

# Invention of Fife Wheat and the Art of Alex Coville

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All images by Grade 4 and 5 students

## Objectives

- To recognize and study the art of Alex Coville
- To create studies of wheat with the exactness of an Alex Coville painting
- Use measurement techniques to draw a piece of wheat
- To manipulate a non-traditional painting tool to create paintings of wheat
- To recognize the composition techniques that would be best used to create paintings of wheat
- To study the invention of Fife Wheat

## Materials

Sketch paper  
Pencils  
Rulers  
Heads of wheat

Large paper 24x28  
Liquid tempera paint  
Small chunks of mat board  
Oil pastel



### **Procedure**

Show some examples of the art of Alex Coville The internet is a good source.  
National Gallery of Canada

Discuss how Alex Coville and the invention of Fife Wheat.

### **FIFE WHEAT**

Wheat farming is an important and integral industry in Canada. With Canada's differing vegetation regions and varying climate and temperature zones there has always been the need for different wheat varieties. The story of wheat has been influenced by many people, from many countries around the world. One of Canada's most popular type of wheat is called Fife or Red Fife. A common story that has been told about the beginning of Fife wheat is that as a young boy David Fife moved from Scotland to Canada. It was 1820 and he farmed with his family near Peterborough, Ontario. David eventually took over the family farm and began trying to develop a hearty wheat variety. As the tale is told Fife was sent some seeds from Scotland.

He planted them but only one plant with three stalks grew. He planned to harvest the seeds from the stalks when they had ripened and continue his experiments with them. Unfortunately, one day his hungry cows got out and were about to eat his three precious stalks. Suddenly Jane Fife, wife of David, came running and scared away the cows. She saved all that remained of the wheat variety that would change the agricultural picture of Canada. The durable and good producing, variety of Fife wheat was red in colour and matured early, making it suitable for Canadian farmers. Later another agricultural innovator named Charles Saunders discovered a cross-breed between Fife and another variety. This wheat sample was almost used as chicken feed, when a worker accidentally took the bag home. In 1908 Saunders named the variety Marquis wheat and it is one of the most resilient and popular choices in areas of early frost, such as Saskatchewan. These stories of wheat remind us of our rich Canadian history and the innovators who helped create it.

Alex Colville was born in 1920 in Toronto, Ontario. He studied Fine Arts at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick from 1938-1942.

Colville has exhibited extensively across Canada and internationally including the Tate Gallery in London, England; Beijing Exhibition Centre; Fung Ping Shan Museum in Hong Kong; Teien Museum in Tokyo; Canadian Pavilion at the 1966 Biennale in Venice, Italy; National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa; Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover and Menschenbilder, Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt, Germany. In 1983 an international touring retrospective of his work was organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Alex Colville's work is found in many collections including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne and Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover, Germany.

Give each child a piece of wheat. Count the kernels of wheat, look at where the stem meets the head of the wheat and how it is constructed. Observe

the outer husk on the kernel of wheat. Look at the beards on the barley if you happen to have barley and look at where the beards begin.

Have them measure in detail the piece of wheat that they have. I had them write down all of the measurements. I focused only on the head of the wheat

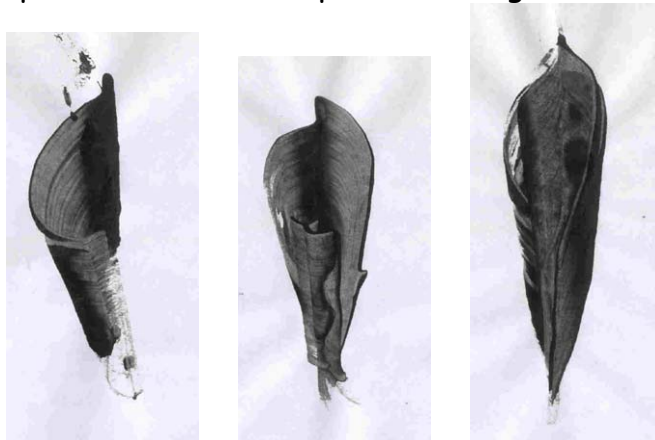
The children then tried to transpose the wheat head onto paper. I had them double all measurements so that it is easier to draw.

Draw the wheat in detail and add the shadows and highlights.

Second day I had the students sketch large heads of wheat on a large paper.

Using tempera paint and a small chunk of mat board the children will paint the wheat.

We did some practice on paper so that the wheat kernels were easier to create. See example below on the steps to creating the wheat kernels.



Putting kernels together will look something like the example below.



The children then paint the background. The children used more than one colour for the background with the small chunk of cardboard. They placed one colour and then put the other on top of it.

