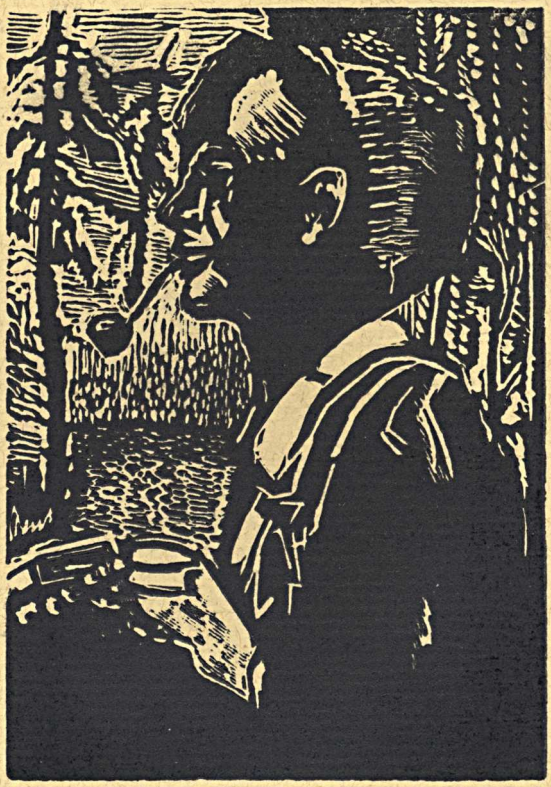
GEORGE A. WALKER

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF



TOM THOMSON

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF TOM THOMSON

STUDY GUIDE

Consider the cover design of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*. At a glance the image may appear to be rough-hewn, but consider that wood engraving is a predominantly 19th-century printmaking technique that requires the artist to create images with a burin manipulated on the end-grain of polished blocks of hardwood, in this case, maple. This is not, particularly, easy to accomplish.

Tom is smoking a pipe, and holding a coffee in his hand. He is wearing a toque, and suspenders, maybe. He appears to be smiling, and he is outdoors, close to a lake. Would any of your students be able to identify the tree on the left as a Jack-pine? Have any of your students ever been to Algonquin Park? or, specifically, to Canoe Lake? Can we assume that Tom is often happy to be outdoors, in the bush? Is there some other detail in the image that I have missed?

The focus of this Study Guide is Visual Literacy. Let's start by considering the first couple of images as they appear on pages three to six in *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*, and then the two that follow the copyright page. …

Compare this engraved portrait
with the archival photograph
reproduced on page 14.

What's different?

Tom may have enrolled in evening classes
at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design
in Toronto. What is there in this image
that suggests an evening setting?

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF TOM THOMSON

A WORDLESS NARRATIVE TOLD IN ONE HUNDRED AND NINE WOODBLOCK ENGRAVINGS

GEORGE A. WALKER

STUDY GUIDE

The Porcupine's Quill

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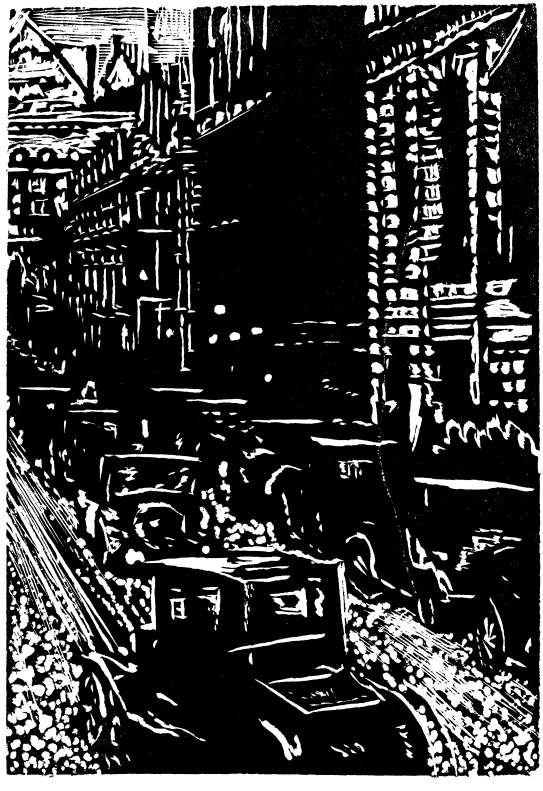

This image is based on the architecture
of a recognizable street in downtown Toronto.
The building at the top left, in particular,
still exists and should help to identify
the street name.

'Thomson was a strange figure in Canadian art—he drifted across the scene for a few years—lived his own life in the woods of Algonquin Park—pitched his tent on new trails—paddled and fished the lakes and streams—and when the mood took him he painted—putting all his experience and simple philosophy into his work. To many artists he was a myth, for he knew few people, but to those of us who have had the rare privilege of taking the trail with him and sharing a tent, or a studio in his brief city sojourns—he was more than an artist of ability,—he was one of those great types that a country produces sparingly and at times when they are needed.

'Tom Thomson is the manifestation of the Canadian character—thought of in terms of beauty. He reveals to us our own environment, changing the direction of our thoughts and aspirations from material and utilitarian considerations to contemplation of the beauty of Canada. A poet, but his language is not words,—a philosopher, but his philosophy is not to be read in books—a creator, an interpreter—an artist.'

—Arthur Lismer, 1934

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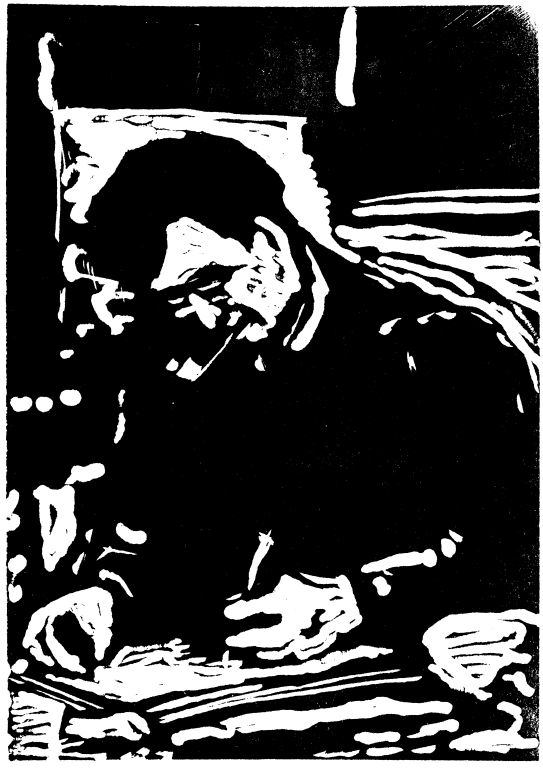


William Cruikshank was a Scottish painter
who emigrated to Canada, opened a studio in Toronto
in 1871 and for 25 years taught at the Central Ontario
School of Art, later the Ontario College of Art.

PREFACE
GEORGE A. WALKER

We all 'read' a vast array of images that present themselves to our attention daily. Our world is filled with signs and symbols. Our distant ancestors once read the stars as a compass, and we still study the sky to forecast weather. The surface of the ground at our feet can tell an experienced tracker just who or what may have been prowling in the vicinity. The earliest cave paintings were inspired by interactions between humans, animals and the world they shared. These sorts of natural signs and signifiers provided the basis for what would eventually become a multitude of written languages. Our essential need to preserve and to communicate our stories has evolved into a complex system of writing that is rooted in the simplicity of the pictogram. Presented thoughtfully, pictures can still convey information, evoke pleasure or warning, influence behaviour and, most importantly, tell a story.

The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson is the second of my wordless narratives to be published in a trade edition by the Porcupine's Quill. In it I tell the story of the Canadian painter and cultural icon Tom Thomson (1877–1917). There is no shortage of art historians who recognize Thomson as a key influence on the Group of Seven and instrumental in the shift of Canadian art towards modernism. Most Canadians, however, know of him from the enduring controversy surrounding the curious circumstances of his death.

It has often intrigued me that Thomson chose to avoid depicting the industry that surrounded him in the city; though, admittedly, a clearly art-nouveau urban approach does

appear in the commercial work that he produced for the Toronto design firm Grip Ltd. Canada underwent dramatic changes during Thomson's lifetime, and the artist found himself in the midst of an industrial landscape cluttered with machines and booming population growth—all coloured by mounting political tensions that would lead to the First World War. Rather than document the grim realities of Toronto, Thomson set out to discover and depict the untamed wilderness of Northern Ontario. Through Thomson's impressionistic style, the paintings from this period communicate the harshness of the Canadian landscape as well as Thomson's steadfast love for a land now threatened by the rise of industrialization. It is Thomson's unceasing search for the definitive expression of an emotionally charged landscape that appeals most to us in his legacy. I hope it seems appropriate that such an artist, who rarely wrote a word but painted and sketched hundreds of images, will have his story retold in the language he understood best—the language of pictures.

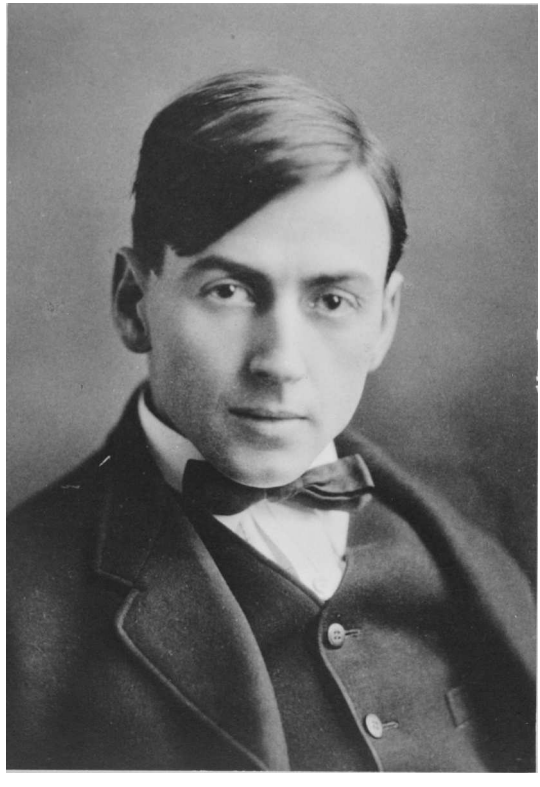
As images provide the means of communication in this book, a basic understanding of the process of engraving is critical to an appreciation of the medium. I tell the story of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* through one hundred and nine engravings carved into handmade blocks of hardwood. Wood engraving and woodcut were techniques favoured by the German Expressionists, many of whom were active around the time Thomson was painting. Though Thomson himself had little interest in art theory, his paintings confirm that he did hold some of the same beliefs as the Expressionists who sought to articulate emotional meaning through a primal response in their art.

In addition to the obvious connection between Thomson and wood engraving, all of the images in this biography were carved into blocks I manufactured myself from Canadian

maple. Wood is an organic material, part of the natural world that Thomson depicted in his landscapes, and like the woodlands he painted it speaks to the artist through the idiosyncrasies it retains, the knots and anomalies buried in the block's rings of time. The tree I used to make the blocks was very likely alive when Thomson was painting in Algonquin Park where part of this story is set. To strengthen the connection between the story of Thomson and the medium used to tell it, my friend Tom Smart presented me with some decaying branches that he believes fell from the trees Thomson painted in *Byng Inlet*. I took these branches and fashioned them into the block that I used to make the last image in the book.

A final note: I should mention that I've divided the narrative into two parts, that of the city and that of the country, to mirror the reality that Thomson led two distinct lives, a duality that was key to both his art and his personal life. When Thomson left the city to live in the bush of Northern Ontario, he became fully immersed in the life of the backwoodsman. Abandoning the city and his commercial artist's work at Grip, he was transformed. His patron, Dr James MacCallum, has said that, 'Thomson had but one method of expressing himself, and that one was by means of paint'.

For myself I believe the body of Tom Thomson still rests at Canoe Lake, and it is also my opinion that the true story of the Tom Thomson tragedy will never be known. Thomson lived, painted, loved and died under a veil of mystery and to this day, stories of Thomson's ghost still circulate in Algonquin Park. What does remain of Thomson now is a potent body of work that defines a moment in time and one man's vivid engagement with nature. My hope is that I have succeeded in communicating some of the same passion in my visual narrative that Thomson achieved in paintings such as *The Jack Pine* and *The West Wind*.



Tom Thomson inherited some money from his grandfather on his 21st birthday. His (relative) affluence may be reflected in this formal style of clothing, with jacket, vest, starched shirt and bowtie.

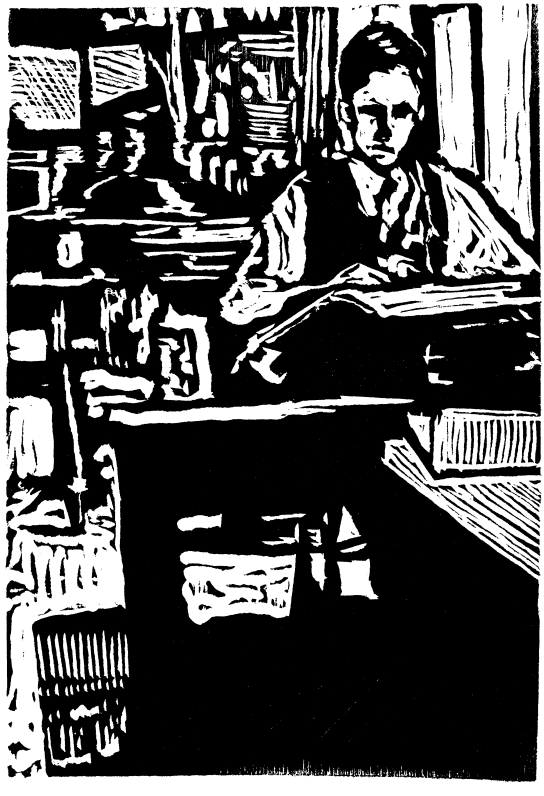
Credit: Archives Canada.

WHO IS TOM THOMSON?

Tom Thomson (1877–1917) was a Canadian artist primarily known for his iconic paintings of the Canadian wilderness, but perhaps best remembered for the curious circumstances attached to his premature death on July 8, 1917 at Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. Thomson directly influenced a small group of Canadian painters that included the likes of A.Y. Jackson, Frederick Varley and Arthur Lismer, all of whom would come to be members of the storied Group of Seven, sometimes known as the 'Algonquin School'.

Tom Thomson is often, incorrectly, credited as being a member himself, or even a founding member, of the Group of Seven, but this is not the case—Thomson had died two years before the Group formally established itself in 1919.

Thomson was born in Claremont, a bit east of Toronto and grew up in Leith, a small village near Owen Sound. He enjoyed a privileged childhood with many opportunities to indulge in music, poetry and drawing. He also embraced a deep and abiding love of nature, cultivated as a result of his connection with renowned naturalist Dr William Brodie, a distant relative, who often accompanied Thomson on hikes through Toronto's ravines (MacGregor 17). In 1899 Thomson apprenticed at a foundry owned by a family friend in Owen Sound where he was soon fired for what was described as habitual tardiness, but may have been a personality conflict between Thomson and the firm's foreman (Klages 20). In the



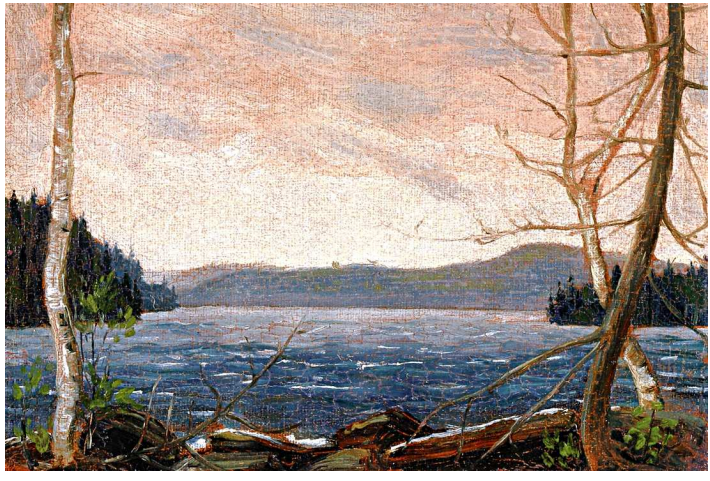
Grip was the name of a commercial design firm where Thomson worked in Toronto early in his career and where he met many of the artists who would form the Group of Seven after his death. J.E.H. MacDonald was senior artist at the firm at that time.

same year, Thomson volunteered to fight in Africa in the Second Boer War, but was refused on medical grounds. (Thomson was later refused entry into the Canadian Expeditionary Force for service in the First World War for similar reasons.)

In 1900, Thomson enrolled in a business college in Chatham, but dropped out just months later to join his older brother, George, who managed a similar school in Seattle. There, Thomson met and enjoyed a brief romance with Alice Lambert, a much younger girl who, by some (unsubstantiated) reports, is said to have rejected his proposal of marriage (Klages 21).

In 1904, Tom returned to Canada, possibly heartbroken, settled in Toronto and joined Legg Brothers, a photoengraving firm, as an illustrator (Klages 21). He began to take art classes in the evenings at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design, where he studied drawing (MacGregor 22). He also took free lessons from William Cruikshank, a member of the Royal Academy of Arts, and under Cruikshank's tutelage produced his first oil painting in 1907 (Klages 21, MacGregor 22).

In late 1908/early 1909, Thomson left Legg Bros. and moved to Grip Ltd, an artistic design firm where several future members of the Group of Seven were similarly employed. It was on the recommendation of a co-worker, Tom McLean, that Thomson first visited Algonquin Park in the spring of 1912. Captivated by the uniquely Canadian landscape, he returned to the Park in the summer to take photographs and to attempt oil painting *en plein air* (Klages 23). These early trips inspired him to follow the lead of fellow artists in producing oil sketches of natural scenes on small, rectangular panels that were suitably sized for portability while travelling.



Northern Lake, 1912.

By the fall of that same year, Thomson had left Grip with a number of his colleagues to work at a storied Toronto printing firm, Rous & Mann. Surrounded by supportive friends and colleagues, his artistic skill—and public recognition of his unique talent—grew. He exhibited his first piece, *Northern Lake*, with the Ontario Society of Artists in 1913, and later sold the painting to the Ontario government (Klages 24).

Tom spent much of the next five years travelling back and forth from Toronto to Algonquin Park, where he busied himself drawing, painting, fishing and meeting the locals, including Algonquin Park Ranger Mark Robinson, Canoe Lake cottagers Martin Bletcher and his sister Louisa and Mowat Lodge proprietors Shannon and Annie Fraser. It was during this time that Tom met Winnifred Trainor, a woman who frequently summered in the Park with her family (McConnell, *Canadian Mysteries*). Thomson was later rumoured to have been engaged to Ms Trainor, though these accounts were never conclusively proven (*Canadian Mysteries*).

In 1914 the National Gallery of Canada began to notice, and to collect Thomson's paintings, which signaled a turning point in his career. Many of Thomson's major works, including *Northern River*, *The Jack Pine* and *The West Wind* began as rough sketches before being rendered as large oil paintings at Thomson's 'studio'—an old utility shack with a wood-burning stove on the grounds of the Studio Building, an artist's enclave in Rosedale, Toronto.

Thomson's painting bears some stylistic similarities with the work of European post-impressionists such as Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, whose work he may have known from books or visits to art galleries. Other key influences were the Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, styles he would most certainly have known from his work in the commercial graphic arts at Grip and Rous & Mann.

Thomson peaked creatively between 1914 and 1917 with the financial assistance of Toronto physician James MacCallum, whose patronage enabled Thomson's transition from graphic designer to full-time professional painter. Described as having an 'idiosyncratic palette', Thomson's control of colour was remarkable. He often mixed available pigments to create unusual colours, which made his distinctive palette along with his brushwork instantly recognizable regardless of the subject of his work.

Thomson disappeared during a canoeing trip on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park on July 8, 1917. His body was discovered in the water eight days later and recovered by Park Rangers George Rowe and Mark Dickson. Dr Goldwin Howland of Toronto (Davies) later examined the body at the request of

Ranger Mark Robinson, noting a bruise on Thomson's right temple, 'evidently caused by falling on a rock', but ultimately cited drowning as the official cause of death (Robinson). The coroner, Dr Arthur E. Ranney of North Bay, confirmed Howland's conclusion that the drowning had been accidental. Thomson's body was first interred in Mowat Cemetery near Canoe Lake, but under the apparent direction of his older brother, George, the body was allegedly exhumed two days later, to be re-interred in the family plot beside the Presbyterian Church in Leith on July 21.

