



Finding Your "I AM" Through Indigenous Visual Art

**Language Arts, Humanities, Visual Arts,
SEL**

**Lesson Plans
Grades 4 - 8**

**This lesson was curated and designed by a non-Indigenous teacher and
reviewed by Indigenous educators.*



Finding Your “I AM” Through Indigenous Art

In 1875, English poet William Ernest Henley wrote *Invictus*, a poem that has long served as inspiration for those facing adversity or challenges in their lives. The word *Invictus* means “unconquered”.

I AM is the motto for the Invictus Games and is inspired by the last two lines of *Invictus*: “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” “I AM” reflects and defines the Invictus Games’ core purpose: to provide a platform for personal achievement, to compete not just against each other, but against oneself.

The Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 (IG2025) will bring together over 500 wounded, injured, and sick military service members and veterans from around the world on a courageous journey of recovery through the healing power of sport. Learn how their experiences at the Games have transformed their lives and helped them in their quest to be “unconquerable.”

Objective

Students will be able to study the visual art of the Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 and find meaning in the images. Students will create their own art incorporating a connection to nature and Coast Salish design elements.

Target Audience

Students in grades 4-8. This lesson would be suited for Visual Arts, Language Arts, or Humanities. It can also be used as an activity on Social & Emotional Learning focusing on identity or resilience.

Teacher Note

These lessons can be adapted to suit your subject, your grade level and your personal style of teaching.

When taking photos of your student’s work, make sure there are no student identifiers in the picture.

IG2025 would like you to be part of the Invictus community and post your student’s work on Instagram (@invictusgames25) with the hashtag

#ShareYourIAM

This activity is on the last page of this document.

Teacher Notes

Introduce The Invictus Games (20 mins)

1. Introduce the Invictus Games by showing the “Heart of Invictus” trailer (1.55 mins) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeJuxMYhmEc>
This allows students to experience the competitors’ resilience and passion as well as the excitement of the Games.
2. Give students **“The Invictus Games: Student Information Handout”**. Either go over the handout with the class or have them read it independently.
3. Ask students to go back to the handout and **highlight or underline three things that stood out for them**. It could be things they have further questions about, things that surprised them or things that inspired them.
4. Have them **discuss in small groups one thing** they highlighted/underlined. They should read the phrase to the group and explain why this grabbed their attention.

Build Inspiration Through Indigenous Art

This unit is best taught when teacher and students work together to go through the handouts. Scaffolding happens when students make meaningful and personal connections to the material. Give time for class and small group discussions as well as time for personal reflections.

The Videos

For the first viewing, show the videos to the class all the way through without stopping so students can see the big picture. On the second viewing, stop the videos when you want to emphasize inspirational moments. Show the class your own thinking as you make personal connections to the material. Ask the students to think of their own connections and have them share those in small groups. You can also stop and start the video to discuss the questions on the handouts and give students time to write their answers.

Gradual Release Model of Instruction

Utilize the “I do, we do, you do” strategy when going through the handouts. The “you do” part doesn’t always have to be independent work. Let small groups or partners work through each question so that student discussion is a key part of this unit. Alternatively, you could divide the work and have small groups teach the information to the class. Choose a variety of strategies to make the readings relevant for students.

THE INVICTUS GAMES STUDENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

Watch “Heart of Invictus” Trailer (1.55mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeJuxMYhmEc>

This 7th edition of the Games will be held on the traditional territories of the Liłwat7úl (Lilwat), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 are working closely with the Nations to ensure they respond to Canada’s Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and to ensure Indigenous protocols are respected in all aspects of the Games.

Overview

The Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 is a special event to honour and celebrate the strength and courage of soldiers and veterans who have been hurt, injured, or have become sick. From February 8th to 16th 2025, more than 500 amazing people from up to 25 countries will come to Vancouver and Whistler for the first-ever Winter Invictus Games. They will take part in 11 different sports to help them heal and grow stronger, with their family and friends cheering them on.

