

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR GRADES 9–12

LEARN ABOUT
**ABSTRACTION AND
THE INSPIRATION
OF NATURE**
through the art of
JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE

ART CANADA INSTITUTE | **INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN**



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**JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE:
LIFE & WORK BY
FRANÇOIS-MARC
GAGNON**

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**JEAN PAUL
RIOPELLE
IMAGE FILE**

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

This teacher resource guide has been developed in collaboration with the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation and complements the Art Canada Institute online art book [Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work](#) by François-Marc Gagnon. The artworks within this guide and images required for the learning activities and culminating task can be found in the [Jean Paul Riopelle Image File](#) provided. This guide is also an important introduction to the celebrations being developed by the [Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation](#) to mark the centennial of the artist's birth in 2023, under the theme "Riopelle: One With Nature." It is also an invitation for teachers and students to become familiarized with Riopelle, in preparation for the deployment of an educational platform, RIOPELLE STUDIO, which will be inaugurated in the autumn of 2022 across the country on the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation website.

Jean Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) is one of the most celebrated and influential artists in the history of modern painting, and his unique approach to abstraction was foundational in establishing Quebec's contributions to modernism. One of the defining characteristics of modern art is the development of abstraction, a type of approach that prioritizes the expressive potential of developing a visual language grounded in colour, form, and texture rather than representation. Riopelle experimented with several different global influences in the development of his own visual language—but in the end, the power and authenticity of his style escapes categorization. This guide invites students to take up Riopelle's call to "go towards nature," one of the primary sources of inspiration for his abstract work, and to explore the ways in which knowledge of the natural world in Canada—including its wildlife, its habitats, and its endless motifs—offers a creative foundation for understanding how to make art in an abstract way.

Curriculum Connections

- Grades 9–12 English Language Arts
- Grades 9–12 French
- Grades 9–12 History of Quebec and Canada
- Grades 9–12 Media Arts
- Grades 9–12 Visual Arts

Themes

- Abstraction
- Canadian wildlife
- Creative expression
- Habitats
- Improvisation



Fig 1. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Composition*, 1954, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 99,1 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection, Toronto.

Teaching Exercises

The exercises in this guide explore the theme of abstraction and the inspiration of nature as represented in artworks by Jean Paul Riopelle.

- Learning Activity #1: Fantastic Improvisations: Sculpting and Scribing Canada's Iconic Wildlife ([page 4](#))
- Learning Activity #2: Going Towards Nature: Creating Wildlife Decalcomanias ([page 6](#))
- Culminating Task: Homage to Canadian Wildlife: Creating a Triptych Tribute to At-Risk Species in Canada ([page 8](#))

A Note on Using This Guide

This guide focuses on Jean Paul Riopelle's interest in animals and nature as primary sources of inspiration for his abstract works. Teachers should also be aware that Riopelle drew inspiration from other subjects of national and provincial significance, and from Indigenous cultural practices and aesthetics. To read more about this, see François-Marc Gagnon's analysis of some of Riopelle's key works in [Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work](#).

JEAN PAUL

RIOPELLE
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The production of this guide was made possible thanks to the contribution of the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation.

WHO WAS JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE?



Fig 2. Jean Paul Riopelle in Paris, 1985, photograph by Michel Nguyen. © Michel Nguyen.

Jean Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) was born to Léopold and Anna Riopelle on October 7, 1923, in Montreal. His parents supported his love of art from a young age, and they encouraged him to take private drawing and painting classes with Henri Bisson (1900–1973), a local artist, when Riopelle was thirteen years old. Bisson taught painting and drawing in the academic style, encouraging close observation and representation, and this experience was foundational in the development of Riopelle’s early skills—while also establishing what he would eventually rebel against when his interest in abstraction grew.

Riopelle continued his education at a number of celebrated institutions in Montreal. His passion for the visual arts eventually brought him to the *École du meuble*, an institution that was home to some of the most radical modern creatives of the day, including the architect

Marcel Parizeau (1898–1945), the art critic Maurice Gagnon (1904–1956), and, perhaps most importantly, the painter Paul-Émile Borduas (1905–1960)—an artist who would go on to found the legendary Quebec movement the Automatistes, and author its manifesto, *Refus global*. This text was published in 1948, and had sixteen signatories: Madeleine Arbour, Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Bruno Cormier, Marcelle Ferron, Claude Gauvreau, Pierre Gauvreau, Muriel Guilbault, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Maurice Perron, Louise Renaud, Thérèse Renaud, Françoise Riopelle, Jean Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan.