To this day, rumours persist that Thomson's death was no accident. The tell-tale bruising on his temple, the fishing line wrapped around his leg, and reports of altercations between Thomson and Martin Bletcher, led to several of Thomson's friends and some of the Canoe Lake locals to question the official cause of death. Others, including Mark Robinson and Shannon Fraser, took issue with the circumstances of the burial. They were convinced that the Thomson family buried an empty casket in Leith, and that Thomson's body remained in its original grave in Algonquin Park. Requests to exhume Thomson's grave were denied by the family, perpetuating the mystery and providing biographers with ample fodder for speculation (Archives).

For artist and Thomson biographer Harold Town, the brevity of Thomson's career hinted at an artistic evolution never fully realized. Town cites the painting *Unfinished Sketch* as 'the first completely abstract work in Canadian art,' a painting that, whether or not intended as a purely non-objective work, presages the innovations of Abstract expressionism.

In September 1917, the artists J.E.H. MacDonald and John

W. Beatty, assisted by area residents, erected a memorial cairn at Hayhurst Point on Canoe Lake, where Thomson had died. The cost was covered by MacCallum. In the summer of 2004 another historical marker honouring Thomson was moved from its previous location in the centre of Leith to the graveyard in which Thomson is reported to have been buried.

Tom Thomson's mysterious death has, ever since, captured the imagination of creative artists, who have used their own art forms as well as existing letters, interviews and newspaper reports, to put forth their own interpretations of events. During the 1970s, Canadian experimental filmmaker Joyce Wieland based a movie (*The Far Shore*, 1976) on the life and death of Tom Thomson. His death is also referenced in The Tragically Hip's recording of the song 'Three Pistols'.

Since his death, Thomson's work has grown exponentially in value and popularity. In 2002, the National Gallery of Canada staged a major retrospective of his work, according Thomson the same level of recognition that had been lavished on Picasso, Renoir and the Group of Seven in previous years. On 3 May 1990 Canada Post issued 'The West Wind, Tom Thomson, 1917' in the Masterpieces of Canadian art series. The 50 cent stamps are perforated 13 x 13.5 and were printed by Ashton-Potter Limited in Toronto.

Sources:

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REFERENCES TO PEOPLE & PLACES

Algonquin Park. The oldest provincial park in Canada, established in 1893, and one of the largest parks (almost 3,000 square miles) in Ontario. Tom Thomson first visited Algonquin in the spring of 1912, and died there on July 8, 1917.

Art Gallery of Toronto. Site of the first Group of Seven exhibition in 1920. Now known as the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO).

Arts & **Letters Club.** Established in 1908, moved to its present location at 14 Elm Street in 1920.

Beatty, John W. Artist who assisted J. E. H. MacDonald in erecting a memorial cairn to Tom Thomson at Hayhurst Point on Canoe Lake in September, 1917.

Belaney, Archie. Later known as Grey Owl; ranger working in Mississagi Forest Reserve who met Thomson in 1912.

Bickersteth, J. Burgon. Warden of Hart House at the University of Toronto. An early supporter of the Group of Seven.

Blecher [Belcher], Bessie. Martin Blecher's sister. The Blechers found Tom's canoe overturned off Little Wapomeo Island on the afternoon of July 8th, 1917 and towed it to Mowat Lodge.

Blecher [Belcher] Jr, Martin. Brother of Bessie. Possibly romantically involved with Winnifred Trainor. Later moved to St Louis under suspicion of being a German spy.

Blecher [Belcher] Sr, Martin. Father of Bessie and Martin, American-German cottagers at Canoe Lake, though the family owned a furniture company in Buffalo, New York.

Martin Sr read the Anglican funeral service at Tom's interment.

Briggs, Mrs Arthur. Daughter of Shannon and Annie Fraser, proprietors of Mowat Lodge.

Broadhead, William. Commercial artist at Grip Ltd. who canoed with Thomson in Mississagi Forest Reserve (west of Sudbury) in August and September of 1912.

Brodie, Dr William. A noted naturalist, and distant relation of Tom, who fostered Tom's love of nature while walking in the ravines of Toronto.

Brown, Eric. (1877–1939) First Director of the National Gallery of Canada. An early institutional supporter of artists associated with the Group of Seven.

Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay. 1914– 15. Painting by Tom Thomson. Byng Inlet is north of Parry Sound and south of Sudbury, on the east shore of Georgian Bay.

Callighen, Harry (Bud). Ranger at Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park who met Thomson in 1912.

Canadian Group of Painters, The Collective of 28 painters from across Canada who came together as a group in 1933 after the Group of Seven had disbanded. Included members of the Beaver Hall Group who had a history of exhibiting with the Group of Seven internationally. The Canadian Group, which eventually included many of Canada's leading artists, held its first exhibition in 1933, and continued to hold exhibitions almost every year until 1967.

Canoe Lake. Railway Station on the Grand Trunk (formerly the Canada Atlantic) mainline east from Parry Sound to Ottawa; located two miles north of Mowat Lodge and a bit west of Ed Coulson's Algonquin Hotel.

Carmichael, Franklin. (1890–1945) Canadian artist, born in Orillia, who was the youngest original member of the Group of Seven.

Carr, Emily. (1871–1945) Canadian artist, born in Victoria, who was closely associated with the Group of Seven, though she was never an official member.

Casson, A.J. (1898–1992) Canadian artist, born in Toronto, who was invited to join the Group of Seven in 1926. Buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg.

Cezanne, Paul. (1839–1906) French artist and post-Impressionist painter who may have influenced Tom Thomson.

Claremont. A small village east of Toronto where Tom Thomson was born in 1877.

Coulson, Ed. Bought the Algonquin Hotel in 1905.

Crombie, Daphne. Guest at Mowat Lodge who may have known something significant about the romantic relationship between Tom and Winnifred Trainor, possibly involving Martin Blecher as well.

Cruikshank, William. (1848–1922) British artist who emigrated to Canada, opened a studio in Toronto in 1871 and for 25 years taught in the Central Ontario School of Art, later the Ontario College of Art.

Davies, Blodwen. Reporter, originally from Fort William (Thunder Bay), who later moved to Toronto and in 1935 wrote and self-published a biography of Tom Thomson called *Paddle and Palette*.

Dickson, Laurie. Local guide who recovered Tom's body from Canoe Lake with the help of George Rowe.

Dixon, Roy. Undertaker from Sprucedale who helped prepare Tom's body for burial.

Ebbs, Harry. Counsellor at Ahmek Camp in Algonquin Park in 1924, then later became a medical doctor.

Fairley, Barker. (1887–1986) British-Canadian painter and scholar, co-founder of *Canadian Forum* magazine. An early supporter of the Group of Seven.

FitzGerald, LeMoine. (1890–1956) Canadian artist, born in Winnipeg. Invited to join the Group of Seven in 1932, shortly before the Group disbanded. The only member of the Group based in Western Canada.

Fraser, Annie. Wife of Shannon, co-proprietor of Mowat Lodge. May have had a brief affair with Tom.

Fraser, Shannon. Husband of Annie, co-proprietor of Mowat Lodge. Known for his temper, particularly when drinking. Borrowed money from Tom to buy canoes for the Lodge, which may have become an issue between them, particularly if Tom was under pressure from Winnifred Trainor, possibly because she may have been pregnant.

van Gogh, Vincent. (1853–1890) Dutch Post-Impressionist painter whose bold colours and dramatic, impulsive brushwork may have influenced Tom Thomson.

Go Home Bay. Location of James MacCallum's cottage on the eastern side of Georgian Bay, due north of Midland.

Grand Trunk Railway. In 1912, when Tom first visited Algonquin Park, the easiest route would have been the Grand Trunk north from Toronto through Barrie, Orillia, Gravenhurst and Huntsville to Scotia Junction where the Grand Trunk crossed the tracks of what was once the Canada Atlantic Railway whose mainline ran east from Parry Sound through Algonquin Park to Ottawa.

Grip Ltd. Toronto design firm, founded in 1873, that later employed many of the artists who came to be known as the Group of Seven. In the early 20th century Grip was deemed to be one of the most sophisticated design firms in the country. Later known as Bomac Batten.

Group of Seven. J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Frank Johnston and Franklin Carmichael all met as employees of the design firm Grip Ltd. in Toronto. In 1913, they were joined by A.Y. Jackson and Lawren Harris.

The Group formalized their professional relationship in 1919, two years after the death of Tom Thomson. The Group disbanded after the death of J.E.H. MacDonald in 1932.

Harris, Lawren. (1885–1970) Canadian painter, born in Brantford, who became known for his landscapes of the Canadian north and the Arctic. Harris was a founding member of the Group of Seven. He was also an heir to Massey-Harris Ltd., at one time the largest agricultural equipment manufacturer in the British Empire. Harris is buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg.

Hayhurst Point. A memorial cairn in memory of Tom Thomson was erected at Hayhurst Point (close to the spot where Tom's body was found) by J.E.H. MacDonald and John Beatty in 1917.

Holgate, Edwin. (1892–1977) Canadian artist, born in Innisfil. Invited to join the Group of Seven in 1930.

Howland, Dr Goldwin. Toronto physician and professor of neurology at the University of Toronto, vacationing at Canoe Lake, who noticed Tom's body floating in Canoe Lake.

Inquest. Conducted by Dr Arthur Ranney of North Bay. Attendees included Dr G.W. Howland, Miss Bessie Belcher, Mr. J.E. Colson, Prop Algonquin Hotel, Mr. J.S. Fraser, Prop Mowat Lodge, Canoe Lake, Mr Mark Robinson Park ranger, Mr Martyn Belcher, Tourist and Mr G. Rowe, Resident guide.

The Jack Pine. 1916–17. One of Thomson's most iconic paintings, and one of the last paintings he completed. Typical of the painter's abiding interest in the prospect of the far shore.

Jackson, A.Y. (1882–1974) Canadian artist, born in Montreal. One of the founding members of the Group of Seven. Buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art

Collection in Kleinburg.

Johnston, Frank. (1888–1949) Prolific Canadian artist who was a founding member of the Group of Seven but who resigned from the Group in 1924. Buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg.

Lambert, Alice. Girl Tom met in Seattle who may have rejected a proposal of marriage.

Leith. Hamlet on the eastern shore of Owen Sound Bay where Tom Thomson grew up and may (or, very possibly, may *not*) be buried.

Lismer, Arthur. (1885–1969) Canadian artist, born in Sheffield, England. A founding member of the Group of Seven, Arthur Lismer is primarily known for his wartime paintings of ships festooned in dazzle camouflage. Buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg.

MacCallum, James. (1860–1943) Canadian ophthalmologist and one of the most important patrons of Tom Thomson and of the Group of Seven. MacCallum owned a cottage on an island in Go Home Bay in Georgian Bay where Tom, J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, and A.Y. Jackson all completed major work. There is a suggestion that MacCallum used his connections in Ottawa to prevent Tom from being accepted for military service.

MacDonald, J.E.H. (1873–1932) Canadian artist, born in Durham, England. A founding member of the Group of Seven, James was also father to the noted Canadian illustrator Thoreau MacDonald, and he was senior artist at Grip Ltd. when Tom worked there. J.E.H. MacDonald was also very involved with the Arts & Letters Club for which he designed the club crest in 1909.

MacKay, Rory. Local historian, primarily interested in nineteenth-century logging in Algonquin Park.

McLean, Tom. Designer who worked at Grip Ltd. and first suggested Tom visit Algonquin Park in 1912.

McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Gallery in Kleinburg that was founded by Robert and Signe McMichael, who began collecting paintings by the Group of Seven and their contemporaries in the 1950s. Six of the members of the Group as well as four of their wives are buried on site.

Morse Code. Mowat Lodge. The original Mowat Lodge had been built as a boarding house for Gilmour Lumber employees, before Shannon and Annie Fraser bought pieces of the property and repurposed the buildings as a vacation destination.

A Northern Lake. (1912) The first painting Tom exhibited with the Ontario Society of Artists (1913). The painting was later sold to the Ontario government for the princely sum of $250 which was all the more welcome considering that Tom earned a modest $35 a week at Grip.

Northern Lights, Fall 1915. Painting by Tom Thomson. A good example of what some critics have suggested may be an 'unpaintable subject'.

Northern River. (1915) Painting by Tom Thomson. Purchased by the National Gallery in 1915 for $500.

Ottawa Art Gallery. Home of the Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, which consists of more than 1,600 works of art assembled by Ottawa collectors O.J. and Isobel Firestone, who acquired the works from the early 1950s to the 1970s. The collection includes a number of paintings by the Group of Seven.

Pine Trees at Sunset. (1915) Painting by Tom Thomson.

Pittaway, Ron. Algonquin Park historian who interviewed Daphne Crombie in 1977, sixty years after she had been a guest at Mowat Lodge on the day Tom died.

Ashton-Potter. Storied Toronto printing company that

produced 'The West Wind' stamps for Canada Post.
Ranney, Dr Arthur. Coroner from North Bay who conducted the Inquest into Tom's death.
Robinson, Mark. Algonquin Park ranger and naturalist. Possibly the last person to see Tom alive.
Round Lake, Mud Bay. Painting by Tom Thomson that was sketched in November, 1915 on or near an island in a lake in the northwest part of Algonquin Park that is now called Kawawaymog Lake.
Rous & **Mann** Tom Thomson and future members of the Group of Seven followed Grip's art director, A.H. Robson, to Rous & Mann Press Ltd, which specialized in fine commercial typography and presswork. In 1919 Franklin Carmichael and A.J. Casson moved on to the first Canadian silkscreen printing firm, Sampson, Matthews Ltd, founded by artist J.E .Sampson and businessman C.A.G. Matthews.
Rowe, George. Local guide who recovered Tom's body from Canoe Lake with Laurie Dickson.
Sharpe, Dr Noble. Author of 'The Canoe Lake Mystery', *Canadian Society of Forensic Science Journal*, June 1970.
Scotia Junction. Railway station where the Grand Trunk line north from Toronto to North Bay intersected the Canada Atlantic line east from Parry Sound to Ottawa.
Silcox, David. Senior arts administrator and more recently president of Sotheby's Canada for twelve years. Co-author, with Harold Town, of *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm* (1977).
Thomson, George. (1868-1965) Tom's eldest brother, who may have accompanied the casket by rail to Leith, though he later denied having done any such thing.
Thomson, Tom. (1877–1917) Perhaps the most influential Canadian artist of the early 20th century, who died, under peculiar circumstances, at an early age (39).

Town, Harold. (1924–1990) Canadian abstract painter best known as a member of Painters Eleven. Co-author, with David Silcox, of *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*.

Trainor, Winnifred. Eldest daughter of Hugh Trainor of Huntsville, who also owned a summer cottage at Canoe Lake. Winnifred was romantically involved with Tom, and may have given birth in the months after Tom's death.

Unfinished Sketch. Painting by Tom Thomson, deemed to be the 'first completely abstract work in Canadian art' by Thomson biographer Harold Town.

Varley, Frederick. (1881–1969) Painter who immigrated to Canada in 1912 on the advice of another Sheffield native (and future Group of Seven member), Arthur Lismer, and found employment at Grip Ltd. in Toronto. Buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg.

Watson, Homer. (1855–1936) Canadian landscape painter, born in Doon, Ontario, who often painted scenes of the Grand River Valley; friend of Oscar Wilde. Watson's work has been compared to that of John Constable, an English romantic of the nineteenth century.

Wattie, Tom. Ranger who met Tom at North Tea Lake in 1913.

The West Wind. 1916–17. Painting by Tom Thomson, possibly unfinished, that was found on Thomson's easel in his studio after his death.

Wieland, Joyce. (1930–1998) Canadian experimental filmmaker and mixed media artist whose 1976 film *The Far Shore* is based on the life of Tom Thomson.

Based on a detail from a Thomson painting called *Black Spruce in Autumn*, 1916. The prospect of a distant 'Far Shore' is one vista that occurs frequently in Thomson's work and provides the title for Joyce Wieland's film (1976).

CHRONOLOGY

1877 Tom Thomson was born on 5 August near Claremont, a village a bit east of Toronto; Tom was the sixth of what would come to be ten children; his eldest brother was George.

1877 The Thomson family relocates to Leith, on the eastern shore of Owen Sound Bay, in October of 1877.

1898 Tom receives a sizeable inheritance (worth several hundred thousand in 2017 dollars) from his grandfather, presumably on the occasion of his 21st birthday.

1899 Starts work as a machine apprentice at William Kennedy & Sons, a foundry in Owen Sound, but leaves after eight months, in August, for reasons that are unclear.

1899 Second Boer War begins in October; Tom makes an (unsuccessful) attempt to enlist.

1900 Tom registers at Canada Business College in Chatham in September; studies there for eight months.

1901 Returns to Owen Sound in the spring; then in the summer stops in Winnipeg on his way to Seattle where he studies for six months (1902) at Acme Business College, managed by his eldest brother, George.

1902 In the fall Tom is hired as a pen artist at Maring and

Ladd, Engravers, in Seattle.

1903 First published graphic art appears in a newspaper—a display advertisement for Acme Business College.

1904-05 Tom returns to Owen Sound.

1905 In June, Thomson joins the art department of Legg Brothers, a photo-engraving firm in Toronto, as senior artist.

1906 Resident at 34 Elm Street, Toronto; may have enrolled in night classes at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design, then later studied with William Cruikshank.

1908-09 Tom is hired at Grip Ltd. by Albert Robson, either December, 1908 or after the New Year; at Grip Tom works under the supervision of J.E.H. MacDonald, senior artist.

1911 Arthur Lismer joins Grip in February, followed shortly thereafter by Franklin Carmichael, in April.

1911 Thomson paints at Lake Scugog (north-east of Toronto) with Ben Jackson, an employee at Grip.

1911 Meets Lawren Harris in November at an exhibition of J.E.H. MacDonald sketches at the Arts and Letters Club.

1912 Central Ontario School of Art and Design (formerly Toronto Art School, 1886–90) is renamed the Ontario College of Art (OCA).

1912 Tom travels to Canoe Lake Station, Algonquin Park, with Ben Jackson in May; camps at Tea Lake Dam and Canoe

Lake; meets the ranger Harry (Bud) Callighen.

1912 Thomson completes an extended canoe trip with colleague William Broadhead through Mississagi Forest Reserve (west of Sudbury) in August and September; meets Archie Belaney, later known as Grey Owl, who is also working as a Ranger.

1912 Thomson moves to Rous & Mann Press in October, following the lead of Albert Robson, Franklin Carmichael and Arthur Lismer; once there they are joined by Frederick Varley.

1912 Meets Dr James MacCallum, an ophthalmologist and patron of the arts, at J.E.H. MacDonald's studio in October.

1913 Thomson exhibits and sells *A Northern Lake* at the Ontario Society of Artists Forty-first annual spring show in April.

1913 Lawren Harris and James MacCallum agree to finance construction of the Studio Building on Severn Street; Harris was an heir to the Massey-Harris farm implements fortune, MacCallum was a wealthy practicing ophthalmologist who specialized in blindness, cataracts, macular degeneration and glaucoma.

1913 Tom decides to paint full-time; takes a two-month leave of absence from Rous & Mann for a sketching trip north.

1913 May have worked as a fire ranger on the Metagami Reserve, just south of Timmins, in the spring and summer.

1913 Goes to Algonquin Park in August, where he canoes from Canoe Lake to Manitou and North Tea Lakes in the northern part of the park;
meets Tom Wattie, a ranger stationed on North Tea Lake, before returning to Canoe Lake.

1913 Returns to Toronto via Huntsville, in November, possibly to visit Winnifred Trainor; Dr MacCallum introduces Tom to A.Y. Jackson, who is sharing Lawren Harris's studio.

1914 Completion of the Studio Building on Severn Street in January; Thomson shares Studio One with A.Y. Jackson, January–February.

1914 Thomson exhibits *Moonlight, Early Evening* in the Ontario Society of Artists Forty-second annual spring exhibition; the painting is sold to the National Gallery of Canada.

