

Indigenous Cultural Background Information

Introduction to Indigenous people in Saskatchewan

Greetings: Tansi (Nehiwyak (Cree), Anin, Sikwa (Nakawe), Edlanet'e (Dene), Hau Kona (Nakota), Hau Kola (Lakota), Hau Koda (Dakota), Tawanshi (Michif, the Metis Language), Hello (English), Salut (French)

MCoS is providing background information for facilitators, teachers and students to support the learning objectives of the new activities in the workshop. It is important to read through it before facilitating these activities, so that facilitators (whoever is leading this activity whether at MCoS workshop, in schools, or in the community) can provide informed instructions and reflection.

The cultural learnings components, stories, and their activities will be the main focus for facilitators. It is important to be careful of romanticizing and mythicizing Indigenous Peoples and therefore must include the information on Saskatchewan Indigenous Peoples and their history as much as possible throughout the workshop.

The activities and their contents strive to meet some of the goals of Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Curriculum Goals. First and foremost, it will “affirm the worth of each individual and lay the foundation for learning throughout life”

(publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/15298-Actualization-Core-Curriculum.pdf) Next, the Ministry of Education believes, “A body of knowledge and a range of skills and attitudes are necessary to function in a changing world.” (ibid,). the Ministry of Education outlines basic skills; lifelong learning; understanding and relating to one another; self concept development; positive lifestyles; spiritual development; career and consumer decisions; membership in society; and growing with change as key components to meet its goals (ibid). This workshop meets elements within each of these components except for career and consumer decision making. Outlined below is a summary of those elements.

1. Basic Skills

- Read write and compute
- Acquire information and meaning through observing, listening, reading, and experiencing
- Process information through intellectual and technological means
- Solve problems by applying basic principles and processes of the sciences, arts, and humanities
- Communicate ideas through written and spoken language, mathematical symbols, and aesthetic expression

2. Lifelong Learning

- Seek and value learning experiences
- Act as self-reliant learners
- Base actions on the knowledge that it is necessary to learn throughout life

3. Understanding and Relating to One Another

- Act on the belief that each individual is worthwhile

- Base actions on the recognition that people differ in their values, behaviours, and lifestyles
- Interact and feel comfortable with others who are different in race, religion, status, or personal attributes
- Develop a sense of responsibility toward others

4. Self Concept Development

- Perceive themselves in a positive way
- Appreciate their own abilities and limitations
- Present themselves with confidence

5. Positive Lifestyles

- Maintain a safe and healthful community
- Respect and seek to enhance the environment
- Appreciate beauty in its many natural and constructed forms
- Express themselves creatively

6. Spiritual Development

- Seek an understanding of the purpose and worth of human existence
- Develop a knowledge of God
- Respect family, religion, and culture in a pluralistic society

7. Membership In Society

- Assume responsibility for their own actions
- Work with others to achieve individual and group goals
- Respect the rights and property of others
- Act with honesty, integrity, compassion, and fairness
- Work towards greater social justice

8. Growing with Change

- Select workable alternatives in response to changing conditions
- Develop confidence in making decisions that involve risk

The information contained within this workshop could fit in to cross curricular areas such as English Language Arts including Communication Studies, Social Studies including Native Studies, Treaty Education, History, Health including Wellness, and Arts Education.

Saskatchewan Indigenous Peoples

Saskatchewan has a diversity of Indigenous cultures. It is home to 7 Nations and 75 First Nations as well as the Métis Nation. The Treaty Areas of the First Nations of Saskatchewan are Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10. (https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-SK/STAGING/texte-text/fnl_1100100020617_eng.pdf) The Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre (SICC) is an excellent source of information about First Nations and their cultures (<http://www.sicc.sk.ca/>).

The seven Indigenous Nations in Saskatchewan are the, Dene, Nakawe (Saulteaux), Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Nehiyawak (Cree), and Métis.

The Dene are located in Northern Saskatchewan where there are seven Dene First Nations:

- Birch Narrows First Nation
- Black Lake
- Buffalo River
- Clearwater River
- English River
- Fond du Lac
- Hatchet Lake

There are three groups of Nehiyawak also known as the Cree living in Saskatchewan: The Plains Cree, The Swampy Cree, and the Woodland Cree.

