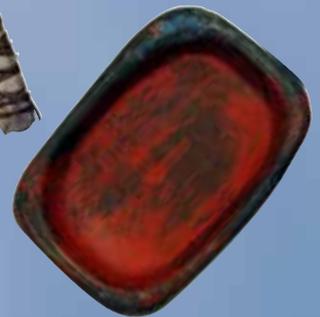


# **Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration**

## **Teaching Kit with Suggested Activities**



INTERPRETATION, PROGRAMS  
AND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT  
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CANADIAN MUSEUM OF CIVILIZATION  
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Canada

# Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration

## Teaching Kit with Suggested Activities

### Introduction

This kit presents practical activities designed to complement your activity program as part of the *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration* exhibition. It describes three options: one activity that participants can do on their own and two that can be led by staff members or trained volunteers. The kit also provides additional information and useful tips to help you prepare and conduct activities.

### Introduction to Inuit Culture

#### Who Are the Inuit?

The word “Inuit”, meaning “the people”, has traditionally been used by Inuit to refer to themselves. Inuk is the singular form of Inuit.

The term “Eskimo” is an exonym, a name invented by outsiders, and was likely derived from an earlier Algonquian word, although its exact origins are obscure. “Eskimo” has not been used in Canada since the 1970s, when it was officially replaced by “Inuit”. However, the word “Eskimoan” is still used by ethnologists to describe the broader language family uniting the northern peoples of Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Siberia. In Canada, the Inuit word for their language is “Inuktitut”, meaning “like the people”.

Inuit and Inuit-related peoples inhabit much of the circumpolar world — an area that includes Greenland, northern Canada, Alaska and the Chukotka region of Siberia. This area is often perceived to be one of the most inhospitable regions of the world. Yet to Inuit, it is “nunatsiaq” — the beautiful land.

Traditionally, Inuit were a semi-nomadic people dependent upon hunting both sea and land mammals. They lived in camps, moving seasonally from the coast to inland to follow the rich Arctic game and to trade with each other and with occasional southerners.

Today, Canada’s approximately 50,000 Inuit live mostly in or around remote settlements scattered across the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Quebec (Nunavik) and Labrador. This move into permanent Arctic settlements began in the late 1950s, when the Canadian government began to offer greater opportunities for education, health care and other social services in newly established communities. Over the past 15 years, many Inuit have moved from the North into major Canadian cities in southern Canada, such as Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto and Winnipeg. However, these urban Inuit continue to speak Inuktitut and to raise their children with Inuit values.

Canadian society has exerted great cultural, economic and political influence upon the lives of the Inuit people. Inuit have responded to this southern influence on their affairs with the establishment of political and economic organizations. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated have helped successfully negotiate, with the Canadian government, the creation of an Inuit homeland called Nunavut (which literally means “our land”). On the local level, the Inuit co-operative movement has provided communities with greater economic control.

In many ways, imported technologies are being used to support an Inuit way of life. The Inuktitut syllabic writing system, and local radio and local television in the form of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation have increased communication among Inuit people. Airplanes, snowmobiles, central heating and computers have all been incorporated into the Inuit northern lifestyle.

Perhaps the most indelible feature of Inuit life is the relationship with the environment. Despite the many changes that have occurred, hunting, trapping and fishing still occupy an essential role in Inuit communities, and are frequently depicted in arts and crafts. Many Inuit consider a close tie to the land to be essential to their culture and survival as a distinct people.

Today, Inuit culture and values continue to play an important role in many aspects of daily life: in the home, on the land, during community events and in the Inuit co-operative movement. The following resources provide further information about Inuit people and their culture:

- Canadian Inuit History: A Thousand-Year Odyssey.  
<http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/education/teacher-resources/oracles/first-peoples/dmorrison/canadian-inuit-history>  
<http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/education/teacher-resources/oracles/first-peoples/dmorrison/canadian-inuit-history2>  
<http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/education/teacher-resources/oracles/first-peoples/dmorrison/canadian-inuit-history3>
- Iqqaipaa: Celebrating Inuit Art.  
[www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/aborig/iqqaipaa/home-e.shtml](http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/aborig/iqqaipaa/home-e.shtml)
- Morrison, David and Georges-Hébert Germain. *Inuit: Glimpses of an Arctic Past*. Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1995.