1914 Tom is elected a member of the Ontario Society of Artists in March.

1914 Thomson meets up with Arthur Lismer at Smoke Lake in Algonquin Park for two weeks early in May.

1914 Thomson travels by canoe to MacCallum's cottage at Go Home Bay on Georgian Bay at the end of May, then back to Algonquin Park in early August via the French River.

1914 World War One was triggered by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by the Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Princip; the war began on 28 July, 1914

when the Austro-Hungarian empire declared was on Serbia.

1914 Thomson paints with A.Y. Jackson in Algonquin Park in the fall; then later they are joined by Frederick Varley and Arthur Lismer.

1914 Tom returns to Toronto in early November.

1914 Thomson exhibits *A Lake, Early Spring* at the Royal Canadian Academy Thirty-Sixth annual exhibition in Montreal in November.

1914 Thomson contributes *In Algonquin Park* to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Patriotic Fund Sale.

1914 Late in the year shares space in the Studio Building with Franklin Carmichael.

1915 Thomson exhibits *Northern River* and *Split Rock, Georgian Bay* in the spring Ontario Society of Artists exhibition; *Northern River* is purchased by the National Gallery of Canada.

1915 Travels to Algonquin Park in mid-March via Huntsville, where he visits Winnie Trainor for a few days.

1915 In May Thomson and George Rowe guide the Johnston Brothers of Pittsburgh to Pine River; on their return, Thomson and Rowe paddle to Big Bear Lake.

1915 Later in the summer Tom buys a new Chestnut canoe, tent and other camping supplies and sets out from Canoe Lake on a long trip, likely to the Magnetawan River, coming

out at South River around Labour Day.

1915 In September Tom paddles back up South River, crosses into North Tea Lake and Cauchon Lake, travelling perhaps as far as Mattawa.

1915 End of September to mid-October at Mowat Lodge on Canoe Lake.

1915 At first snow, travels to Huntsville for a brief stay with Winnifred Trainor before returning to Toronto; to save on rent, moves into the shack, formerly used by a cabinet maker, behind the Studio Building on Severn Street, which he shares with Arthur Lismer; over the winter paints a number of decorative panels for the MacCallum cottage at Go Home Bay.

1915 One-man exhibition at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto, December.

1916 Stops, again, in Huntsville to visit Winnifred Trainor for a few days on his way north in March.

1916 Thomson exhibits *Spring Ice* in the Forty-fourth annual Ontario Society of Artists spring exhibition; *Spring Ice* is bought by the National Gallery.

1916 Takes a job as a fire ranger in late May and reports to Achray, a park station at Grand Lake on the south branch of the Petawawa (now Barron) River, where he works with Edward Godin; Tom paints the sign that reads 'Out-Side-In' for the facade of the rangers' cabin.

1916 In August Thomson and Edward Godin canoe down the south branch of the Petawawa River to the Barron Canyon, then continue up the north branch of the river to Lake Traverse.

1916 Returns to Toronto in late October / early November; exhibits *The Hardwoods* at the Thirty-eighth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in Montreal.

1917 Thomson returns to Algonquin Park in March; acquires a guide's licence; fishes with James MacCallum in May.

1917 July 8. Park Ranger Mark Robinson, Mrs Thomas (wife of the local railway section head) and Mrs Colson (wife of the owner of the Hotel Algonquin on Joe Lake) see Thomson and Shannon Fraser walking down to Joe Lake Dam in the morning; Tom is not seen alive again.

1917 Tom's body is recovered from Canoe Lake eight days later, on July 16.

1917 July 21. An undertaker from Huntsville supposedly arrives at Canoe Lake to exhume the body for shipment to Owen Sound for re-burial on the instructions of George Thomson; this may, or may not, have happened; the body may rest in the family plot at Leith, or, perhaps just as likely, may still be at Canoe Lake where it was buried by Roy Dixon and Mark Robinson.

1917 Memorial cairn with a bronze tablet designed by J.E.H. MacDonald is erected at Hayhurst Point in

September, by MacDonald, J. W. Beatty, Shannon Fraser and George Rowe.

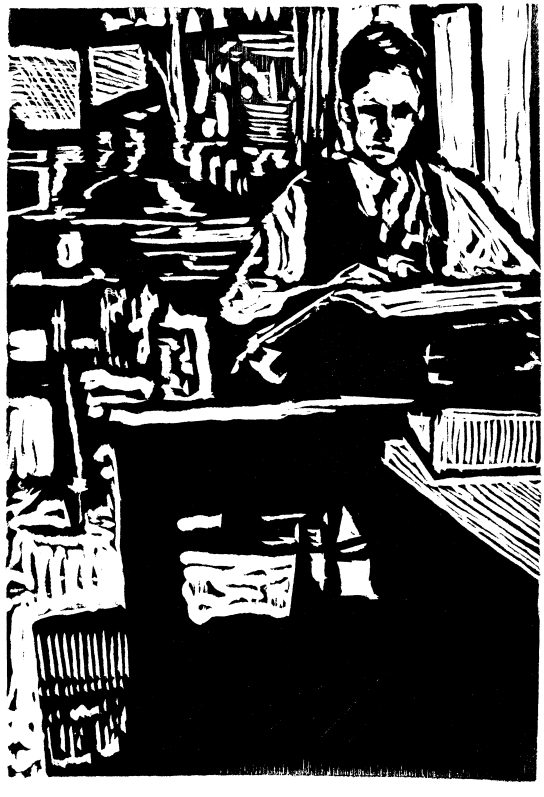
1917 Memorial exhibition of Thomson's work organized by James MacCallum at the Arts and Letters Club in December.

The Chronology as it appears is not based on original research and does not pretend to be particularly authoritative. Some of the events described herein are verifiable, some are admittedly based on conjecture and still others are subject to empassioned debate by any number of commentators. Adapted in part from *The Silence and the Storm*, Harold Town and David P. Silcox, McClelland & Stewart, 1977; from *Tom Thomson*, Joan Murray, Douglas & McIntyre, 2010 and from *Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him*, Roy MacGregor, Random House Canada, 2010.

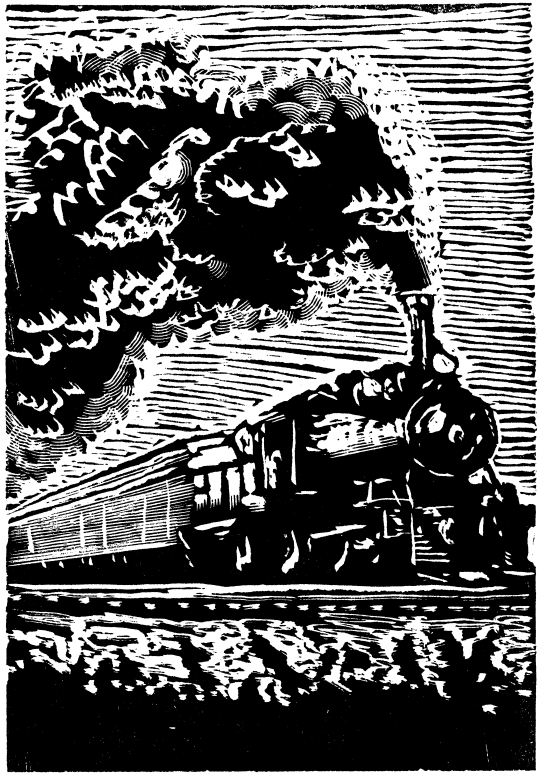
CHRONOLOGY / TIMELINE EXERCISE

Using the reference information contained
in the Biography, the References and the Chronology
let's try to establish a Timeline for the book.

1. After his return to Canada from Seattle
Tom enrolled in night classes … at what school?
and in what year?



2. Albert Robson hired Tom to work at a graphic design firm called Grip Ltd. … in what city? and in what year?



3. Tom Thomson first visited Algonquin Park
with his friend Ben Jackson in the spring of what year?

What was the name of the railway that offered
passage to Algonquin Park at that time?

What was the route, from Toronto?

4. Tom Thomson tried (unsuccessfully) to enlist in the military when World War One started.

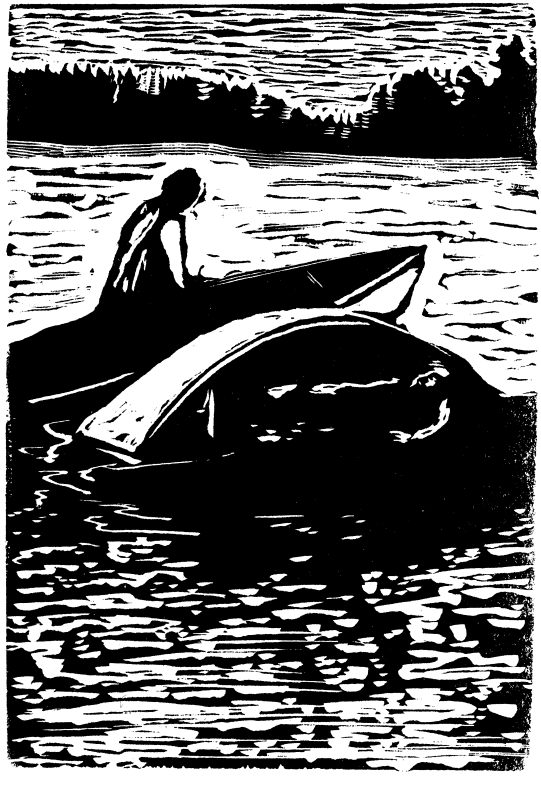
What month, in what year, did the War start?

5. Winnifred Trainor, of Huntsville, summered at a family cottage on Canoe Lake, just a bit south of Mowat Lodge.

Tom stopped in Huntsville for a few days on his way back to Toronto, in November of what year?

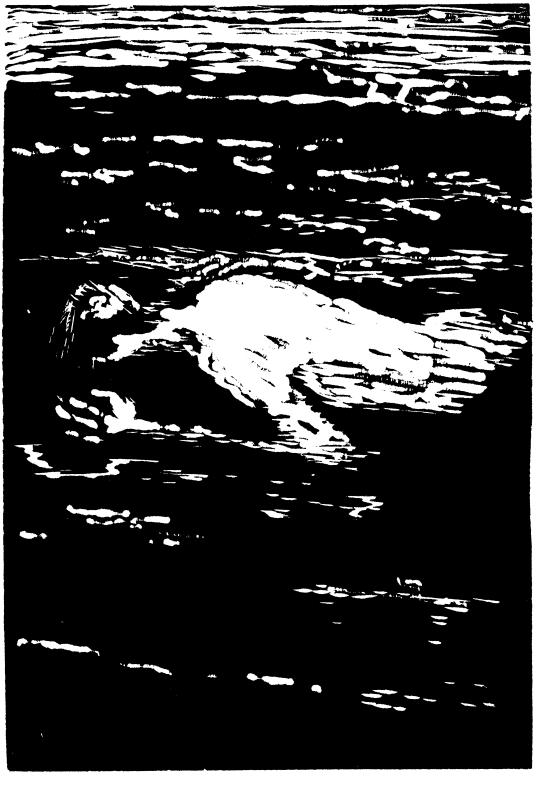
6. To save on rent Tom moved his studio
to a utility shack behind the Studio Building
on Severn Street in Toronto
in the late fall of what year?

7. Edward Godin's ranger cabin at Achray on Grand Lake. Tom painted the sign that reads 'Out-Side-In' and summered with Godin in Algonquin Park in what year?



8. One theory suggests that Tom may have been murdered and his body dumped into Canoe Lake

on what day?
in the summer of what year?



9. Tom's body was recovered from Canoe Lake
how many days later? and on what day?

10. This could be the train that took Tom's body
from Canoe Lake to Owen Sound for reburial at Leith.

Or, is that Winnifred Trainor,
lurking in the shadows on the left,
on her way to Scotia Junction.

CHRONOLOGY / EXERCISE ANSWERS

1. After his return to Canada from Seattle Tom enrolled in night classes at the Central Ontario School of Art (later the Ontario College of Art) in 1906.

2. Albert Robson hired Tom to work at a graphic design firm called Grip Ltd. in Toronto, either December, 1908 or shortly after the New Year.

3. Tom Thomson first visited Algonquin Park with his friend Ben Jackson in the spring of 1912. At that time the easiest (and perhaps, the only) access was on the Grand Trunk railway north from Toronto through Barrie, Orillia, Gravenhurst and Huntsville, then changing at Scotia Junction to the old Canada Atlantic line east to Canoe Lake.

4. Tom Thomson tried (unsuccessfully) to enlist in the military when World War One started on 28 July, 1914 … when the Austro-Hungarian empire declared war on Serbia.

5. Tom stopped in Huntsville for a few days on his way back to Toronto in November of 1913, presumably to visit Winnifred Trainor, who Tom had met that summer at Canoe Lake.

6. To save on rent Tom moved in to the utility shack on the grounds behind the Studio Building on Severn Street in December of 1915; Tom shared the space, at first, with Arthur Lismer.

7. Tom painted the rustic sign that reads 'Out-Side-In' on the side of the cabin at Achray, Grand Lake and summered with ranger Edward Godin in Algonquin Park in 1916.

8. Tom is seen with Shannon Fraser walking to Joe Lake dam on the morning of July 8, 1917 and is not seen alive again. His overturned canoe is recovered that same afternoon.

9. Tom's body is recovered from Canoe Lake eight days later, on July 16, 1917. He was buried the next day (the 17th).

10. Ranger Mark Robinson claimed that Winnifred Trainor left on the train from Canoe Lake Station on the evening of Tuesday, July 17th. Telephone records indicate that Trainor was in Huntsville the next day, Wednesday, July 18th.

Bonus question: what was the name of the film
Joyce Wieland made about Tom Thomson
that was released in 1976?

VISUAL LITERACY / A PRIMER

Paul Arthur was one of the most successful graphic designers working in Canada in the 1950s and 60s. One of Paul's most prestigious commissions was to create wayfinding signage for Expo '67 in Montreal which became a triumph of simplicity and clarity. Words were used if necessary, but pictures were favoured and colour was deemed to be indispensible. Some two dozen custom pictographs were developed for Expo, including male and female washroom signs which were at once *too* simple as well as too similar, and led to confusion and confrontation until they were replaced by more illustrative versions. More successfully, animal silhouettes identified the parking areas; not only highly memorable and therefore very effective, they also became symbolic of the modernity exemplified by the Expo experience.

Students will also be familiar with the ubiquitous sort of wordless instructions[1] included in every carton of IKEA furniture. Take, for example, the twelve pages of instructions which detail the assembly of a Billy bookcase—one of the least complex of any IKEA product.

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1. For this section we are indebted to Sharon Turnbull-Schmitt, a former superintendent of the Toronto District School Board.

www.ikea.com/assembly_instructions/billy-bookcase—202-cm__JXQ13_PUB.PDF

The cover page of the manual provides an overview of the assembled bookcase, in each of two possible sizes. Page two is divided into four horizontal panels. The first panel advises that construction will require a slotted screwdriver, a Phillips, a pencil and a hammer. The second suggests that assembly will be happier with two participants, rather than one. The third cautions against damaging a corner of the frame, and recommends construction on a carpeted surface. And finally, the fourth panel suggests that any confusion will be solved by a telephone call to IKEA. Page three illustrates the various components provided with the unit and details the number of units of each that will be required. Page three also cautions against using the bookcase as a ladder, which is somewhat amusing but does reinforce the manufacturer's suggestion that the completed bookcase be secured at the top to a wall with the bracket that is also provided, and illustrated, together with the requisite screw and two washers.

Pages four to twelve illustrate the construction of a Billy bookcase in vastly more detail than I could ever hope to replicate in text, and there are no words, which provides a huge cost-saving advantage for a company that was founded in Sweden, is headquartered in the Netherlands and sells its products in forty-nine countries.

I am reminded of a video I saw once in which Benny Andersson explained that the Swedish pop group ABBA decided to record in English rather than Swedish because the market in Sweden was simply too small. For IKEA, even the use of English is not as universal as the use of pictograms.

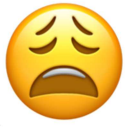
Texting with embedded icons is one way that secondary school students (and others) communicate regularly using images; and yet, communicating with icons does presuppose a basic level of visual literacy as well as a shared visual vocabulary. Let's test the validity of this theory.

The images you see on the following pages are presented as scalable Pdf files that can be projected onto a screen. Split the class into manageable focus groups of six to eight students each, then ask each group, working independently, to match the emoji in the left-hand columns with the accompanying (scrambled) list of possible 'meanings'. Perhaps some students will also want to suggest alternate 'meanings' that may be equally appropriate.

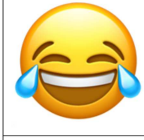
Our suspicion is that you will not achieve unanimity, but that you WILL recognize a general concensus that will be broad enough to confirm that the students do share a 'basic level of visual literacy' as well as a 'shared visual vocabulary', and this will be true regardless of what some students may think about the challenges inherent in more complex IKEA construction manuals, or, for that matter, the enduring popularily of ABBA (which could well be a contentious topic).

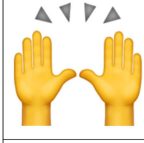
These are precisely the skills that will be required to interpret and to appreciate Wordless Novels in general, and George Walker's *Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* in particular. But first, three simple tests of visual literacy, followed by three pages that indicate the correct answers …

	AWKWARD
	HAPPY
	HOPEFUL
	HUGGING
	INNOCENT
	JOKING
	ROLLING EYES
	SMIRKING
	TEARS OF JOY

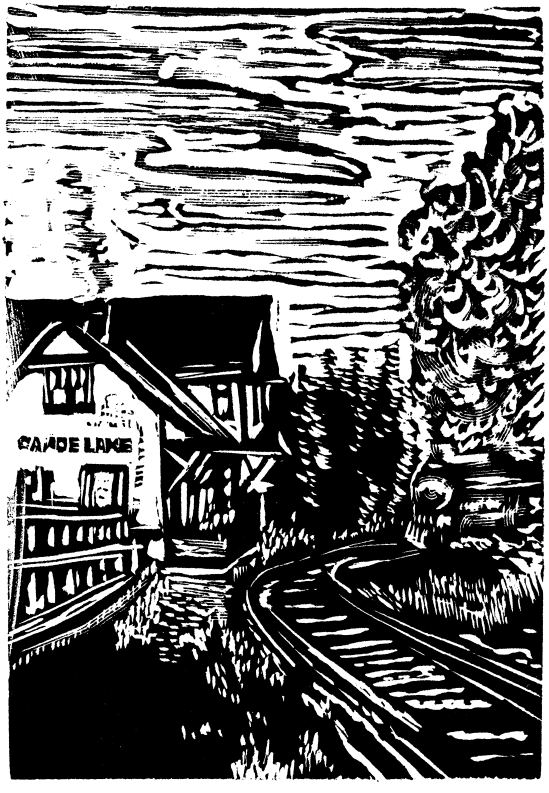
	CELEBRATION
	CONFOUNDED
	CONTENTMENT
	NAUGHTY
	OK
	SCREAMING IN FEAR
	SILLY
	TIRED
	UNAMUSED

	AGREEMENT
	BLOWING A KISS
	BROKENHEARTED
	DEEP THOUGHT
	NERVOUS
	PENSIVE
	SHOCKED
	SICK
	WINKING

	HAPPY
	INNOCENT
	AWKWARD
	SMIRKING
	ROLLING EYES
	HUGGING
	JOKING
	TEARS OF JOY
	HOPEFUL

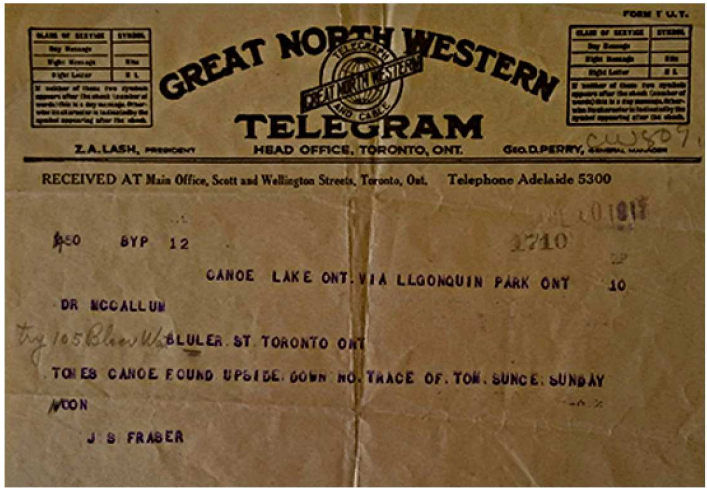
	OK
	NAUGHTY
	CONFOUNDED
	SCREAMING IN FEAR
	CONTENTMENT
	CELEBRATION
	TIRED
	UNAMUSED
	SILLY

	NERVOUS
	WINKING
	BLOWING A KISS
	SHOCKED
	DEEP THOUGHT
	SICK
	AGREEMENT
	BROKENHEARTED
	PENSIVE



Grand Trunk train #90 eastbound from Parry Sound
to Ottawa approaches Canoe Lake Station.