The Plains Cree are located on 38 First Nations:

- Ahtakakoop
- Beardy's / Okemasis
- Big River
- Canoe Lake
- Cowessess
- Flying Dust
- Gordon
- Island Lake
- James Smith
- John Smith
- Joseph Bighead
- Kahkewistahaw
- Kawacatoose
- Little Black Bear
- Little Pine
- Makwa Sakahikan
- Mistawasis
- Moosomin
- Muskeg
- Muskowekwan
- Nekaneet
- Ochapowace
- One Arrow
- Onion Lake
- Pasqua
- Peepeekisis
- Pelican Lake
- Piapot
- Poundmaker
- Sakimay
- Saulteaux
- Star Blanket
- Sturgeon Lake
- Sweetgrass
- Thunderchild
- Waterhen
- Whitebear
- Witchehan Lake

The Swampy Cree are located on three First Nations:

- Red Earth
- Shoal Lake
- Cumberland House

The Woodland Cree are also located on three First Nations:

- Lac La Ronge
- Montreal Lake
- Peter Ballantyne

The Nakawe living in Saskatchewan moved to the Plains from the woodlands. They are also known as Saulteaux, Ojibway, and Anishinabe. They are located on 15 First Nations in Saskatchewan:

- Cowessess
- Fishing Lake
- Gordon
- Keeseekoose
- Key
- Kinistin
- Muscowpetung
- Muskowekwan
- Okanese
- Pasqua
- Sakimay
- Saulteaux
- Whitebear

The Lakota are descendants from the Oglala Lakota in South Dakota. They came here with Sitting Bull. They are part of the Dakota/Nakota/Lakota Nation. The Lakota are referred to as the Sioux which is a name given to them by the French. There is only one Lakota First Nation in Saskatchewan located at Wood Mountain.

The Dakota are part of the Dakota/Nakota/Lakota Nation. They are also referred to as the Sioux and are located on three First Nations in Saskatchewan:

- Standing Buffalo
- Wahpeton
- Whitecap Dakota

The Nakota are part of the Dakota/Nakota/Lakota Nation. They are referred to as Assiniboine: a name that came from the French who adapted the name the Cree and Ojibway gave these peoples. They are located on 4 First Nations:

- Pheasant Rump
- Mosquito
- Carry the Kettle
- Ocean Man

The Métis historically were descended from a French father and a First Nation mother. In a more contemporary society Métis are descended from mixed First Nation and European parents. Métis people are also descended from Indigenous Peoples who accepted money or land scripts for land exchanges and peace and goodwill in lieu of signing treaties (<http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis/citizenship>)

Métis have developed a unique culture and are a distinct people. They are legally recognized by the federal government and classified as Aboriginal Peoples. The language spoken by members of the Métis language is Michif.

Métis Peoples live throughout Saskatchewan in urban centres such as Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and North Battleford. They also live in towns and villages such as

- Beauval
- Buffalo Narrows
- Cole Bay
- Green Lake
- Cumberland House
- La Ronge
- Archerwill
- Batoche
- Big River
- Cochin
- Debden
- Duck Lake
- Leoville
- Meadow Lake
- Nipawin
- Pine House
- St Louis
- Spiritwood
- Yorkton
- Lebret
- Lestock
- Fort Qu'Appelle
- St. Victor-Willow Bunch.

This workshop will provide an overview of Indigenous culture, etiquette, and protocols. It will not provide spiritual teachings. This needs to be done by appropriate Elders and knowledge keepers of each Nation.

There are many different Indigenous communities and Nations in Saskatchewan. There are many similarities in world views, philosophies, teachings, and laws. However, not all Indigenous Peoples are the same. It is appropriate to recognize that diversity and not make assumptions of pan-Indigenous similarities. Pan-Indigenous means thinking, believing, and portraying all Indigenous Peoples as the same.

Therefore, when striving to learn about Indigenous Peoples in Canada, please do so with respect and through the following of each Nation's protocols.

Comprehension Questions

- Name the 7 Indigenous Nations in Saskatchewan.
- What does pan-Indigenous mean?
- Why is it important not to believe all Indigenous Peoples are the same?
- If we decided all Europeans were the same would that mean the French, English, Spanish, Italian, Germans all be the same and think the same?

First Nations History

In order to begin to understand the importance of Indigenous culture and protocols, it is important to learn about First Nation history from Indigenous perspectives. Once aware of the history, it is easier to appreciate and value its importance. It also prevents romanticizing, mystifying, and dehumanizing Indigenous Peoples.

First Nations' history extends back to time immemorial, long before the arrival of the newcomers to their territories. When people from other continents arrived on the shores of North America, First Nations laws, protocols, and procedures set the framework for the first treaties among Aboriginal peoples. First Nations lived in diverse vibrant and structured societies. All the First Nations had their own laws and legal traditions that guided and directed the people in their daily interactions with each other, their families, communities and other nations. (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre. Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies. P. 2)

Culture is a way of life for all people. Consequently, for each First Nation, culture was and is a way of life. It is also diverse and unique within each First Nation. However, this way of life was disrupted through colonization.