Borduas was an important influence and mentor for Riopelle. He taught avant-garde approaches that the young painter would come to embrace, including the technique that became foundational for the development of abstract painting in Quebec: [automatism](#). This strategy became a rallying cry for the Automatistes, who wanted to rebel against the insularity of Quebec society and traditional artmaking. While Riopelle’s participation in the Automatistes was a pivotal experience, he set his sights further abroad in years ahead. In 1948, Riopelle settled permanently in France. He explored abstraction in watercolour and ink, as can be seen in works like *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1953, and in oil, with paintings such as *Autriche III (Austria III)*, 1954.

It was in Paris, in 1955, that Riopelle met the celebrated American painter Joan Mitchell (1925-1992), who he would love and share his life with for twenty-five years. Though Mitchell participated in Abstract Expressionism, a movement grounded in the work of the New York School, over the course of the 1950s, Riopelle’s work became more distinctive, and less easily categorized, bringing the natural world to life in abstract yet remarkably grounded ways.

After a monumental career that included such landmark events as representing Canada at the 31st Venice Biennale in 1962, creating the iconic public sculpture *La Joute* in 1969, winning the Prix Paul-Émile-Borduas in 1981, and being named Grand Officer of the National Order of Quebec in 1994, Riopelle died on March 12, 2002, at his residence in Isle-aux-Grues. The intensity, energy, and expressiveness of his art continue to emanate in extraordinary ways today.

The year 2023 will mark both the 75th anniversary of *Refus global*, as well as the centenary of the birth of Riopelle. Important centenary celebrations will underline the contributions of the artist to the history of Canadian and international art, all over the world.



Fig 3. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1953, coloured ink on wove paper, 74.5 x 107.4 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Fig 4. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Autriche III (Austria III)*, 1954, oil on canvas, 200 x 300.7 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



Fig 5. Jean Paul Riopelle, *La Joute (The Joust)*, 1969–70 (cast in bronze c.1974), bronze, 380 cm high x 1,240 cm in diameter (approximate dimensions). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal.

NATIONAL & WORLD EVENTS



Fig 6. Tanks move through the jungle during the Vietnam War.



Fig 7. Statue of Jean Lesage in front of the Parliament Building of Quebec, Quebec City.



Fig 8. The Canadian Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal, 1967.



Fig 9. Ceremony on the occasion of the foundation of Nunavut, April 1st, 1999.

JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE'S LIFE

The École du meuble in Montreal is founded.	...	1923	.....	Jean Paul Riopelle is born in Montreal on October 7.
	...	1935		
The Second World War ends.	...	1943	.....	Riopelle enrolls at the École du meuble in Montreal, where he studies with Paul-Émile Borduas.
	...	1945	...	Riopelle starts to explore the creative potential of automatism with the painter Marcel Barbeau.
The first exhibition of the Automatistes is held in Montreal in April.	.....	1946	...	Riopelle takes part in the first exhibition of work by the Automatistes in Montreal. This same year, he travels to Paris for the first time.
The automatiste manifesto entitled <i>Refus global</i> is published.	...	1947	...	
	...	1948		
The Vietnam War begins.	...	1949	.....	From March 23 to April 23, Riopelle has his first solo exhibition in Paris at Galerie Nina Dausset.
	...	1955	.....	Riopelle meets his long-term partner, artist Joan Mitchell, in Paris.
Jean Lesage is elected as the Premier of Quebec, an event that is often associated with the start of the Quiet Revolution in the province.	...	1960		
	...	1962	.....	Riopelle represents Canada at the 31st Venice Biennale.
	...	1963	...	
The maple leaf flag is adopted in Canada.	...	1965	...	The National Gallery of Canada presents the first major retrospective of Riopelle's work in the country. The exhibition is then presented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts the same year.
Montreal hosts Expo 67.	...	1967	...	
	...	1968	...	The Musée du Québec (today the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec) presents its first major Riopelle exhibition.
Pierre Elliot Trudeau is elected Prime Minister of Canada.	...	1980		
Quebec has its first independence referendum, called by the Parti Québécois.	...	1994	.....	Riopelle is named a Grand Officer of the National Order of Quebec.
	...	1999	...	Riopelle dies on March 12 at his residence in Isle-aux-Grues.
On April 1, Nunavut officially becomes a territory in Canada.	...	2002	...	
	...	2023	.....	International celebrations marking the centenary of the birth of Riopelle.



Fig 10. Jean Paul Riopelle, c.1928, photographer unknown. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle. This photograph of Riopelle, then about five years old, shows his early love of fishing.



Fig 11. Jean Paul Riopelle in his studio on rue Durantin, Paris, in 1952. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Photograph by John Craven. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.