VISUAL LITERACY / MORSE CODE



FORM T U.T.

GREAT NORTH WESTERN TELEGRAPH CO. AND CABLE

GREAT NORTH WESTERN

TELEGRAM

Z.A.LASH, PRESIDENT — HEAD OFFICE, TORONTO, ONT. — Geo.D.PERRY,

RECEIVED AT Main Office, Scott and Wellington Streets, Toronto, Ont. Telephone Adelaide 5300

250 BYP 12 1710

CANOE LAKE ONT VIA LGONQUIN PARK ONT 10

DR MCCALLUM

105 BLULER ST TORONTO ONT

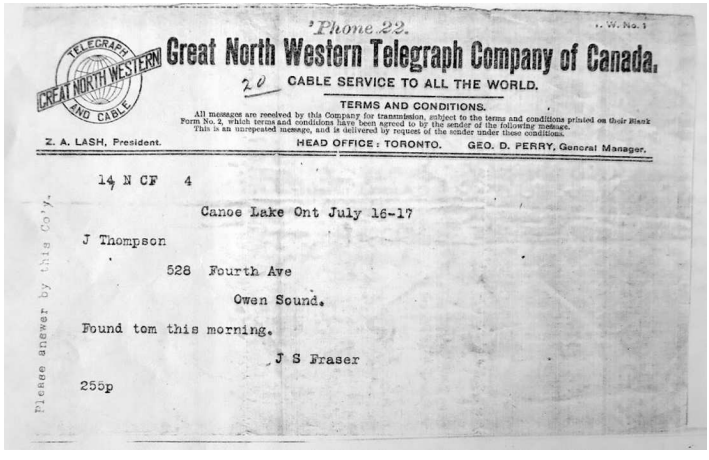
TOMS CANOE FOUND UPSIDE DOWN NO TRACE OF TOM SUNCE SUNDAY NOON

J S FRASER

On July 10, 1917, Dr James MacCallum received a telegram from Shannon Fraser, proprietor of Mowat Lodge at Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. The scrap of paper, featuring the logo of the Great North Western Telegram Co., read as follows: 'Tom's canoe found upside down. No trace of Tom since Sunday.' On July 16, six days later, Shannon Fraser sent another message, this time with worse news: 'Found Tom this Morning.'

Alexander Graham Bell had demonstrated a working telephone in Brantford in 1876. The Bell Telephone Company was created the following year and in ten years expanded service to 150,000 customers in the eastern United States, but Bell's new-fangled invention was not in common use in

Canada in the early part of the twentieth century,[1] and particularly not in the wilds of Algonquin Park. The electric telegraph, on the other hand, had been introduced by Samuel Morse as early as 1838 and spread rapidly in conjunction with the building of railways in the nineteenth century.



'Phone 22.

Great North Western Telegraph Company of Canada.

CABLE SERVICE TO ALL THE WORLD.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS.

All messages are received by this Company for transmission, subject to the terms and conditions printed on their Blank Form No. 2, which terms and conditions have been agreed to by the sender of the following message. This is an unrepeated message, and is delivered by request of the sender under those conditions.

Z. A. LASH, President. HEAD OFFICE: TORONTO. GEO. D. PERRY, General Manager.

14 N CF 4

Canoe Lake Ont July 16-17

J Thompson

528 Fourth Ave

Owen Sound.

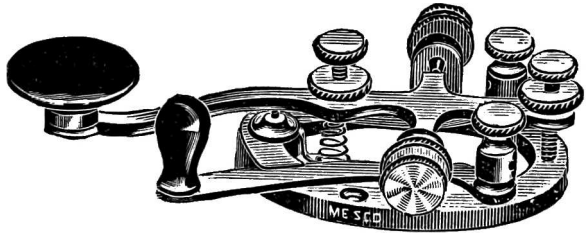
Found tom this morning.

J S Fraser

259p

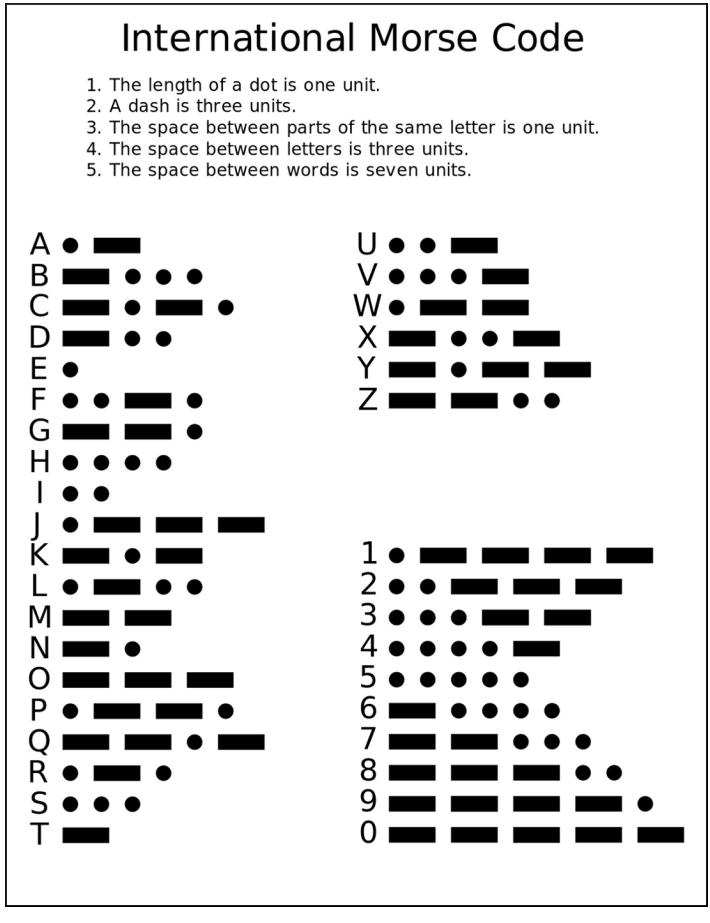
Please answer by this Copy.

The protocol for transmission over telegraph wires was the 'Morse' code that had been standardized in 1844 so that the most common letter in English, the letter 'e', is keyed with the shortest code, a single dot.



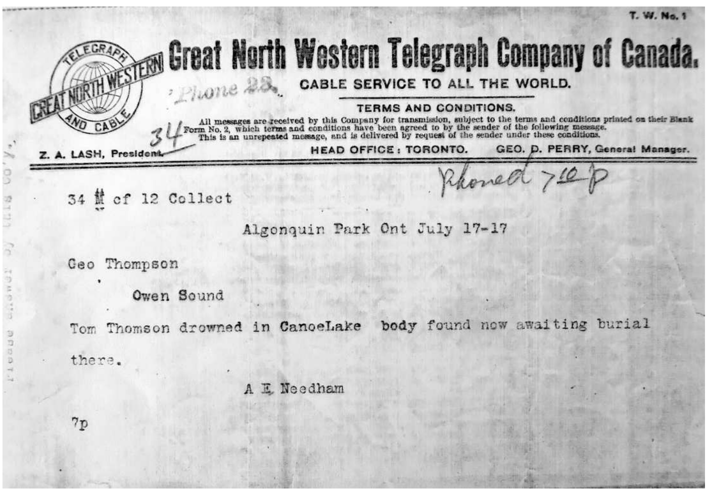
1. Look closely through the images in *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*. How many telephones do you see? What about telegraph wires?

Each Morse code symbol represents either a text character or a procedural phrase and is represented by a unique sequence of dots and dashes. The dot duration is the basic unit of time measurement in code transmission. The correct length of a dash is three times the duration of a dot. Each dot or dash is followed by a short silence, equal to the dot duration. The letters of a word are separated by a space equal to three dots (one dash), and the words are separated by a space equal to seven dots.



In April of 1912 the radio-telegraph operator on the *Titanic* was one of the first to broadcast the Morse-coded internationally-recognized SOS distress signal—three dots, three dashes and three dots. Operators on other ships within radio range were confused by the message, because everyone knew the *Titanic* had been designed and built to be unsinkable.

Morse code was, at one time, favoured by amateur radio operators and it is still used in modern avionics to manage air traffic control of the largest and most sophisticated jet aircraft, particularly with VHF omnidirectional range (VOR) and distance measuring equipment (DME).



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Z. A. LASH, President. HEAD OFFICE: TORONTO. GEO. D. PERRY, General Manager.

Phone 23. 34 Phoned 7 10 p

34 M of 12 Collect

Algonquin Park Ont July 17-17

Geo Thompson

Owen Sound

Tom Thomson drowned in CanoeLake body found now awaiting burial there.

A E Needham

7p

Albert Needham may have been a station master at Canoe Lake who transmitted the death notice to George Thomson, Tom's older brother.

Test: Using your cellphone, send a text message to a friend, coded in Morse Code, and ask for a reply, also coded in Morse. Can you read it?

WHAT IS A WORDLESS NOVEL?
TOM SMART

The wordless novel is a unique form of storytelling that communicates a narrative entirely in images, without the use of captions, speech bubbles or other ancillary forms of text. First published in Europe during the early decades of the twentieth century, when public concern around issues to do with social justice and the rife potential for abuse in a capitalist economy was prevalent, wordless novels came to be associated with stories that furthered contemporary political and social agendas, particularly from the wistful perspective of the dispossessed.

The images in wordless novels are not, typically, colourful, of the sort you might expect to see in children's picture books, but they often embrace the comparative starkness of images that are created using nineteenth-century relief printmaking techniques. Relief printing requires artists to draw pictures in reverse onto blocks of wood or linoleum, then to cut away areas that are intended to remain white in the final print. The raised portion of the finished block, which contains the image to be printed, is then coated with ink before being pressed onto paper, resulting in a black-and-white image. Various types of relief printing include wood engraving (in which the image is worked into the endgrain of maple or boxwood with engraving tools), woodcut (which uses parting tools, knives and gouges on the plank of the wood) and linocut (in which the image is cut into a piece of linoleum).

Individual images contain visual elements that allow attentive

readers to establish contextual information such as time, place and mood. When presented in sequence, these elements coalesce with visual allegory, metaphor and symbols to communicate meaning. By deciphering the visual clues in each image, readers can follow the plot of the narrative and trace character development as well as begin to develop an understanding of whatever message it is the story may be trying to impart.

Wordless novels require a certain basic proficiency in visual literacy to be able to 'decode' the thread of the narrative as it unfolds. Readers must be able to deploy a variety of skills including observation, comprehension, analysis, order and sequencing and visual assessment. Readers must also be willing to employ a degree of creativity in order to develop and refine their interpretation of the events depicted. Readers are not, however, constrained in any way by language. Since wordless novels do not rely on text to communicate meaning, the stories that they tell are equally accessible to those proficient in any language, at any level of reading or learning ability.

As an art student[1], George Walker boarded in what he has described as a 'rundown apartment building in the heart of Toronto'. When Walker and the other tenants were given notice by the bank that they would be required to pay double rents for one month, owing to the unfortunate circumstance that the previous landlord had absconded with their rent payments, Walker gave voice to his and his neighbours' frustration and anger by printing a poster with the image of a vulture

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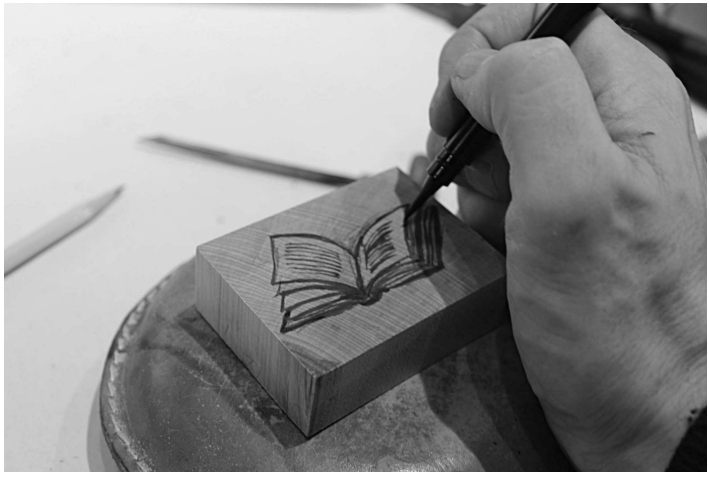
1. This text is adapted from a longer feature on George Walker that first appeared in the *Devil's Artisan* 68, Spring 2011.

on it, an unflattering reference to the bank. The boarding house was 'plastered' with these prints as a way to protest and to attract the attention of the bank inspectors. In the end, and owing in no small measure to the impact of the vulture posters, the bank relented and did not force the issue of double payment with the tenants.

Walker discovered in this episode a lesson in just how effective a poster image could be in exposing and challenging abusive authority and injustice in a society, even one as small as a group of tenants. A cogent image, matched with a purpose and cause, that was printed and disseminated, proved to be an effective way to encourage change; the lesson Walker learned in the boarding house inspired him to look further into the use of wood engraving and woodblock printing in the service of social protest. The capacity of printmaking to be an agent of protest, and to tell a visual narrative, inspired Walker. The recognition that a print could bear witness to injustice enticed him to research the history of the graphic novel, and in particular the work of twentieth-century Belgian artist Frans Masereel (1889–1972).

Walker had first encountered Masereel's work in a 1982 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario. His reaction to the wood engravings was immediate and profound, and persuaded him to reassess his own creative production and direction. Walker also started to collect Masereel's graphic woodcut and engraved novels that had been published in Germany in the 1920s by Kurt Wolff. Through Masereel, Walker, not unlike the fictional Alice, dropped into a veritable rabbit hole of wonder and enchantment as he immersed himself in the milieu of the graphic novel through the window provided by this Belgian master of the medium.

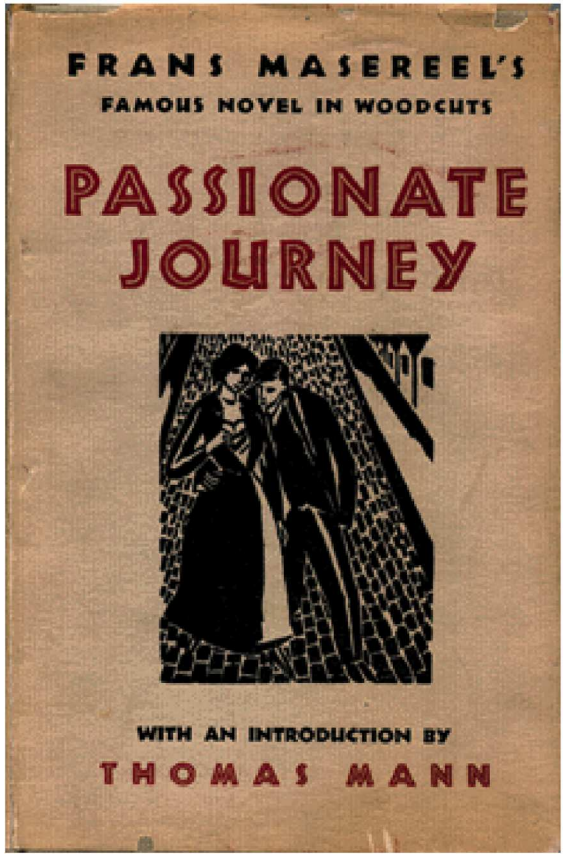


Preparing a block for engraving.

Commonly regarded as the first master of the wordless novel, Frans Masereel came of age as an artist in post-World War One Germany, a time of severe austerity, social upheaval and political unrest. Born in Belgium, he fled the war-torn country in 1916 for Paris and then Geneva where he joined the international pacifist movement. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, Masereel turned his artistic talents to creating hundreds of anti-war drawings. *25 Images de la Passion d'un Homme* (*25 Images of the Passion of a Man*), his first graphic novel, was published in 1918 in Geneva and became an inspiration for a generation of artists in Germany and abroad who were seeking the means to condemn the decay in society around them in a pure, visual language. The scope of the graphic novel form inspired other artists, animators, writers, musicians and, especially, filmmakers. In 1923 Masereel settled in Germany, where he became close friends with Expressionist artist George Grosz (1893–1959), a kindred spirit in the anti-war protest movement. Grosz and his German contemporaries were vocal and strident opponents of the war, its after-effects on German

society and the consequent much-reduced standard of living that had left many in the country impoverished, disenfranchised and perilously close to despair. In the two-year period 1925–27 Masereel created nearly one thousand wood engravings, many of which were published by the Munich-based Wolff, who also released German editions of Masereel's graphic novels. Wolff paired Masereel's wordless novels with introductions penned by notables such as Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse; Mann, for example, characterized Masereel's work as 'silent film in black and white without titles'.

The reader of a Masereel novel, dropped into the quagmire of hopelessness that he describes, turns the pages and becomes increasingly outraged at the abuses the protagonist is forced to endure. This, of course, is Masereel's point, and this is the lesson Walker took from his Flemish mentor. By drawing attention to the assaults and corruption that propel the story, Masereel gave an imagery and narrative to a contemporary readership who, suffering greatly from want, found in him an author and artist who described their anxieties. He also pointed to the nameless and faceless villains who embodied the sinfulness that had created the calamitous society in which they existed. A consequence of the visual rhetoric of authoritarianism was to encourage people to react. Masereel intended not just description and narrative; his goal was provocation. He was an agent of agitation. Masereel conscripted his work to the cause of righting social injustice by drawing attention to evil and the harm it does to the individual and society. He burdened his readers with a moral obligation to redeem the tragedy that afflicted his protagonists, and frequently this took the form of direct action in society. This dimension was not lost on Walker.



Passionate Journey, or *My Book of Hours*,
is a wordless novel published in 1919 by Flemish artist
Frans Masereel. The story is the longest and best-selling
of the wordless novels Masereel made. It tells
of the experiences of an early 20th-century everyman
in a modern city.

Anger and action, by-products of the reading experience, were delivered all the more potently because, at heart, Masereel's books are inflamed by passion. His masterful *The Passion of a Man* is a remarkable and tragic visual exegesis of heroism in the face of authority and repressive political systems. In it Masereel depicts the figure of an everyman who, in confronting repression, offers himself up as a sacrifice and is executed. Decidedly anti-religious, *The Passion of a Man* is a secular testament and reinterpretation of the gospel story of the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ. The style of Masereel's engravings shows an artist with a firm command of his medium. The figures are depicted in starkly contrasting blocks of dark and light, giving a sense of immediacy and urgency. An artist adept with the devices of composition, pictorial structure, draughtsmanship and dynamic symmetry, Masereel uses the various means of picture-making to lend drama and cadence to the narrative as it unfolds on the successive pages. Gesture and expression drive the emotive energy—the passion—of the story. Masereel has an extraordinary ability to convey emotion through attitude and gesture with an economy of means. His characters, while individuals in the class struggle, have an archetypal quality. The visual poetry comes from the lyricism of the progression of imagery, the potency of the visual metaphors and symbolic language and the pure essence of the types that are carved into his blocks and printed on his sheets. In brief, Masereel possessed an uncommon ability to depict the deeply felt, and to embody it in a modality that rang true to a wide readership.

The Canadian graphic novelist Laurence Hyde (1914–1987) was born in England, then emigrated to Canada and settled in Toronto in 1928 where he later joined the National Film

Board. As a filmmaker, he developed a keen understanding of the sequencing of images required to propel a narrative forward, a skill that enhanced his graphic work. His masterful *Southern Cross* (1951) is a critical testament of the United States government's testing of the hydrogen bomb on Bikini Atoll in 1946. The one hundred twenty engravings comprising the visual narrative lay bare the human and social costs of the decision to evacuate the atoll prior to the detonation of the device.