## Activity 1 – Self-guided

### Writing Names in Inuktitut

Visitors will learn how to write their name in Inuktitut. The activity will introduce them to the Inuit language, Inuktitut, and to its syllabic writing system. They will be able to see how Inuit artists use syllabic characters to sign their artwork and to better understand how these signatures are used to authenticate the origin of prints.

### Tie-ins with the Exhibition

- The activity allows visitors to see how Inuit artists use syllabic characters to sign their prints.
- Visitors can try to “decipher” the artists’ signatures using the syllabic character table in Appendix 1.

### Learning Outcomes

- Visitors will be introduced to the Inuit language and shown how its syllabic characters are transcribed.

### Activity Outline

- Ideally, set up the activity in the exhibition area so that visitors can see the artists’ works.
- For the activity, provide a table so that visitors can write their name in Inuktitut.
- Print the goal of, and instructions for, the activity on a sheet. Leave this information on the table or post it on a board.
- If possible, make an area available for those who would like to display their names in Inuit syllabic characters.

### Required Material

#### *Material for Setting Up*

- Work table and chairs or stools
- Containers to organize material and keep the area tidy

#### *Material for the Activity*

- A few sheets of paper to photocopy the Inuit syllabary
- Blank sheets of paper
- Pencils
- Erasers

### Preparation

- Place the activity material on a table. Use pencil holders and paper trays to help keep the area organized.
- Ideally, you should use a large table so that several visitors can participate in the activity at the same time.
- Print Appendix 1, which contains the Inuit syllabic character table, and leave it on the activity table.
- Print Appendix 2, which contains a copy of the signature on an Inuit work of art.

## **Additional Information**

### ***How Inuit Artists Sign Their Artwork***

Artists usually make an inscription with a pencil indicating the title of the work, the name of the artist, the technique used, and the date and place of production. Inuit artists sign their name in syllabic characters in the lower-right corner of the print.

The igloo, with the shape of an upside-down “U”, appears under the artist’s signature, indicating the artist’s workshop. This symbol is usually printed in red. In the case of the signature in Appendix 2, the workshop is the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative located in Cape Dorset, Nunavut (Canada). Other workshops use other symbols to indicate the origin of prints. Later, the printmaker’s signature will also be added, in black ink, after the artist’s signature.

### ***A Primarily Oral Culture***

Writing was not used by Inuit until missionaries came to the Arctic in the late nineteenth century. Inuit history was passed on orally, through legends and stories that were used to convey valuable knowledge to children and to entertain them during those long, dark days and nights in the North.

Today, English is spoken, written and read by many young Inuit. In both English and the Inuktitut language, the spoken rather than the written word is widely preferred.

### ***How the Language Works***

The Inuit language is created by using a root word which is made more specific by adding prefixes and suffixes (words that are added on before or after the root word). One long word in Inuktitut could be translated into a full phrase in the English or French language.

The word “Inuktitut” is made up of the root word “Inuk”, meaning “a person”, and the word “titut”, which means “in the manner of”. Language gives us clues about how people live and what they value in their own culture. Inuktitut represents not only the language itself but also the ways of the people. In fact, it is said that one can sleep, dance, eat and even smile Inuktitut!

Inuit are also a people closely connected to the land and this is reflected in their vocabulary as the natural world is described in rich detail. For example, in Inuktitut there are numerous words for “snow”; they differ for specifying the consistency and texture of the snow.

### ***How and When the Inuktitut Writing System Was Developed***

The Inuktitut writing system was adapted from a syllabic writing system developed by missionaries around 1850. It was based on a series of symbols, which are called “syllabics”. They were modelled after the shorthand writing used by secretaries, and each symbol represents a different sound specifically, a syllable.

In the 1960s, another writing system was introduced to Inuit in schools. This system was called “Roman orthography”, and it used the letters of the English and French alphabets to spell words the way they sounded (phonetically). This type of writing is used in the western Arctic, while syllabics are used in the central and eastern Arctic.



## Activity 2 – Guided

(approximately 30 minutes)

### Creating Individual Seals

This activity will show visitors how Inuit prints are signed using a seal. The system was borrowed from Japanese prints.

### Tie-ins with the Exhibition

- This exhibition examines the influence of James Houston on Inuit printmaking; in particular, the Caucasian artist's meeting with Un'ichi Hiratsuka and his introduction to the Japanese tradition of printmaking. This influence is evident in the use of a seal to sign Inuit prints to certify the work's authenticity.

