



# ***Finding Your "I AM" Through Indigenous Visual Art***

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

**Lesson Plans  
Grades 9 – 12**

*\*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 9-12. This lesson would be suited for a Visual Arts, Language Arts, Humanities or Psychology class. It can also be used as an activity on Social & Emotional Learning focusing on identity or resilience.

## Teacher Note

There is no need to assess everything in this package as students will demonstrate their understanding through synthesizing the information in the final essay/paragraph.

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 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 the students.

# THE INVICTUS GAMES STUDENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

Watch “Heart of Invictus” Trailer (1.55mins)

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

This 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Games will be held on the traditional territories of the Lilwat7úl (*Lilwat*), x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (*Musqueam*), Skwxwú7mesh (*Squamish*) and səliiwətaʔ (*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 celebrates the unconquered human spirit of military service members and Veterans who are wounded, injured, or sick. From February 8 – 16, 2025, over 500 of these heroes will travel from up to 25 different nations to Vancouver and Whistler for the first-ever Winter hybrid Games. These service members will compete in 11 different sports to support their journey of recovery with their family and friends cheering them on from the sidelines.

‘Invictus’ means unconquered and embodies the fighting spirit of the participants, as well as their motivation to move on with their lives, and to not let themselves be defined by their struggle.

## Inspiration Through Poetry

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 provides a platform for the injured, and sick military service members and Veterans from around the world to embark 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.”

Want to learn more about the transformative powers of the Invictus Games and feel the emotion, strength and perseverance of the competitors?

**Watch “Heart of Invictus” on Netflix**



# 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](https://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](https://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](https://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 Lil'wat7úl (Líl'wat) 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 Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nation.

I am Chief Jen Thomas of səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-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 səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-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), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) and Lil'wat7úl (Líl'wat) 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.

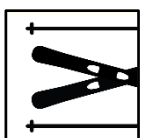
**1.** Chief Dean Nelson said, "That was the very first thing I saw, was that identical journey". Chief Jen Thomas also said, "Hand in hand, we walk together on the journey of recovery". In what way are First Nations People and the Invictus Games competitors on a similar journey?

**2.** 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?

**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?

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

**5.** Why do you think they chose these natural environments?



# Lessons From the Land



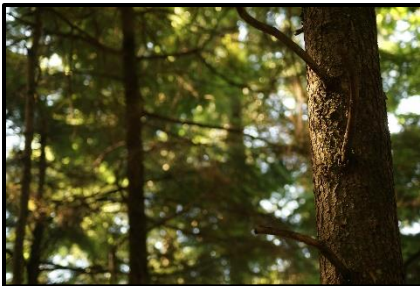
*The connection between Coast Salish people and the land and water of the Pacific Northwest is at the center of cultural beliefs and practices. For the Coast Salish peoples, the earth is the ultimate source of nourishment and knowledge. Earth provides gifts of food, shelter, clothing and medicine.*

<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. There is so much we can learn from nature. **Look at the following photos and with your small group, use personification and brainstorm what “character traits” each subject can teach us.**

For instance, what can we learn from a sunset? Think of traits like colorful personality, creative, calm, harmonious, special, grateful, etc. **List as many words as you can for each photo.**

*(Photos by cassie.lumsden IG)*



## Character Traits of Trees



## Character Traits of Eagles

## Character Traits of Waterfalls

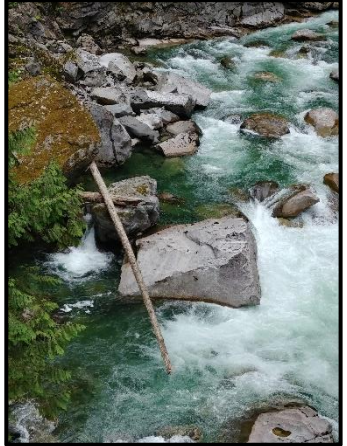




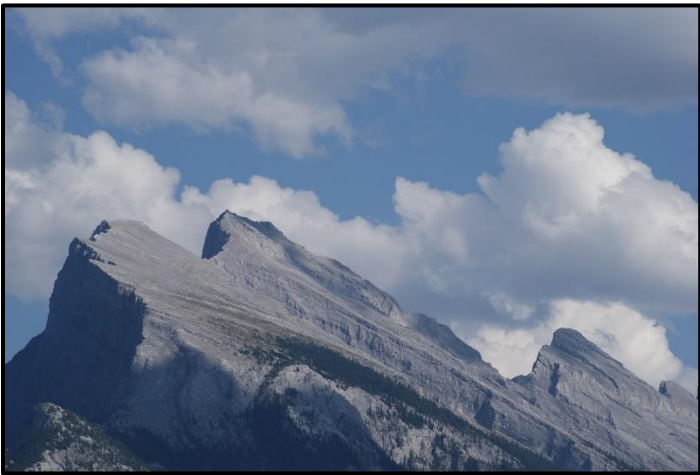
**Character Traits of  
The Sun**

**Character Traits of  
The Ocean**

**Character Traits of Rivers**



**Character Traits of Lakes**



**Character Traits of Mountains**



# Coast Salish Art

**"The ovals and circles represent cycles, unity, and centrality.** Cycles mean the cycles of nature such as the sun, moon, and sky. We think about the seasons in nature and of human life. It reminds us that it is important to consider how our actions affect ourselves, our people and our generations yet to come.

**The crescents and extended crescents represent phases such as life and such as the moon.** It can also be characterized as a marking of a passage of time and seasons rather than weeks, months and years. The Coast Salish People relied heavily on seasonal rounds and using these seasonal phases helped with their day to day living.