Colonization

Colonization is the action or process of an external power or group of people settling among and establishing control over an area of land and the indigenous people of an area. (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/colonization>)

Colonization is a method of absorbing and assimilating original peoples into the culture of a forceful invading power. This process attempts to and often destroys any remnants of the cultures the invading power sees as a threat. Rules and regulations are then imposed to make sure original peoples' cultures are erased.

Colonization in Canada came about through "...formal and informal methods (behaviours, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies) that maintain the subjection or exploitation of Indigenous peoples, lands and resources. Colonizers engage in this process because it allows them to maintain and/or expand their social, political, and economic power." (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre. Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies. P. 3)

Colonization was and is very harmful to Indigenous Peoples and has cost "lands, resources, lives, and self determination." (ibid p.3)

Colonization in Canada and Saskatchewan took many forms. It began when settlers came to Canada. They initially realized that this country was already inhabited by many nations and peoples. There were different world views and the settlers needed more and more land to settle themselves. This is where colonization began and agreements were made and sometimes broken with the original peoples (Indigenous Peoples) of this land. (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/m/article/aboriginal-treaties/>)

Royal Proclamation

One of the first agreements was the Royal Proclamation. It was made in 1763. The Royal Proclamation maintained that Indigenous People should not be disturbed on Indian lands, and lands reserved for their use. Within the Royal Proclamation “The King reserved Western Lands (Prairies, Northern Ontario for several nations or tribes of Indian that were under his protections as their exclusive hunting grounds.”

(http://www.shannonthunderbird.com/royal_proclamation.htm)

Many settlers (newcomers) felt the Royal Proclamation gave too much power to Indigenous Peoples, especially when settlers needed a bigger and bigger land base. Thus, treaties were made.

Treaties

Treaties are a formal agreement between two or more states in reference to peace, alliance, commerce, or other international relations” (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/treaty>).

Prior to the arrival of the settlers (newcomers) Indigenous Nations made treaties among themselves to arrange for peace and friendship and to establish boundaries and respect of lands and waters they were living in.

Treaties were made between settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Canada from 1701-1923. Treaties with Saskatchewan First Nations took place from 1871-1907. The “Government of Canada and the courts understand treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal people to be solemn agreements that set out promises, obligations and benefits for both parties.” (<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032291/1100100032292>).

The initial treaties were made between the British Crown and Indigenous Peoples to promote peace and friendship. This is the true spirit and intent of Treaty - to live in peace and friendship to coexist in harmony in a brother to brother and sister to sister relationship. However, many treaties were signed with different understandings from the dominant powers and countless times ended up in the giving up of title to lands seen as “the respective rights of Aboriginal people and governments to use and enjoy lands that Aboriginal people traditionally occupied.” (ibid)

In exchange for Indigenous lands, Treaties provided for reserve lands, farm equipment, animals, annual payments, ammunitions, clothing, rights to hunt and fish, education, and health. Many of these promises have been and continue to be broken. Broken Treaties are a process of continued colonization. The Treaties were initially made between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples. They were later made a responsibility of the Canadian Government.

Treaties can only be made between two states (Nations). Since Indigenous Peoples have Treaties recognized by the Government of Canada, they are considered Nations and have the right to be sovereign. According to legal theory, sovereignty means having the full right and power to govern oneself without any interference from outside sources or bodies. Colonialism has denied this right to Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Saskatchewan.

Indian Act

The Indian Act was made law in 1876. It reduced the rights and powers Indigenous people had according to the Royal Proclamation and the Treaties. It dictates the way Indigenous People are to live, govern themselves, identify, etc. After an Indigenous person dies, the Indian Act has authority over their will. The Indian Act “clearly violated the spirit and intent of the Treaties that First Nations had signed with the Crown” (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre: 2009. Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies. P.2)

Furthermore, the Indian Act “imposed the banning and illegalizing of cultural, ceremonial and traditional activities of First Nations’ people. Often times the Indian Act had no basis in law. Many times, through the years, certain sections were deemed human rights violations and had to be changed” (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/I-5/>).

The Indian Act also brought about a pass system in 1855 “to control and restrict movements of First Nations’ people” (ibid p.2). The pass system required all First Nations people to get permission by means of a pass to leave the reservation. People could not leave one minute before the pass allowed them to leave and could not return late without the fear of being jailed. “... (T)he pass system contributed greatly to the segregation of First Nations’ people from Canadian society. Furthermore, the pass system restricted and limited contact with relatives who lived off-reserve or on different reserves.” (ibid p. 4) The pass system was enacted well into the 1940s and was only repealed in 1951.