Unlike his earlier peers, whose work often portrayed the consequences of economic hardship, Hyde bluntly castigates military authoritarianism. His is a tale based on historical fact, framed in the imagery of the expulsion from Eden, with the added exponents of love, murder and death in a post-nuclear apocalypse. Although *Southern Cross* is fiction, its first readers would not have missed the allusion to current events, nor would the forceful critique have been lost on them. Rockwell Kent, in the novel's introduction, describes Hyde's work as 'a story of love and happiness culminating in immeasurable disaster. While not a war story it is at once a warning of the horror that war might visit on all life upon this earth, and a revelation of the cruelties that are present and the disasters that are imminent in the maintenance of peace by threat of war.'

Fundamentally, *Southern Cross* is a visual excoriation of military might, an indictment of the arms race and an anti-American tract. Its steep, tragic arc is rivalled only by Otto Nückel's masterful *Destiny* (1926). Together these two books exemplify a dark trope of the developing genre. Their 'morbid and tragic' stories, 'tales of poverty and crime and the hopeless trap in which many people find themselves from a depressed economic stratum', served as graphic critiques of abusive power. Their mode of presentation, emphasizing the darkness of

their fictional worlds, reinforces the desperate plight of their protagonists. An empathetic reader could not help but be moved to action, projecting the fictional plight to the everyday sphere. The graphic novel tradition, extending from the neo-Expressionism of Frans Masereel through the American Lynd Ward and Laurence Hyde, developed as a visual literature of despair, of fall and redemption, of protest against abuse, of militarism, of the arms race and of poverty. Through the work of these artists, the graphic novel became a form of agitprop, a call to challenge the status quo, and—at the extreme—to overthrow power structures preventing personal, social and political determinism.

George Walker is a contemporary heir to this tradition. To look back on his career from the mid-1980s to the present is to see the manner in which he understood, fully absorbed and embraced the tradition that is traced through these artists.

Wordless emblems, visual narratives, stories without words, these comprise the complex xylographica that is the art of George A. Walker. Over the course of some three decades of creative pursuits, there has emerged this clear purpose: to develop, create, fashion, engrave and disseminate a visual alphabet that codifies the grammar of an imaginative and deeply personal iconography. From the beginning of his career as an artist, Walker has been drawn to the expressive capacity of the limited-edition print, the processes of wood engraving and its various forms and conventions—image, emblem, device, illustration, interpretation, parallel text and graphic novel, among many distinct derivations and combinations of all of these. His practice is characterized by an acknowledgement of craft and historical antecedent, careful attention to process and method, technique, and the nuances of working

within the parameters that each of these imposes. Paradoxically, by working within the boundaries of each of these rubrics, Walker has creatively sought to convey the antithesis of order and methodical process. His is the pictorial world on the other side of the mirror—the irrational, the dream, the unconscious whether individual or collective, madness, lunacy, angels and witches, these comprise his expressive lexicon. Although called up from the intimate well of the subconscious, Walker's art is meant to express a social meaning. It gives viewers—readers—a different kind of literacy to understand their condition as either completely enfranchised free agents, or as victims of authoritarianism. Walker's wordless narratives are not mute statements of self-referential meaning. They give a clear prospect of the world in all its dimensions from the other side of the looking-glass.

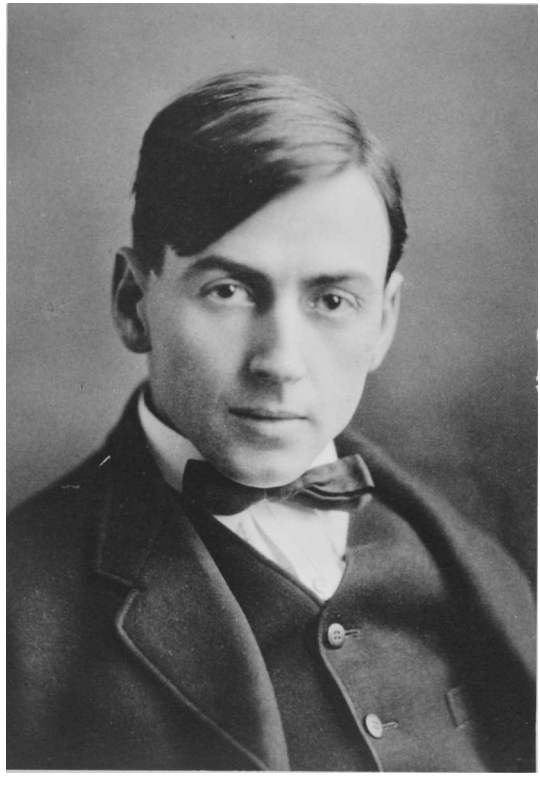
SOURCE MATERIALS / VISUAL LITERACY

The notion of Truth in Art is one that has become increasingly timely in an era of alternative facts and fake news; a world in which philosophical rumination is conscribed by the range of 140 character tweets, albeit recently enhanced to 280 characters.

Some of the images in *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* are based on historic photographs. In this section we will present a selection of the original photographs opposite the engravings George Walker has created from the images. In some cases the engravings replicate the detail in the photographs quite faithfully; in the case of Tom in his canoe the change in lighting makes for a dramatically different effect.

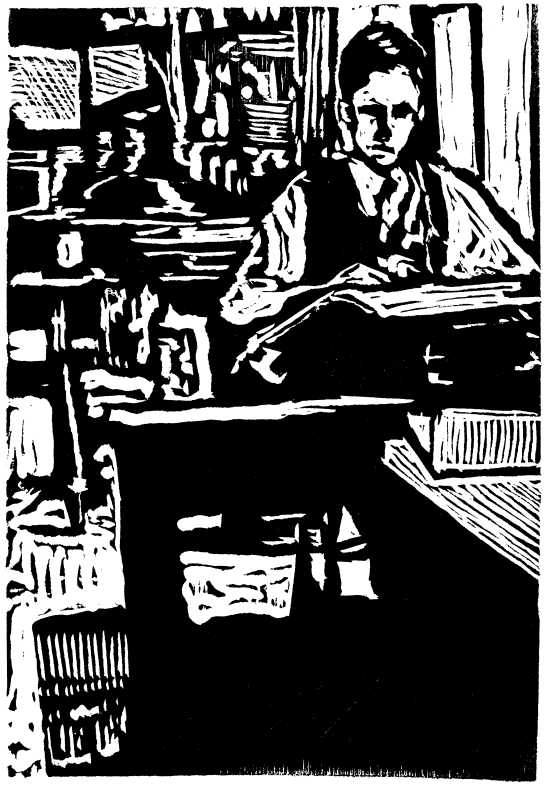
Choose an image from the selection that follows and answer the following questions. Refer to the chronology, references and your own research in your answer.

a) Who are the people and/or what are the places depicted in the image? b) What clues does the image give us about the time in which the story takes place? What does the image suggest about life in that era? c) What purpose does the image serve in furthering the narrative?



Tom had inherited a considerable sum of money from his grandfather on the occasion of his 21st birthday in 1898, and would have had no trouble affording fashionable clothes.

Tom started work at The Grip in December of 1908 or January, 1909 and remained with the firm until October of 1912 when he moved, with a number of his colleagues, to Rous & Mann.



The pork pie hat, for men, was popularized
by silent film star Charlie Chaplin.

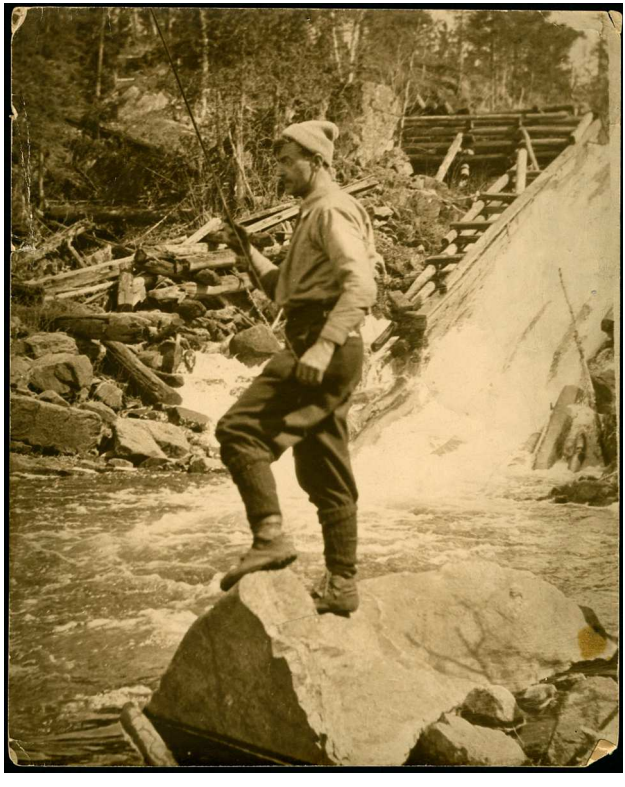
The same sort of hat appears on the mysterious
fisherman who watches Tom's body being recovered
by George Rowe and Laurie Dickson at the end
of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*.

Once World War One began in earnest
in July, 1914 there would have been considerable
peer pressure on able-bodied men to enlist.

A smaller version of this poster appears
on the wall in the recruitment office
a few images further on.

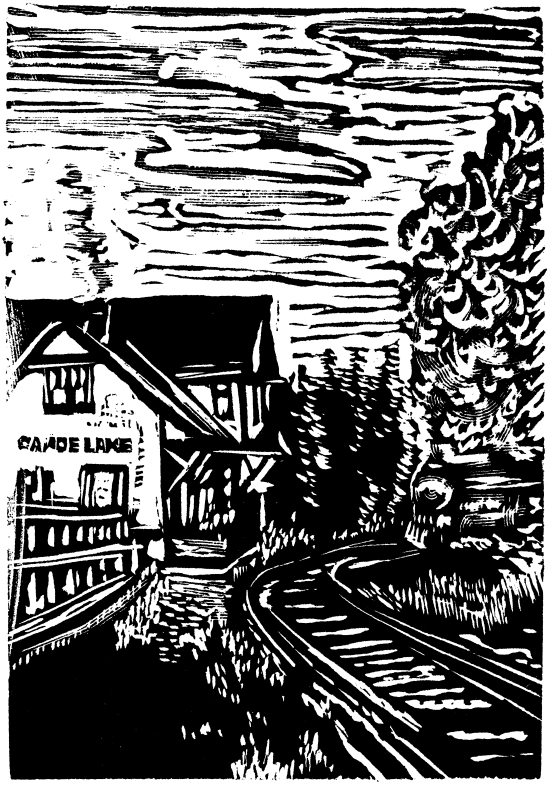
The pressure to enlist would have been relentless, particularly in the city.

Less so in the wilds of Algonquin Park.



Cauchon Falls, where Little Cauchon Lake
empties into Laurel Lake.

Grand Trunk train #90 eastbound from Parry Sound
to Ottawa approaches Canoe Lake Station.

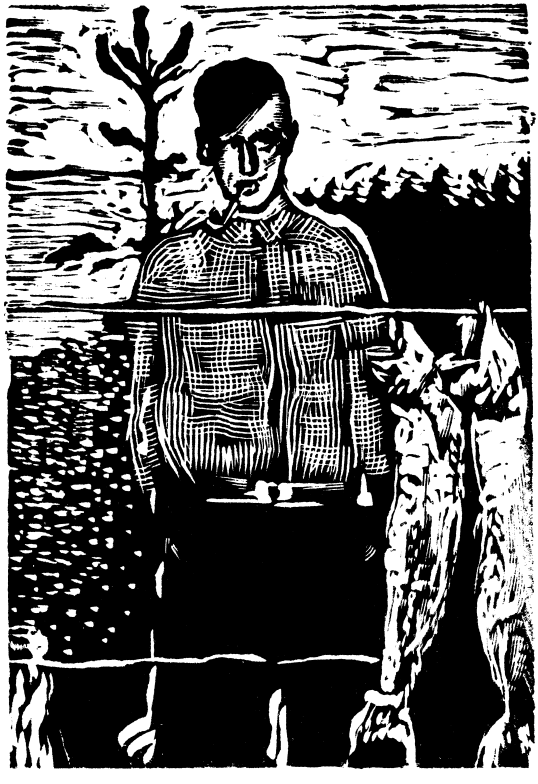

CAMDE LAKE

Tom summered in Algonquin Park at a time
when refrigeration would have been unknown.

Fish, freshly caught, or dried, would
have been a staple of Tom's diet.

Notice the shadow of the photographer
in the right-hand foreground.

Who is it?



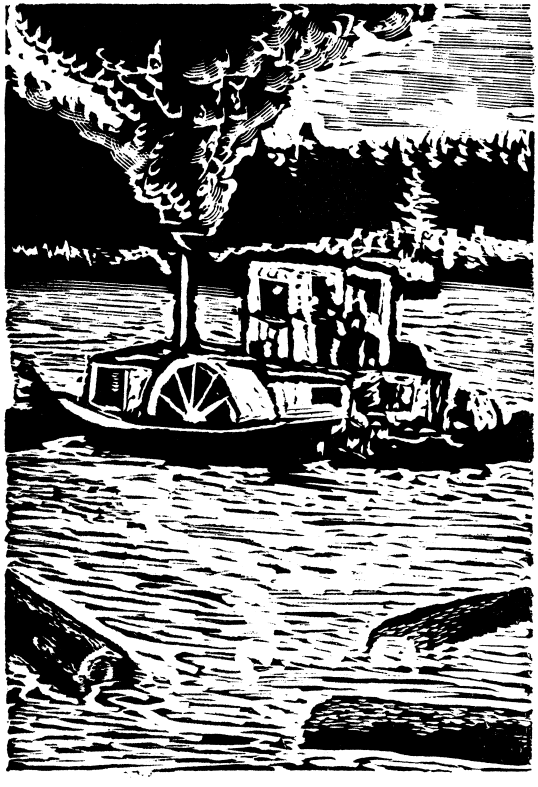
Winnifred Trainor's parents owned a cottage
on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park.

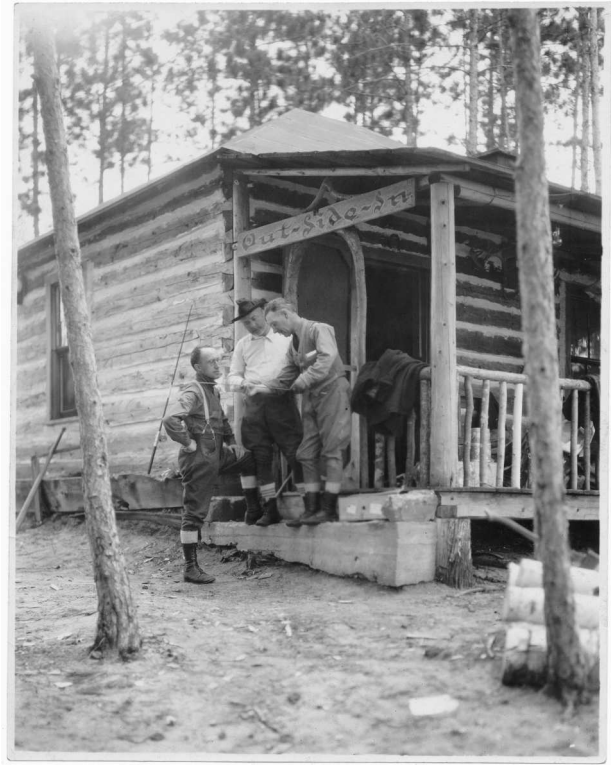
Winnifred could have met Tom Thomson in 1912
but certainly no later than the summer of 1913.

An 'alligator' boat of the sort
that would have been in common use
by the logging industry in the late
19th and early 20th centuries.

Gilmour Logging was one of the larger
commercial operations in Algonquin Park.
Headquartered on Canoe Lake, the company
was renowned for shipping cut lumber
hundreds of miles to their mill
at Trenton on Lake Ontario.

Mowat Lodge was originally built
as a Gilmour bunkhouse.





The ranger's cabin at Achray, on Grand Lake,
where Tom worked with Edward Godin through the summer
of 1916. Tom painted the sign that reads 'Out-Side-In'.

The sheer amount of provisions and gear packed into the front of the canoe provide ample testimony to Tom's experience in the wilderness.

By changing the lighting to a moonlit scene George Walker has added an ethereal quality to the image that is not present in the photograph.

Grand Trunk train # 90 at Canoe Lake Station.
On the left: Rose Thomas, Mrs Hancock, Shannon Fraser
in the shadows behind them, and Mrs Thomas on the right.

Some commentators have argued that the relationship between Tom Thomson and his patron James MacCallum (right) is not dissimilar to the relationship between the painter Tom Thomson and the engraver George Walker.

Notice, in this image, the hat that MacCallum is wearing. We'll have more to say about pork-pie hats a little later.

SOURCE MATERIALS / VISUAL LITERACY (2)

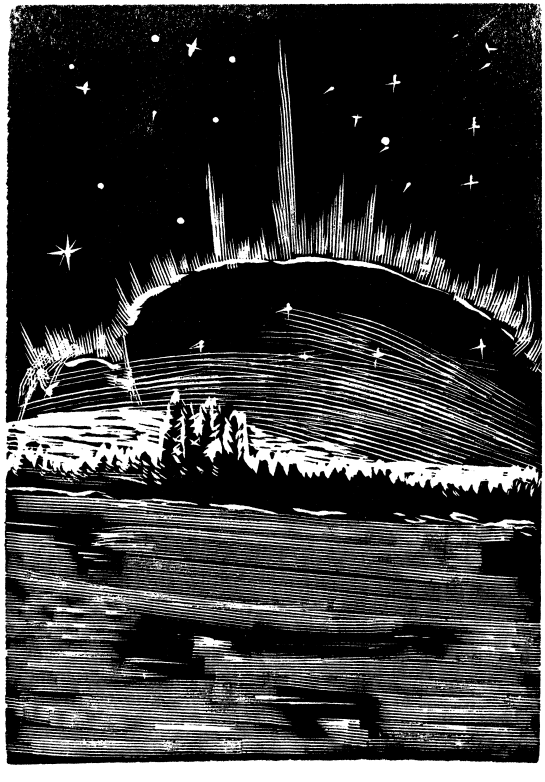
Wordless novels can be effective in the classroom when used as catalysts to teach skills of observation and comprehension, analysis, order and sequencing and hence the sort of visual assessment that often leads to creativity. In *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* a number of the woodblock images are based on iconic paintings, though the source of the images may not be apparent to the casual reader. This is, very possibly, George Walker's intent: to deliberately meld the distinction between the landscape of Algonquin Park and the paintings of Tom Thomson to the point at which the two become indistinguishable. Page 79, for example, is sourced from *Pine Trees at Sunset*; p 101, *Northern River, 1915*; p 123, *Byng Inlet*; p 125, *Round Lake, Mud Bay*; p 135, *The Jack Pine*; and it is surely no coincidence that the image on page 139 is based on *The West Wind*, which was found, perhaps unfinished, on Tom Thomson's easel after his death.

The following couple of pages present reproductions of the paintings paired with the wood blocks. Questions that arise from this presentation include: Has George Walker done an effective job in rendering what in many cases are large format oil paintings to relatively miniscule engravings? Can the recognizable essential form of the original painting be presented without the use of colour? Is George Walker's choice of wood engraving as the medium appropriate to a story about the Canadian back country?

Pine Trees at Sunset (1915). The seamless transition in the sky from a strangely acidic green to tangerine orange is technically difficult to achieve with oils, particularly given that the image was likely painted quickly, in less than 30 minutes. The painting set a price benchmark when it sold at auction in 2008 for just under $2 M.

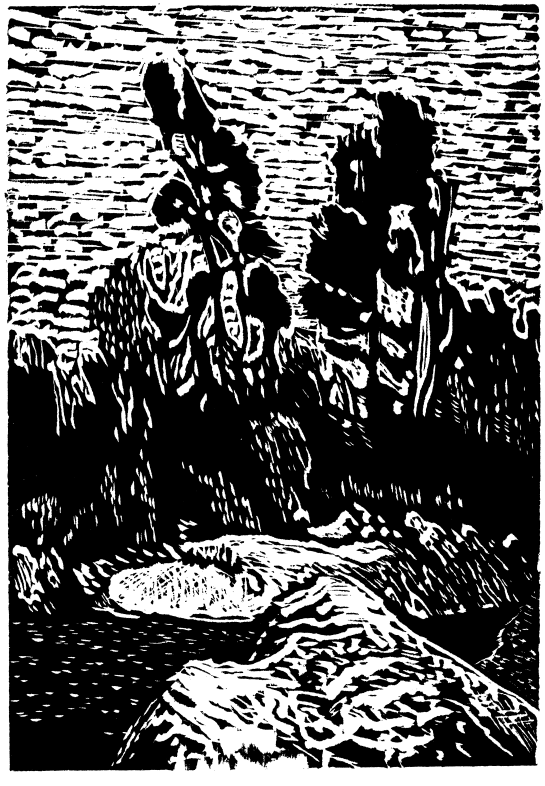
Northern Lights, Fall 1915. Thomson was often enchanted by the mystery he found in the night, when the pale light of the moon and stars glistened on the surface of a lake and underscored the forbidding majesty of the surrounding forest. These commonplace phenomena formed an essential part of what Tom's patron James MacCallum has called his 'Encyclopedia of the North'.

