



INDEPENDENT STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITY
FOR GRADES 1–12

Early 20th Century Childhood

through the art of

Helen McNicoll

**EXPERIMENT WITH
ACTIVITIES INSPIRED BY
HISTORICAL CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES**

TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Using Helen McNicoll's art as a starting point, this independent activity will examine the concept of childhood, and the historical activities, pastimes, and chores of children. This activity has been written to complement the Art Canada Institute online art book [Helen McNicoll: Life & Work](#) by Samantha Burton and adapted from the Teacher Resource Guide titled "Learn about Early Twentieth-Century Childhood through the art of Helen McNicoll." For additional learning materials, please see the Art Canada Institute [Teacher Resource Guides](#).

In this activity, students will analyze paintings by Helen McNicoll to learn more about the pastimes, hobbies, and chores that were often a part of childhood life in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada.

Please note that it is suggested that you prepare supplementary material on historical activities of childhood to support your students. This can be shared through a synchronous class, an asynchronous video posted to your digital space, or an additional handout.

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 between students throughout this activity.

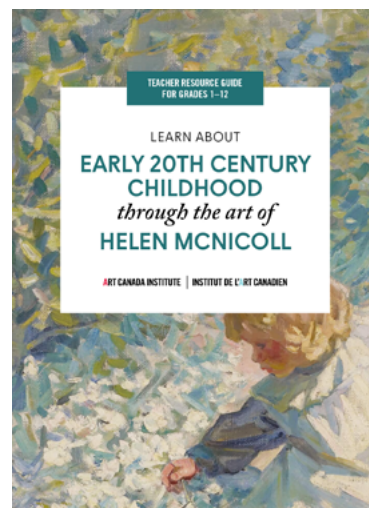
Students will also be given the opportunity to share their work with their peers at the end of this activity. Applications for creating a video message include iMovie and QuickTime. Applications for creating a communal gallery space include CoSpaces Edu, Google Classroom, and Seesaw.

A Note on Using This Activity

This activity examines a view of childhood at the turn of the twentieth century that is rooted in the writing of Enlightenment thinkers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, who saw childhood as an idealized period of tranquility and innocence before the hardships of adulthood. This outlook represented a minority in Canada and the world at the time. It is important to acknowledge that during the period in which McNicoll was working, many Indigenous children were forced to attend residential schools. As well, child labour was common. Time and care should be taken to honour the histories and experiences of all children, and to acknowledge the privilege inherent in McNicoll's depictions.

Curriculum Connections

- Grades 1–6 Language Arts
- Grades 1–6 Social Studies
- Grade 8 History
- Grades 9–12 English
- Grades 11–12 Canadian and World Studies



DOWNLOAD GUIDE

ADAPTED FROM

**Learn about Early 20th
Century Childhood
through the art of
Helen McNicoll**

Grades 1 to 12

THEMES

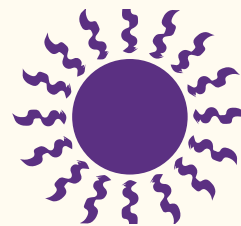
- Childhood
- Children
- Leisure activities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- Socio-economic status
- Women



McNicoll moved to St. Ives, Cornwall, in southern England, to paint by the sea.



EDUCATION:
Art Association of
Montreal



McNicoll regularly worked outside, even in extremely hot weather, and critics admired how she painted sunlight.

GET TO KNOW THE ARTIST



ART MOVEMENT:
Impressionism



BEST KNOWN FOR:
Her paintings of
women and children



McNicoll had a studio in London, England, where she worked and exhibited paintings.

HELEN MCNICOLL

McNicoll took numerous painting trips in Europe, which was very unusual for a woman in the early 1900s.



BORN: December 14, 1879

DIED: JUNE 28, 1915

PLACE OF BIRTH: Toronto, Ontario

PLACE OF DEATH: Swanage, England



INDEPENDENT STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITY

EXPERIMENT WITH ACTIVITIES INSPIRED BY HISTORICAL CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Artist Helen Galloway McNicoll was born in Toronto, Ontario, in 1879. The art of McNicoll (1879–1915), with its beautiful and idealized depictions of childhood, is a counterpoint to the realities of countless Canadian children who had lives that were very different from those in her paintings.

In this activity, you will analyze paintings by Helen McNicoll to learn more about the pastimes, hobbies, and chores that were often a part of childhood life in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada.

Materials Needed

- Computer, iPad, etc.
- Paper
- Pencils, pencil crayons, or markers

Learning Goals

1. I can use art and cultural artifacts to understand the experiences of people from history.
2. I can discuss the various chores, activities, hobbies, and pastimes of children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
3. I can use my critical thinking and creative skills to analyze an artwork.
4. I can show empathy, care, and understanding when researching the experiences of people from history.
5. I am respectful and use appropriate language in my responses on the discussion board.

Success Criteria

1. My written work shows clear evidence of research and understanding of the specific time period and place.
2. My written work shows clear evidence of research and understanding of the role of children within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
3. My written work is thoughtful, clear, and edited.
4. 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 Helen McNicoll.

<https://vimeo.com/456802095>

Think about what you found interesting about the artist Helen McNicoll. Post your thoughts on the collaborative discussion board or share them 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.



Helen McNicoll in her studio at St. Ives, c.1906, photographer unknown. Helen McNicoll artist file, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

Step 2: 5 min

McNicoll is widely known for her Impressionist paintings of women and children in the early twentieth century.

Look at the artworks by Helen McNicoll below.

- What are some of the activities, games, and chores seen in these images? Create a list of the ones you see.
- Now imagine beyond the painting. What other activities can you imagine (but do not see in the painting) the children might also be doing at these locations? Add these items to your list.

Post your list on the collaborative discussion board or share it directly with your teacher using the preferred method of communication.



Helen McNicoll, *Cherry Time*, c.1912, oil on canvas, 81.7 x 66.4 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg (1995.30.3).



Helen McNicoll, *Gathering Flowers*, c.1911, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.



Helen McNicoll, *Minding Baby*, c.1911, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Helen McNicoll, *The Blue Sea (On the Beach at St. Malo)*, c.1914, oil on canvas, 51.4 x 61 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art and Auction House.

Step 3: 5 min

Select one of the activities below.

- Picking or drying fruit
- Skipping games and chants
- Hoop rolling and other recess games/leisure activities
- Weaving
- Sewing/quilting/needlepoint
- Making butter
- Making jam
- Baking
- Tending to farm animals
- Reading (you might consider creating a list of children's books of the time)

Step 4: 60 min

Using research, create a short description and/or demonstration of the activity, pastime, game, or chore as it would have been performed in this time period. Feel free to experiment and recreate these experiences at home. You can include photographs and videos of your time spent learning this activity, pastime, game, or chore (such as baking bread, sewing, etc.) within your written post or video message.

Your teacher may have shared information regarding the historical activities of childhood and specific resources for research. Please review these materials, following your teacher's instructions.

Step 5: 5 min

Post your written response or video message on the collaborative discussion board or share it directly with your teacher using the preferred method of communication. If creating a written statement, remember to write clearly, structuring your thoughts carefully and paying attention to proper writing conventions. Be sure to edit your work before you submit it. Please note your teacher may ask you to share your learning in a synchronous class meeting.

Step 6: 10 min

Take time to explore the collaborative gallery space. Review at least two other videos/written posts 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.



Helen McNicoll, *The Farmyard*, c.1908, oil on canvas, 71 x 85.5 cm.
New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, Saint John Art Club Collection,
1995 (1995.26.26).