

These guidance notes are designed to help you use this totem pole as a focus for cross-curricular teaching and learning. A visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum gives the chance to see your chosen object and offers your class the perfect learning outside the classroom opportunity.



## Starting Questions

The following questions may be useful as a starting point for developing speaking and listening skills with your class.

- What do you think this object is made from?
- How is it decorated?
- What animals can you see?
- What do you think the decorations might mean?
- Where might the object come from?
- Why was it made?
- How do you think it was used?
- What skills do the people who made it have?
- How do you think this pole got to the Museum?
- Why do you think this pole is in a Museum?

The Haida totem pole is on display in the Pitt Rivers Museum.

The pole is made from a red cedar tree and measures 11.36m.

An image of this pole is available on our website:

<http://objects.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/PRMUID4979.html>

Factsheet: [www.prm.ox.ac.uk/totem.html](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/totem.html)



Inspired by the National Gallery's  
Take One Picture programme

# Background Information

## The Object

This totem pole is made from a red cedar tree by the Haida people who live on Haida Gwaii, a group of islands off the North West Coast of Canada. This post stood at the front of Star House in the village of Old Massett, and was raised by Chief Anetlas at a potlatch when he adopted a young girl. The figures on the pole tell the histories, ancestral crests, social status and privileges of the Haida family whose house it marked. The pole was removed from Star House in 1901 and sent to Oxford where it has been in the Museum ever since.

The artist would have carefully selected the right red cedar tree, and then felled and transported it back to the village to carve the pole as dictated by the crests and stories associated with the Chief Anetlas and his family. A centre line would be drawn down the front in charcoal and the design sketched down one half. The design would then be mirrored exactly on the other half of the pole to give a symmetrical effect.

The bottom figure on a Haida pole is usually most important. The raven at the bottom of the pole most likely represents a crest owned by Anetlas. In Haida society you either belong to the Raven or the Eagle clan, and you have to marry someone from the other clan. Chief Anetlas belonged to the Eagle clan whilst his wife was from the Raven clan. The grizzly bear holding a human with two cubs at its feet probably refers to the Bear Mother story where a young girl marries a bear and gives birth to twins that are half bear, half human. The bear with a frog in its mouth and a cub between its legs may be part of the Bear Mother story. The three watchmen on top of the pole were designed to look out over the ocean and alert its homeowners of danger. The number of rings on the watchmens' hats record the number of potlatches held by the pole's owner. Originally the central watchman had 9 rings but now it only has 4 – it is thought the others were cut off to fit the pole into a travel container on its way to the Museum.

## The Historical Context

When the pole was originally put up at the front of Star House it would have been part of a potlatch ceremony. Potlatches are ceremonies held to transfer rights and privileges to individuals, such as using certain crests, and to bring honour to the host and his extended family. They are held at important occasions such as installing a chief, adopting a child, marriages or memorial services.

During a potlatch, hosts and guests feast together. Dances, songs and stories of the host clan will be performed, and special clan items will be worn and displayed such as masks, headdresses and button blankets with clan crests. Chiefs make formal speeches at potlatches to recite their family lineage and achievements. Guests are given gifts to show them respect, and to say thank you for agreeing to act as witnesses about the rights they saw being transferred. Haida society is traditionally an oral society so it is important to have witnesses if nothing is written down!

When the totem pole was acquired in 1901 the potlatch had been made illegal in Canada dating to revisions in the Indian Act in 1884. Haida people were pressed not to put up totem poles and regalia linked to potlatches could be confiscated. Now traditional rights have been reinstated and potlatches and the raising of totem poles are an important part of Haida life again.



Detail of the totem pole showing a bear holding a person

# Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 and KS2 curriculum

You can use this totem pole as a starting point for developing pupils' critical and creative thinking as well as their learning across the curriculum. You may want to consider possible lines of enquiry as a first step in your cross-curricular planning. This may help build strong links between curriculum areas. After using strategies to help children engage with the object and asking questions to facilitate dialogue you can work with the children to develop lines of enquiry which will interest them.

Here are a few suggestions of possible lines of enquiry using this object:

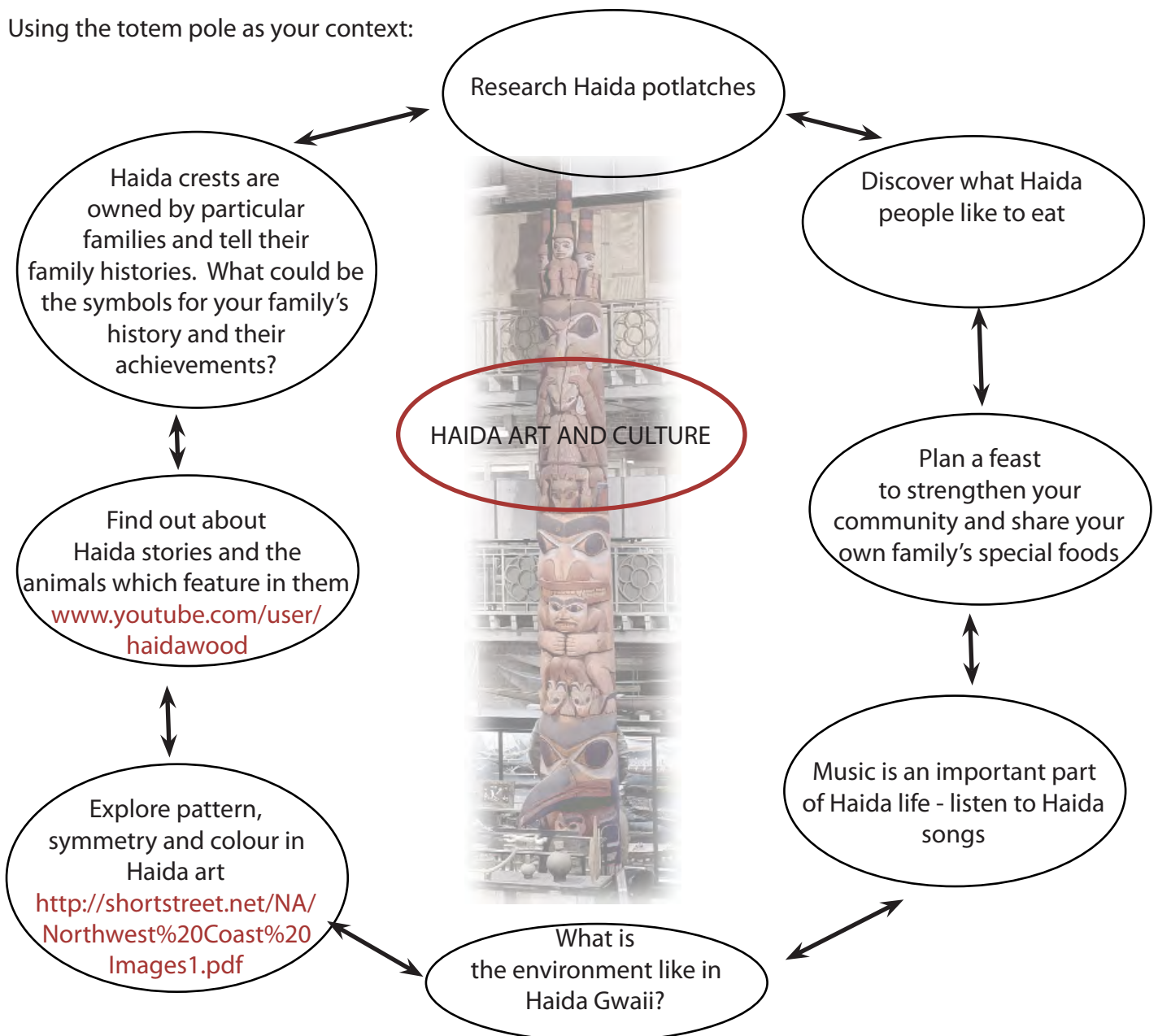
- Haida art and culture
- Family
- Social identity
- People and place
- Importance of stories

Using one or more line of enquiry as your starting point consider how you can work in a number of curriculum areas to build links.

## Using HAIDA ART AND CULTURE as a line of enquiry

Here are a few ideas of how you can develop a range of learning opportunities to engage pupils with this line of enquiry. Each activity can link with the others to build on pupils' learning across the curriculum.

Using the totem pole as your context:





## Tips for introducing objects to a class

- Display an image of the object in the classroom for a number of days with a tape recorder or 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the object. Once comments and questions are gathered a class discussion can follow.
- Display a large image of the object in the classroom. Cover it with paper and then gradually reveal it in the days leading up to your visit, asking pupils to guess what they are going to see.
- Work in pairs sitting back to back. One child has a picture of the object and describes what they can see whilst the other draws what is described
- Introduce an object to the whole class in a question and answer session as outlined on page one
- Create a word bank using words that come from looking at the object and use these to create poems.

## Take One...INSET Training

Book a staff INSET session to find out more about our Take One.. programme, and how to engage children with artefacts across the curriculum.

Suitable for Foundation to KS2 teachers.

Venue: Pitt Rivers Museum

Please email [rebecca.mcvean@prm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rebecca.mcvean@prm.ox.ac.uk)

**“Thank you for a wonderful and stimulating day . I came away buzzing full of ideas.”**

Feedback after a recent  
Take One...INSET

## Take One...Inspires

Take One... encourages teachers to use an object, painting or other resource imaginatively in the classroom, both as a stimulus for artwork, and for work in more unexpected curriculum areas. Work in many curriculum areas can be inspired by using a single object as a starting point.

The challenge is for teachers to use objects to develop culturally enriching, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum.



Families designed different sections of a totem pole and watched it grow on the Clore Learning Balcony at the Pitt Rivers Museum

To support your Take One.. project book a:

KS1&2 Take One.. workshop - 75 minutes

Contact

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