Fig 12. Jean Paul Riopelle on the occasion of the exhibition *Riopelle, peintures, estampes (Riopelle, Paintings, Prints)* held at the Musée des beaux-arts and at the Hôtel d'Escoville in Caen, Normandy, 1984, photograph by P. Victor. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

LEARNING ACTIVITY #1

FANTASTIC IMPROVISATIONS: SCULPTING AND SCRIBING CANADA'S ICONIC WILDLIFE

Improvisation is at the heart of many forms of abstract artmaking that were influential for Jean Paul Riopelle. The Surrealists, for example, were interested in the creative potential of the subconscious mind and the ability to produce works of art and literature in an intuitive, spontaneous, and collective way. Riopelle once associated sculpture with spontaneity, stating: “when I was small—and still today when I get the chance—I made snow sculptures. Starting with the traditional children’s snowman, I would create fantastic improvisations to which my bronzes owe a great deal.” With this in mind, students will produce “fantastic improvisations” of their own, creating clay sculptures in response to some of Canada’s most iconic wildlife creatures and penning collective poems in the manner of the Surrealists.

Big Idea

Characteristics of Canadian wildlife

Learning Goals

1. I can learn about wildlife in Canada.
2. I can practice Surrealist modes of written and artistic expression.
3. I can work collaboratively on a creative activity.

Materials

- Buckets of water
- Clay
- Computers and access to internet for research
- [Jean Paul Riopelle Image File](#)
- Plastic sheets to cover desks
- Paper
- Pens and pencils
- “Who Was Jean Paul Riopelle?” biographic information sheet ([page 2](#))

Process

1. As an icebreaker activity, show students a series of images of Canadian wildlife, and have them write down descriptors for each image without thinking too much about what they are writing. Ask them to focus on the following question: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you see this animal? Animals might include beavers, caribou, monarch butterflies, polar bears, beluga whales, and Canada geese (images can be found on the wwwf.ca website).



Fig 13. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hibou A (Owl A)*, 1969–70, (cast c.1974), bronze, 1/4, 143 x 93 x 74 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City.

Learning Activity #1 continued

2. Once students have written descriptors for each of the animals, ask them to share their descriptors with the group. Assign an animal to each student and provide time to research the following questions about their assigned animal. Students will then share their preliminary research with the class.

- What species is this animal?
- Where in Canada has the largest population of this animal?
- What is the major habitat for this animal?
- What are some of the most defining characteristics of this animal?

3. Introduce students to the work of Jean Paul Riopelle using the biographic information sheet, and show them the following selection of works that he created that were inspired by animals:

- *Hibou – Jet Black*, 1970
- *Poisson sur fond bleu*, 1968
- *L'ours*, 1969–70

Ask students to make observations about some of the characteristics of Riopelle's style in relation to the works you are sharing. Use this as an opportunity to introduce some of the techniques that Riopelle was interested in, such as [automatism](#) and [lyrical abstraction](#).

4. Going further into detail about these approaches to abstract artmaking, emphasize that these techniques bring together two of Riopelle's primary interests: working in an abstract and spontaneous way, and going towards nature for inspiration.

5. Put students in small groups of three and assign each student group a wildlife animal from Step 1. Using their descriptors and research as inspiration, have students engage abstract techniques to create a collective, spontaneous clay sculpture inspired by their wildlife animal, with each student adding one component of the animal to the clay sculpture.

Activity Extension

Have students create a collective, spontaneous poem dedicated to their animals and in a style Surrealists used. Each student should write one sentence about their assigned animal using the structure *adjective-noun-verb-adjective-noun* [students could also incorporate their descriptors from Step 1, into their poems]. They should then fold the sheet of paper over and pass it along to their peer to contribute their sentence. Once each teammate has contributed a sentence, they can unfold the sheet of paper and see their collective Surrealist poem.

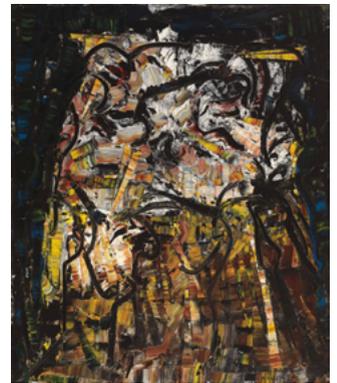


Fig 14. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hibou-Jet Black (Owl-Jet Black)*, 1970, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 59.7 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection.



Fig 15. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Poisson sur fond bleu (Fish on blue background)*, 1968, colour etching with aquatint on Mandeure rag paper; signed and numbered 73/75 in pencil to margin, 72.7 x 54.7 cm (sheet). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022).



Fig 16. Jean Paul Riopelle, *L'Ours (The Bear)*, 1969–70, bronze, 154 x 122 x 106 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

LEARNING ACTIVITY #2

GOING TOWARDS NATURE: CREATING WILDLIFE DECALCOMANIAS

The principle of “going towards nature” is a rallying cry for much of Riopelle’s work. With this phrase, the artist delineated a belief at the core of his practice; namely, that art does not have to simply mimic nature, but that it can be derived from nature itself in the formation of a visual world. This approach allowed Riopelle to hang somewhere in the balance between abstraction and representation, perhaps one of the most unusual aspects of his work. This activity is inspired by Riopelle’s work *Décalcomanie n° 1* (*Decalcomania No. 1*), 1946, and his working philosophy of “going towards nature” to encourage students to create visual worlds derived from natural forms. Students will learn about animals and habitats—visual worlds in their own right—and will develop abstract creations inspired by motifs they observe to make “decalcomania” works of their own.

