Graphic Arts

By Ovila Mailhot

Students view Indigenous graphic design examples, participate in gallery walks examining designs for national organizations, learn Photoshop techniques, and study Indigenous design best practices.

Overview

Through this lesson students will be exposed to various examples of Indigenous graphic designs created by the Indigenous-owned company Vincent Designs. Students will first engage in a Gallery Walk where they will view examples of Indigenous graphic designs created for organizations such as the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Indspire Awards and more! While viewing the designs, students will learn about the inspiration and meaning of each. Next, students will learn from Indigenous graphic artist Ovila Mailhot where they will be taken through a series of lessons on how to use Photoshop to create graphic designs. Finally, students will read and respond to the article "Considerations and Best Practices in Indigenous design".

Duration

1-2 Hours

Materials

- "Graphic Design Gallery Walk" Posters
- "Considerations and Best Practices in Indigenous Design" Article

Activate: Gallery Walk

Prior to the beginning of the lesson, print the "Graphic Design Gallery Walk" posters in colour and hang them around the room.

Divide students into five groups. Inform them that they will be viewing and learning about Indigenous graphic designs. The examples from today's lesson were all designed by the company Vincent Design and can be found at: https://vincentdesign.ca

Groups should be given 3-4 minutes to view the posters, discussing the elements of the graphic design such as the colour, composition, texture, and impact on viewers; the accompanying briefing, approach, and result; along with their personal preferences – do they like the design? Why or why not?

Once the time limit is up, groups will rotate to the next poster, until they've had a chance to view all five.

Next, inform the group that they will be learning how to create digital designs using Photoshop from Indigenous graphic artist Ovila Mailhot.

Acquire: "Graphic Arts" by Ovila Mailhot

Have students read "Graphic Arts" by Ovila Mailhot, found on pages 158-182 of the Create to Learn textbook.

To debrief the reading, ask the class the following questions:

1. How did Ovila learn his craft?
2. What program does Ovila use to create his rough sketches before he transfers them to Photoshop?
3. What tool does Ovila say saved him a lot of time?
4. How did Ovila say he learned about traditional art?

Next, inform students that today they will be learning more about the ethics of Indigenous design.

Apply: Read and Respond

Distribute the article "Considerations and Best Practices in Indigenous Design" to each student (either digitally or in print).

Have students independently read the article and respond to the following questions:

1. Which of the Vincent Designs from the Gallery Walk do you think is the most impactful and why? (3 marks)
2. What are the four design elements that are taught in design school? Define each of them (8 marks)
3. What does the article say about storytelling as it relates to authentic representation? (3 marks)
4. What is the charter called that serves to protect Indigenous designs? (1 mark)
5. How does Vincent Designs say their work ensures proper consultation and consent? (4 marks)
6. What are your final thoughts regarding Indigenous design? (1 mark)

Assess: Grading Article Responses

Mark the response questions for accuracy and completeness. In total, the responses are worth 20 marks

Graphic Design Gallery Walk Examples

Example 1: National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

BRIEFING

The NCTR carries on the work started by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC): a new website was needed to make it easier for Survivors and other users to preserve and access these sacred records.

APPROACH

Working closely with NCTR staff, we designed and developed a new user-friendly and user-responsive website with navigation and a site structure that integrates more seamlessly with their databases and supports their goals for decolonizing the archives.

RESULT

The new NCTR website reflects their mandate to honour and preserve residential school truths for all time, for all of Canada and the records are now more accessible for continued healing, learning, dialogue and reconciliation.

Logo created by Vincent Designs.

Example 2: Northern Youth Abroad Fund

BRIEFING

A new initiative, led by a group of young Inuit and First Nation people, contacted us for a brand concept that would represent who they are while showcasing their deep connection with their communities and environment.

APPROACH

After thorough consultation, we chose visuals for the logo that reflect the land, Indigenous culture, and symbols of the Fund's core values including respect, knowledge and inclusiveness.

RESULT

A colourful and modern visual that captures the northern geography and surrounding communities. The animals chosen represent characteristics of the land while colours are inspired by the northern climate. Together, they create a beautiful, versatile symbol to represent the organization and their vision.

Logo and write-up by Vincent Designs.

Example 3: REDress Project

BRIEFING

The REDress Project, by Canadian Artist Jaime Black, has become a well-known visual for representing the MMIWG2S movement across North America. We wanted to highlight the impact on the family, friends, and communities affected by these losses.

APPROACH

The design was inspired by the idea of the wind flowing through a lone red dress. We also wanted to have the dress include elements that represent all Indigenous Peoples. The wind, conveyed by the faces on the right, represent the Grandmothers, Mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and friends.

RESULT

This icon acknowledges the many women that have been lost, as well as the people of the communities and of each family member affected: the design honours the spirits of those women and offers support, healing and spirit.

