

# The Amazing Maud Lewis

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Suggested Grade Levels: 3-6 (but can be modified for younger grade levels)

Subject Areas: Visual arts, social studies, mathematics, Language arts

## Rationale:

Maud Lewis is one of Nova Scotia's best known folk artists; her artwork is exhibited in galleries throughout Canada and Maud Lewis originals are much in demand. Her cheerful, unique paintings of simple flowers, birds, animals, etc. are a priceless Nova Scotian treasure. She was a true hero who triumphed brilliantly in spite of physical disability and poverty. This lesson provides an opportunity for students to investigate the life of Maud Lewis and appreciate what an amazing little woman she was. They will have a chance to learn about her tiny home (which has been restored and is now on display at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia) and to practice mathematical skills as they construct a scale model of it. They will also have a chance to "walk in her shoes" as they create artwork in the style of Maud Lewis.

Note: Some activities in this lesson (e.g., drawing to scale) might only be appropriate for senior elementary students. Teachers might decide to select only the investigation of Maud's life and art making activities.

## Logistics:

### *Classroom set-up*

- Access to computers and the school or local library will be helpful as students investigate examples of Maud Lewis' artwork.
- A space will need to be cleared in the classroom for the mapping out of the perimeter of Maud's home.
- Desks will need to be grouped in twos or threes for the construction of the scale model activity.

### *Materials*

- Meter sticks
- Cardboard and glue or strong tape
- Masking tape
- pencils
- coloured markers, crayons, etc.
- card stock paper for making cards

### *Suggested resources / images*

- Examples of Maud Lewis' art work and her preserved home that are on permanent display at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
- Websites that include images of Maud Lewis' art (e.g., Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Mayberry Fine Art)

- MacLean’s magazine website (article entitled “Paying Tribute to Painter Maud Lewis”)
- *I Can Make Art Like Maud Lewis* (National Film Board film)
- National Film Board website (lesson plan for *I Can Make Art Like Maud Lewis*)
- Maud Lewis reproductions found on postcards, Nova Scotia tourist brochures

### Suggested Outcomes:

Students will be expected to:

- Demonstrate an understanding that many individuals, groups, and events have contributed to the development of their provincial identity throughout its history (Social studies)
- Investigate art and artists within their community (Visual arts)
- Work individually and with others throughout the creative art-making process (Visual arts)
- Estimate and apply measurement concepts and skills in relevant problem situations (Mathematics)
- Listen attentively and demonstrate awareness of the needs, rights, and feelings of others (Language arts)

### Introduction:

To prepare for this lesson, the class might discuss questions such as:

- Who are some of Nova Scotia’s heroes?
- Are there people with physical disabilities who make special contributions to your community?
- Can you locate Marshalltown on the map of Nova Scotia?
- Have you ever heard of Maud Lewis?

In addition, ask students to bring to class the following information:

- Interior dimensions of their apartment or home (e.g., 10 metres wide x 10 metres long x 2.8 metres ceiling height), not including the garage if they have one
- List of pieces of furniture and appliances that they have in their living-room and kitchen

As you display for students a few examples of the art of Maud Lewis found on postcards, etc. or on a web site, explain that this tiny woman is one of our true Nova Scotia heroes. In spite of serious physical disabilities and poverty, she created wonderful images of life in rural Nova Scotia that are now exhibited all round the world. When you have announced that this lesson’s title will be *The Amazing Maud Lewis*, ask students to note in their journals, throughout the activities, all the reasons why they think that she was (or was not) amazing.

### Suggestions for Teaching and Learning:

1. Invite students, in small groups, to conduct research (library or Internet) about Maud Lewis. Not more than 15-20 minutes should be required for this research. You might want to provide specific questions about which they should find information, such as:

- Where and when did Maud Lewis live?
- What disabilities did she have?
- Who did she marry and how old was she when she was married? (Note that there are sites that have incorrect information about this – it could be important for students to discover that what they find on the Internet is not necessarily correct.)
- How much did she sell her small paintings for?
- What do Maud Lewis originals sell for today?

