

# Local Folk Artist Charlie Macdonald and Relief Sculpting

## Suggested Grade/Age Levels

Suggested Grade level 2 - 6 (could be modified to include more research for Grade 7 – 12)

## Subject Areas (if relevant)

- Visual Arts
- Social Studies – history, geography
- Environmental Science
- Language Arts

## Rationale

Students will learn about local folk artist Charles Macdonald and his life as a self-taught artist and businessman. We will touch on historic trades and emerging technologies that changed how we live.

## Students will be expected to:

- Explore nature, drawing, and journaling through the creation of a simple sketchbook.
- Work from their sketchbook drawings to create a clay relief sculpture telling a 3-part story about nature.
- Learn about additive and subtractive sculpture techniques as well as visual story telling.

## Suggested Materials and Resources

Day 1: *Fox and Rabbit* storybook, and a large stapler (if available).

Per student: 8.5" x 11" white paper, ruler (metal if possible), pencil.

Day 2:

Per student: 3" x 9" Masonite board, 1kg self-drying clay & clay tools (craft sticks, wood skewers and food utensils are also useful as clay tools).

## Learning Indicators

Use a variety of materials, technologies, and unconventional tools to create their own artworks, COM, CI, CT, PCD, CZ, TF)

Apply the principles of design (pattern, variety, contrast, emphasis, rhythm/movement, balance, unity) in art making (COM, CI, CT, PCD, CZ)

Examine artworks found in their own community: local artist Charles MacDonald's artwork and his historic house (COM, CT, CZ)

## Introduction & Process

**Day 1** Slide show and discussion about local folk artist Charles Macdonald.

1. Have any of you heard of Maud Lewis? Can you tell me something about her?
2. What is folk art? What do we mean when we call someone a folk artist?

3. What if I told you that an amazing folk artist once lived right down the street from here? He made beautiful paintings and sculptures and built fantastic houses that you can still visit. I am going to give you some clues about his artwork and see if any of you can guess who I am talking about.
  - His house is yellow.
  - It is made completely of concrete.
  - There are cement animals in the yard.
4. Charles MacDonald Facts and information:
  - Charles was born in Steam Mill, NS. Where is that?
  - From a young age Charles, (also called Charlie) loved to draw.
  - He wanted to be an artist but there were obstacles. (Describe them)
5. To overcome his inability to study art, Charles looked around his community for ways to further his creative skills and interests. At the age of 15 he quit school and got a job as a coffin maker.
  - What kind of creative skills do you think he learned making coffins?
7. Then Charles got a job as a Wheel Wright.
  - What do you think a wheel wright does?
  - Charles did not make much money at these jobs, but he became a very good carpenter, and this experience would serve him well in the future as an artist.
8. Growing up, Charles spent a lot of time at shipyards watching men go off to travel the world.
  - . In 1898 when Charles was in his early 20s, he got a job as a ship's carpenter and started a great adventure traveling the world. This was during the end of the Age of Sail.
  - What do you think, "The Age of Sail" is?
9. While Charles travelled the world, he took photos, drew, did watercolour paintings, kept journals and sketchbooks. Some of his sketchbooks were so fantastic that they are now part of the permanent collection at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.
  - Do any of you keep a journal or diary?
  - Do you ever draw in them?
  - How is a sketchbook like a journal?

## **Let's make a simple sketchbook**

1. Fold 8.5" x 11" paper in half, then in half again, resulting in a 4.25" x 5.5" rectangle. Using the sharp, flat edge of a ruler, carefully slit the short edge folds. Staple the crease to create a small booklet. (use a large stapler if you have one)
2. Write your name on the front of your handmade sketchbook and draw a picture of your favourite animal.
3. Fill the pages of your book with drawings and information about your animal, answering the following questions. The more detailed the drawing the better:
  - A. What does your animal eat?
  - B. How does your animal get its food?
  - C. Where does your animal live?
  - D. How does your animal interact with other animals in its environment?

## Day 2

1. Charles MacDonald travelled for years, finally returning to Nova Scotia where he opened a concrete company in Centreville (not far from where he grew up). He was excited about building with concrete, a relatively new material and said homes built from concrete did not require insurance as they could not burn down.
  - Look around you, what is your school built from?
  - Why do you think schools around here are built out of these same materials?
  - Do you think maybe Charles was a trend setter?
2. Charles made all kinds of artwork, but we are going to focus on one piece of his artwork, a sculpture that is also like a painting.
  - What is a sculpture? 3D
  - What is a drawing? 2D
3. Relief artwork is both 2 D and 3D – additive and subtractive
  - Relief - a method of molding, carving, or stamping in which the design stands out from the surface, to a greater (high relief) or lesser (bas-relief) extent.
  - Charles made this Relief from cement because that is what he like to work with.
4. This artwork tells a story of a fox chasing a rabbit in three scenes. This is a story about the life of the fox and the rabbit. Read the story to the students.

### Let's make some art

Clay relief sculpture telling a story about your animal in three scenes, adding and subtracting clay to creating a 3-dimensional panel.

1. Consulting your sketchbook, decide what your three-story scenes will be. Make a sketch of your story plan.
2. Shape and flatten your clay to fit squarely on your piece of Masonite.
3. Carefully peel the clay off the Masonite and carve grooves into the back side (this will keep it from curling up as it dries). Place the clay gently back on top of the Masonite
4. Divide your clay panel into 3 sections. They do not need to be equal in size. Sculpt your animal story images into the 3 clay sections, adding and subtracting clay using clay tools.
5. Put your completed clay artwork in a safe place to dry.

### Suggestions for Assessment

Students could be assessed on class participation during discussion, detail of journal entries, ability to follow instructions, understanding of sequencing and story telling, understanding of two dimensional and 3-dimensional, composition.

### Lesson Extensions

Between Day 1 and Day 2, students could research animal habitats, life cycles and food chains. Once dry, the sculptures can be painted with acrylic paint, and the lesson can be extended to include color theory (primary, secondary colors, tints and shades, complimentary colors).

### Lesson plan by Terry Havlis Drahos