



Revealing our Histories

A whole school collaborative heritage
legacy project
by artist Julie McIntyre
and Tecumseh Elementary Students



Overview

Revealing our Histories is a whole school art inquiry and heritage legacy project that took place between September 2024 and June 2025 in the studio at Tecumseh Elementary School in Vancouver.

It was led by local printmaker Julie McIntyre as part of the AIRS program, and involved the entire student body at the school.

The project delved into the changing historical landscape and heritage of the school itself and the surrounding Victoria-Fraserview neighbourhood situated on the unceded and traditional lands of the x̱wməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwxwú7mesh and səliwətał Nations.



Students were divided into 6 cohorts comprised of 3 classes. Each cohort focused on a different aspect of the neighbourhood's heritage;

*Tecumseh school
Family stories
The land
Domestic architecture
Indigenous plants and
Transportation routes.*

All class engaged in learning about the significance of the land for the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm people who have stewarded it since time immemorial and the impacts of colonialism on both the land and its people.

In the studio each class conducted historical research, uncovering local knowledge and developing imagery informed by archival photographs, natural history, and family stories. Students weaved these into individual printed and collaged projects that made personal connections to aspects of heritage that resonated with them.

Learning was supported by educational materials from xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Nation, Tecumseh's Archives, City of Vancouver Archives, Ken MacLeod's The Story of South Vancouver and John Oliver High School and VSB archives. Expert knowledge on Indigenous plants and local domestic architecture was generously shared through neighbourhood walks by ethnobotanist Senaqwila Wyss from Skwxwú7mesh Nation, and cultural historian John Atkins.





Printmaking Processes: image transfer through light exposure, cyanotype, press printing of relief and monotype prints and silk-screening onto the banners.





Through the expert guidance and direction of Julie McIntyre, students transferred and layered archival, drawn, collaged and stencilled imagery onto 12 double-sided banners using a variety of printmaking and textile processes; including serigraphy, relief print, cyanotype and embroidery. This imagery evokes the multi-layered and interwoven cultural histories of Tecumseh Elementary school and the surrounding neighbourhood. These legacy banners, installed in the school, are a reminder of past heritage and the way students present and future are an active part in shaping the future heritage of their community.



Tecumseh Elementary School: 1910-present

The first cohort primarily of Grade 6 & 7s studied the story of Tecumseh and learned how history differed or helped to shape their current classroom experience, such as the mandating of recess breaks in 1896, or the similarities of the pandemic of 1917-19 to the COVID closures. They were asked to build a tunnel book that showed a personal experience they had at Tecumseh. A few students were new to the school, so their images suggested how they struggled to fit in, which is arguably the most relevant issue for this age group.



Tunnel book connecting to archival material to show personal memories and feelings of isolation as a newcomer at Tecumseh School.



Students printed their own cyanotypes and serigraphs from the school's archives and adapted collage material to bring their stories together. Some of the archival photos, as well as a few tunnel books were transferred onto screens and printed onto the canvas banners.

Tunnel book depicting the ice storm that broke the pipes and flooded the school in December of 2023 and Julie McIntyre with students working with archival images.





Family Stories

The second cohort's theme was immigration patterns of the Victoria-Fraserview area, so we asked them to mine their homes and find family heirlooms, portraits, treasured regalia, and even Disney or Marvel paraphernalia that together represent the unique culture of their household. We made negative transparencies of some of these finds, so students could shoot them as cyanotypes and incorporate them with a variety of material into their tunnel books. Some of their completed tunnel books were transferred onto screens and printed onto the canvas banners.