*Note:* It might be effective to give only one or two questions to each group. In this case, it would be important for more than one group to have the same questions.

2. Once the research is complete, pool the information, discover any inaccuracies, and compile a brief biography of Maud Lewis.
3. Ask students to write, on a small piece of paper, the interior dimensions of their own apartment or home. Ask them not to put their names on the paper. Collect these and write on the board several examples (width, length, ceiling height). Discuss this information, noting especially which one is the smallest.
4. Clearing a space on the classroom floor, use masking tape to mark the dimensions of Maud and Everett Lewis' home (4 metres x 3.75 metres). Compare this size to the examples provided by students. Explain that this area was the entire home, except for a sleeping loft upstairs.
5. Place a piece of tape on the wall to show how high her ceiling was (1.8 metres). You might also hold a piece of Bristol board at that height and invite some of the tallest students to stand under it.
6. You might choose to ask students to consider the list of furniture found in their own kitchens and living rooms and make decisions about which pieces are essential. Challenge them to imagine how this furniture would have fitted into the one room in Maud's home. They might even use substitutes (desks, chairs, etc.) to actually see how crowded it would have been. Now display for the students images of her home, showing the art work that decorated every surface. (The AGNS website is an excellent resource for this.)
7. Invite them to make responses in their journals to what they have discovered about her tiny home.
8. Invite students, working in groups of 3-4, to construct a scale model (1:10) of Maud's home, using cardboard and construction paper. Some students might like to use markers or crayons to decorate the doors and interior surfaces.
9. In a full class activity, consider a number of examples of Maud's artwork. Talk about what her subjects were (animals, birds, flowers, and the world around her in

rural Nova Scotia), the colours she used (she did not blend colours). Students will undoubtedly discover other things that are unique about her artwork. Ask students to suggest why they think her work has become so famous. Remind them once again of the physical challenges that Maud faced (hands deformed by arthritis, etc.).

10. Inform students that, when Maud first moved to Marshalltown, she used to paint Christmas cards that her husband would sell as he drove around the area. Invite them to make their own greeting card using card stock provided, creating a front page that is “in the style of” Maud Lewis. Note: The NFB film *I Can Make Art like Maud Lewis* provides detailed directions for art making “in the style of” Maud.
11. Challenge them to do their artwork with mittens on, or with their fists clenched, so that they feel a sense of the challenges presented by Maud’s physical disabilities. You might also suggest that they keep their arms bent as they work. In a full class discussion, invite students to share what they have learned through this activity.

### Ideas for Extension:

Arrange a field trip to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia for a guided tour of the Maud Lewis exhibit.

You might choose to discuss the difference between “in the style of” and copying artwork.

Invite a folk artist from the local area to the classroom to talk about and show her / his artwork. Students could plan questions that they would like to ask in advance of the visit.

Mount an exhibition of the students’ Maud Lewis work in the classroom or library. This could include both the house models and greeting cards, as well as personal responses that students have written to what they have learned from delving into her life and art.

Consider selling the greeting cards that the students have made during a parent-teacher interview day. The money raised could be used to assist in purchasing art supplies or go toward the AGNS field trip.

For language arts extension, invite students to write a proposal for naming a building or park in their area after Maud Lewis.

It could be highly meaningful to invite a student from another class, or an adult from the local area, who has a physical disability to visit the class to share thoughts about how that person lives with the challenge and experiences success and joy.

**Suggestions for Assessment:**

Ask students to consider all the reasons why they think Maud Lewis was (or was not) amazing. Written and visual responses could be recorded in personal journals.

Have a full class discussion about why Maud Lewis is a true Nova Scotia hero.

Use a rubric to record students' group work skills during the model-making activity.

Assess the models of Maud's house, using criteria agreed upon in advance (e.g., accuracy of the measurements, 90 degree angles).

The student exhibition described in Ideas for Extension would provide an excellent tool for assessing student learning.