understanding of the treaty text changed?
- What was the impact of the treaty?
- What does the treaty mean to you personally?

Write a brief statement and post it to the collaborative discussion board.

Step 6: 45 min

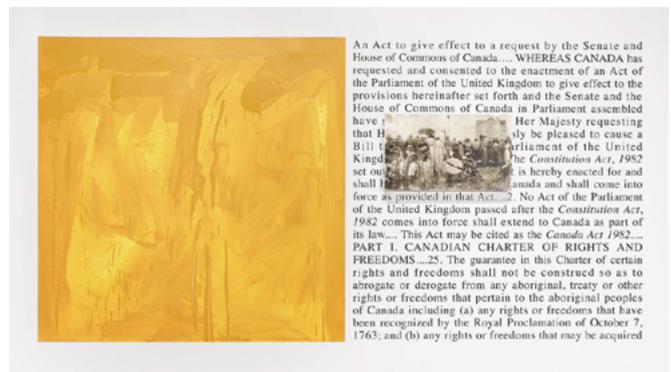
Look back at the responses you gave in Step 5 and reflect on what you have learned. Create an artwork that demonstrates your individual connection to the treaty and obligations under it. The artwork can be created in any medium (watercolours, coloured pencils, markers), and it should be about your personal identity, community, and connection to the treaty text. Keep in mind that Houle has confronted colonial treaties and legislation about land as an Indigenous artist, and his identity is fundamental to his work. Everyone will approach this project differently, depending on their own background: do not copy Houle's approach but rather find your own creative connection to what you have learned.

Step 7: 15 min

Write a short artist statement about what you have tried to achieve in your work. Write clearly and respectfully, structuring your thoughts carefully and paying attention to proper writing conventions and proper terminology. Where possible, provide specific examples from your research to support your statements (the specific treaty, the lands, and the people involved). Be sure to edit your work before you submit it, posting it and a photo of your artwork to the collaborative gallery space that your teacher has created for this assignment.

Step 8: 10 min

Take time to explore the collaborative gallery space. Review at least two other artworks and provide your peers with two stars (something they have captured well) and a wish (something you wish you had seen in their work) as feedback.



Robert Houle, *Premises for Self-Rule: Constitution Act, 1982, 1994*, oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, laser cut vinyl, 152.4 x 304.8 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, purchased with funds from the Estate of Mary Eileen Ash, 2014 (2014/1). © Robert Houle.