Big Idea

Visual motifs in nature

Learning Goals

1. I can identify the major visual characteristics of a wildlife species in a specific habitat.
2. I can explore the difference between abstraction and representation.
3. I can create a visual work inspired by motifs in Canadian wildlife species.



Fig 17. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Décalcomanie n° 1* (*Decalcomania No. 1*), 1946, oil on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Materials

- Access to the internet for research
- [Jean Paul Riopelle Image File](#)
- Large sheets of paper
- Markers
- Paint
- Sticky notes

Process

1. Present the following image comparison showing one abstract work by Riopelle and one historical mosaic to explore the experience of looking at different types of abstract work:

- *Décalcomanie n° 1* (*Decalcomania No. 1*), 1946
- *Mosaic with doves at the House of the Faun*, Pompeii, second century, BCE

Ask students which type of image they prefer—the more abstract image, or the more representational image—and ask them to try to articulate why.



Fig 18. *Mosaic with doves at the House of the Faun*, Pompeii, second century BCE.

Learning Activity #2 continued

2. Next, explain the [decalcomania](#) technique that Riopelle used to make the abstract work they considered in Step 1.
3. To explore why Riopelle made art that was abstract, present the concept of creating a work of art that is “going towards nature” and have a discussion. Ask students to consider: what might this mean in relationship to creating an abstract work of art about nature?
4. Present students with a working definition of “habitat” and explain that there are multiple habitats in Canada, with different wildlife species living in each. Spotlight four chosen habitats, such as Arctic, urban, oceanic, and freshwater habitats (see wwwf.ca for ideas).
5. Show students abstract paintings by Riopelle and other Canadian abstract painters that correspond to each of these habitats:
 - Arctic habitat—Jean Paul Riopelle, *Iceberg n°1 (Iceberg No. 1)*, 1977
 - Urban habitat—Paul-Émile Borduas, *Graffiti*, 1954
 - Ocean habitat—Paterson Ewen, *Ocean Currents*, 1977
 - Freshwater habitat—Jock Macdonald, *Fish Playground*, 1946
6. Now that students have spent some time looking and thinking abstractly about habitats, ask students to select one habitat that was reviewed in class, and to research an animal species from their chosen habitat. Once they have selected an animal, have them identify one unique visual characteristic of the species. Task students with developing a visual pattern or motif inspired by their chosen animal’s defining visual characteristics.
7. Have students create a decalcomania work featuring the visual pattern or motif. Students can use paint to create their motif on a sheet of paper, and then fold it in two to generate the mirror image.
8. Ask students to make a quick representational sketch of their chosen animal using bold markers and large sticky notes.
9. Hang the student decalcomania works up in the classroom, and place all of the sticky notes on the board. Have students guess which animal is being evoked in the decalcomania motifs by inviting them to move the sticky note sketches on top of or next to each decalcomania work. Once all of the works have been identified, have students present some of their research on the animal they depicted in their abstract image.



Fig 19. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Iceberg n° 1 (Iceberg No. 1)*, 1977, oil on canvas, 250 x 500 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection, Montréal.

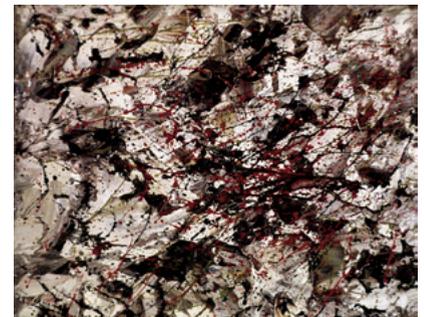


Fig 20. Paul-Émile Borduas, *Graffiti*, 1954, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm, private collection.



Fig 21. Paterson Ewen, *Ocean Currents*, 1977, acrylic, pure ochre, and gum arabic on gouged plywood, 243.8 x 228.6 cm, collection of BMO Financial Group.