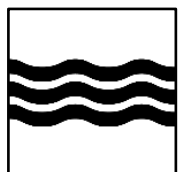
The word ‘Invictus’ means “unbeaten” and shows how these brave people refuse to give up. It reminds us of their fighting spirit and how they keep going, no matter what challenges they face.

Inspiration Through Poetry

In 1875, a poet from England named William Ernest Henley wrote a famous poem called *Invictus*. The word *Invictus* means “unbeaten.” This poem has inspired many people who face tough times in their lives.

The motto for the Invictus Games is “I AM.” This comes from the last two lines of the poem *Invictus*: “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” “I AM” shows what the Invictus Games are all about—helping people achieve their personal best. It’s not just about competing with others but also about challenging themselves.

The Invictus Games gives injured or sick soldiers and veterans from around the world a chance to heal and grow stronger through sports. These Games help them on their journey to feel strong and “unbeatable” again.



Invictus Games and Indigenous Peoples

Watch the video "[Ceremonies – Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAReCi0a7BQ)" to see what the games are all about (www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAReCi0a7BQ)

Watch the video, "[What We Do](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OJOV-eoOS0)" to see what effects the games have (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OJOV-eoOS0)

- 1. These competitors are on a journey of healing. What phrases do they use that demonstrate how intense their journey has been? You may need to watch the video a few times or stop and start as necessary.**



Watch [Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025: Four Host First Nations](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYRFh7Nj3gs)

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYRFh7Nj3gs)

"The very first thing I saw, was that identical journey. Where we are, where we have been and we struggle with trauma being who we are. It is an identical journey Invictus and First Nations. I'm Chief Dean Nelson and I want to welcome you to the homelands of the Liłwat7úl (Liłwat) Nation."

"Hello. I'm Chief Wayne Sparrow, elected chief of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam) First Nation. I want to welcome you to our ancestral lands. We admire your courage and your participation walking together with you on this journey in life. Welcome on behalf of our community."

"It's been an awakening not only to be included but feeling a part of every step of the way. The power of Invictus to be unconquered is something that our Indigenous Peoples connect with wholeheartedly. My message to the competitors through our culture and our traditions. Our teachings are to hold each other up, to empower each other and we are only stronger together, united. I am Counselor Wilson Williams and I want to welcome you to the traditional territory of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation."

"I am Chief Jen Thomas of səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nation. I'd like to welcome all the competitors and visitors who will come for the Invictus games to our beautiful land. We at səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nation believe in the power of sport. We admire your courage and determination to overcome any challenge. I want to take this time now to welcome the competitors to the shared territory of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) and Liłwat7úl (Liłwat) Nations. Hand in hand, we walk together on the journey of recovery."

Invictus Games and Indigenous Peoples (Pg 2)

Instructions: Discuss the following questions in small groups. Each member of the group should record everything that is discussed.

1. Watch the video a 2nd time and describe the natural environment each Chief or spokesperson chose to film their speech. Record specific things you see in the background.

2. Why do you think they chose these natural environments?

3. Chief Wayne Sparrow and Chief Jen Thomas both spoke of admiring the courage of the competitors of the Invictus Games. Why do you think it took courage for the competitors to be part of the Invictus Games?

Challenge Questions:

4. Chief Dean Nelson said, "That was the very first thing I saw, was that identical journey". Chief Jen Thomas also said, "Hand in hand, we walk together on the journey of recovery". In what way are First Nations People and the Invictus Games competitors on a similar journey?

5. Why do you think Counselor Wilson Williams said, "The power of Invictus to be unconquered is something that our Indigenous Peoples connect with wholeheartedly". What do you think he meant by this?



Lessons From the Land

The connection between Coast Salish people and the land and water of the Pacific Northwest is at the center of cultural beliefs and practices. For the Coast Salish peoples, the earth is the ultimate source of nourishment and knowledge. Earth provides gifts of food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

<https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/assets/2009-11-17-Coast-Salish-Fast-Facts.pdf>

As colonizers, we have much to learn from Indigenous People about having a relationship with the land. We can learn a lot about ourselves by looking and studying nature.