In addition to the pass system the Indian Act also implemented a permit system in the 1890s. This system restricted First Nation farmers. They needed these permits to “buy or sell their crops, livestock and implements. This restriction prevented farmers from participating and competing in the Canadian economy” (ibid p. 4). “The permit system is still in the Indian Act, though it hasn’t been enforced since the mid-1960s. It’s just one painful episode in Canada’s paternalistic treatment of First Nations.

(<http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/indian-act-permit-control-culture>).

Residential Schools

“A key part of the colonization effort was the residential school system” (ibid p. 3). They were started on the advice of Edgar Dewdney and Nicolas Davin (familiar names in Regina). Both of these men believed the only way to get the “Indian” out of the child was to separate him or her from their mothers. “These schools assaulted First Nations’ culture by endeavouring to ensure that, ‘the savage child would surely be re-made into the *civilized adult*’ and ‘Children throughout the history of the system were beaten for speaking their language.’” (ibid p.3).

Indigenous children were forced to attend residential schools usually far away from their home communities. Once they were forced to speak English, give up their culture and practices. Students were often beaten, molested, tortured and even killed.

As a result of residential schools and colonization a “loss of language, culture, and understanding of First Nations’ laws, traditional knowledge, ceremony and songs” (ibid p.4) occurred and to this day many First Nations’ languages are becoming extinct. Furthermore, “the colonization process has led directly to poverty, family violence, drug, chemical and alcohol addictions for Indigenous Peoples all over the world.” (ibid p.4). Colonization has

broken down family and kinship ties and has greatly affected the reverence for and role of women. “Colonialism introduced the concept of the superiority of men and the second class status of women...This concept was alien to First Nation’s peoples who made no such distinction between men and women.” (ibid p.4). Prior to colonization Indigenous women played important and key roles in Indigenous societies and ceremonies.

“Colonization at the physical, psychological and social levels had done significant damage to First Nations’ culture and languages” (ibid p.5).

Comprehension Questions

- Why is Indigenous history important before learning about Indigenous culture?
- What is colonization?
- What effect does colonization have on people?
- What was the Royal Proclamation?
- What are treaties?
- What is the true spirit and intent of treaties?
- What was the pass system?
- What was the permit system?
- Why did Dewdney and Davin think residential schools were necessary?
- What happened in residential schools?
- How do you think you would feel in a residential school?
- How would you feel if you experienced colonization?

Decolonization

Decolonization is the process of becoming free from colonial status. The return to Indigenous being and doing is the act of decolonization. It ensures that Indigenous Peoples make changes in the way they live and govern themselves. Decolonization includes the re-evaluation of political, social, economic and judicial structures. It needs to reflect Indigenous social and legal culture and not those imposed through colonialism. Indigenous Peoples are the ones who must structure and guide the decolonization process.

Decolonization means to question and defy the legitimacy of the colonizers’ continued role as master within our First Nations’ communities and all of society. Decolonization should become a standard part of First Nation’s vocabulary especially among the young. Questioning and defying colonialism is a part of working towards First Nations freedom, from subjugated human being to liberated human beings and reasserting First Nation’s sovereignty (ibid p.5).

An important act of decolonization is returning to Indigenous languages. “The recovery of our languages is one of the most powerful forms of self-determination and is necessary to reverse the effects of colonization. With language revitalizations comes the profound understanding of the cultures, traditions and the teachings of First Nations Elders (ibid p. 5). Culture is also an important part of decolonization and is a form of empowerment for Indigenous Peoples.

Comprehension and Reflection Questions

What is decolonization?

Why is decolonization important?

Why is language important to decolonization?
How would you try to decolonize yourself if you were colonized?

Cultural Learnings

Culture is “the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group” (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/culture>). We are all part of a culture. We all belong to an ethnic group, an age group or could be in a social group. We can even be part of a school culture. Indigenous Peoples are also part of diverse cultures.

Each culture we belong to has its own rules/protocols. It is important to learn these rules and or protocols when we participant in our own culture or walk within or learn about someone else’s culture.

Within Indigenous cultures each Nation shares a “collective understanding of the ceremonies, the language and the laws...” (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre: 2009. Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies, p.11).

The culture of each First Nation provides the means for the protocols and methodologies to be applied. Each First Nations’ culture means a way of life, the way of life provided by the Creator. Each First Nation has an understanding of their way of life and the gifts given to them. These gifts include the language, the land, the air, the water the ceremonies and the traditions. (ibid)

Spirituality is an important part of Indigenous culture and life. “The spiritual traditions of the First Nations are based first and foremost on the belief that there is only one God, often referred to as the father or Creator (ibid, p. 15).