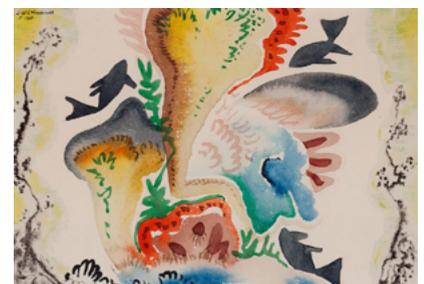


Fig 22. Jock Macdonald, *Fish Playground*, 1946, watercolour on paper, 32 x 39 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

CULMINATING TASK

HOMAGE TO CANADIAN WILDLIFE: CREATING A TRIPTYCH TRIBUTE TO AT-RISK SPECIES IN CANADA

One of the formats that Riopelle was interested in working with was the triptych, a series of three painted panels that come together to create a single work of art. He used the triptych format in some of his most iconic works, including *Pavane (Hommage aux Nymphéas) (Pavane [Tribute to the Water Lilies])*, 1954, and *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1964. In these works, as in so many others, his visual touchstone was the natural world, and images of animals and wildlife take on a symbolic dimension within this context. This activity invites students to adapt the triptych format in order to learn about the concept of “at-risk” species in Canada and to create tributes to the nation’s endangered species.

Big Idea

At-risk wildlife in Canada

Learning Goals

1. I can understand the concept of “at-risk” when it comes to wildlife in Canada.
2. I can identify the differences between “at-risk” categories of wildlife in Canada.
3. I can synthesize and present research in a creative project.
4. I can collaborate with my peers on a shared task.

Success Criteria

To be added to, reduced or changed in collaboration with students.

1. The chosen animal species fits into one of the at-risk species categories.
2. The teamwork is approached in an equitable and supportive way.
3. The information presented is correct and supports the larger ideas.
4. The information has been obtained from reputable sources.
5. The source of the information is properly cited following referencing guidelines.
6. The final triptych, blog post, and recording are thoughtful and created with care.

Materials

- Access to the internet for research
- Access to a printer
- [Jean Paul Riopelle Image File](#)
- [Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work](#)
- Large poster boards for triptych projects
- Large sheets of paper for brainstorming
- Paint, markers



Fig 23. Jean Paul Riopelle and Georges Duthuit in 1954, in front of *Pavane (Hommage aux Nymphéas) (Pavane [Tribute to the Water Lilies])*, 1954. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Photographer unknown. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

Culminating Task continued

Process

1. Show students two of Riopelle's triptych works to familiarize them with the three-panel format:

- *Pavane (Hommage aux Nymphéas) (Pavane [Tribute to the Water Lilies])*, 1954
- *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1964



Fig 24. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Pavane (Hommage aux Nymphéas) (Pavane [Tribute to the Water Lilies])*, 1954, oil on canvas, 300 x 550.2 cm (triptych). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Guide students in a discussion using the following questions as prompts:

- What do you notice about the format of these works?
- What is the effect of looking at a triptych rather than looking at a single painted panel?
- Why do you think some artists choose to work with this format?

2. Explain that *Pavane* is a tribute to the French artist Claude Monet (1840–1926) and his painting *Nymphéas (Water Lilies)*, 1920–26, and explain the concept of an homage—something created to celebrate, and to show honour and respect.



Fig 25. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1964, oil on canvas, 276.4 x 214.5 cm (panel A); 275.5 x 214.7 cm (panel B); 275.5 x 214.5 cm (panel C). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

3. Next, review the following definitions and distinctions related to how at-risk species are categorized in Canada (courtesy of wwwf.ca):

“Extinct: A wildlife species that no longer exists

Endangered: A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction

Special Concern: A wildlife species that may become threatened or endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats

Extirpated: A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere

Threatened: A wildlife species that is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction”

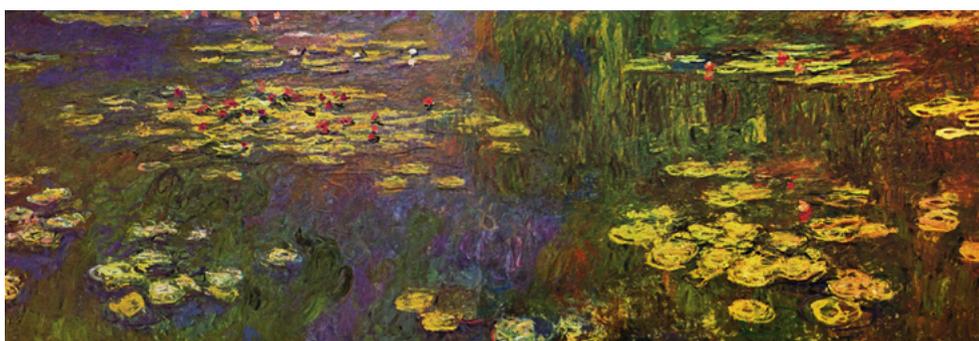


Fig 26. Claude Monet, *Nymphéas (Water Lilies)*, 1920–26, oil on canvas, 219 x 602 cm, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris.

Culminating Task continued

4. Put students in groups of three and assign each student group a category of creature from the list above, based on data and research about at-risk species in Canada. Have them choose an at-risk or extinct animal species in their category.
5. Give student groups time in class to research their species, with a set of targeted questions that they should be thinking about addressing. Questions might include the following:
 - What are the threats to the wildlife population your species belongs to?
 - What is being done or can be done to help change the status of your chosen animal?