Small Group Instructions

- 1. Cut out each title** and lay it across your table
- 2. Cut out each picture** and place them below the matching title. Some photos can go under more than one category. You can move the photos as you move through this activity.
- 3. Cut out each of the words** in the word bank. **Discuss each word as a group and decide which words go with which photo.**

If things in nature could talk, think of what they would tell you about their own positive personality traits. For example,

- A mountain might tell you that it has inner strength.
- A tree might tell you that it is part of a giving family.
- A sunset might say that it is creative, special, grateful, or calm.

Some of the words may go with more than one part of nature. There is no right answer, your group can place the word under any photo that fits. **Be sure your group has made the decision together and everyone can explain their thinking.**



Lessons From the Land (Pg 2)

4. Look at the photos and the words your group placed under each photo. **For each piece of nature, choose a word that represents who you are on the inside.** If nothing fits for you, think of your own word that would match the photo and who you are. Write the word for each piece of nature below.

Tree: I AM _____

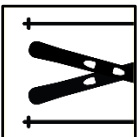
Waterfall: I AM _____

River: I AM _____

Ocean: I AM _____

Lake: I AM _____

Sun: I AM _____



Mountain: I AM _____

Titles / Categories

Trees

Lakes

Eagles

Waterfalls

The Ocean

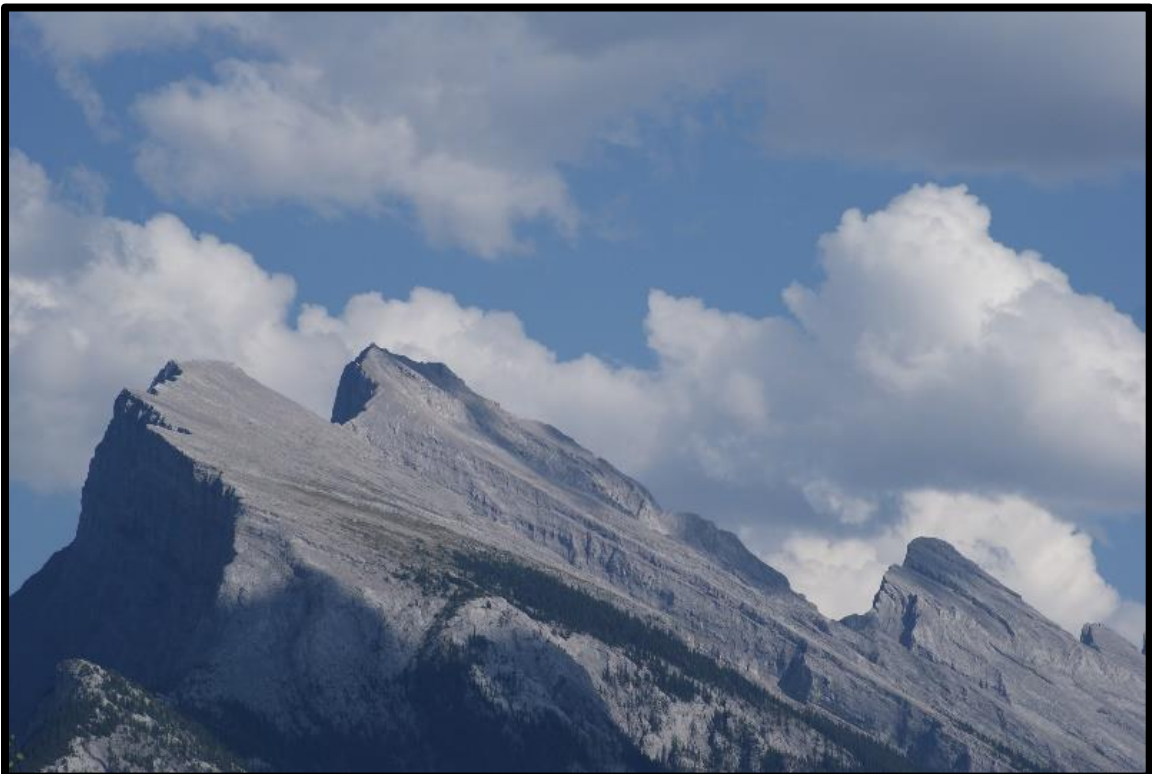
The Sun

Rivers

Mountains

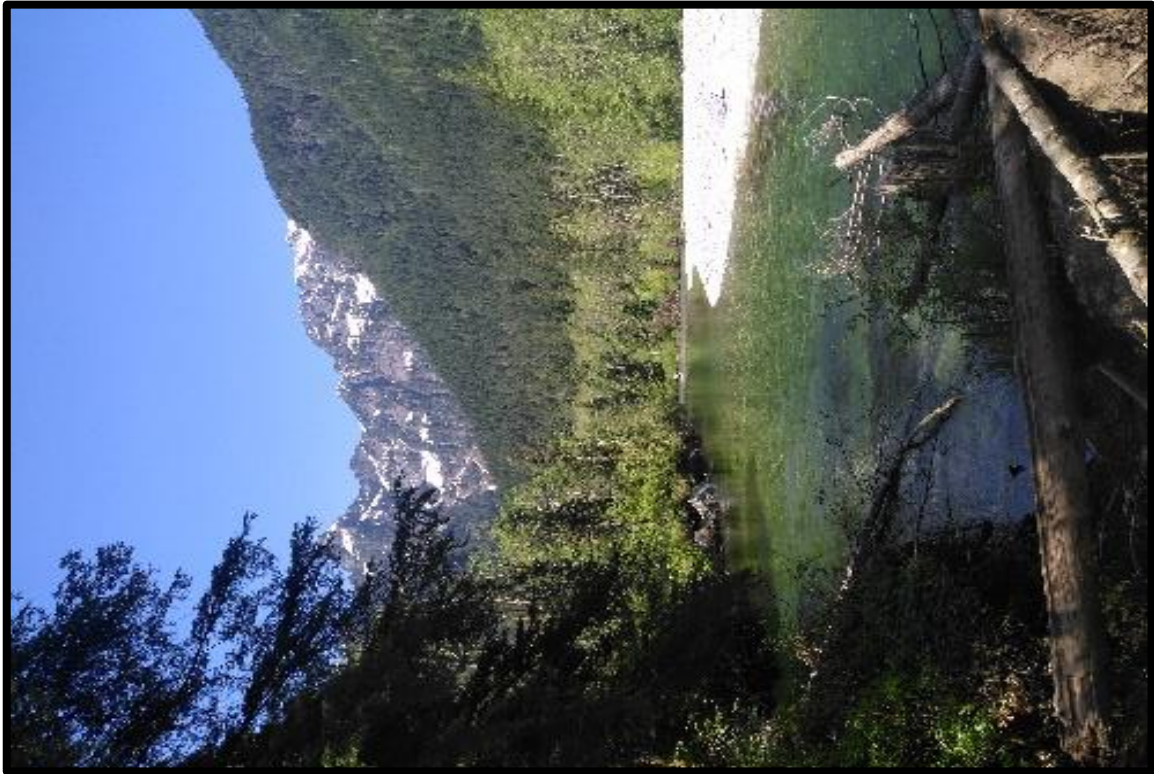
Photos

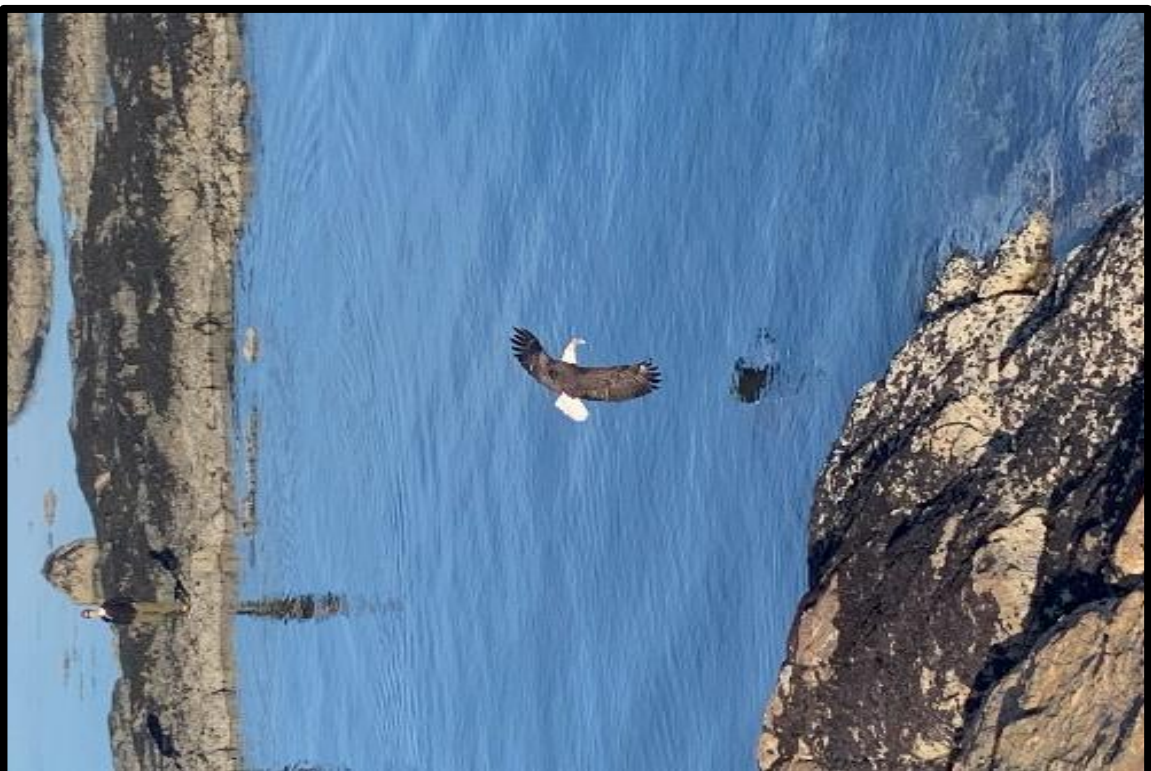
All photos by cassie.lumsden (Instagram)













Word Bank

Brave

Persistent

Bright

Protective

Cheerful

Deep

Energetic

Gentle

Friendly

Kind

Graceful

Bold

Helpful

Proud

Majestic

Patient

Peaceful

Calm

Powerful

Quiet

Reflective

Sharp

Reliable

Warm

Steady

Strong

Watchful

Wise

Coast Salish Art

Ovals and circles stand for cycles, togetherness, and the idea of being in the center of something. Cycles are things that happen over and over again in nature, like how the sun rises and sets, the moon changes shape, and the seasons come and go. These cycles remind us to think about how what we do today affects us, the people around us, and future generations.

Crescents and long crescents show different phases or stages, like the moon or different times in life. Instead of thinking about days, weeks, or months, the Coast Salish People followed the changing seasons to know when to do important things. These seasonal phases helped them live their daily lives.

The trigon is a special symbol with a deep meaning. It has four points — three you can see and one in the center. The center point is very important because the number four is special in Coast Salish teachings. It represents the four main directions (north, south, east, and west) and the four parts of being human: the body, the mind, the heart, and the spirit.