Student tunnel books overlaying personal and family stories of place

The Land

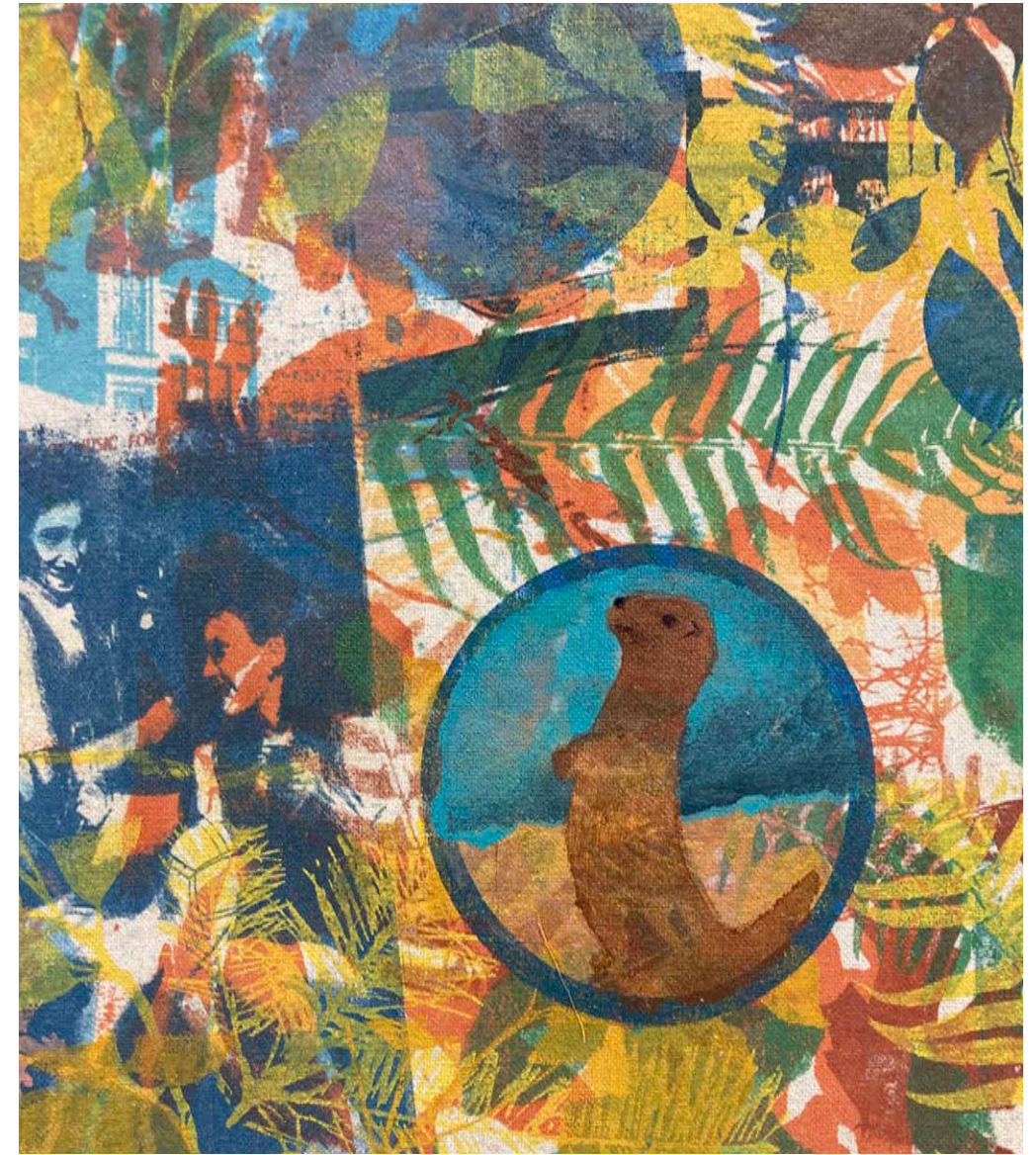
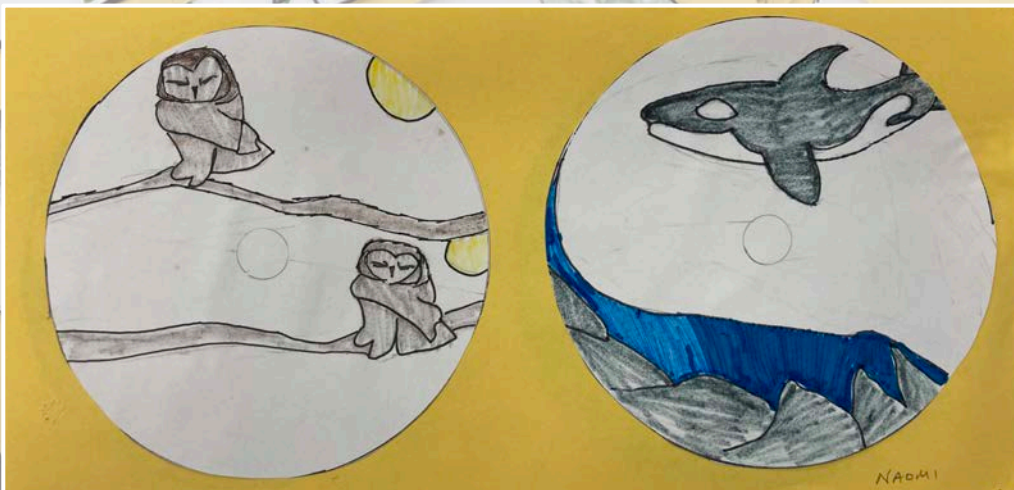
The third cohort explored indigenous histories including place names, land topography, displacement and what reconciliation could look like. Squamish ethnobotanist Senaqwila Wyss introduced grade 4 and 5 students to the concept that all of nature is reverent and living beings including rocks and plants. Under the boughs of a great Western Red Cedar, she talked about its many uses as their “tree of life” and how to gently and safely take a little bough home. Senaqwila spoke about how to identify many species and their fake “twins” as well as their plant friends and pollinators. She encouraged the students to choose a plant and follow it over the seasons to see how it adapts to changing conditions.



