

## Aboriginal Perspectives Unit Guide for the Theme Indigenous Knowledge

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### Overall Objective

The focus of this unit is on the Passing of Gifts: skills, knowledge, values, beliefs, customs and traditions. The sharing of traditional knowledge maintains an important link between the past, present and future generations.

### Grade Levels

7-12

### Content Areas

Language Arts  
Social Studies  
History  
Visual Arts

### Films (and excerpts used)

*Mothers of Many Children*, 1977 excerpt 1 (5 min 05 s – 7 min 05 s)

*Circle of the Sun*, 1961 excerpt 1 (13 min 36 s – 16 min 06 s)

*Tales of Sand and Snow*, 2004 excerpt 1 (7 min 12 s – 8 min 49 s)

*Kanata: Legacy of the Children of Aataentsic*, 1999

Excerpt 2 (9 min 53 s – 11 min)

Excerpt 5 (16 min 27 s – 19 min 19 s)

NB: The excerpts and related films can be viewed online free of charge at  
<[www.nfb.ca/aboriginal\\_perspectives](http://www.nfb.ca/aboriginal_perspectives)> in the Indigenous Knowledge Theme.

### Materials Required

Journal (notebook), Computer, Internet connection or videocassette or DVD player, TV set

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### Summary

The belief of our interconnectedness with the past, present and future underpins all aspects of Aboriginal life. The passing of gifts from generation to generation, therefore, is fundamental to the survival of Aboriginal peoples. Inherent in all our traditional knowledge is the world view that we are a part of nature, not apart from it, and that we are all *physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual* beings.

### Introduction Activity (10 minutes)

Ask the class to think about their own families and recall any special remedies, traditions or skills that have been passed down, e.g., a flu remedy, ways of celebrating a birthday, a cultural dance. How is this information transmitted from one generation to the next? Ask students what they know or do today that they would like to preserve.

**ACTIVITY 1: Connecting with our Communities** (2 X 50 minutes)

**Step 1:** Tell the students to pay particular attention to the walking-out ceremony depicted in the film excerpt.

- Show the film clip from *Mothers of Many Children*.

**Step 2:** Discuss the different roles depicted for males and females in the walking-out ceremony. Have students compare the traditional gender roles shown in the film with those in their own cultures.

Brainstorm a list of questions the class would like to ask an Aboriginal Elder about cultural traditions, beliefs and world views.

**Step 3:** Invite an Aboriginal Elder to the classroom to recognize and honour their specialized knowledge and wisdom (see teacher notes for proper protocols).

**Step 4:** Have students connect with members of their own families who have particular knowledge and life experiences that shape their cultural identity. Have students audiotape or videotape their encounter for sharing at a later date.

**ACTIVITY 2: Holistic World View** (50 minutes)

**Step 1:** Tell the class to pay close attention to how the various people express their connection and relationship to Mother Earth (their environment) in these film clips:

- *Kanatu* (excerpts 2 & 5 or the film in its entirety)
- *Tales of Sand and Snow* and *Circle of the Sun*

**Step 2:** Have each student draw a large circle in their notebook (you may prefer to prepare a handout with this figure already drawn), and divide the circle into four equal quadrants, labelled Physical, Emotional, Intellectual and Spiritual. Have each person list attributes or components related to each one, e.g., Physical – healthy diet, exercise; Emotional – healthy relationships, bereavement; Intellectual – education, acquisition of skills; Spiritual – religious traditions, ceremonies.

**Step 3:** Explore the concepts of balance and harmony. For example, what happens if we ignore or emphasize one aspect of our being? Ask for examples. Expand the discussion to a global view, where a society emphasizes one aspect of the environment over another. Are imbalances created? How do we work towards a re-establishing balance and harmony, at a personal level and on a global scale?

**Step 4:** Establish the connection between a person's values or beliefs and his/her actions and how this connection is ultimately expressed through cultural traditions and ceremony. Students should demonstrate their understanding of the concept by identifying areas of balance/imbalance, dissonance or harmony in their own lives. Elicit some strategies to maintain a balance in all elements of one's personal and environmental health.

**Closure Activity** (10 minutes)

Have students reflect in their journals on the importance of tradition in their lives, commenting on how this shapes their identity and helps them to understand the cultures and traditions of others.