April Strickland, Mi'kmaq [Introduction to Contemporary Coast Salish Art](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkLNGXvpFu8)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkLNGXvpFu8>)
(2:47 – 4:38)



Coast Salish art often uses shapes and patterns that are balanced and symmetrical, which represent the balance found in nature.

From <https://legacy.uvic.ca/gallery/cornett/coast-salish-art>

Invictus Games Visual Identity

“We are very proud of the work we did together, and believe this artwork is a strong representation and reflection of our Nations’ culture, lands, and waters,”

- Levi Nelson (Lil’wat Nation)
- Mack Paul (Musqueam Nation)
- Ray Natraoro (Squamish Nation)
- Olivia George (Tsleil-Waututh Nation)

“We were able to share our ideas, experiences, and cultural references, to come together for the first time to convey meaning from our Nations.”

From <https://invictusgames2025.ca/latest-updates/invictus-games-vancouver-whistler-2025-unveils-new-visual-identity-designed-by-four-leading-first-nations-artists/>



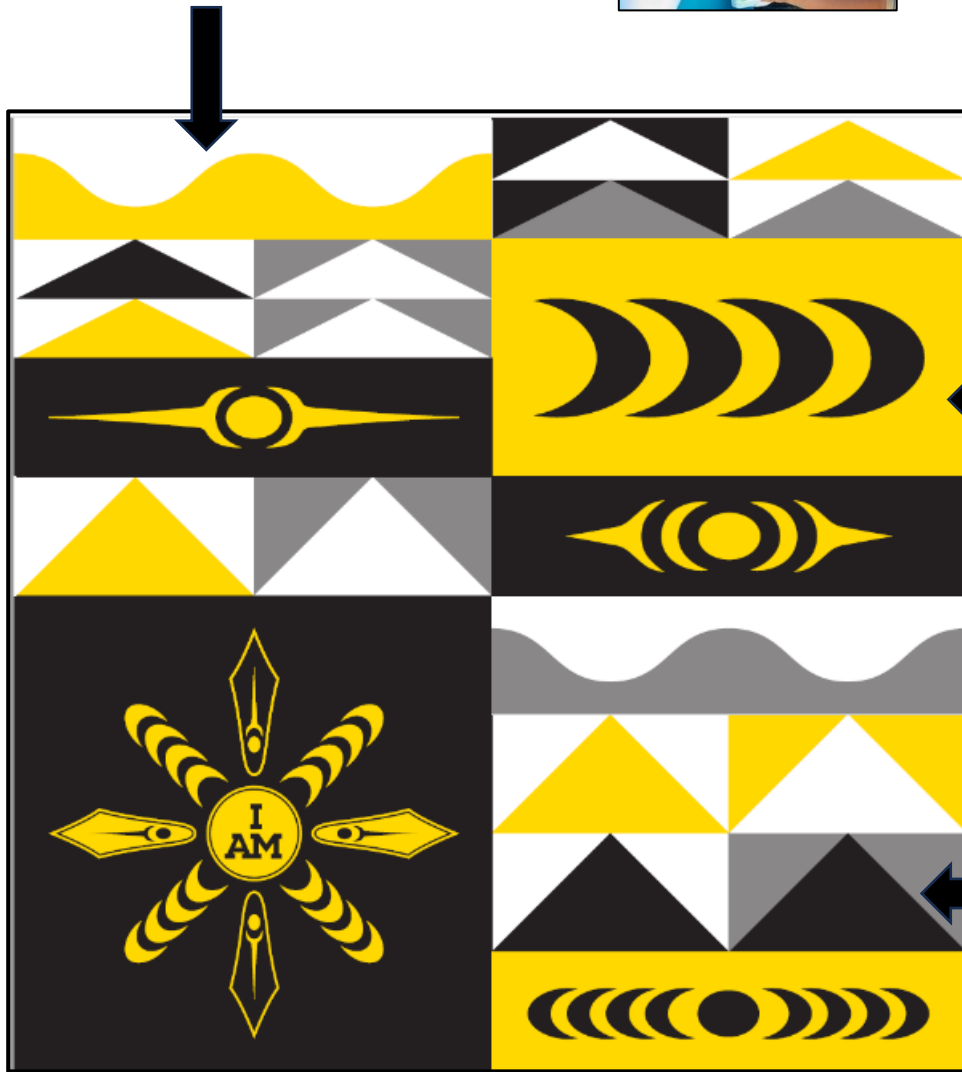
Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations Artists