George Walker has furthered this nocturnal theme in his moonlit rendition of the period photograph of Tom in his canoe (page 165).



Northern River, 1915. Writing to James MacCallum, Thomson characterized *Northern River* as his 'swamp picture', which hardly does justice to the masterful composition that has been recognized as Thomson's first major artistic triumph. As with many of his paintings, the scene is common in Algonquin Park and would be unremarkable if not for the intensity of concentration brought into play by the artist.

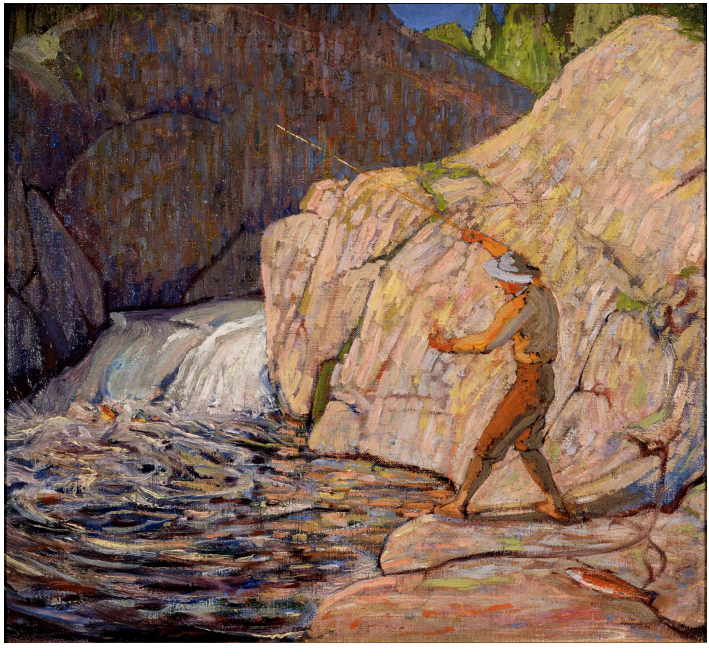
Byng Inlet (1914–15). The trees in this painting are eastern white pines, which often reach the age of 250 years, and occasionally survive longer in spite of their favoured proximity to monumental outcrops of precambrian rock as pictured here on the eastern shore of Georgian Bay. Byng Inlet is south-west of the village of Britt, between Parry Sound and Sudbury, close to the mouth of the Magnetawan River which connects Algonquin Park to Georgian Bay. Tom Thomson sketched in this area just the one summer, in 1914, on his way to James MacCallum's cottage at Go Home Bay.



Round Lake, Mud Bay (1915). Curator Joan Murray has documented an inscription on the back of *Round Lake* that claims the flock of geese is headed south. If that information is, in fact, correct (?) then the artist must have been facing east, which means we are looking at a sunrise, which is somewhat doubtful because of the slightly reddish cast to the yellow at the bottom left.

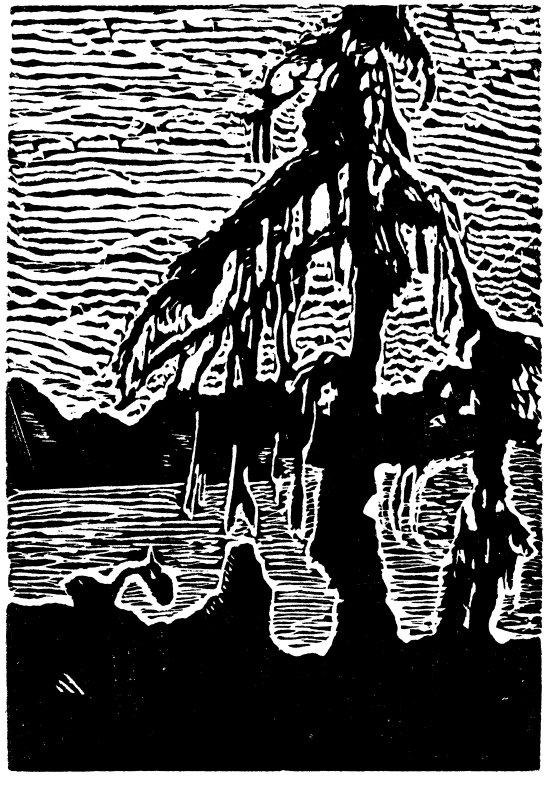
Any number of commentators have remarked on the strength of Thomson's sunsets, which may have been enhanced by the eruption of Lassen Peak in northern California in May of 1915. The volcano spewed ash 30,000 feet into the atmosphere, some of which may well have been pushed far to the east by the prevailing jet stream.

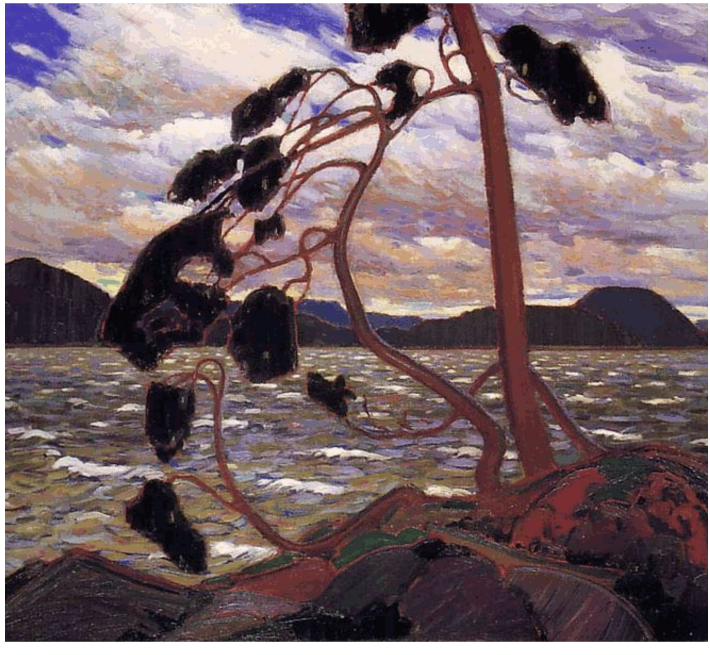
Black Spruce in Autumn (Fall, 1915). There are a number of visual effects that recur frequently enough in Thomson's paintings that together they can be characterized as essential to his unique visual grammar. One is the theme of the 'far shore' that Joyce Wieland explored in her 1976 film of the same name, but notice that the 'far' shore (as depicted in *Black Spruce in Autumn*, for example) is never so very far distant that it couldn't be reached in a vigorous twenty-minute paddle. Another, related, visual effect is that Thomson's perspective is almost always that of a canoeist, who sees what he sees from an elevation of four feet above the waterline, which tends to accentuate the height of trees, especially those in the foreground, and by so doing accords them a majesty they might otherwise lack.



The Fisherman (Winter, 1916). One of a group of paintings done at this same time that share a certain 'staged' quality and a stiffness of configuration that persuaded James MacCallum to suggest they may have been unfinished. In either case *The Fisherman* is nowhere near as compelling as either *The Jack Pine* or *The West Wind*, both of which were painted shortly thereafter. It is conceivable *The Fisherman* may be referenced in *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* for no other reason than to prefigure the artistic conceit by which George Walker introduces into the narrative his own mysterious fisherman, wearing a remarkably similar hat, on page 199.

The Jack Pine (1917). Tom Thomson was known as a colorist who was particularly skilled at mixing colours to achieve unexpected and remarkable effects. The plum colour on the rock in the foreground is one such example, particularly in contrast to the pale blues on the far shore. Thomson's dramatic use of specimen trees as the central architectural element in his paintings was yet another visual effect that serves to characterize his work, and to differentiate it from the more 'civilized' oaks and maples that were painted by Thomson's contemporary, Homer Watson, whose landscapes were set in the relative gentility of the Grand River Valley near Kitchener.





The West Wind (1917). Painted in the winter of 1916–17, this iconic pine demonstrates that Thomson's formative artistic influences were at once eccentric and wholly original. Here he combines the sinuous forms of Art Nouveau (a style he had used to considerable effect in earlier paintings such as *Northern River*), with the vivid colours of the early Expressionists, and melds the two to create a reflection of Canada that had never before been seen. Arthur Lismer has suggested that he saw in this painting a paradigm of what he imagined as the essence of the Canadian character—strength and determination in the face of adversity.

CURRICULUM NOTE—

Analysis and Critical Literacy.

Central to any comprehension of the wordless novel is an analysis of its component parts—the images—and how they communicate meaning. Exercises in this guide ask students to consider what is and is not depicted in each image, and to explain how these elements contribute to a rich understanding of the visual narrative. The Guide also provides resources that encourage students to evaluate a number of primary sources in order to support their own interpretation of the historical events depicted in the book. One such exercise presents a number of contemporary theories about the cause of Tom Thomson's death. Students are asked to evaluate each theory based on the merits of the argumentation and the credibility of the theorist, as follows …

THE DEATH OF TOM THOMSON / THEORIES & HYPOTHESES

No one can know for certain what happened on Sunday, July 8th, 1917, the day Tom Thomson suddenly disappeared. Some contemporaries, including Ranger Mark Robinson, Mrs Thomas (wife of the local railway section head) and Mrs Colson (wife of the owner of the Hotel Algonquin on Joe Lake), have claimed they saw Thomson alive that morning … walking down to Joe Lake dam with Shannon Fraser, but many were equally convinced he must have died the night before.

What is known, is that Tom Thomson's body surfaced eight days later and was sighted by a vacationer on Canoe Lake who happened coincidentally to be a physician and a neurologist. Dr G.W. Howland examined the body and determined Thomson had suffered a mishap in his canoe. Others on the lake, who knew Thomson well, felt his death was no accident.

A hundred years later there are still half a dozen theories as to what might have occurred; some, perhaps, more persuasive than others, but all six theories have their advocates, and in each case there is source material to support the various suppositions. Look closely at each of the images towards the end of George Walker's *Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*. Are there clues, worked into the images (starting around p 171) that would suggest which of the various theories George Walker believes to be the correct one? And do you agree?

The body was found with a length of fishing line
wrapped around one ankle, which *could* be consistent
with death by accidental drowning, though
there are other plausible explanations
for the fishing line that are equally persuasive.

ACCIDENTAL DROWNING

Goldwin W. Howland was a Toronto physician and professor of neurology at the University of Toronto, vacationing on Little Wapomeo Island, who saw an unidentifiable object in the water off Hayhurst Point on the morning of Monday, July 16 and asked two local guides, George Rowe and Laurie Dickson, who were in a canoe on the water at the time, to investigate. It was Rowe and Dickson who recovered Tom's body (see page 207 of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*).

Dr G.W. Howland, Toronto, July 17, 1917:
'Body of Tom Thomson, artist, found floating in Canoe Lake, July 16, 1917. Certified to be the person named by Mark Robinson, Park Ranger. Body clothed in grey lumberman's shirt, khaki trowsers and canvas shoes. Head shows marked swelling of face, decomposition has set in, air issuing from mouth. Head has a bruise over left temple as if produced by falling on rock. Examination of body shows no bruises, body greatly swollen, blisters on limbs, putrefaction setting in on surface. There are no signs of any external force having caused death, and there is no doubt but that death occurred from drowning.'

Dr Howland examined the body the next morning, Tuesday, July 17 because the arrival of the coroner, Arthur Ranney of North Bay, had been delayed. By his sworn deposition (above) Dr Howland would seem to be convinced, in his own mind, that Tom had drowned, but Howland was not acting as a

coroner and did not comment, either way, as to whether he thought the 'drowning' was accidental. By the time the coroner did arrive at Canoe Lake (the evening of July 17) Tom's body had already been buried in Mowat cemetery.

One problem with Dr Howland's deposition is that one such version specifies a 'bruise', consistent with a fall, as being found over the left temple, and yet another version (supposedly delivered to Tom's brother, George) talks about a bruise over the *right* temple. The apparent confusion is odd, though the bruise itself *could* be consistent with accidental drowning if Tom had perhaps tripped in his canoe, fallen, hit his head on a gunwale, knocked himself unconscious, rolled off the canoe into the water and drowned. Particularly if Tom had been drunk at the time of the accident, except that early afternoon (particularly on a Sunday) sounds a bit unlikely of a time for Tom to have been drunk enough to do himself harm. And this does not sound like the sort of misadventure that would happen to an expert canoeist, which Tom was.

Mark Robinson was the Park Ranger who identified the body at the request of Dr Howland. Mark's testimony is perhaps more credible than that of others, specifically because part of his job as Park Ranger required him to meet incoming rail traffic at Canoe Lake station, and to familiarize himself with the identities of new arrivals. Mark was looking, in particular, for possible poachers, but he also had a keen sense of the composition of the Canoe Lake community in general. Blodwen Davies was a reporter, originally from Fort William (Thunder Bay), who later moved to Toronto and in 1935 wrote and self-published a biography of Tom Thomson called *Paddle and Palette*. Martin Blecher and his sister Bessie found Tom's canoe on the afternoon of July 8th, and towed it to Mowat

Lodge (pages 207, 209, 211).

Mark Robinson to Blodwen Davies, 1930:
'We buried his remains in the little cemetery at Canoe Lake, Martin Blecher Sr. reading the Anglican funeral service at the grave. Later his remains were taken up and went to Owen Sound for burial. Dr Ranney of North Bay conducted what inquest was held. Tom was said to have been drowned. It may be quite true but the mystery remains.'

Dr A.E. Ranney [Coroner], Letter to Blodwen Davies, May 7, 1931:
'The body was in such a state of decomposition when found that it had to be buried as quickly as possible. The body was thoroughly examined by Dr G.W. Howland, qualified Medical Practitioner of Toronto, before inquest, who gave me a full description of the condition of the body. There was only one bruise on the right side of head, temple region about 4 inches long, this, no doubt, was caused by stricking some abstacle, like a stone, when the body was drowned. Dr Howland swore that death was caused from drowning, also the evidence from the other six witnesses points that the cause of death was drowning. Those who were present at the inquest were as follows: Dr G.W. Howland, Miss Bessie Belcher [Blecher?], Mr J.E. Colson, Prop Algonquin Hotel, Mr J.S. Fraser, Prop Mowat Lodge, Canoe Lake, Mr Mark Robinson, Park Ranger, Mr Martyn Belcher [Blecher?], tourist and Mr G. Rowe, resident guide.'

One problem with the accidental drowning theory is that Tom Thomson *was* an expert canoeist (see pgs 115, 117, 119 &c); Tom did, however, drink alcohol (p 157, 173) which sometimes led to fights (p 155). Alcohol could have been a

contributing factor, which would not have been evident when Dr Howland examined the body on July 17, after it had been in the water over a week.

And then there's the curious circumstance that the body was found with a length of fishing line wrapped around one ankle, which could, perhaps, support a theory of accidental drowning, unless of course the fishing line was perhaps attached to a weight of some sort, intended to deliberately sink the body, in which case the fishing line supports a theory of manslaughter at least, and possibly murder. There is one other suggestion … that Tom may have sprained his ankle and had wrapped the ankle himself in fishing line, for support, to relieve the pain. This seems not terribly likely, because it would take a *lot* of fishing line to tape an ankle.

Thomson biographer David Silcox has suggested a variation on the Accidental Drowning theory in which Tom may have stood up in his canoe to urinate over the side, tripped on his fishing line, fell, hit his head on a gunwale on the way down, knocked himself unconscious, rolled off the canoe into the water and drowned. Except that an experienced canoeist would never stand up in a canoe to urinate, and David Silcox, an accomplished canoeist himself, would know that.

THE FISHING LINE

The fishing line that was found wrapped around Tom's right ankle is troublesome.

It is unlikely, as some have suggested, that Tom may have wrapped the line himself to relieve the discomfort of a sprained ankle … simply because fishing line is thin and it would take a LOT of tedious winding to build up sufficient rigidity to support a sprained ankle. If Tom did not wrap the line himself then we do have to consider the possibility that Tom inadvertently got himself tangled in fishing line, but that does not sound like the sort of thing an expert canoeist would allow to happen, and it is also inconsistent with Mark Robinson's description of the state of the canoe when it was recovered, which made mention of the fact that Tom's camping gear was neatly stowed and at least one paddle was lashed to the inside of the canoe (as it would be to facilitate a portage) though Robinson also noted that the paddle was secured with a type of knot that Tom Thomson did not favour.

If we suspect that Tom, deliberately or inadvertently, did *not* wrap the fishing line himself, that leaves the real possibility that someone else (possibly the murderer) may have done the wrapping as part of an attempt to ensure the body, once dumped, stayed sunk in Canoe Lake.

Typically, in the case of a drowning, the victim's lungs fill with water which weights the corpse enough to sink it until gases

released by decomposition of the flesh generate enough buoyancy to force the body back to the surface. This process can be quite rapid but it is variable and dependent on the temperature of the water. Canoe Lake is not large, but it does include 21 km of shoreline, so it is substantial and the lake is as much as 150 feet deep in places, where the water would be very cold and could partially explain why the body did not surface until a week later.

Or, perhaps the body *had* surfaced earlier, and no-one noticed it. But that's not likely because Canoe Lake, at its widest, is still just four hundred yards across to the far shore.

It is also curious that Dr Howland noticed there was no water in Tom's lungs, even after eight days' submersion. This condition is not common with victims of drowning though it is not unheard of either and could have been the result of a spasm in the throat that blocked the windpipe. If Tom's lungs were filled with air, however, then one would have expected the body to surface sooner, unless, of course, the corpse had been weighted with some sort of anchor.

As recently as 1969 the CBC interviewed pathologist Dr Noble Sharpe and asked, amongst other things, if Dr Sharpe could agree that it *might* have been possible for the submerged body to have entangled itself in fishing line simply by the action of currents in the water. Dr Sharpe agreed that such a scenario was within the realm of possibility though he added that he had no first-hand experience of any such occurence and Dr Sharpe had been, at one time, Ontario's chief forensic medical investigator.

The fishing line that was wrapped around Tom Thomson's

right ankle was not anything like the monofilament line that followed from DuPont's invention of nylon in 1938 and remains in common use today.

We know, for example, that the Chinese used line made of silk for angling as early as the fourth century. We can only assume that people before this may have used vines as line or perhaps fine thread made from plant fibre. We know from the journals of Samuel Pepys that the fishing line he used in 1667 was made from catgut or silk. Woven horsehair was popular in the early 20th century so it is possible that Thomson may have used horsehair. Silk threads were long and much stronger than horsehair and silk line could be made by machines, which was an advantage because horsehair line had to be made by hand. Silk line had drawbacks though, because it had to be rinsed and dried on open spools after every use and it was vulnerable to damage from ultraviolet light from the sun.

Thomson certainly could have used either silk or horsehair but some have suggested that he may have used copper line.

We do not know, and we will never know, exactly what type of line was wrapped around Thomson's ankle but line made of braided horsehair wears quickly if used frequently. The individual strands tend to break and fray which weakens the line at that spot and the line would break eventually. For many fishermen silk line replaced horsehair in 1908 because it could be produced mechanically and hence it was cheaper to buy. Thomson could also have used linen thread as fishing line, though linen line was also susceptible to damage from bacteria, mold and ultraviolet light. Linen or silk would likely have rotted if used to hold Thomson's body under water. This could explain why it rose to the surface a week after his death.

Copper line would have proved more resilient as a tether.

Tom's fishing pole, that might have been attached to one end of the fishing line, was never found.

CURRICULUM NOTE—

Using Reading Comprehension Strategies.

According to the Ontario secondary school curriculum, students must be able to select and use appropriate reading comprehension strategies to understand texts. The wordless novel and its attendant focus on visual literacy requires students to engage a different set of comprehension strategies than might be occasioned by reading a novel or a poem. The exercises, activities and discussions fostered by this Guide invite students to analyse emotions, reactions, behaviours and motives that are implied through visual cues rather than through word choice, dialogue or reported thought.