Riopelle sometimes liked to embed codes, symbols, and hidden messages in his works, as in the painting *L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg (Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg)*, 1992 (learn more about this work in [Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work](#)). Students could be asked to similarly brainstorm codes, symbols, and hidden messages about their chosen animal, to be included in their triptych project.



Fig 27. Jean Paul Riopelle, *L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg (Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg)*, 1992, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 155 x 1,424 cm (1st element); 155 x 1,247 cm (2nd element); 155 x 1,368 cm (3rd element). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City.

6. Using Riopelle's triptych format as inspiration, have student groups create a triptych tribute to their endangered species. Since students are in groups of three, each student should be responsible for one panel. Triptychs should include abstract images that represent the animal as well as explanatory text addressing the major questions asked and answered, and, as appropriate, graphs, news headlines, and additional images.
7. To present their work in a collective way, have students photograph their triptychs and post images to a collective blog, like JamBoard or WordPress. In lieu of traditional artist statements, have students record short podcast episodes presenting the research they undertook for their triptych tributes, and a short description of the symbols, motifs, and codes they included. Have students post their recordings alongside their photographs.

HOW JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE MADE ART: STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Here are a few of the important artistic concepts that characterized the art of Jean Paul Riopelle. For more information see the [Style & Technique](#) chapter of *Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work* by François-Marc Gagnon.

WORKING IN AN ABSTRACT WAY

Jean Paul Riopelle embraced a form of visual language that was particular to the rise of modern art in the early years of the twentieth century: abstraction. Though Riopelle's early training in art consisted of private lessons with the painter Henri Bisson, who taught him how to make representational work, as can be seen in the landscape *Sans titre (Scène pastorale)* (Untitled [Pastoral Scene]), c.1940, he later gravitated towards the abstract styles of modern movements. This ultimately led to his embrace of a technique known as [automatism](#), an approach to artmaking that consisted of creating spontaneous, intuitive markings without exercising preliminary control and planning over the image.



Fig 28. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Scène pastorale)* (Untitled [Pastoral Scene]), c.1940, oil on cardboard, 23.3 x 30.6 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



Fig 29. Jean Paul Riopelle, *La roue (Cold Dog—Indian Summer)* (The Wheel [Cold Dog—Indian Summer]), 1954–55, oil on canvas, 250 x 331 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal.

WORKING WITH PALETTE KNIVES

One of Riopelle's most distinctive approaches to painting was his use of palette knives, rather than paint brushes, to create many of his large-scale works. The adoption of this experimental tool allowed the artist to create images that mimic the geometric abstraction of the mosaic form. The “mosaic effect” in Riopelle's work started to be a prominent feature in the 1950s, when his incorporation of the palette knife dabs onto the surface of the canvas started to give his paintings a sculptural, almost three-dimensional quality. The visual effect of this technique can be seen in works like *La roue (Cold Dog - Indian Summer)* (The Wheel [Cold Dog - Indian Summer]), 1954–55.



Fig 30. Jean Paul Riopelle, *L'isle heureuse (The Happy Isle)*, 1992, mixed technique on two wood panels, 154.3 x 203.2 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection.

FROM THE PAINTER'S PALETTE TO THE AEROSOL CAN

While the palette knife replaced the brush for Riopelle from the 1950s onwards, the aerosol spray can replaced the paint can and tube in the 1970s. Some have suggested that this was perhaps due to a diagnosis of osteoporosis, which hindered his ability to continue creating work in the way he was accustomed—but Riopelle was always looking for new strategies to innovate and experiment with abstract forms. The use of aerosol spray opened up exciting possibilities for exploring the creative potential of negative and positive space and presented an unexplored dimension for the development of abstract visual motifs. It also created room for exploring imprints and traces, as can be seen in his late painting *L'isle heureuse (The Happy Isle)*, 1992.

WORKING WITH SCULPTURE

Though Riopelle is known primarily for his contributions to painting, he was insistent about his prolonged and profound interest in sculpture. His interest in working in three-dimensional form gained prominence in his output from the 1960s onwards (early precedents exist in a series of small clay sculptures he created in 1947). Riopelle's three-dimensional creations have some remarkable similarities to his paintings: their organic forms hearken back to his consistent approach of taking inspiration from his natural surroundings, while his interest in abstraction is visible in the fragmented nature of some of his sculpted creations.