Logo and write-up by Vincent Designs.

Example 4: University of Manitoba Graduation Pow Wow

BRIEFING

U of M's Marketing Communications Office was looking for a fresh, updated brand from an experienced Indigenous designer for their annual event that celebrates Indigenous graduates with traditional ceremonies and activities.

APPROACH

Weaving together event imagery, traditional colours and symbols, and a clean, colourful design, we rebranded and redesigned the event banners, posters, website, digital and event materials.

RESULT

The new, engaging look of the Graduation Pow Wow brand is a reflection of the youth, optimism and positive energy of this event and new Indigenous grads – an eye-catching brand that will support U of M's advertising and marketing for years to come.

Logo and write-up by Vincent Designs.

Example 5: Indspire Awards

BRIEFING

This national not-for-profit Indigenous education organization needed a complete brand refresh with modern, consistent marketing tools to promote their annual Indspire Awards program and ceremony.

APPROACH

The Indspire Awards celebrate Indigenous people whose stories inspire, uplift and educate – to capture this, we wove sample colours from recipient belongings and a "reaching for the stars" concept across a full suite of marketing materials.

RESULT

The new high-impact design artfully captures the vision of the awards program, while the layout of the revamped event program lets each recipient take centre stage in appreciation of their unique accomplishments and stories.

Logo and write-up by Vincent Designs.

Considerations And Best Practices In Indigenous Design

By Vincent Design
March 8, 2021
Found at: https://vincentdesign.ca/2021/03/08/considerations-and-best-practices-in-indigenous-design/

"Consider the reception and implication of all designs so that they protect the environment, are sustainable, and remain respectful of Indigenous cultures over deep time: past, present and future."

Protocol 8, International Indigenous Design Charter

The field of professional graphic design is a creative arts industry with a long history, many diverse influences and a foundation of key skills, knowledge and practice.

For example, in design school, those of us called to this field spent a lot of time considering what constitutes "good design", how to recognize it and how to create it. We trained in colour theory, typography, ratios and the Rule of Thirds. We drew lines for days (months!), developed our skills at page layout, and learned to create clean, versatile logos. In both web and graphic design, we also learned to apply User Experience (UX) Design, a professional standard for ensuring that artistry and visual appeal also meets the practical needs of clients and audiences.

Above all, professional designers learn through education, mentorship and experience to create designs that tell stories, reflect tone, convey emotions and encourage conversation. These are the foundations of the design industry as a whole, and thus they also inform and influence the evolving movement of Indigenous Design.

There are, however, extra layers to consider with Indigenous Design, whether the work is being created by an Indigenous designer or when the project and material is Indigenous – or both.

At Vincent Design, we like to approach these considerations as best practices and guiding principles. We share some of them here, along with examples from our own portfolio, to contribute to the growth and conversation about Indigenous design.

AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION

All memorable, iconic brands and designs are about storytelling – and Indigenous cultures bring a long storytelling tradition that can enrich and inform graphic designs.

These stories are spiritual, symbolic and sacred; they are not meant to be used or shared lightly. But they are not frozen in time either. In our work, we must blend the meaning of these stories into contemporary realities and modern platforms, avoiding tropes and stereotypes, while also honouring the wishes of each client and what they want depicted in their designs.

Being open to conversation and ideas, but also aware of the potential blind spots in design as they relate to representing Indigeneity, is essential to finding this balance.

Authentic, representative Indigenous designs also recognize that every group, culture and community is unique, represented by their own symbols and icons. Understanding that Indigenous cultures are diverse leads to designs that speak to diverse audiences. At the same time, we can draw from universal themes in the collective culture, from the stories that connect us all to the land, our ancestors and creation.

Founder and creative director Shaun Vincent expands on this principle with his own approach:

"My artistic style draws on my Métis roots and finds inspiration in nature – animals, plants, the environments around us that we all share. They are specific enough to evoke memories and connections to people's own experiences, but they are generic and universal enough to be useful creative symbols: they leave the specific interpretation up to the viewer. This style gives my designs the capability of overlapping from nation to nation, region to region, which is useful to any project but often essential in Indigenous designs."

For example, we chose soft colour palettes, simple lines and stylized Indigenous imagery in the design for local grassroots youth organization Ndinawe, a design that is universal in appeal while also uniquely reflective of their values, mission and trusted role in the community.

Similarly, featuring traditional medicine bags in various styles in the new logo for Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin Inc. (KIM) is an authentic symbol of their role as a northern Indigenous health entity and also speaks to the diversity of nations they serve and represent.

"Representation can be quite challenging in professional Indigenous design," adds Vincent. "Sometimes the topic or organization is best represented by a familiar, sacred symbol. Sometimes those symbols are important to the client or their audience, and they specifically ask for them to be included in the design. In these cases, we are also providing customer service and people-centred designs, and so an authentic process also has to be flexible, realistic and open-minded."