Shannon Fraser was known to have a temper particularly when drinking. And Tom had loaned Shannon some money, which Tom may have needed repaid.

Tom may have indulged in a brief affair with Annie Fraser which could have been another issue between the two men.

MANSLAUGHTER

Daphne Crombie was a guest at Mowat Lodge who would later reveal some pertinent information she claimed Annie Fraser had told her about the relationship between Tom Thomson and Winnifred Trainor. Ron Pittaway was an Algonquin Park historian who interviewed Daphne Crombie in 1977, sixty years after Tom's death. Shannon and Annie Fraser were the proprietors of Mowat Lodge, where Tom often stayed on Canoe Lake, particularly when the weather was inclement for camping. We can certainly see evidence of a fight (p 183, 185) and possibly Tom's body being dragged (p 189) and put into a canoe (p 191, 193, 195). Dr James MacCallum was Tom's patron.

Daphne Crombie to Ron Pittaway, 1977:
'Tom and George [Rowe?]… they'd had a party. They were all pretty good drinkers, Tom as well. Well, they went up and had this party. They were all tight and Tom asked Shannon Fraser for the money that he owed him because he had to go and get a new suit. … Anyway, they had a fight and Shannon hit Tom, you see, knocked him down by the fire grate, and he had a mark on his forehead … Annie [Fraser] told me all this and also Dr MacCallum. Tom was completely knocked out by this fight. Of course, Fraser was terrified because he thought he'd killed Tom. This is my conception, and I don't know about other people's. My conception is that Shannon took Tom's body and put it into a canoe and dropped it in the lake. That's how he died.'

Shannon Fraser was known to have a temper, and Tom had loaned Shannon money to buy canoes for Mowat Lodge. It's conceivable, as well, that Tom may have been feeling pressure from Winnifred Trainor and may have needed the loan repaid for a wedding (hence the reference to 'a new suit'), especially if (as some have suggested) Winnifred was in fact pregnant. In 1917 the prospect of the extreme sort of social stigma that would be attached to an unwed mother could likely have driven Winnifred near to desperation, and hence multiplied the pressure on Tom severalfold. And there is some suggestion that Tom may have indulged in a brief affair with Shannon's wife Annie (p 109?) which in itself would have provided ample motive for a fight with Shannon, not to mention the added complexities of his ongoing relationship with Winnifred.

Mark Robinson was the Park Ranger who had identified Tom's body at the request of Dr Howland. The detail about the fishing line (see below) is curious; and it's odd that Mark Robinson found 'no marks on the body' if Shannon Fraser had, in fact, killed Tom in a fist fight.

Mark Robinson to biographer Blodwen Davies, 1930:
'I assisted Roy Dixon, undertaker of Sprucedale, Ontario, to take the body from the water in the presence of Dr Howland. There were no marks on the body except a slight bruise over the left eye. His fishing line was wound several times around his left ankle and broken off. There was no sign of the rod. His provisions and kit bag were in the front end of the Canoe when found. The lake was not rough.'

Tom's brother George was alleged (by some) to have accompanied the casket by rail to Owen Sound for burial, though he

later denied it. The only means of access to Canoe Lake was by train. (p 65, 83, 85, 111)

George Thomson to Blodwen Davies, June 8, 1931:
'I had heard that there was some ill feeling between Tom and some man in that region [Mowat village]. It was somewhat casually referred to by someone at Canoe Lake, possibly one of the Rangers, but as this was while we were still looking for Tom and I was still hopeful of his safe recovery, I didn't at the time attach any serious importance to the report.'

The 'man' in the region *could* have been Shannon Fraser, or it could have been Martin Blecher who may have harboured romantic designs of his own on Winnifred Trainor.

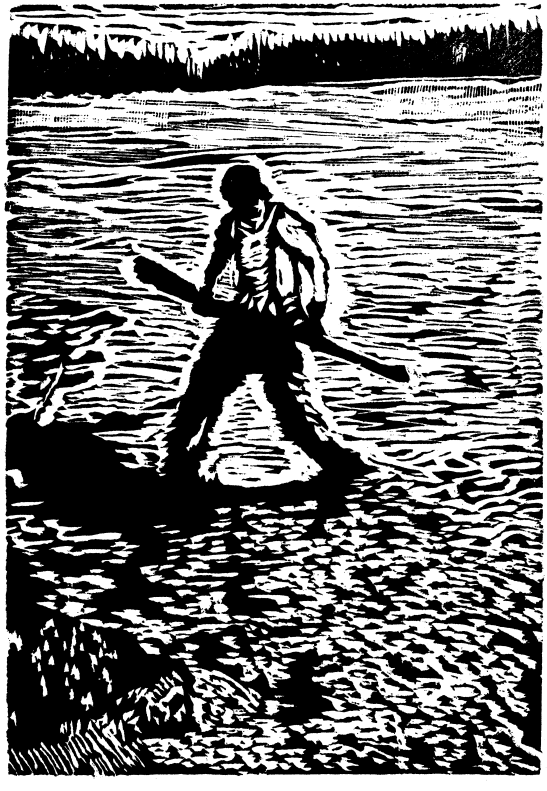
Ranger Mark Robinson to Blodwen Davies, 1930:
'J. Shannon Fraser and wife of Canoe Lake Ont., and daughter Mrs Arthur Briggs all knew Tom extra well, and if Fraser will tell the truth, much could be got from him, but weigh well his remarks. You might [also] interview Martin and Bessie Blecher, but again be careful. They possibly know more about Tom's sad end than any other person.'

Mark Robinson may have been suspicious that it was the Blechers (Martin and Bessie) who found Tom's canoe and returned it to Mowat Lodge very promptly, the afternoon of July 8, the same day Tom had gone missing. Mark may have been suspicious, as well, that the inquest was held at the Blechers' cottage rather than Mowat Lodge. And Mark may have thought it curious that Martin Blecher served beer to the attendees at the inquest.

CURRICULUM NOTE—

Making Inferences and Extending Understanding of Texts.

One of the specific expectations of the high school English reading curriculum is to encourage students to make and explain inferences derived from texts. The exercises in the Guide test students' ability to understand visual narratives by asking them to explain their own creative interpretations of the images and what they reveal about characters, situations, historical context and other relevant story elements. Furthermore, students are expected to make connections between the ideas presented in a given text and with the world around them.



The ‘zoom’ is one of the common visual effects that appears frequently in silent films of the 1920s as well as wordless novels that were first developed about the same time.

MURDER WITH A PADDLE

Harry Ebbs was a counsellor at Ahmek Camp, a Taylor Statten camp for boys on the east shore of Canoe Lake, in 1924, then later became a medical doctor. Harry Ebbs was also part of a small team of amateur forensics, under the direction of William Little, who exhumed a body at Mowat Cemetery in 1956. Rory MacKay was a historian, primarily interested in nineteenth-century logging (p 147, 149). Martin Blecher Sr had been a successful furniture dealer in Buffalo, New York who retired to a cottage in Algonquin Park in 1909. The Blechers had a son, Martin Jr, and a daughter, Bessie. Martin Jr was later suspected of being a German spy though there is not a lot of persuasive evidence to support the theory. Martin Jr was, however, not well liked by the locals at Canoe Lake.

Dr Harry Ebbs, at Ahmek Camp, interviewed Nov. 26, 1975 by Rory MacKay:
'I was there in 1924, that's seven years after the event—and the person who was suspected or whose name was whispered most often was Martin Blecher […] I had 75 workmen up there and I had to bring all my food in from the train and I had to get my order out every day […]. I could see the smoke from the train and I was late […] I could see Martin Blecher coming down the creek in his little boat, there was quite a big curve and I knew that if I didn't get there first, that I would have to go way out around him and I would lose quite a lot of valuable time. Well I did beat him […] and as I went by, he picked up a paddle and swung it, and if I hadn't ducked he would have

crowned me right there on the spot.'

Dr Goldwin Howland did notice, at the time of his examination (July 17) that Tom's face was swollen, and also that there was a bruise over the left temple. Both the swelling, and the bruise, *could* be consistent with a quick shot to the head with a paddle, and could also be consistent with a loss of consciousness, particularly if the paddle hit Tom's head forcefully in the vicinity of his temple.

Harry Ebbs' commentary is perhaps all the more credible because he was not part of Canoe Lake 'community' in 1917, so he would not necessarily have been swayed by any common prejudice against the Blechers, or Martin Jr in particular. On the other hand, the incident described by Harry Ebbs took place in 1924, seven years after the fact, though it *could* (maybe) substantiate a supposition that Martin Blecher may have been predisposed to wield a paddle in anger, and may have done so more than once.

And we have motive … not simply that Martin Blecher was unpopular, but also that Martin *may* have been involved with Winnifred Trainor (and Tom may not have appreciated the competition?). Then there was the War, already in its third year by the spring of 1917. Tom had, apparently, tried to enlist at the outbreak of hostilities, and was refused (apparently on medical grounds; possibly because James MacCallum, unbeknownst to Tom, had pulled strings in Ottawa). Blecher was American, of German descent. There is some suggestion that Tom may have sided with the Allies in an argument with Blecher over which side would likely prevail in the end. There is another suggestion that Tom may have accused Blecher of being a deserter from the US military. Possibly true, but Tom

would have been on thin ice, making any such accusation, particularly given that his own service had been declined on somewhat flimsy medical grounds.

Ranger Mark Robinson journal entry, July 10, 1917:
'Tuesday, July 10. Morning wet and cool. Mr Shannon Fraser came to house about 9:15 am and reported that Martin Bletcher had found Tom Thomson's canoe floating upside down in Canoe Lake and wanted us to drag for Mr Thomson's body. We went to Canoe Lake and interviewed Miss Bletcher who was with her brother on Sunday in his little motor boat. Going to Tea Lake dam they had passed a canoe floating upside down between Statton's Point and the Bertram Island. They didn't stop to examine the canoe as they had heard there was a canoe that had drifted away from its moorings and had not been found, but they intended to pick up the same as they returned. They passed the canoe at 3pm on Sunday the 8th.'

This journal entry *sounds* as if Ranger Mark Robinson may have been suspicious … in the first instance because Martin Blecher apparently noticed the overturned canoe on Sunday (July 8) but didn't bother to report the discovery or to recover the canoe until the next day. Mark Robinson also had some concerns about the inquest, and we'll get to those as well.

Mark Robinson to Blodwen Davies, 1930:
'J. Shannon Fraser was at the lake as Tom left and was the last man (as far as the Public know) to see Tom alive. He left at about 12:50 pm and at the inquest it came out that Martin and Bessie Blecher, American-German tourists with a cottage at Canoe Lake had found Tom's canoe floating not three-quarters of a mile from where he started out from the Trainor

cottage at about 3 p.m. An east wind was blowing and this canoe could *not* have been there under ordinary conditions. They [the Blechers] did not report finding the canoe until the following morning when the canoe was brought in from behind Little Wapomeo Island.'

This account is highly circumstantial, and tainted by the fact that the interview was conducted thirteen years after Tom died, but it does suggest that Ranger Mark Robinson, even as late as 1930, was still suspicious of Martin Blecher.

CURRICULUM NOTE—
Interconnected Skills.

The curriculum articulates a need for students to be able to explain how a variety of skills can help them read more effectively. To address this goal, the Guide asks students to demonstrate a mix of reading, writing, artistic and communication strategies. For example, students may be asked to write a vignette inspired by images in *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*; to draw a graphic novel that incorporates people or places from the book; to write a poem or series of poems about specific scenes depicted in the book; or to present a short speech on an issue important during Tom Thomson's lifetime. After each of these, students may reflect on how their creative endeavours have deepened their appreciation of the text.

From this image it appears clear
that Tom has lost consciousness; and that
his left temple is resting on jagged rock.

The question becomes … did he fall,
perhaps as the result of drinking?
or for some other reason?

SUBDURAL HEMATOMA

… a collection of blood between the covering of the brain and the surface of the brain; can be fatal when caused by a severe head injury (p 187?) which Tom could have suffered if the fight with Shannon Fraser occurred at Mowat Lodge, and Tom fell against a heavy iron grate in the fireplace, as was suggested by Daphne Crombie, or if the fight continued outdoors and Tom bashed his head on the rocks.

Dr Noble Sharpe received his M.B. from the University of Toronto in 1911, and served with the Canadian Army Medical Corps in Europe until 1919. From 1919 to 1923, he served as Assistant Professor of Pharmacology at the University of Toronto and from 1923 to 1950, as Pathologist at Old Grace Hospital, the Toronto Hospital for Consumptives, and Toronto Western Hospital. In 1951 he was appointed Medical Director of the Ontario Attorney-General's Laboratory, retiring in 1967. After his retirement, Sharpe served as a Consultant Pathologist with the Ontario Centre of Forensic Sciences. His medical credentials are impeccable.

Dr Noble Sharpe, 'The Canoe Lake Mystery', *Canadian Society of Forensic Science Journal*, June 1970, 34-40.
'I do not criticize Dr Howland for failing to make an internal examination. Decomposition would have masked indications of drowning as the cause of death. Even the absence of water in the lungs would not rule out the possibility. I am, however, puzzled by the bleeding from the ear. If this, whatever the

cause, occurred in the water, it would in all probability have been washed away. Dried blood implies a time lapse before immersion.'

Dr Sharpe's argument recognizes that any injury to the head that may have been occasioned by a mishap in the canoe … presuming that Tom tripped over his own fishing line, fell and whacked the side of his head on a gunwale before rolling off and in to the water … would have produced liquid blood that almost certainly would have been washed clean by the wave action of currents in the lake. Dried blood, on the other hand, could well be (and apparently was) still visible in the ear cavity even after the body had been in the water for eight days. This suggests that some significant trauma to the head had occurred some time prior to the body's immersion in the lake, and also suggests that the person who dumped the body was also complicit in the head injury.

MURDER WITH A GUN

In spite of his deserved reputation as a rugged outdoorsman Tom Thomson was certainly interested in the ladies (p 99, 103, 105).

Charles F. Plewman, 'Reflections on The Passing of Tom Thomson', *Canadian Camping Magazine*, 1972.
'When the body was found Miss Winnie Trainor, Tom's girl friend from Huntsville, whose parents had a cottage on Canoe Lake in front of the Lodge, appeared on the scene and demanded the right to see the remains, saying that there must have been foul play as she was certain that Tom didn't drown by accident in a small lake like Canoe Lake. This, Mark Robinson stoutly refused to grant. (The body had been in the lake about eight days and was not very presentable).'

Dr Noble Sharpe, 'The Canoe Lake Mystery', *Canadian Society of Forensic Science Journal*, June 1970, 34-40.
'Tom was socially inclined, and he was said to be interested in a local lady [Winnifred Trainor]. (I had a telephone conversation with this charming person in 1956, and she told me she was engaged to him.) It was also said Tom had a rival [Martin Blecher?] and they had quarrelled. Their altercations reached a climax when Tom accused the other man of being a deserter from the American Army. Tom, incidentally, had been rejected on account of flat feet. Rumours relating to his rival's implication were rife. It was stated that on the night before Tom Thomson disappeared that a man threatened him. Still

later it was rumoured a shot had been heard coming from the direction Tom had taken when he was last seen.'

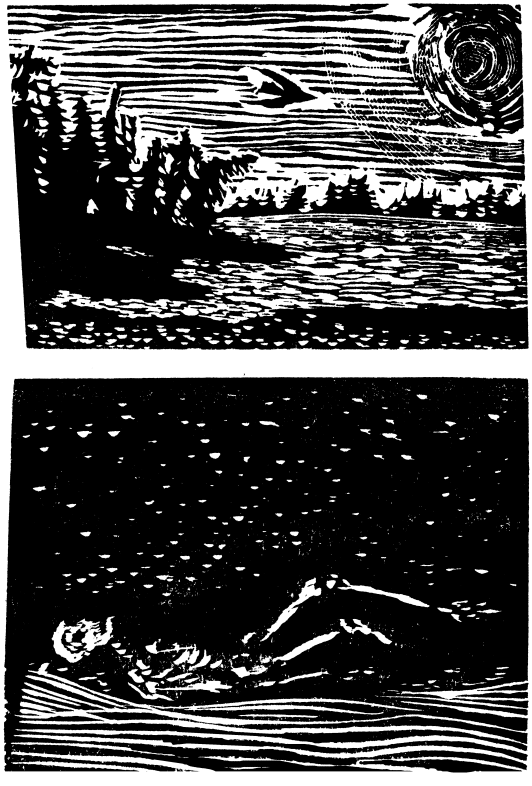
William Little was supervisor of the reformatory in Brampton, Ontario, during the 1950s and 60s during which time he also pursued an avid interest in the Tom Thomson tragedy. In the late 1960s, Little became a Judge. He also worked with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1969 to produce a television documentary about Thomson's death. In 1970, he published *The Tom Thomson Mystery*, a summary of his research regarding Thomson's death in which he described how he had excavated (in 1956) Thomson's original grave at Canoe lake with three of his friends, one of whom was Harry Ebbs. They found remains—including a skull with a hole in it—which they naturally assumed *must* have belonged to Thomson but Dr Noble Sharpe ultimately concluded that the remains exhumed by Little belonged to an unidentified Indigenous man, and that the hole in the skull had been caused by surgical intervention, and not a bullet.

It would, of course, be fascinating to do some digging at the Thomson family plot at Leith, but the family has never sanctioned any such intervention, and the plot at Leith lies within consecrated ground (whereas the Mowat Cemetery was not so designated).

SUICIDE

Charles F. Plewman, 'Reflections on The Passing of Tom Thomson', *Canadian Camping Magazine*, 1972.
'After the funeral, Shannon Fraser who operated Mowat Lodge where Tom had stayed, and who was more intimate with Tom than anyone else, confided in me what he felt had actually happened. Tom Thomson [...] was engaged to marry Miss Trainor. She was pressing him to go through with the marriage. He intimated that she was coming up to see Tom to have a showdown on the fatal week. He mentioned that Tom was a shy and sensitive person and that he felt he just could not face the music. The impression Shannon left me with was that somehow Tom had come to the conclusion that a settled, married life was not for him, but that he just could not say so to Miss Trainor. Recalling Tom's previous statements of not to worry if he didn't return on time, Shannon said that had made him feel that Tom had contemplated doing something on earlier occasions but had not mustered sufficient courage to go through with this intention.'

One problem with the Suicide theory is that a note was never found. Another problem with this narrative (as above) is that Shannon Fraser, himself, remains a prime suspect and would naturally be anxious to shift attention elsewhere. On the other hand it is very possible that Winnifred Trainor may have been pregnant at the time, which would have put enormous pressure on Tom to 'make an honest woman of her'.



The last block in *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* was fashioned from wood taken from a limb that may have fallen from a tree that appears in Tom's painting called *Byng Inlet*.

INTERMENT

Tom Thomson died, very likely, on the afternoon of Sunday, July 8th, 1917, sometime after Ranger Mark Robinson saw him walking to Joe Lake dam with Shannon Fraser in the morning and sometime before Martin Blecher found his canoe overturned on Canoe Lake in the afternoon.

It is perhaps conceivable that Tom had died the previous evening (July 7), possibly as the result of a fight with Shannon Fraser or Martin Blecher, but that scenario assumes that Mark Robinson was mistaken, which seems unlikely.

Tom's body was spotted by Dr Goldwin Howland in the water off Little Wapomeo Island on the morning of Monday, July 16, and was towed to shore by George Rowe and Laurie Dickson. The body was identified by Chief Park Ranger Mark Robinson who contacted undertaker Robert H. Flavelle of Kearney, and his embalmer, Michael R. Dixon (Robinson's cousin, coincidentally), who arrived together at Canoe Lake on Monday, July 16. (Flavelle billed for lodging from 3:45 p.m., Monday to 6:45 p.m., Tuesday while Dixon stayed at Robinson's cabin.)

Dr Howland examined the body the next morning (Tuesday, July 16) and found it to be in a state of advanced decomposition. The body was embalmed by Dixon, transferred to the mainland and buried in Mowat Cemetery by Flavelle before the Coroner, Arthur Ranney, arrived from North Bay that

same evening (July 16), and despite the protestations of Winnifred Trainor who had likely arrived on the morning train.