Fig 31. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hibou-Roc (Owl-Rock)*, 1969–70 (cast in bronze 2010), bronze and leftover wax, 2/8, 54.8 x 44 x 27.3 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection, Winnipeg.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Supplementary Materials Provided by the Art Canada Institute

- The online art book *Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work* by François-Marc Gagnon: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/jean-paul-riopelle>
- [Jean Paul Riopelle Image File](#) with artworks and images related to this lesson.
- “Who Was Jean Paul Riopelle?” biographic information sheet ([page 2](#))
- Timelines of national and world events and Jean Paul Riopelle’s life ([page 3](#))
- “How Jean Paul Riopelle Made Art: Style & Technique” information sheet ([page 11](#))

GLOSSARY

Here is a list of terms that appear in this resource guide and are relevant to the learning activities and culminating task. For a comprehensive list of art-related terms, visit the Art Canada Institute’s ever-growing [Glossary of Canadian Art History](#).

automatism

A physiological term first applied to art by the Surrealists to refer to processes such as free association and spontaneous, intuitive writing, drawing, and painting that allow access to the subconscious without the interference of planning or controlled thought.

Automatistes

A Montreal-based artistic movement. Centred on the artist, teacher, and theorist Paul-Émile Borduas, the participating artists exhibited regularly between 1946 and 1954, making Montreal a locus of mid-century avant-garde art. Artists included Marcel Barbeau, Marcelle Ferron, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean Paul Riopelle, Fernand Leduc, and Françoise Sullivan.

decalcomania

Developed in the eighteenth century, decalcomania is a transfer technique in which ink or some other pigment is pressed between two surfaces—often glass, porcelain, paper, or some combination. When paper is used, it may be folded to create a mirror image. The resulting blot may then be embellished or otherwise added to. Decalcomania was adopted by the Surrealists and Automatistes as a way to introduce chance into the making of an image.

lyrical abstraction

A style of abstract art that arose within the larger movement of Art Informel, itself known as the European complement of American Abstract Expressionism. Art Informel paintings typically drew inspiration from the natural world; they were less rigid and more expressive than geometric abstraction, which was dominant at the time.

modernism

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Modernist movements in the visual arts have included Gustave Courbet’s Realism, and later Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.



Fig 32. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1969, pastel on paper, 50 x 65.5 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

The following external resources can be used to augment the learning activities and materials provided by the Art Canada Institute. They are to be used at the teacher's own discretion.

Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation

www.riopellefoundation.com

RIOPELLE STUDIO, an educational initiative from the Jean Paul Riopelle Foundation on the occasion of the celebrations dedicated to the centenary of the birth of the artist in 2023, coming in autumn 2022

www.riopellestudio.com

World Wildlife Fund Canada website (English and French)

<https://wwf.ca/>

Wildlife Habitat Canada

<https://whc.org/>

The Art Assignment, "The Case for Abstraction" learning video from PBS Digital Studios

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96hl5J47c3k>



Fig 33. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Composition, 1947)* (Untitled [Composition, 1947]), 1947, pen and black ink with coloured ink wash on wove paper, 22.8 x 30.5 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

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5

themes related
to the oeuvre of
Jean Paul Riopelle



10

art projects for
children and teenagers



5

online creation games for
students of all ages



5

online appreciation
games for students of all
ages



19

didactic, technical and
themed video capsules



1

explanatory glossary

1 Introduction



2 Preparation



3 Realization



4 Integration



Visit our website at the beginning of the 2022 school
year to introduce your students to the fascinating and
inspiring world of this legendary Canadian artist and bring
Riopelle's centenary celebrations to your classroom!

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FIGURE LIST

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Cover: Snow geese gathering on mass preparing for the great fall migration, Victoriaville, Quebec, Canada. Credit: iStock / Dopeyden.

Fig 1. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Composition*, 1954, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 99.1 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection, Toronto. Photo credit: Courtesy of Mayberry Fine Art, Toronto.

Fig 2. Jean Paul Riopelle in Paris, 1985. Photograph by Michel Nguyen. © Michel Nguyen.

Fig 3. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1953, coloured ink on wove paper, 74.5 x 107.4 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (39742). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.

Fig 4. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Autriche III (Austria III)*, 1954, oil on canvas, 200 x 300.7 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Horsley and Annie Townsend bequest (1963.1395). Photo credit: MMFA, Denis Farley.

Fig 5. Jean Paul Riopelle, *La Joute (The Joust)*, 1969–70 (cast in bronze c.1974), bronze, 380 cm high x 1,240 cm in diameter (approximate dimensions). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

Fig 6. Tanks move through the jungle during the Vietnam War. Photo credit: Donn A. Starry, Department of the US Army. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 7. Statue of Jean Lesage in front of the Parliament Building of Quebec, Quebec City. Photo credit: Bouchecl. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 8. The Canadian Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal, 1967. Photo credit: Jean-Marie Brochu. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 9. Ceremony on the occasion of the foundation of Nunavut, April 1st, 1999. Photo credit: Ansgar Walk. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 10. Jean Paul Riopelle, c.1928, photographer unknown. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

Fig 11. Jean Paul Riopelle in his studio on rue Durantin, Paris, in 1952. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Photograph by John Craven. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

Fig 12. Jean Paul Riopelle on the occasion of the exhibition *Riopelle, peintures, estampes (Riopelle, paintings, prints)* held at the Musée des beaux-arts and at the Hôtel d'Escoville in Caen, France, in 1984. Photograph by P. Victor. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

Fig 13. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hibou A (Owl A)*, 1969–70 (cast in bronze c.1974), bronze, 1/4, 143 x 93 x 74 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City, gift of the Marc Bellemare (2015.900). Photo credit: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Idra Labrie.