Students gathering cedar boughs, frogs leaf and Senaqwila Wyss sharing with Tecumseh students



In the classroom, we studied xʷməθkʷəy'əm (Musqueam) artist Susan Point and those she influenced particularly with her spindle whorl research and contemporary approach. We created our own two colour circular stencils with indigenous plants and animals and printed them onto paper and directly on our banners.



Student botanical drawing of native plants from herbarium sheets made by the artist; Spindle whorl inspired drawings, other stencils and banner print.

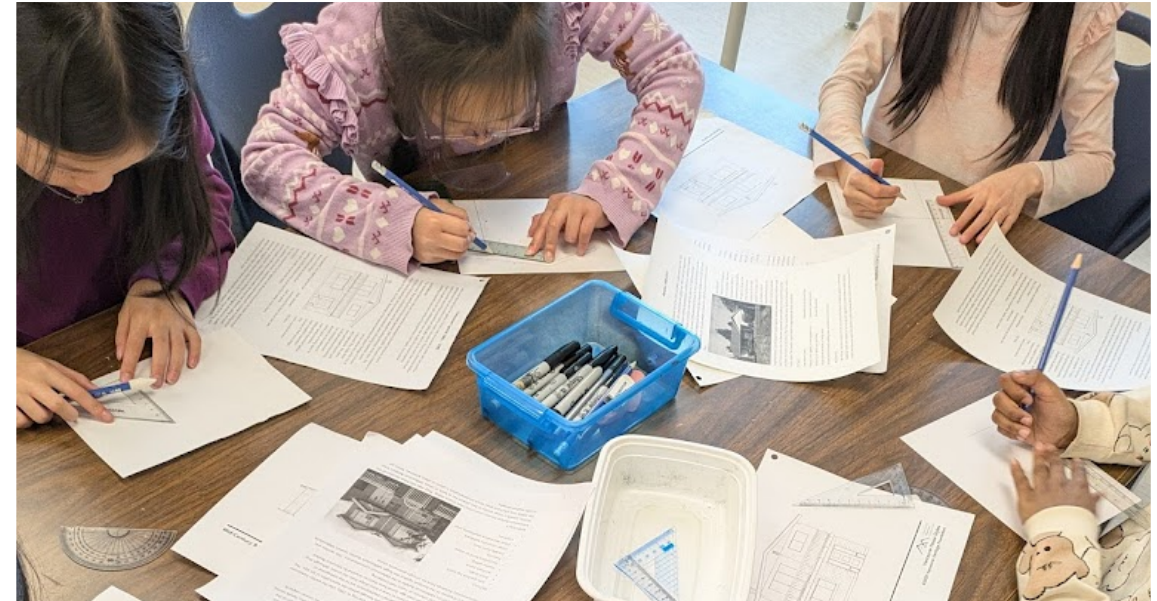
Domestic Architecture

Cultural Historian, John Atkins led some of our Grades 2, 3 and 4 students on walking tours this spring to study changes in domestic architecture and urban infrastructure in the former “Diaper Town” neighbourhood. John showed them where the natural streams were and how to follow them by the slope of the land. Students discovered dates on sidewalks, why a few roads didn’t meet neatly at the intersections, and the reason why some houses are elevated on one side of the road, while the other side is street level or lower. They learned to look for survey markers, hydro and electrical connections and how to date the homes by their style.



Walking tour with cultural historian John Aiken





In the art room we experimented with architectural drawing, using angles and geometry to build our period house styles. We “carved” the line drawings into foam plates that we printed them onto wallpaper and other decorative papers as well as and the banners.