When the body was located, Tom had been missing for over a week. Winnifred Trainor had, presumably, been in contact with the Thomson family in the interim and would have known the family's wishes as to the preferred burial site in the family plot at Leith. Trainor later complained that her advice had been ignored, or overruled (probably by Mark Robinson), possibly because of the advanced state of decomposition of the body.

A telephone bill from the Huntsville office of Bell Telephone records two calls placed by 'Miss Traynor' from Huntsville to 'Mr Thomson' in Owen Sound, and four telephone calls to 'Mr Flavelle' in Kearney, all of them made on Wednesday, July 18 after Winnifred had attended Thomson's late Tuesday afternoon burial in Mowat Cemetery and returned (presumably) on the evening train to Huntsville.

The inquest, such as it was, and the Coroner's verdict of Accidental Drowning, are both somewhat suspect … in the first instance because the Coroner did not, himself, examine the body but rather relied on second-hand information from Dr Howland. And the inquest was held at Martin Blecher's cottage (which is odd), rather than Mowat Lodge; and Blecher served beer and cigars at the proceeding, which seems out of keeping with the gravity of the proceeding; and George Rowe, who had assisted in the recovery of the body, had not been summonsed but attended only after Mark Robinson went to fetch him. Winnifred Trainor did not attend the inquest.

Arthur Ranney's determination of Accidental Drowning was

never particularly convincing at the time, and was formally challenged in 1930 when journalist Blodwen Davies published *Paddle and Palette* with Ryerson Press and then filed an 'Application for the exhumation of the body of one Thos. Thomson drowned in Canoe Lake in 1917' with the Attorney General in 1931. Arthur Ranney's verdict would, eventually, be overturned in 2008 by Dr Michael Pollanen, then chief forensic pathologist for the Province of Ontario, who changed the cause of death to 'unknown'.

Ranger Mark Robinson diary, Thursday, 19 July:
'Mr Churchill undertaker of Huntsville arrived last night and took up body of Thomas Thomson artist under direction of Mr Geo Thomon of Conn USA. The body went out on evening train to Owen Sound to be burried in the family plot.'

From this diary entry it seems clear that Mark Robinson thought Tom's body had been exhumed, perhaps on the Thursday morning, by Mr Churchill from Huntsville and shipped to Owen Sound, perhaps on the evening train. Shannon Fraser would seem to corroborate that supposition …

Shannon Fraser, Letter to James MacCallum, July 24, 1917:
'the Paddles was tied up in the canoe and canoe turned over when we found him he was in a bad state so we burried him he and his brother came up and took him a way with him he was dug up and put in a sealed coffen.'

But Mark Robinson has also indicated that he visited the Mowat cemetery shortly thereafter and found no evidence that the soil had been disturbed. One theory suggests that Mr Churchill may have sent a coffin filled with rocks to Owen

Winnifred Trainor insists she was at Canoe Lake Station on the day Tom's coffin was loaded for shipment to Owen Sound.

Sound, a charge he vigorously denied when he was interrogated on the subject in 1956 by Dr Noble Sharpe, Ontario's chief forensic medical investigator.

Dr Sharpe also spoke to Winnifred Trainor (in 1956) who testified that both she and her father were present at the Canoe Lake railroad station when the casket was loaded aboard the train (presumably Thursday, 19 July because we know from telephone records that Winnifred was in Huntsville on Wednesday, 18 July) and they were convinced that the body was in it. The Thomson family in Owen Sound was similarly convinced, and made mention of the strong odour emanating from the casket.

For extensive access to primary source material as well as password-protected access to a suite of so-called 'expert' Interpretations of the Tom Thomson mystery visit

http://canadianmysteries.ca/en/index.php

The pork pie hat, for men, was first popularized by silent film star Buster Keaton in the 1920s.

George Walker would most certainly be aware of this connotation, and he used a similar hat when he introduced James MacCallum (page 23).

MASTER CLASS

Reading Comprehension Activity. Choose an image from *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* and answer the following questions as best you can. Refer to the chronology, references and your own research in your answer.

a) Who are the people and/or what are the places depicted in the image?
b) What clues does the image give us about the time in which the story takes place? What does the image suggest about life in that era?
c) What purpose does the image serve in furthering the storyline in the wordless narrative as a whole?

Narrative Interpretation Activity. Near to the end of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*, the artist inserts himself into the narrative, somewhat disguised as a sport fisherman. What does this intervention suggest about the nature of the narrative? Of storytelling in general? You may wish to refer to Tom Smart's Introduction, or, alternatively, you may want to consider the similarities between the wordless novel as it was perfected by Frans Masereel in *Passionate Journey* (1919) and the silent films of Hollywood that were popular from 1895 to 1936. Bear in mind that the American artist Lynd Ward has admitted that, to create a wordless novel, he first had to visualize it in his head as a silent film. You may also want to consider that George Walker's next wordless novel (as yet uncompleted) presents the career of

If this image appeared as a single frame
in a silent film, there would be a soundtrack.

What do you hear?

Mary Pickford, born in Toronto on University Avenue, who went on to found United Artists with Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks.

Wordless Novel Format Comprehension Activity.
Consider the form of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* and answer the following questions.

a) How does the wordless novel format differ from other graphic novels that you have read?
b) What are some of the limitations of telling a story without using any words?
c) What are some of the advantages?
d) Are there any types of stories that are particularly well-suited to being told without words? Explain why or why not.

Artistic Interpretation Activity. Consider the melancholic image (opposite) that appears on page 165 of *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*.

a) If this image were presented as a frame in a silent movie, there would be a soundtrack. What do you 'hear', when you look at the engraving?
b) What sort of tone do you think the image communicates?
c) Which artistic elements in the image contribute to this effect?
d) If you were the artist, what are some other techniques you might have used to complement this tone?

Creative Writing Activity 1. Choose one of these two images from *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* (either page 35 or 53). Write a prose vignette inspired by the scene. Feel free to develop your own characters, but be sure to stay

true to the setting evoked by the image as you write. The marching band, for example, could be part of an Orangeman's Parade at which Protestants celebrate Prince William of Orange's victory over King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The parade is typically staged each summer on July 12 and would have been very common in southern Ontario at this time. In 1914, the parade would have happened just weeks before the start of World War I.

Creative Writing Activity 2. Choose a series of five consecutive images from *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*. Provide captions or dialogue for each image. Explain why you chose to include the words you did. Consider the tone of the image as well as the vocabulary of the period as you complete the exercise.

Research Activity 1. Do some research of your own on the Group of Seven. Write a paragraph or two that explains their significance to the development of Canadian art. Who were the members? What were they known for? Why are they still remembered today?

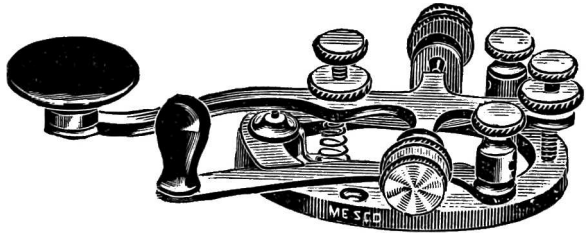
Research Activity 2. Do some of your own research on Canada as it was in 1917. What was the political situation? What were some of the biggest news headlines of the era? What were some of the inventions, tools and products that were popular at the time?

Creative Writing / Design / Research Activity. Do some research on commercial design in the 1910s. What did newspaper or magazine advertisements look like? What kinds of elements did they include? What sorts of products did they promote? How did they differ from the magazine and

newspaper ads we see today? Once you have done your research, design your own advertisement in the style of Tom Thomson's time, paying attention, in particular, to the typography and the penmanship.

Essay Question. What do you think happened to Tom Thomson at the end? Make reference to primary and secondary sources to support your claims.

Last Little Bit. Tom Thomson is buried either at Leith, on the eastern shore of Owen Sound Bay or Mowat Cemetary at Canoe Lake. Make your choice, then send your answer to a friend by texting in Morse Code (dots & dashes, and spaces, no words). Hint: keep your answer short, just like a telegraph operator would, or you'll be typing for a long while.



A wood engraving by George Walker
in which George's long-time friend Bill Poole draws
a proof on a Chandler & Price platen press.

STILL MORE IDEAS

Heather Thelwell, Bishop Macdonell High School (Guelph) reports: 'I am definitely interested in further supporting the role of wordless books in a high school setting. In particular with high functioning autistic kids that enjoy the more complex stories, but are not literate.'

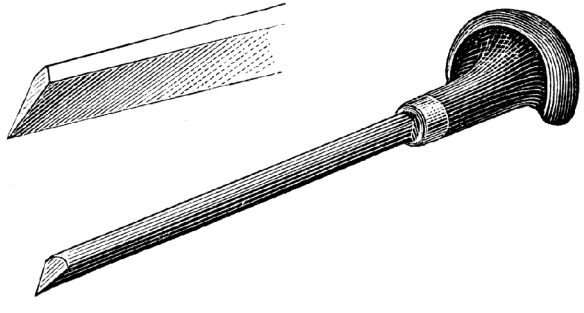
Sharon Turnbull-Schmitt, a former superintendent of the Toronto District School Board, draws attention to what she identifies as opportunities for the development of oral language skills in *Tom Thomson*. Students could, as Sharon suggests, write a script for a play about Tom Thomson, or perhaps an interview with the artist that could probe the complexities of his romantic relationships with Winnifred Trainor and Annie Fraser. Tom Thomson's rustic life in Algonquin Park could also evoke lyrics for a ballad, perhaps done in the style of Gordon Lightfoot, though students will also want to reference Gord Downie's song, recorded by the Tragically Hip, called 'Three Pistols', in which Winnifred Trainor lurks in the shadows at Mowat Cemetery and tends to Tom's grave.

Philip Fernandez (Etobicoke) suggests that small 'teams' of two or four go through the book a page at a time and write out a line or two of text for each image. According to Philip 'This can be fun because there are pages in the book where you truly have to guess what is going on.'

Margaret Lindsay Holton (Waterdown) suggests that she 'felt

and inferred an absence of sound, particularly music' while leafing through the pages of *Tom Thomson*. Margaret suggests that students could be asked to create a 'music list' to reflect the sounds that would have been associated with the early part of the twenteieth century, perhaps the sounds of the British Music Hall (esp George Formby Sr), and with Tom Thomson's life, both in Toronto and in the wilds of Algonquin Park.

Beau Williamson (Montreal) admits that wood engraving tools are too small, too sharp, too difficult to manipulate and generally too dangerous for classroom use but suggests that similar effects could be explored with scratchboard or even (in a pinch) 'black poster paint on paper prepared with a solid base of wax crayon'. One drawback to scratchboard is that it does not convey any of the 'mirror' imaging required by relief printmaking (wood engraving, linocut or woodcut).



Margaret Lindsay Holton suggests that students be encouraged to 'create an app. Each image would have documentary digital photography and wiki-like links that explore the nature and origin of the artefacts inherent in the engravings … Study: Use the app as a starting point to encourage students to discuss their own lives and their own artefacts.'

Sharon Turnbull-Schmitt suggests one lesson could feature a screening of 'His Favourite Pastime', a sixteen-minute burlesque starring Charlie Chaplin that was produced in 1914 and is readily available on YouTube. In the silent film, Charlie gets drunk in the bar then steps outside, meets a pretty woman and tries to flirt with her, only to retreat after the woman's father returns. Which calls very much into question the issue of what Winnifred Trainor's father, Hugh, must have thought of a ne'er-do-well painter of pictures who drank too much and may have gotten his daughter 'in a family way.'

Jose Ortega (Mexico City) suggests a reading list as follows:

Arizpe, Evelyn and Morag Styles. *Children Reading Picturebooks, Interpreting Visual Texts*. 2016.

Elkins, James. *Visual Literacy*. 2009.

Heffernan, James A.W. *Cultivating Picturacy, Visual Art and Verbal Interventions*. 2006.

Karasik, Paul and Mark Newgarden. *How to Read Nancy. The Elements of Comics in Three Easy Panels*. Fantagraphics, 2017.

Mitchell, W.J.T., *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. 1994.

Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed.), *The Language of Images*. 1980.

Mitchell, W.J.T., *Iconology: image, text, ideology*. 1986.

Spiegelman, Art. *Reading Pictures. A Few Thousand Words on Six Books Without Any, Lynd Ward: Six Novels in Woodcuts*. Library of America, 2010.

OTHER WORDLESS NOVELS BY GEORGE A. WALKER

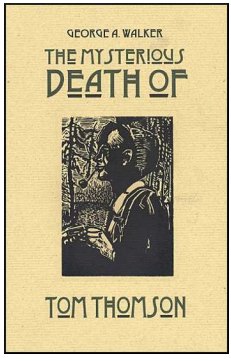
'The delicacy and intelligence of George Walker's print-making seems to have come to us from a bygone age.

Fortunately, we have George with us now.'

—Neil Gaiman, author of *The Sandman*

The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson

2013 Doug Wright Award, shortlisted

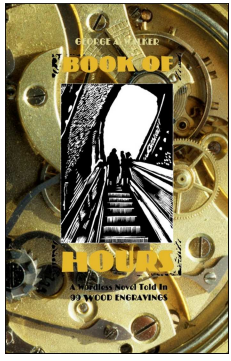


'George A. Walker, the talented wood engraver and "book artist", has composed *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* in 109 woodblock engravings presented in a handsome volume by the Porcupine's Quill. While reading Walker's wordless narrative, one becomes eerily aware of silence: wordlessness itself becomes a mode of silence, and an agent of voiceless voicing, unheard dialogue and mute interrogation. In fact, it's not easy to use words to describe what happens once you are engaged in this sequence of woodblock images: events proceed: a man, Tom Thomson, emerges as an increasingly solitary figure, slowly withdrawing from urbanity and emerging in the wilderness, where, as different versions have it (and Walker's is one of them), he meets his fate. The effect of the wordless imagery is strangely acoustic: a silence filled with echoes. The book does not want to be put down; instead the reader, the observer, re-engages again and again, returning to read into the images a story that eludes understanding just as understanding seems to elude stories without words. This is a book for the shade on a bright summer day.' —Mandelbrot, *Geist*

'The peer assessment committee noted the high production values in your books and they particularly remarked on the title *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson* as a contribution to Canadian literature and the visual arts.' —Canada Council officer Elizabeth Eve

Book of Hours

2011 *Foreword* Magazine Book of the Year, shortlisted



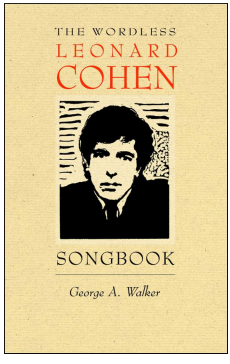
'Walker's silent howl is an extended visual elegy delicately and boldly carved into the page by a sure, steady and skillful hand. It's a dirge for a way of life and a mindset destroyed in the most public and profound of ways. *Book of Hours* deserves a place next to Art Spiegelman's brilliantly faulted *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Rick Veitch's sublimely surreal *Can't Get No*, and other worthy titles which explore the meaning, impact, and ramifications of September 11th, 2001.' —Bill Baker, *Foreword* Reviews

'Walker reveals a society in which people follow their everyday routine, showing us small moments of normal life in the irretrievable time before terrorist attacks were considered possible on our own shores. The images are elegant, with a cumulative sense of active life, individuals captured in one moment of a full and personal existence. Rather than the story of one person, it accumulates the weight of narrative due to the reader's foreknowledge of what is to come. Each page adds another life that is going to be forever changed. …

'This results in a striking book, with an overhanging sense of doom to the images of casual daily life, all those people just going about an ordinary day completely unaware of what was coming. Even in the form of fairly straightforward, uncluttered images, often of a single person who isn't doing much at all—sometimes gazing at a computer, sometimes lying in bed—there is a sensation of alarm that grew stronger as I neared the end of the book. I didn't want to see what I knew what about to happen. It was surprisingly affecting, powerful in its simplicity.' —Melanie, *The Indextrious Reader*

The Wordless Leonard Cohen Songbook

2015 Independent Publisher (IPPY) awards, winner (Design)



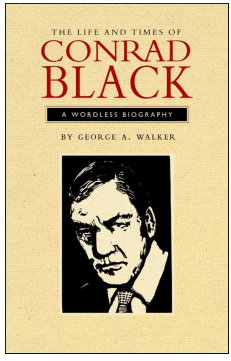
'*The Wordless Leonard Cohen Songbook*, by Toronto-based artist George A. Walker, delivers exactly what the title promises. The book includes eighty wood engravings that depict Cohen's life and influences, from his childhood to his recent tours. It's a cool idea, and the engravings are beautifully done. The presentation might limit the material's appeal to Cohen's existing fan base, but the book is a lovely keepsake for that audience. …

'Some of the images are inspired by famous photos of Cohen with his contemporaries, imaginatively depicting Jimi Hendrix, his then-lover Janis Joplin, or Phil Spector (shown pointing a gun at Cohen). Others depict figures who drew Cohen's interest, including poet Federico Garcia Lorca and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. These images are interspersed with portraits or performance images of Cohen. The book's foreword suggests viewing the engravings while listening to music, and they do flow nicely when perused as a Cohen album like *I'm Your Man* or *Songs of Love and Hate* plays in the background. …

'*The Wordless Leonard Cohen Songbook* definitely succeeds as an art book, thanks to the quality of Walker's engravings; and as a collectible for Cohen fans, thanks to how well the artist captures his subject.' —Jeff Fleischer, *Foreword* Reviews

The Life and Times of Conrad Black

2014 *Foreword* IndieFab Book of the Year Award, Shortlisted



'Woodcut engraving is a demanding form, one that reduces images to a rudimentary boldness where everything depends on the contrast between black and white. Yet in Walker's sure hands, these bluntly hewn images convey the full mystery of Conrad Black: his intelligence and his foolishness, his love of the glamorous spotlight and his reserve, his crudeness and his decorum. Whatever else you want to say about Conrad Black, he's a complicated character. In this suite of drawings, Walker has done justice to Black's complexity. Without using a word, Walker's images give voice to the inner Black.' —Jeet Heer, *The Globe and Mail*

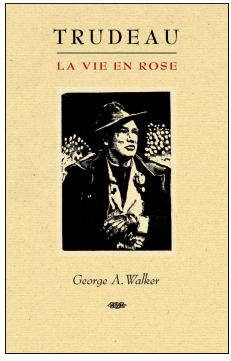
'By eschewing words, Walker's woodcuts are allowed to stand as simple and powerful gestures to a life story that any amount of words would be unable to tell in any case. His interpretation of Black's infamous middle finger is wonderful, as is the effect produced by a seemingly stray halo in a depiction of Black defending himself to the world. These images are, as Tom Smart's closing essay suggests, a kind of text in themselves, and they tell a story that is truly compelling, even and especially if it is a story that requires us to contribute more than usual to its telling.' —Jeremy Luke Hill

'The assessors remarked on the press's strong contribution to Canadian literature and the high production value of the titles. They were particularly enthusiastic about the wordless biography of Conrad Black and the work done to promote that title.'

—Canada Council officer Sarah Dingle

Trudeau: La Vie en Rose

2016 eLit Awards, Runner-up



'The Porcupine's Quill has championed the undeservedly obscure art of the wordless graphic novel, having previously published several similar works by Walker, as well as Steven McCabe, Jarrett Heckbert and others. Trudeau, like the other books, can stand solely on its illustrations without any text at all—including an excerpt from current prime minister Justin Trudeau's eulogy for his father upon the latter's death in 2000, and a preface by Canadian literature professor George Elliott Clarke, both of which precede Walker's series of black-and-white woodcuts. …

'Particularly for non-Canadians, these images provide a penetrating sense of Trudeau and his times, but sometimes sacrifice thorough comprehension. Thus, Walker features not only the previously mentioned text, but also a written addendum, providing context and additional insight into the woodcuts. These brief components flesh out the biography nicely, though as Tom Smart, author and curator of the Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, writes, "Trudeau grasped the potential of emblematic actions and attitudes," making the star of this biography Trudeau himself. …

'La Vie en Rose translates roughly as "life through rose-colored glasses, "and it's hard to imagine a better subject for a wordless biography than the effervescent and optimistic Pierre Trudeau. Sticking his tongue out, sliding down a banister, pirouetting behind Queen Elizabeth II, or shaking hands with dignitaries and celebrities, Trudeau's personality and charisma leap from these pages. Infused by his energy and Walker's skill, *Trudeau: La Vie en Rose* proves a resounding success.' —Peter Dabbene, *Foreword* Reviews