**The trigon is a spiritual connection.** This design element has four points. Three surface points and a fourth inner point. The fourth point was central to Coast Salish teaching because 4 is a ritual number. There are four major directions and four aspects of human nature: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual."

*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)*



**"The use of geometric symmetry** in Coast Salish art, is often said, **reflects the balance of nature.** In fact, the environment is a common element in Salish art, where animal-like forms are often seen on their own or combined with human-like forms. Such ambiguity is deliberate since Salish notions of spirits are intensively private."

*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,"** says Levi Nelson (Lil'wat Nation), Mack Paul (Musqueam Nation), Ray Natraoro (Squamish Nation), and 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.** We are honoured to show our work on the world stage through the Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025."



*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

xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) and Liłwat7úl (Líłwat)

*"The visual identity for the Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 was designed and created as a result of a unique collaboration between four Indigenous artists – one from each of the Four Host First Nations. This collaboration represents a first-of-its-kind initiative to create a visual identity for an international sporting event".*

*invictusgames2025.ca/latest-updates/invictus-games-vancouver-whistler-2025-unveils-new-visual-identity-designed-by-four-leading-first-nations-artists/*

## 1. To find meaning, with your group, look back at the previous pages:

- Invictus Games Student Handout
- Invictus Games and Indigenous Peoples
- Lessons From the Land
- Coast Salish Art

**Create a word bank** based on everything you have learned relating to the Invictus Games, the land, the journey, etc. Look for words that you would want to see visually represented in The Invictus Games Shared Journey Emblem and artwork.

## 2. In a small group, analyze the Indigenous Games Blanket and Shared Journey Emblem on the next page.

Look at all the details and discuss what you **imagine** the meaning might be, **keeping in mind everything you have previously learned**.

Draw an arrow from each detail and write what you **think** that part represents. *For example, a triangle might represent a mountain which also represents strength.*



# Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations (pg2)



# Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations (pg3)

**3. With your group, look at the quotes** from the Four Artists below. Analyze what they have said and draw arrows from the shapes to their meanings on the Indigenous Art on page 2.



## Olivia George (Tseil-Waututh Nation)

- “The ripples motif from the shared journey emblem represents the connection between family and friends and the service members.”
- “While it was my first time meeting Ray and Mack, I learned [we] have so [many] similarities with the communities and felt welcome to [work] together for the first time.”



## Levi Nelson (Lil'Wat Nation)

- “When I thought about the journey of healing, one thing that came to mind was working together in the canoe.”
- [talking about the Shared Journey Emblem – the I AM logo] “This symbolizes the coming together to accomplish one thing.”
- [The Shared Journey Emblem – the I AM logo] “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 applied to also the competitors, family and friends who will be joining the Invictus Games 2025.”



## Ray Natraoro (Squamish Nation)

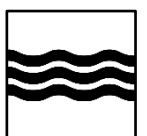
- “First time for us working together in collectively to make a design as an equal.”
- “The Squamish phrase, Chen Chen Stway—this is an important meaning in the Squamish Nation in supporting one another and the healing process of teaching our ancestors.”
- “Black mountains- spiritual powers that come from the sky, protectors.”



## Mack Paul (Musqueam Nation)

- For the Musqueam community, black represents the warrior people and yellow represents wealth.

**4. Individually, look back** at what you wrote as character trait words on the “**Lessons From The Land**” handout. Choose **one** word for each landform that is **meaningful to you and encompasses who you are**. Connect each of your words to one of the shapes in the Indigenous Art on page 2 of this activity.



# Putting It All Together

**For this activity, you will need the handout, "Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations".**

The Coast Salish People use specific shapes to create meaning in their artwork. As you have learned, they also have a strong connection to the land and draw inspiration from this. Think of how these shapes and environmental landforms represent you personally.

**1. Look back at your word bank and previous work and choose a word that best encapsulates who you are matching each landform.** Turn this word into an "I AM" statement by writing your word on the line below. **Then draw the shape** used on the artwork on page 2 of the handout, "Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations" that matches that landform.

**Tree:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**Waterfall:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**River:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**Ocean:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**Lake:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**Sun:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**Mountain:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**2. Look back at the page, "Coast Salish Art". Read about the meaning of each shape. Think of a word that represents the shape's meaning and relates to you.** Write the word in the blanks below. Beside that, draw the shape as it used on the handout, "Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations (Pg2)"

**Circle/Oval:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

**Crescent/Extended Crescent:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:

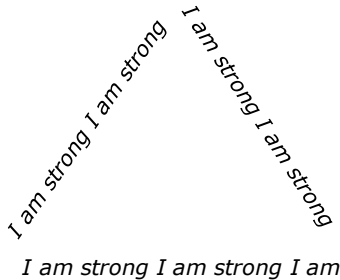
**Trigon:** I AM \_\_\_\_\_ Shape:



# Putting It All Together (pg 2)

**3. Craft an abstract piece of art (that demonstrates symmetry) or a landscape that reflects the Coast Salish land on which we work and play and also captures who you are.** Use **only** the Coast Salish shapes and any shape in the artwork on page 2 of "Invictus Games Art & The Four Host Nations" that reflects the various landforms listed above.

**You will use your I AM statement to draw the shape it pertains to.** For example – to create a mountain, use a pencil to draw a large triangle. Write your I AM statement from above (very small) along all the edges of the triangle in colored pen. Lastly, erase the pencil line. See the example below.



Do this for every single shape you use and change color for the various shapes.

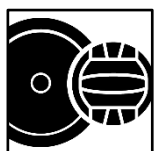
If you use a circle to symbolize the sun, you can use your I AM statement for sun and/or you can choose the statement that goes with the Coast Salish meaning of circles.

**Keep in mind that the Coast Salish abstract art uses geometrical symmetry to reflect the balance of nature.**

## 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.***

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



AMI