### Learning Outcomes

- Visitors will make connections between Inuit and Japanese printmaking.
- Visitors will become familiar with the basic printing technique.
- Visitors will learn how Inuit and Japanese artists sign their works.

### Activity Outline

- Guide participants to start the activity by examining the signatures on the exhibition prints. For large groups, you can create small teams.
- Encourage participants to look, on their own, for similarities between the signatures on the Inuit and Japanese prints.
- Using Appendix 2, which contains a copy of an Inuit artist's signature, help participants distinguish the syllabic characters from the symbol of the artists' co-operative.
- Using the syllabic character table (Appendix 1), present the Inuktitut transcription system and explain how Inuit people came to use this system.

### Workshop

- Once visitors understand the signature system for Inuit prints, encourage them to create their own seal. Participants can either create their signature in syllabic characters or invent their own seal for their family (or for any other affiliation of their choice).

### Required Material

#### *Material for Setting Up*

- Work table and chairs or stools
- Containers to organize material and keep the area tidy

#### *Material for the Activity*

- One potato for each participant. You can also use high-quality erasers.
- Washable poster paint or acrylic paint; ink, if needed
- Sponges
- White or coloured paper
- A good knife for peeling or an X-acto or other small utility knife. A kitchen knife is recommended for use by children.
- Drawing paper
- Drawing material: pencils, erasers

**Preparation**

- Place the activity material on a table that has been covered to protect it against paint splashes.
- Ideally, you should use a large table so that several visitors can participate in the activity at the same time.

**Workshop Outline**

- Ask participants to draw a rough sketch of their seal.
- Cut the potatoes in half. Make sure that the potatoes were cleaned beforehand to remove dirt.
- Instruct participants to use a knife to carve one half of the potato with their initials, syllabic characters or whatever shape they like. Instruct participants to apply the poster paint on the potato with a sponge and to print the pattern on the sheet of paper.

**Additional Information****Seal**

A seal is a signature that guarantees a document's authenticity. The term also refers to the object that produces this signature.

**Inuit Art Seals**

Inuit artists use seals to authenticate their prints once the works are finished. This is a result of the influence of Japanese printmaking on Inuit art.

**Use of Seals in Japan**

In Japan, seals are referred to as *Hanko* (判子, *hanko*). They are used by individuals or companies to sign and validate all types of documents, prints and correspondence (personal or administrative).

The first evidence of seals in Japan dates from AD 57: it was a massive *hanko* in gold belonging to the Emperor. Initially, only the Emperor and his attendants had *hanko* because they were considered a symbol of the Emperor's authority. Nobles began using their own personal *hanko* after AD 750, and the samurai revived them in the Middle Ages. Today, people in Japan can authenticate and register their *hanko* through administrative services in order to use them for official purposes, to sign all types of documents.

Graphic artists use seals to both decorate and sign their work. This tradition has existed for many centuries. The signatures are often the artist's name or surname. The decorations are most often very short phrases or slogans chosen by the artist. There is considerable freedom in terms of shape (oval, round or square), material (wood, stone or buffalo horn), size and graphics.

The Japanese prints featured in this exhibition present good examples of signatures using *hanko*.

## Activity 3 – Guided

(approximately 60 minutes)

### Creating Prints or Stencils

This activity will introduce participants to the fundamentals of these two printing techniques, which were used by artists whose works are featured in the exhibition.

### Tie-ins with the Exhibition

- The exhibition presents the history of the art of Inuit printmaking. Today, this art is still practised in northern Canada.
- This guided activity presents the basics of the art of printmaking: prints and stencils.

### Learning Outcomes

- Visitors will become familiar with print and stencil techniques.

### Activity Outline

#### *Discussion*

- Invite participants to start the activity by examining the works featured in the exhibition, in particular, by comparing prints and stencils. For large groups, you can create small teams.
- Encourage participants to search, on their own, for similarities and differences between these two techniques.
- Encourage participants to discuss the works that they prefer, and to explain what they like and find interesting about them.
- Determine their interest in a particular theme, activity or memory, and encourage them to share that in the artwork they are getting ready to create.

#### *Workshop*

- Once visitors understand the systems of both printing techniques, help them to create their own artwork. Tell participants that they can choose to make either a print using a linoleum block or a stencil. Clearly explain both techniques to them (you can prepare an example in advance to show participants).