Fig 14. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hibou—Jet Black (Owl—Jet Black)*, 1969, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 59.7 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection. Photo credit: Courtesy Heffel Fine Art Auction House.

Fig 15. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Poisson sur fond bleu (Fish on blue background)*, 1968, colour etching with aquatint on Mandeuire rag paper; signed and numbered 73/75 in pencil to margin, 72.7 x 54.7 cm (sheet). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022).

Fig 16. Jean Paul Riopelle, *L'Ours (The Bear)*, 1969–70, bronze, 154 x 122 x 106 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2019). Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

Fig 17. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Decalcomanie n° 1 (Decalcomania No. 1)*, 1946, oil on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Gabrielle Borduas (Dr.1989.1). Photo credit: MMFA, Brian Merrett.

Fig 18. *Mosaic with doves at the House of the Faun, Pompeii*, second century BCE. Photo credit: Wikicommons, Berthold Werner, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Fig 19. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Iceberg n° 1 (Iceberg No. 1)*, 1977, oil on canvas, 250 x 500 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada, Christine Guest.

Fig 20. Paul-Émile Borduas, *Graffiti*, 1954, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).

Fig 21. Paterson Ewen, *Ocean Currents*, 1977, acrylic, pure ochre, and gum arabic on gouged plywood, 243.8 x 228.6 cm. Collection of BMO Financial Group. © Mary Handford. Photo credit: Jennifer Rowsom.

Fig 22. Jock Macdonald, *Fish Playground*, 1946, watercolour on paper, 32 x 39 cm. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (1973.013.002).

Fig 23. Jean Paul Riopelle and Georges Duthuit in 1954 in front of *Pavane (Hommage aux Nymphéas) (Pavane [Tribute to the Water Lilies])*. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Photographer unknown. Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

Fig 24. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Pavane (Hommage aux Nymphéas) (Pavane [Tribute to the Water Lilies])*, 1954, oil on canvas, 300 x 550.2 cm (triptych). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (15038.1-3). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.

Fig 25. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1964, oil on canvas, 276.4 x 214.5 cm (panel A); 275.5 x 214.7 cm (panel B); 275.5 x 214.5 cm (panel C). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2019). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966 (66.4268). Photo credit: Courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Cathy Carver. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022).

Fig 26. Claude Monet, *Les Nymphéas (Water Lilies)*, 1920–26, oil on canvas, 219 x 602 cm. Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris. Photo credit: Wikicommons, The Yorck Project.

Fig 27. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg (Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg)*, 1992, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 155 x 1,424 cm (1st element); 155 x 1,247 cm (2nd element); 155 x 1,368 cm (3rd element). © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City, gift of the artist (1996.96). Photo credit: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie.

Fig 28. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Scène pastorale) (Untitled [Pastoral Scene])*, v.1940, oil on cardboard, 23.3 x 30.6 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Lise Kelly (2009.31). Photo credit: MMFA, Christine Guest.

Fig 29. Jean Paul Riopelle, *La roue (Cold Dog—Indian Summer) (The Wheel [Cold Dog—Indian Summer])*, 1954-1955, oil on canvas, 250 x 331 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, with a special grant from the Government of Quebec (2001.163). Photo credit: MMFA, Denis Farley.

Fig 30. Jean Paul Riopelle, *L'île heureuse (The Happy Isle)*, 1992, mixed technique on two wood panels, 154.3 x 203.2 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection. Photo credit: Archives of the Catalogue raisonné of Jean Paul Riopelle.

Fig 31. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Hibou-Roc (Owl-Rock)*, 1969-70 (cast in bronze 2010), bronze and leftover wax, 2/8, 54.8 x 44 x 27.3 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Private collection, Winnipeg. Photo credit: Courtesy Mayberry Fine Art Gallery, Winnipeg.

Fig 32. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Untitled)*, 1969, pastel on paper, 50 x 65.5 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). Photo credit: Courtesy of Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal.

Fig 33. Jean Paul Riopelle, *Sans titre (Composition, 1947), (Untitled [Composition, 1947])*, 1947, pen and black ink with coloured ink wash on wove paper, 22.8 x 30.5 cm. © Jean Paul Riopelle Estate / SOCAN (2022). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (14924). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.