"The ripples motif from the shared journey emblem represents the connection between family and friends..." **Olivia George**



"For the Musqueam community, black represents the warrior people and yellow represents wealth." **Mack Paul**

"Black mountains- spiritual powers that come from the sky - protectors." **Ray Natraoro**



"The overall structure exemplifies for me a floral pattern which represents the traditional medicines which are used to help heal our community. This can be also applied to the competitors, family and friends who will be joining the Invictus Games 2025." **Levi Nelson**



Invictus Games Art & Meaning For You

1st Instruction: For each of the specific shapes in this Indigenous piece of art, label what you think each shape's meaning represents. Use each word only once.

Sun

Ocean

Eagle

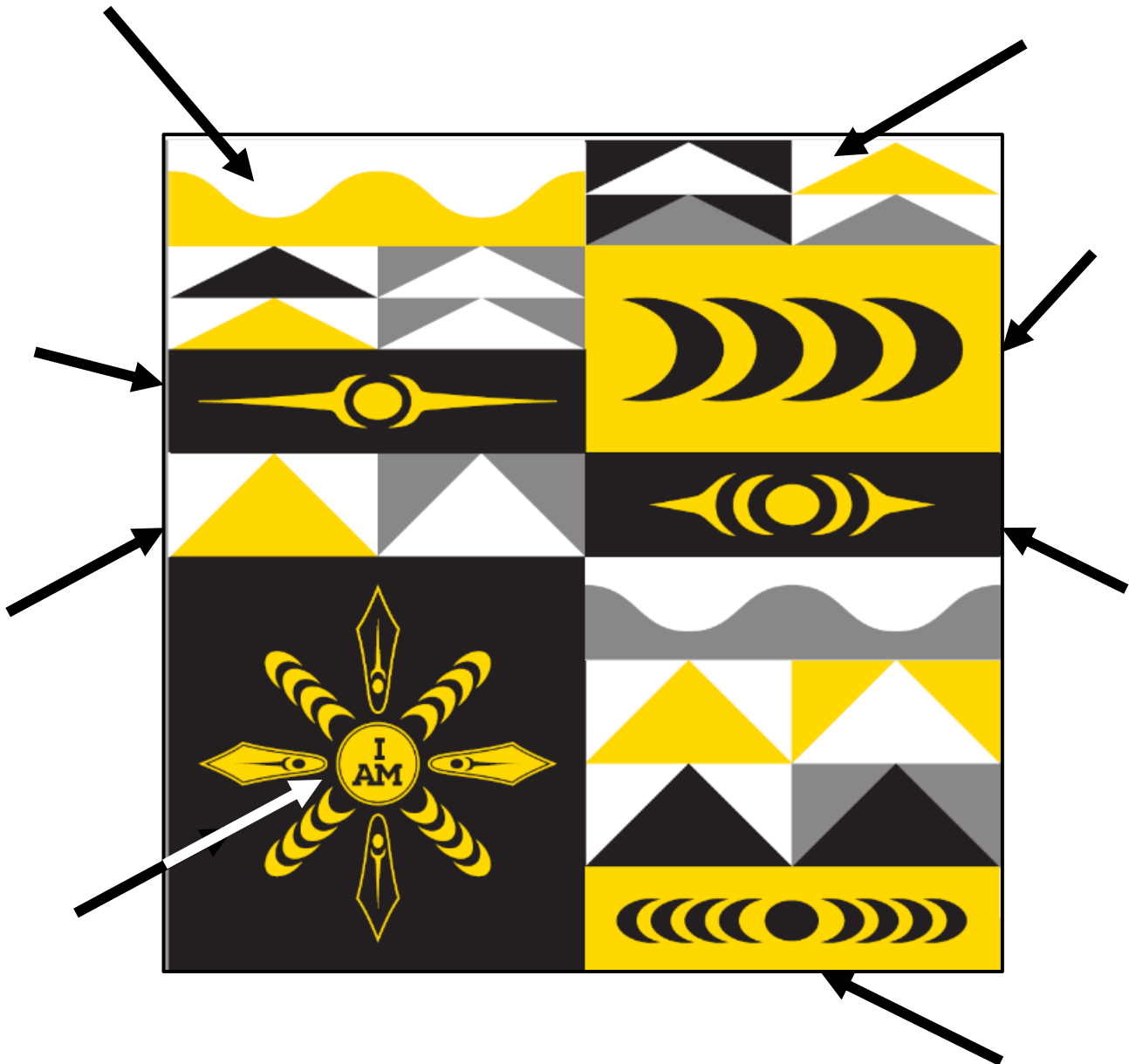
Mountains

River

Trees

Lake

Waterfall



2nd Instruction: Go back to the handout, "Lessons From The Land (pg. 2)" and add in your "I AM" statement to each arrow.

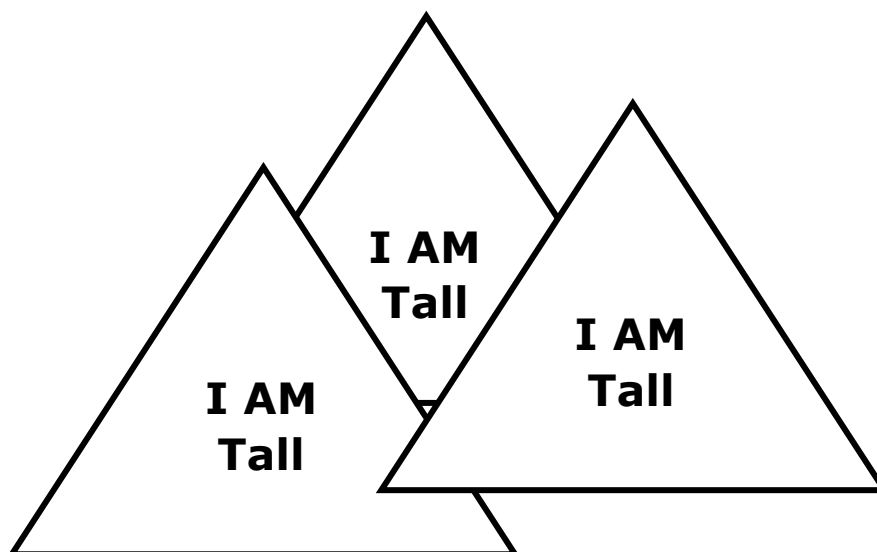


Invictus Games Art & Meaning For You (pg2)

Create a picture of a landscape or an abstract collage that also captures who you are. Use **only** the Coast Salish shapes and any shape in the artwork on page one of this handout.

You will write your "I AM" statement inside the shape it matches.

For example – to create mountains, use a pencil to draw a large triangle. Inside the triangle, write your I AM statement from page one of this handout



You can go to <https://legacy.uvic.ca/gallery/salishcurriculum/art-project/coast-salish-design-elements-templates/> and print the following templates if you wish or you can draw the shapes freehand.

Use **at least 5** of the shapes from page one. You can also create more shapes of your own if you like, just make sure each shape represents something from nature and also has your I AM statement written inside the shape (as illustrated above).

Be Creative and Have Fun!

On the following page, use a Sharpie and choose your favourite "I AM" statement. Make your I AM word(s) large, so it stands out when your teacher takes a photo of your work to post on Instagram.

AMI

INVICTUS
GAMES
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