



Novel Study
Teacher's Guide for

Under Emily's Sky

by Ann Alma

CLASSROOM USES

Under Emily's Sky is an historical novel which presents biographical information about Canada's famous west coast eccentric, artist Emily Carr, as well as introducing information relevant to units dealing environmental issues, B.C. settlement, personal growth and family and social values. This novel can be used to create a number of integrated units on art, history, geography and forestry practices, language arts and community building. It is also suitable for a unit on personal growth and anger management, as the story deals with Lee's feelings after her parents' break-up. Lee learns to channel her anger through painting and comes to accept the departure of her father as a necessary and appropriate action. As a novel study, *Under Emily's Sky* can be enjoyed as a fast-paced adventure story.

HISTORY

Under Emily's Sky is set both in 1996 (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 11) and in 1936 (chapters 4 to 10). Lifestyle, housing, tools, scenery (eg. rain forests versus less dense forests) and clothing in each era are easily compared when Lee and Alex (cousins from the Nineties) meet Willard and Clare (twins from the Thirties). Social values play a large role in determining Lee's attitude toward the differences she witnesses in the past and in particular makes her aware of and grateful for the material advantages she is afforded in the modern day. The novel also lends itself to

a unit on the history of homesteading in B.C. and the Depression years in the Prairie provinces. Using library resources, students will be able to research the "Dirty Thirties" as a means to help them better understand Clare and Willard's situation in the novel. Supplementary materials can be found in local museums and in the Activities section of this guide.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Emily Carr was a prolific writer, keeping journals (see book list) and corresponding with many people. She also made notes before beginning to paint her subjects, writing on scraps of paper wherever available. Like Emily Carr students can use the novel to appreciate the "art" of writing and the value of expressing oneself in written form.

VISUAL ARTS

Throughout the course of the novel, Emily Carr comes alive as the reader "watches" her paint. Carr was a fierce painter who transferred her emotions onto her canvasses. She chose to remain single and without children so she could pursue a life as an artist. She experienced extreme poverty and hardship but her dedication always allowed her to find ways to afford the time and materials to paint. The novel is ideal for an integrated unit with Art so that readers too can pick up the brush, charcoal or pencil and put their own feelings on paper. The novel also lends itself to further studies of Canadian painters and Emily

