Soap Stone Sculpture

Soapstone carving is an ancient practice dating back more than 3000 years ago. An art gallery has commissioned you to create a soapstone sculpture reflecting a specific animal or Inukshuk. The final work must show clear evidence of an influence from the Northern Canadian style/period.

You will gain appreciation of the art of Canada’s aboriginal peoples, develop problem solving skills in designing your own work in the Northern Canadian style with subtractive sculpture techniques, and learn to follow steps for cutting, carving, and polishing soap stone.

You will first create 3 different conceptual sketches (different angles – front, side and back), which will be evaluated. You will also submit a statement outlining the chosen subject matter of the work and artistic style in your sculpture and the sculpture techniques you used in creating it.

What is Soapstone?
There are three different kinds of rocks found on the earth. They are igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic. Soapstone is formed by changes in the structure of an igneous rock such as peridotite. These changes occur at low temperature and moderate pressure in the presence of water. Soapstone is then a metamorphic rock that forms in layers with different degrees of thickness.

Soapstone, which is also known as steatite, is a soft rock which is made up mostly of the mineral talc. It feels soapy or oily and can be found in a variety of colours such as white, gray, or grayish-green.

History: Cape Dorset is probably the most famous art producing community in Canada’s north. With so many talented sculptors, there is bound to be a wide range of styles; The Cape Dorset sculptural style is rooted in a love of naturalism and an interest in wildlife and the spirit world, but has incorporated a love of the flamboyant, the dramatic and the decorative.

Sculptures exhibit a strongly stylized or elegant naturalism, and are generally highly finished. One senses a certain self-consciousness on the part of the artists, as well as a desire to manipulate the material to a high degree.

STEP ONE: RESEARCH THE WORK OF OTHERS: Look at the examples on the following sheets and analysis the various interesting forms and shapes, what stylistic similarities can you note in the works?

STEP TWO: DRAW: In your sketchbook 3 different conceptual sketches of your chosen subject matter from 3 angles – front, side and back.

• Consider the elements and principles of design. (Shape, Form, Texture, Balance) How have other artists depicted the traditional soapstone carving form you are attempting to create?
• Consider the artist style: How will you reflect their traditional sculpture technique(s)?
• Your finished work must show clear evidence of influence from contemporary or past works of art.

STEP THREE: CREATE: Follow your approved 3 conceptual sketches, begin creating your work using soapstone and tools provided in class. WRITE your Artistic Statement Template to document your artistic process. REVIEW: the sculpture techniques in this handout.

STEP FOUR: REFLECT: Answer the following questions using the elements and principles of design and complete your Artistic Statement Template for formal evaluation.

1. What part of your finished project did you find most successful and why?
2. What part of your finished project did you find least successful and why?
3. If you had to do this project, what part would you change or improve on and why?
A) Subject Matter Chosen:__________

What stylistic similarities can you note between your work and works you have researched in the Northern Canadian style/period? (i.e shape, form and texture)

B) What did your chosen subject matter symbolize historically:

C) Sculpture techniques used in your work and how they reflect the chosen Northern Canadian style/period:
SCULPTURE TECHNIQUES: THE LOON
Subtractive sculpture techniques: Cutting, carving, and polishing soap stone

Mark the areas with pencil of where you will be carving.

Start by using the small handsaw to remove the largest sections of stone.

Continue carving out areas of detail with the smaller metal files or sandpaper. Remember that this stone can be brittle and fragile, so don't get too caught up in detail, keep the forms large and don't use too much negative space.

When you are happy with your carving, immerse it in water and start sanding it wet with the roughest (lowest number) of black special paper. Use sandpaper, (various grades) Make sure that all areas are very smooth, with no cut marks.

When it's smooth, go to the second roughest, and finally the smoothest (highest number) paper. Be sure to sand it wet, getting it as smooth and shiny as possible.

Be sure to sand it wet, getting it as smooth and shiny as possible.

Let the sculpture dry for approximately 15 minutes in the sun, and then smooth it with some mineral oil.
Inukshuk Symbolism pronounced IN-OOK-SHOOK

One of the purposes attributed to inukshuit is that they serve as markers or signposts to help guide the Inuit across the treeless tundra of the Canadian Arctic.

Inukshuk (singular), meaning "likeness of a person" in Inuktitut (the Inuit language) is a stone figure made by the Inuit. The plural is inuksuit. The Inuit make inuksuit in different forms and for different purposes: to show directions to travellers, to warn of impending danger, to mark a place of respect, or to act as helpers in the hunting of caribou. Similar stone figures were made all over the world in ancient times, but the Arctic is one of the few places where they still stand. An inukshuk can be small or large, a single rock, several rocks balanced on each other, round boulders or flat.