RESPECTING INDIGENOUS CULTURES

When we're designing logos with significant meaning for Indigenous businesses or organizations, it can be a challenge to touch on everything from the history, meaning, symbolism and subject matter while also considering design basics like legibility, cohesiveness, contemporary usage and attractiveness. It can be quite the balancing act.

Our best practice is to follow the protocols of the International Indigenous Design Charter, a thoughtful guide for anyone using, representing and sharing Indigenous knowledge and culture in professional design practice.

In particular, Protocol 8, "Impact of Design", asks designers to ensure that "the representation of Indigenous cultures:

- reflects their cultural values and respects their customary laws;
- protects and respects the environment and honours the values of Indigenous cultures;
- are an authentic reflection of Indigenous knowledge; empowers Indigenous peoples: past, present and future; and,
- positively impacts Indigenous peoples who are both the subject and producers of the story: past, present and future."

This can take many forms. It can mean including appropriate land declarations or acknowledgements of country in print and digital projects. It can involve ensuring any photos, and the subjects of any photos, taken or purchased to represent Indigeneity depict appropriate cultural values and honour the client and audience they address. It can mean supporting mentoring and hiring Indigenous designers from a diversity of nations and cultures to enrich and inform your firm's approach.

For example, all of these considerations shaped our design of the logo for the Southeast Resource Development Council – logo treatment required special sensitivity with respect to using the symbolic aspect of tobacco in First Nation culture, ensuring its positive, traditional meaning was preserved and conveyed.

CONSULTATION AND CONSENT

When incorporating material from Indigenous teachings and sacred symbols, a collaborative approach can ensure that use of the more familiar sacred images and stories are tied to clients' purpose, goals and brands.

Here too, the International Indigenous Design Charter provides a roadmap: Protocol 1 recommends that Indigenous design is Indigenous led, that we "ensure Indigenous stakeholders oversee creative development and the design process."

As a best practice, we respect and uphold that Indigenous knowledge belongs to its cultural custodians: we always have informed consent from our clients, their communities or both to include any Indigenous element. We are Indigenous designers ourselves, and we therefore bring an awareness and sensitivity to each project we undertake and oversee.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers close to Vincent Design are also valued members of our team. We take grateful counsel in their advice, stories, conversation and feelings towards Indigenous issues, symbols and topics.

For example, in the case of our work on the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, consultation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and stakeholder groups informed our selection of elements. We also undertook careful research with museum curators and historians on artifact archives to inform our designs and ensure we understood the cultural relevance of each item and symbol.

TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To do this work, we sometimes also have to embrace what is difficult. We know that truth is a part of meaningful reconciliation. Some projects and subject matters require acknowledging pain and loss in our communities and cultures. We must always be sensitive, respectful and trustworthy to use, represent and work with this material.

At the same time, we have an equal responsibility to create designs that celebrate thriving, resilient and vibrant Indigenous cultures, realities and futures. Our designs will also always be rooted in the beauty, richness and joy of the First Nation, Inuit and Métis cultures we represent.

Curriculum Connections

Alberta, Northwest Territories & Nunavut

- Grade 11 and Grade 12 Entrepreneurship course
- Art 10,20,30

British Columbia & Yukon

- Entrepreneurship and Marketing 10
- Media Design 10
- Graphic Production 11 (identical to Entrepreneurship and Marketing 10)
- Career Life Education

Ontario

- Business Studies Grade 9 and 10
- Information and Communication Technology in Business, Grade 9 or 10
- Media Arts Grade 11 and 12

Grade 9 Technology and Skilled Trades

Strand A: Design Processes and Related Skills

- A1.1 investigate and describe fundamental technological concepts, and explain how they are relevant to developing products and/or services in a variety of broad-based technology areas
- A1.2 apply an understanding of fundamental technological concepts, design considerations, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) concepts as appropriate in developing projects involving the creation of products and/or services
- A1.4 communicate design ideas for various purposes and audiences, using appropriate industry terminology
- A1.7 collect and synthesize information from a variety of sources, including people with diverse perspectives and from various communities, such as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, to inform their projects

Strand B: Technological Development, Impacts, and Careers

- B1.2 analyze how the development and application of technologies are impacted by legal, ethical, social, economic, and environmental considerations
- B1.3 investigate and identify contributions to technological innovations made by Canadians, including women, and members of diverse groups and communities in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit
- B3.1 explore a variety of roles, responsibilities, and opportunities related to current and emerging careers in technological fields, including a variety of broad-based technology areas, and the skilled trades
- B3.3 investigate and describe a variety of pathways leading to careers in technological fields and the skilled trades, including their structure and the educational and financial requirements for them