Indigenous spirituality is not to be understood as religion. It is a way of life and is “an understanding that all of the Creator’s creations including the smallest insect and the air we breathe, have a life force or a spirit and are therefore sacred” (ibid, p .15).

Each culture, spirituality, and religion has laws, rules, ways of conduct, and protocols. Correspondingly, Indigenous laws are a profound part of culture.

The Indigenous Laws have been referred to as First Nations, Indian, and natural laws. Indigenous Laws pre-exist the signing of the Treaties. In fact, at the time of the Treaty signing these laws governed and directed the Treaty-making process. Indigenous Laws are from the Creator. They are not human created laws, therefore, are powerful and profound. All of the Creator’s creations have laws that they abide by... (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre: 2009. Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies, p.8).

Indigenous spirituality is interwoven into all aspects of life, and is important to Indigenous culture which encompasses history traditions, laws. Each of these are found within language, stories and teachings.

The laws and the stories which tell of the history and traditions of the people can be empowered once again. Indigenous people told ‘stories’ to tell their laws, these stories contained teachings and laws to deal with different issues that arise. Indigenous traditions and stories are both similar and different in case law precedent. They are analogous to precedent because they attempt to provide reasons for and reinforce consensus about broad principles and to justify or criticize certain deviations from generally accepted standards (ibid, p.6).

Additionally, there are appropriate ways to seek Indigenous culture and spirituality. For instance, “various knowledge keepers have stated that in order to appropriately understand these [Indigenous] laws and ceremonies a person had to live a good lifestyle. This lifestyle entails living a healthy and addiction free life (ibid, p. 15).

It takes a lifetime of learning to fully understand Indigenous culture. What you are experiencing today is just a small brief glimpse in to a vast world of knowledge. People who would like to learn this knowledge, need to be sincere of heart, approach Indigenous communities, Elders, and knowledge keepers, follow protocols, and natural laws.

Conversation

Engage participants in discussion to:

- Define culture
- Explain what cultures they are a part of
- Examine how Indigenous culture is similar and different from their own cultures
- Discuss stories they have learned which have taught them about who they are and how to behave
- Discuss the sacredness of all life. How this is important to Indigenous Peoples and all Peoples.

Protocols

Protocols are defined as unwritten rules or guidelines that every culture, community or society has. There is an expectation that they will be observed by everyone who interacts within these cultures, community or society.

Indigenous Protocols in Saskatchewan

Each Indigenous Nation has specific protocols. It is best to approach those you will work with and learn from them to find out what those protocols are before formally approaching the appropriate person(s). Respectful questions are welcome.

Respect is demonstrated by following protocol. It means respecting yourself and every living being. Respect also involves paying attention, listening, and being silent. Do not interrupt, and only ask questions when an Elder or knowledge keeper is done talking and/or when invites questions.

Generally, offering tobacco (giving tobacco to an Elder or knowledge keeper) is a well-established protocol among Indigenous Peoples, when they are asked to share their wisdom. Many times you may also present a cloth which is referred to as print. “The cloth is usually broad cloth and one to two meters [or yards] long.” (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural

Centre: 2009: Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies p.12). Sometimes there are other gifts given such as “blankets, clothes, guns, or horses.” (ibid, p. 13). However, “Elders teach that the gifts given are at the discretion of the person. The more contemporary gift is monetary, especially for meetings or other such events when a prayer is needed by the Elders.” (ibid, p. 13). When the tobacco is accepted, it means that the Elder or knowledge keeper is willing to assist you.

Reflection Questions

- There are protocols in all cultures and religions. Ask participants if they can think of any?
- Have them reflect on what they do while they are in class, at a meeting, at church, in the Mosque, or Synagogue or any other places they go to in their life -even crossing a street.

February is Saskatchewan Aboriginal Storytelling Month

“For Indigenous people, storytelling is both a gift and a very old custom, sanctioned by the people to teach, entertain, and remember.” “Traditionally, it is during the winter months that First Nations storytelling occurs.”

(http://www.sicc.sk.ca/first_nations_storytelling.html)

“Storytelling is at the heart of First Nations and Métis experiences,” Minister responsible for First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs Minister Jim Reiter said. “Through stories, song and performance, participants will be sharing the rich traditions of indigenous people with the entire province.” (<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2016/february/01/storytelling-month>).

Developed with Sue Deranger, Indigenous Education Consultant.