



## VIEWING GUIDE

Presented by  
the Intellectual  
Property Issues in  
Cultural Heritage  
Project

# COMMODIFICATION OF INUIT SYMBOLS AND POTENTIAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS



## VIOLET FORD

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Video URL: <http://bit.ly/RJ0sCK>

## SUMMARY

The commodification of Inuit cultural symbols has been increasing. This presentation examines emerging legal norms that may limit the misuse of such cultural symbols and protect community interests in the future.

## KEY CONCEPTS

Marx's definition of commodification, social value vs. commercial value, free and prior informed consent, colonialism, self-determination, customary law.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between an *inuksuk* and an *inunguaq*?
2. How does Violet define "commodification"? In her view, how does commodification change relationships?
3. Violet describes how the *inuksuk* was used for promotion of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics "without the free and prior informed consent of Inuit communities." What does she mean by this? How did the Inuit community respond?
4. As a result of the Olympics, Violet suggested there was an "*inuksuk* boom" and the symbol was used widely in marketing various products. What problems arose as a result? Were there also benefits to this?
5. Violet notes that the *inuksuk* became a symbol for Canadian national identity. Do you see this as a benefit or a problem, and why?
6. Violet states that "commodification of cultural symbols is a new form of colonialism or the last frontier to be discovered." What does she mean by this? Do you agree or disagree, and why?



## ACTIVITY / ASSIGNMENT

### A. The *Inuksuk* and the 2010 Vancouver Olympics

1. Provide a short summary of how the *inuksuk* came to be used for the Olympics.
2. Outline the perspectives of at least three different groups on this use of the *inuksuk*.
3. Identify any relevant professional heritage association Codes of Ethics concerning this issue. How could these be used to resolve conflicts?
4. What is the current situation regarding the use of the *inuksuk*? Was any conflict resolved?
5. Drawing on the points raised in Violet's presentation, what is your opinion on the use of the *inuksuk* by the Vancouver Organizing Committee? Would you have done anything differently? Why or why not?

### B. Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Professional Codes of Ethics

1. Identify five heritage/archaeological/anthropological organizations with Codes of Ethics (local, national and international).
2. Provide a summary of how each code addresses the responsibilities of professionals to:  
a) heritage sites and objects, b) intangible heritage, c) Indigenous communities, and d) the public.
3. Do these codes address the issue of cultural commodification? If so, how?
4. How would you improve these codes to accommodate issues of appropriation and commodification? Use the issues and examples discussed by Violet to craft an additional statement addressing these concerns.

## RESOURCES

Canada Games Vancouver Website (2010).  
<http://bit.ly/1pbueft>

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Website.  
<http://bit.ly/1mgC57p>

Inuksuk Wikipedia Website.  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuksuk>

Keene, Adrienne. Native Appropriations Website. <http://nativeappropriations.com>

National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association Inc. Website 2013. <http://bit.ly/1j4xq7u>

Olympic.org. (2005). Olympic Vancouver 2010 Winter Games Emblem.  
<http://bit.ly/1tMltaC>

UHaul Nunavut SuperGraphic Website.  
<http://bit.ly/Ug2n3B>

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples (2007). *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.  
<http://bit.ly/1igqUsJ>

Young, James O. (2010). *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. Wiley-Blackwell: Malden, MA.

This Viewing Guide was created by Marina La Salle & the IPinCH Commodifications of Cultural Heritage Working Group, May 2014.