

REVIEWS

Reading the Museum – a video

visit Reading the Museum on the Web: <http://www.nald.ca/rtm.htm>



Exploring how museums can be an inspiration and resource for adult literacy, this video challenges our ways of seeing both literacy students and museums. Focusing on three successful demonstration projects undertaken across Canada by the [Canadian Museums Association](http://www.nald.ca/rtm.htm) in partnership with local museums, the video portrays adult literacy students thoughtfully and with respect. Students speak openly and poignantly about the challenges of becoming literate; each one is presented as an individual with family and community bonds. They all have strong perceptions about themselves and their lives. Patricia, Gail, Helen, Claude, and the others look like our friends, neighbours and relatives, far removed from the stereotype of the non-functional adult literacy student so often represented in the media.

Then there are the museums. Whether the [Edmonton Art Gallery](#) (working with Prospects Literacy Association), the [McCord Museum](#) in Montreal (working with [Carrefour Education Populaire de Pointe St. Charles](#)), or the New Brunswick Museum (working with Read Saint John), all are shown as welcoming places where basic education students can find a way to connect. Using paintings, sculpture, and artifacts, literacy instructors collaborated with museum educators to support innovative projects adapted to the philosophy of the literacy program. So, the popular education group in Montreal used photocopies of historic family photo albums from the McCord collection to stimulate reading and writing, then took the students to the museum to look through original artifacts. Finally, the project linked back to social issues in their own neighbourhood by asking the students to create albums of their own. They show off their creations with pride.



In the end, each project produced materials and publications that are used and admired by others, bolstering the self-esteem of the learners and contributing to their collective learning. The commentary points out links between images and print, between art and writing, and demonstrates how art triggered recognition, self-reflection and identification that lead to some stunningly sensitive writing. The viewer is moved when Julie, a student who created a storybook about the Saint John Fine Arts Gallery finds herself not yet able to read her own words fluently, yet smiles as she affirms, “These are my words. I’ve done it. I can’t read it very well. It takes time, and that’s what I have.”

All teachers should find this video worth watching and modeling. [LS]

Available in English, narrated by poet Dennis Lee, and in French, narrated by children's book illustrator and playwright Marie-Louise Gay, the video is available for \$29.95 plus \$6.00 postage and handling. Add \$5.00 extra for US deliveries. Taxes extra.

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