

CURRICULUM THEMES

Saskatchewan Voices; Sculpture; Ceramics;
History and Culture

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

GRADE 4 | CR4.2: Students will explore Saskatchewan artist Joe Fafard's portraits and respond by creating a visual or written work about a local person who is significant in their lives.

JOE FAFARD: *THE POLITICIAN*

Fafard's sculpture of *The Politician* depicts John G. Diefenbaker, Canada's 13th Prime Minister. Diefenbaker was a persuasive speaker and a prairie populist who prided himself on being able to remember the names of thousands of his constituents. Fafard has skillfully captured the essence of the man who suffered election defeats for two decades before finally being elected to Parliament, achieving the leadership of his party and then the Prime Minister's office.

In *The Politician* Fafard presents Diefenbaker in his later years, perhaps his last campaign in 1979, striking a characteristic hands-on-hips pose. Being a man of the people was part of the Diefenbaker persona, so it would be perfectly natural for him to climb on a chair in any of the community halls in his constituency to speak to a small group of voters.

With *The Politician*, Fafard has applied his characteristic attention to detail to the figure on the chair, which exhibits strength of character and a sense of humanity that elevates this sculpture above a portrayal of one person to become the archetypal politician.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Do you know someone who has a pose or gesture that is unique to that person, like John Diefenbaker's hands-on-hips pose? What does that pose or gesture say about the person?

Newspaper editorial cartoonists had a wonderful time drawing Diefenbaker during his time as Prime Minister and leader of the opposition. What unique qualities does Fafard's sculpture have that raise it above a cartoon or caricature?



Joe Fafard, *The Politician*, 1987, bronze, patina, acrylic paint, edition 4/12.
MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina Collection.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE IMAGE](#)

ACTIVITY

Fafard relies on clay and other media to describe and define character, in much the same way as a writer uses words. For the piece seen here, he uses clay to express observations, memories and insight gathered from public events and the context of the times to present his take on a famous Canadian personality.

Write a journal or create a sketch book page as though you were preparing to create a sculpture of an inspiring local figure in your life.

- Select the person you are planning to sculpt. This could be a prominent person in your community, someone in your school, or even a family member who is important to you.
- Research qualities and attributes of your figure. What are their personality traits? What physical gestures are they known for? Make a list of these things at the top of your writing page or sketchbook page.
- Write about the expression and body stance you will give the figure and why.
- Make a sketch of the figure as a precursor to making a clay form.

POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

- A framed “desk photograph” or watercolor painting of a place that is important to your figure.
- An illustrated map of their travels.
- A diary of events of an important time period in their life.
- A fictional newspaper article with illustrations about an event in this person’s life.
- An “official” portrait in clay or paint.
- A drawing or painting of a significant event in their lifetime.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Paper or a sketchbook
- Pens, pencils and erasers
- Air-dry clay (opt.)
- Painting utensils (opt.)

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Joe Fafard is an internationally acclaimed artist who was born in the small farming community of Ste. Marthe, Saskatchewan in 1942. When he was a boy growing up on the farm, he would draw pictures of horses in his spare moments. People began to notice his ability to sketch animals and told him he would be an artist someday. Some of his most well-known works are tied to his rural prairie roots, such as his bronze sculptures of cows that are displayed in many public places in major cities across Canada.

Fafard received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Manitoba in 1966, and then earned his Master of Fine Arts degree from Pennsylvania State University in 1968. He taught art at the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan from 1968 to 1974, but left teaching to settle in the small community of Pense, just west of Regina, where he became a full-time sculptor. Fafard was part of a significant art movement in Saskatchewan that pushed back against the dominance of abstract artwork in the sixties and seventies. The Saskatchewan branch of this movement was greatly influenced by California Funk artists such as David Gilhooly.

In the 1970s, Fafard used clay as a medium for much of his sculptures. His career took a new direction in the early 1980s when he won a major commission to create a public art installation at the Toronto-Dominion Bank building in downtown Toronto. Entitled *The Pasture*, his casting in bronze of cows grazing on what was once a pasture was a success. In 1985 he established a foundry in Pense, producing numerous insightful and often humorous ceramic and bronze works of people and animals that reveal his close connections with *Prairie life*. He passed away in his home located just outside of Lumsden, Saskatchewan, in 2019 from stomach cancer.

Fafard was the recipient of numerous awards throughout his life, including the *Order of Canada* (1981), the *Architectural Institute of Canada Allied Arts Award* (1987), the *Saskatchewan Order of Merit* (2002), the *National Prix Montfort* (2003), and the *Lieutenant Governor's Saskatchewan Centennial Medal for the Arts* (2005). He has also received honorary Doctorates from both the Universities of Regina and Manitoba.