

Bill Reid Gallery and The Raven's Call

Using the Animation

The animated video of *The Raven's Call* is Haida artist and author Michael Yahgulanaas's free adaptation of a story by Bill Reid. While it changes many things in Reid's decades-old tale, it does pose the same dilemma: what should the totem characters do next?

The answer depends on how the characters view their own sense of identity. Do they see themselves as representatives of a past culture, who exist to show its former greatness and maintain its traditions? Are they works of art to be admired? Are they participants in some new, living culture, or part of the larger, industrial culture, or should they return to the natural elements, apart from the human world? The Raven seems to believe that they "can figure this out," and that's what the Web site asks students to do by adding their own endings to the tale.

If students need a little help in approaching the problem of ending the story, here are some suggestions to help them along.

Younger Students

Role-play each of the characters: the Watchman, the Owl, the Orca, the Cormorant, the Beaver and the Raven. Each character in the animation makes a statement. You can prepare for each role by creating small groups to discuss each statement and decide who will play the role.

Follow up the role-play with a class discussion of the statements and a brainstorm of new answers that might also be offered.

Alternatively, you can create a chart listing the "Pros" and "Cons" for each character's response.

Older Students

Spend some class time discussing the symbolism of this little allegory. The totem pole may be an artifact of Haida culture, but when it's "re-awakened" by the Raven's call, it becomes symbolic of that culture in the 21st century. Understanding it that way, the characters' statements at the end of the story are really answers to the question, "What role can we, as representatives of Haida culture, play in the world today?"

In class discussion, translate each character's statements into a single clear sentence. This will involve considerable interpretation and generalizing of the individual sentences. The Whale says that he wants to "go on a long swim," but this could be interpreted to mean, "We should abandon the human world and become creatures of nature."

Discuss the implications of each of these statements in terms of the totem's importance in Haida tradition and current history. If students are familiar with the Website contents or have studied First Nations issues, they may be able to understand the statements in the context of ongoing issues of First Nations culture and political power in a post-colonial context and questions of identity and artistic

integrity that were important to Bill Reid.

You might make each sentence the resolution for a mini-debate. Have students in teams of two argue for and against the solution and rebut arguments from the opposing team.

Creating an Ending to the Story

The Website allows students to conclude the story in a choice of formats: text only, text with images, video and audio. These submission formats actually create many different options for students' endings. They may combine a series of images into a video, for instance, resulting in a presentation like a comic book or slideshow. By adding an audio narration or dramatization to it, they can imitate the look and mood of the animated story.

The class may find it useful to brainstorm possible endings and ways to represent them. Consider live filming of a role-play, the written script of a screenplay, a radio drama, even a cut-paper animation. With some encouragement, students will be able to come up with imaginative solutions.

Students can work individually or in groups to create productions for submission.