Inukshuk in the form of human beings, called inunnguaq, seem to have been a recent development, perhaps only appearing after the arrival of European whalers in the 19th century. One of the most important types of inuksuit are those that helped in the caribou hunt. These are usually built with 2 or 3 rocks piled up and placed in converging lines along the migration route of the herd. The Inuit placed arctic heather among the rocks to simulate human hair. The figures were intended to spook the caribou and stampede them towards the places where the hunters hid.

An open leg on an inukshuk found near water or a coastline may point to an open channel for navigation. If an inukshuk is on open land, a leg or arm might suggest a direction. Inuksuit placed near a lake might show that fish can be found in the lake at the roughly same distance the figure is placed from the shoreline. Two or more inuksuit with openings in them were sometimes lined up to act as sort of view port, directing the viewer to an important focal point or to the next Inukshuk.

Some inuksuit are built out of respect for a beloved person or are constructed as memorials to a cherished one. Primarily found in the Arctic landscape, the Inukshuk serves as a guide to travellers on land and sea, providing comfort, advice and spatial orientation. An Inukshuk also serves as a focus of veneration for the spiritual seeker. For centuries, the Inukshuk structure has acted as a guardian to keep vigil over the land and remains a powerful symbol of safe harbour in an uncertain world.

In the magical realm, inukshuks are places of power. They concentrate the energies of the stones used to create them. Inukshuks are rooted in the Earth but lift upward to the sky, symbolically representing the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms. They also serve to act as reminders to us of our dependence on one another. Whatever the purpose for its construction, remember that Inuit tradition forbids the destruction of an Inukshuk.
Loon and Fish Symbolism

**Loon** – The Loon has traditionally been seen as a symbol of communication and also serenity.

**Fish** - Water, Current, Flow of Life From the Earth.

*Soap Stone Sculptures Loons & Fish Examples*

![Soap Stone Loons and Fish](image)

**Bear Symbolism**

**Bear** symbolizes introspection and intuition blended with instinct. Bears hibernate in the winter, which may explain their association with "dreaming the Great Spirit" or retrospection. The symbolism of the Bear's cave reflects returning to the womb of Mother Earth. [A cave is an archetype for the mind - sleep - returning/flying/spiraling to higher consciousness.] This also suggests a strong feminine aspect, one of nurturing and protection. Bear cubs, born in the early spring, can spend as many as seven years with their mother before reaching maturity. People with Bear Medicine are considered by many as self-sufficient, and would rather stand on their own two feet than rely on others. They are sometimes considered dreamers. Many have developed the skill of visualizing new things, but as a result can get caught up in the dreaming, making little progress in waking reality. Bear's medicine includes introspection, healing, solitude, wisdom, change, communication with Spirit, death and rebirth, transformation, astral travel, creature of dreams, shamans and mystics.

The Lakota Sioux call Bear “Tob Tob." To this tribe, Bear is a symbol of wisdom. This animal reveals the interrelationship between the person within the environment of creation, personal truth within the clan and the universe. Bear helps people recognize personal truth and when to stand up for rights and when to walk away. According to Chippewa tradition, the grizzly, Mudjekeewis, is the Spirit Keeper of the West. This totem symbolizes introspection and strength and imparts inner knowledge that makes it possible for people to seek alternative paths to their goals.

*Soap Stone Bears and Sculptures*

![Soap Stone Bears](image)

**Polar Bear** - To the Inuit, the Polar Bear also called the Dawn Bear is the ancient ancestor of all bears. There are many Inuit myths in which polar bears have sexual relations with women. Many images by Inuit artists show humans and animals inhabiting the same social space in a harmonious and amicable manner. Animals are often seen engaging in human activities such as speaking and dancing.

Animals have a 'soul' and must be hunted with due respect and ritual. Animals, for the Inuit, have 'personhood' though are not human. Offense against an animal soul can lead to all manner of misfortune including bad hunting and inclement weather. Bad hunting can bring starvation for there are few wild plants to be gathered for food in the arctic.
**Soapstone Sculpture Rubric**