Students drawing different styles of houses; silkscreening stencil negatives onto the banner and examples of architectural relief prints and plates.



Indigenous Plants



Student botanical drawings and learning about native plants with Senaqwila Wyss



Our Grade 1s and 2s studied Indigenous plants and tried to image this neighbourhood before the settlers arrived. They also attended a walk with ethnobotanist Senaqwila Wyse this spring where she explained the healing properties of many plants and showed them how to give thanks to their offerings. The students created botanical images from herbarium sheets, cyanotypes and serigraphs of indigenous plants, as well as positive and negative monotypes of their leaves. They also drew their indigenous plants directly on tiny embroidery screens with watercolour crayons and then used a transparent medium and a squeegee to transfer their plant images onto paper and the canvas banners.

Student botanical drawings - Snowberry and Oregon grape; Herbarium sheet of Sword Fern and positive and negative monotype printing with local leaves.



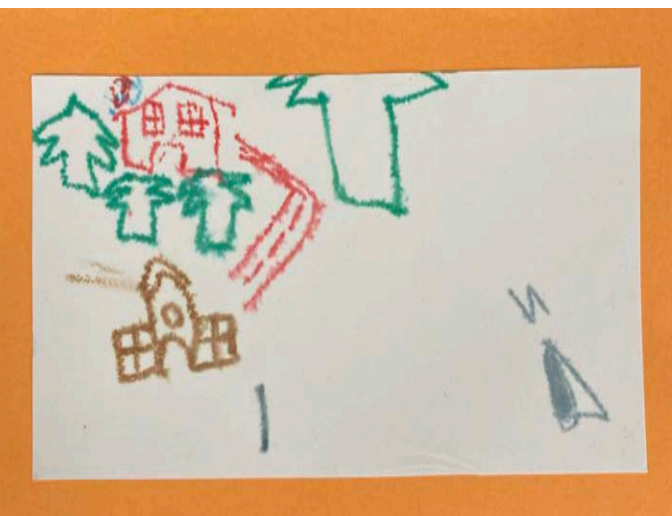
Transportation Routes

For 3 weeks the kindergarten students learned about maps. They explored maps of our neighbourhood with the original streams and coastlines, as well as city maps of our roads over time. We looked at the symbols on maps and how to read a legend.





The first day, we made monotypes of our routes to school using a set legend of images. In the following class, we learned the running stitch and sewed our paths onto the banners with symbolic colours. (Blue thread for streams, green for park, silver thread for roads). In the final class, we took scraps from the banners and created a bookmark with our name on it, so we could take a part of this project home with us.





Imagery on the Heritage banners

The legacy banners are made from stencilled and screened images that represent the multi-layered histories of Tecumseh school and surrounding neighbourhood over time. There are 12 banners in all with different layered imagery on each side.

You will find:

Archival images of **Tecumseh Elementary school** over the years from 1910 till the present day.

Historical photographs of **students and teaching staff**, including **Vivan Jung** the first VSB teacher of Chinese descent who taught at Tecumseh from 1950-85.

Spindle whorl inspired stencil images representing the idea of interconnectedness with the land using images of native **plants and animals** from the Victoria Fraserview area.

Silhouette **stencils of Indigenous plants** that would have been prevalent before colonisation; these include **Cedar, Hemlock, Dogwood, Sword ferns, Deer Fern, Maple, Nootka Rose, Bitter Cherry, Horsetail and Oregon grape**.

Relief print drawings of **houses** from the surrounding neighbourhood showing the different **architectural styles** over time.

Running stitches by the Kindergarten classes, that meander through the banners depicting the many paths that cross space and time, from early **wayfinding footpaths** to **railway lines, streets and roadways**.





Botanical prints, archival photographs, animal stencils and domestic architecture prints



Archival photographs, Tecumseh logo, botanical prints and spindle whorl stencils of local flora and fauna



Archival photographs, logos , botanical prints, architectural stencils, roadway maps and stitching



This AIRS project was made possible through a Heritage Legacy Fund Grant from Heritage BC and field trip grants through Vancouver Heritage Foundation.

AiRS extends gratitude to teacher Marion Elizabeth Collins and Principal Jesse Brown and all the classroom teachers and student artists at Tecumseh Elementary School.



The Artist in Residence Studio program (AIRS) is an artist-led organization for providing equitable access to high quality and socially relevant visual arts education for children in public elementary schools through long-term artist studio residencies.