### Required Material

#### *Material for Setting Up*

- Work table and chairs or stools
- Containers to organize material and keep the area tidy

#### *Linoleum Block Printing Material*

- Ready-made linoleum (lino) blocks
- Small lino blocks (5 to 6 cm, or 2 to 2.5 in., squares) if participants are going to carve their own blocks, and lino carving tools. Styrofoam trays are an interesting alternative material for younger participants.
- Water-soluble printing ink, such as Speedball, or liquid tempera paint
- Soft rubber rollers
- Wooden or plastic mats (to apply ink to rollers)
- Construction paper

- Bristol board
- Pencils or pens (to write the artists' names)
- Drying rack or drying line and clothespins (to hang prints to dry)
- Elastic bands (to transport rolled prints)

### ***Stencilling Material***

- Precut stencils
- Stippling brushes, sponges or emptied bingo markers filled with diluted tempera paint
- Tempera blocks
- Construction paper
- Bristol board
- Small containers of water and cloths to dampen (for wiping off stencils)
- Paper clips (to attach stencils to paper)
- Pencils or pens (to write the artists' names)
- Drying rack or drying line and clothespins (to hang prints to dry)
- Elastic bands (to transport rolled prints)

### **Preparation**

- Make examples of different prints.
- Empty ink from bingo markers and replace it with diluted tempera paint.
- Cut construction paper to fit stencils.
- Cut frames from bristol board (to frame artwork).
- Set up workstations with required materials.

### **Additional Information**

Two of the most popular forms of contemporary printmaking are the stonecut and the stencil. Both of these art forms are done manually and require a minimum of equipment and technical training. The stonecut is an adaptation of the woodcut, a relief technique that produces interesting textures and contours based on the variations of rhythmical cuts made in the stone's surface.

Stencils are essentially cut-outs. Images are produced directly on paper by pounding ink through the cut-outs with stippling brushes. Varying colour transitions and textures are achieved by varying the density of the ink that is applied. The first stencils were made from stiffened sealskin, but today, heavy paper is used.

## Additional Resources

### Books

- Blodgett, Jean. *In Cape Dorset we do it this way: three decades of Inuit printmaking*. With essays by Heather Ardies, Leslie Boyd and Linda Sutherland. Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, ca. 1991.
- Boyd Ryan, Leslie. *Cape Dorset Prints, A Retrospective: Fifty Years of Printmaking at the Kinngait Studios*. San Francisco, California: Pomegranate, 2007.
- Hessel, Ingo. *Inuit Art: An Introduction*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 1998.
- LaBarge, Dorothy. *From Drawing to Print: Perception and Process in Cape Dorset Art*. Calgary, Alberta: Glenbow Museum, 1986.
- Leroux, Odette, Marion Jackson and Minnie Aodla Freeman. *Inuit Women Artists: Voices from Cape Dorset*. Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1994. (Published in the United States through the University of Washington Press.)

### Websites

- An Inuktitut glossary is available at <http://www.livingdictionary.com/main.jsp>
- Kids' Stop is a fun site for youth, with a wealth of interesting information on the history of Aboriginal languages. It can be found on the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website, <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ach/lr/ks/index-eng.asp>

## Appendix 1

### Inuktitut Syllabary

△	i	▽	u	△	a
∧	pi	∨	pu	∧	pa
∩	ti	∪	tu	∩	ta
ρ	ki	δ	ku	б	ka
∩	gi	∩	gu	∩	ga
┌	mi	└	mu	┌	ma
σ	ni	б	nu	ρ	na
∩	si	∩	su	∩	sa
∩	li	∩	lu	∩	la
∩	ji	∩	ju	∩	ja
△	vi	▽	vu	△	va
∩	ri	∩	ru	∩	ra
∩ρ	qi	∩δ	qu	∩б	qa
∩∩	ngi	∩∩	ngu	∩∩	nga
∩	ti	∩	tu	∩	ta

## Appendix 2

### Example of an Inuit Artwork Signature

Artist: Lucy Qinnuajuak  
Title of Work: *Owl and Companion*  
Date: 1961  
Technique: Stonecut print  
Printed by: Lukta Qiatsuk



Lucy Qinnuajuak (just "Lucy" is written in the syllabics)  
Lukta Qiatsuk (it sounds like "lu-ta" in the syllabics)  
West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative



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