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<th>Name: __________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge/Understanding</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 0</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of connections between artistic style and sculpture techniques and art period.</td>
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<td>Demonstrates understanding of the elements &amp; principles of design in the sculpture (e.g. form, shape, balance, texture)</td>
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<td>Thinking/Inquiry: Concept: Soapstone sculpture animal/inukshuk</td>
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<td>Communication: Clarity: Discusses artistic style, symbolism of chosen work, period &amp; techniques in the artistic statement</td>
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<td>Reflective Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application: Creative Process: Ability to solve a series of artistic problems, showing an awareness of formal qualities, visual conventions, and relevant ideas and concepts. Preliminary Sketches (3)</td>
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<td>Creative Process: Demonstration of Skill Development &amp; following procedures including Clean Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses elements &amp; principles of design &amp; painting sculpture techniques to produce an effective artwork (shape, form, texture, balance etc.)</td>
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A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create a variety of art works, individually and/or collaboratively;
A1.1 use a variety of strategies, individually and/or collaboratively, to generate ideas and to develop plans for the creation of art works (e.g., in small groups, use brainstorming, research, concept webs, and/or mind maps to generate original and imaginative ideas; filter their ideas to select a suitable one to serve as the basis for their art work; use notes and/or thumbnail sketches to help them develop clear and flexible plans that show attention to detail; revise their plans on the basis of peer- and self-assessment)
A1.2 use experimentation, reflection, and revision when producing a variety of art works in each of the following areas: drawing, sculpture, painting, printmaking, and mixed media (e.g., experiment with a variety of materials/media, techniques, and tools to find ones that are appropriate for their planned art work; reflect on their preliminary work and on feedback from their peers before revising their art work)
A1.3 document their use of the creative process in a portfolio (e.g., include evidence of their conceptual, creative, and technical skills; include thumbnail sketches, checklists, and/or graphic organizers to show evidence of experimentation, reflection, and revision), and refer to this portfolio to reflect on how effectively they have used the creative process
A2. The Elements and Principles of Design: apply elements and principles of design to create artworks for the purpose of self-expression and to affect personal values;
A2.1 use various elements and principles of design to create art works that express personal feelings and/or communicate emotions to an audience (e.g., create a mixed-media self-portrait that uses colour, line, and shape in the style of Frida Kahlo to convey their personality and elicit emotions from the audience)
A2.2 apply elements and principles of design as well as art-making conventions to create art works that communicate ideas, information, or messages, and/or that convey a point of view on an issue (e.g., use colour, line, shape, contrast, and emphasis when creating a graffiti piece that addresses an issue in their local community; incorporate symbolism to communicate a message about an environmental issue)
A3. Production and Presentation: produce art works, using a variety of media/materials and traditional and/or emerging technologies, tools, and techniques, and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of ways of presenting their works and the works of others.
B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by examining, interpreting, evaluating, and reflecting on various art works;
B1.1 identify and describe their initial reactions to a variety of art works, and explain the reasons for their reactions (e.g., the aspects of the work and/or their personal experiences that contributed to their first impressions of its mood, subject, intent)
B1.2 identify and describe the elements and principles of design used in their own art works and the works of others, and describe their effects (e.g., how line, colour, and shape are used to create emphasis, mood, and/or movement)
B1.3 explore and interpret a variety of art works, both historical and contemporary, to identify and describe their purpose and style, the materials used, and the meanings the works convey
B1.4 use a variety of strategies (e.g., peer- and self-assessment, formal critiques, feedback and reflection following public displays) to identify and reflect on the qualities of their own art works and the works of others, and evaluate the effectiveness of these works
B2. Art, Society, and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how art works reflect the societies in which they were created, and how they can affect personal values;
B2.1 identify and describe the function of various types of art works in past and present societies
C1. Terminology: demonstrate an understanding of, and use correct terminology when referring to, elements, principles, and other components related to visual arts;
C1.1 use appropriate terminology related to elements and principles of design when creating and analysing art works
C1.2 use appropriate vocabulary to describe techniques, materials, and tools when creating and presenting visual art works
C1.3 identify and describe the stages of the creative process and the critical analysis process (e.g., how reflection relates to the other stages of the creative process)
C2. Conventions and Techniques: demonstrate an understanding of conventions and techniques used in the creation of visual art works;
C2.2 demonstrate an understanding of several conventions used in visual art works (e.g., exaggeration, metaphor, simile, symbols, synectics; conventions associated with heroic, narrative, naturalistic, and satirical works)
C3. Responsible Practices: demonstrate an understanding of responsible practices in visual arts.
C3.2 demonstrate an understanding of safe and conscientious practices associated with the use of materials, tools, and technologies in visual arts, and apply these practices when creating and/or presenting art works (e.g., use appropriate precautions when dealing with hazardous materials; adopt protective measures when using sharp tools; keep their work space clean and free of physical and other hazards; demonstrate respect for classroom facilities, tools, equipment, and technological devices)