**Check for Understanding**

*Role Exchange*: When students are faced with an issue that is potentially divisive, advise them to first place themselves in the position of the other people and view the situation from their perspective.

**References and Resources**

Aboriginal Canada Portal: <http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/acp/site.nsf/en-frames/ao20024.html>

[Vanier Institute of the Family -- Virtual Library - Transition Magazine - Back Issues - A Society for All Ages](#)

## Evaluation rubric

### PRESENTATION RUBRIC

Criteria	1	2	3	4
<b>Content:</b> organization, intent/purpose, analysis/ understanding, conclusion	Disorganized, confusing, incomplete; intent and purpose are vague; low level of understanding of topic and no analysis; presentation stops without a summary.	Presentation is somewhat planned, yet a bit disjointed; intent and purpose are generalized; presentation is narrative and lacks analysis; conclusion does not reflect all aspects of the presentation.	There is evidence of planning, preparation and a format being followed; purpose and position are clear; evidence of understanding but the analysis is not fully developed; confusion refocuses ideas, yet offers nothing new.	The ideas are interconnected and the presentation flows smoothly from one idea to another; captivates audience and focuses topic; critical analysis throughout which raises new perspective; student's understanding goes above and beyond topic; conclusion ties ideas together clearly and raises new questions.
<b>Language Use:</b> appropriate, interesting, clear	Language is ineffective, vague, or inappropriate; does not convey the intent of the presentation; inaudible, unclear and confusing.	Language used conveys main message of presentation, though somewhat generalized and non-specific; inconsistencies are evident in clarity and audibility.	Language used was effective; conveys the intent of the presentation; audible, specific and appropriate.	Language used is meaningful and thought-provoking; use of language is memorable and rich; audible, clear and concise.
<b>Delivery Style:</b> confidence, enthusiasm, audience, visual aids	Presenter lacked confidence and did not understand the material; presenter was stiff, uninterested, or appeared bored; audience was inattentive and uninterested in presentation; visual aids were not used.	Presentation is affected by nervousness or bravado of presenter; demonstrates a general understanding of main points of material; audience is mostly willing to listen/view; use of visual aid(s) is attempted.	Open and clear presentation with generally effective body language conveys solid understanding of material; presentation is interesting and there is a sense of audience appreciation and cooperation; visual aid(s) are effectively used.	Eye contact, effective body language; complete understanding of material; shows personal interest in material; presentation was animated and enthusiastic; aware of audience and ensured participation and interest of all; used a variety of appropriate, high quality aids.

## Appendix

### Teacher's notes

#### *Inviting Elders to the School*

All cultures are enriched by individuals who are keepers of knowledge. Indian and Métis Elders play a key role in reviving and retaining unique cultural knowledge. This has the added benefit of enhancing self-esteem in Indian and Métis students. In fact, all students stand to gain heightened awareness and sensitivity, which form the basis for mutual respect.

There are protocols for approaching Elders that **may vary from community to community**. The tribal council, band council or Aboriginal community members may be able to assist you. Before an Elder's visit, it's important for the students and teacher to engage in a cycle of giving and receiving associated with making a request of an Elder. Find out what the acceptable customs are. Also, school divisions are encouraged to provide honoraria, an expense reimbursement, transportation, or a combination of these to the Elder.

Elders are few in number and have significant commitments in their communities. Special gatherings and ceremonies weigh heavily on their personal time and energy. In addition, many are responsible for the care of young children and for leadership in their own families. Sensitivity, caring, respect and a willingness to consider the time constraints of Elders is essential for developing a positive relationship.

It is recommended that a prior consultation with the Elder be held to share ideas about learning outcomes.

#### *Oral History Interviews*

Oral interviews are considered by many Aboriginal peoples to be the most reliable, authentic and accurate method for doing research on First Nations, Inuit and Métis history in Canada. Oral history values and respects the keepers of the traditions and knowledge.

Oral history interviews are ways of collecting information from people who participated in, or witnessed events. The oral tradition documents national, regional, community and family histories through ritualized storytelling. It is from such accounts that a sense of identity, values and cultural life is derived.

Oral history projects also serve to personalize the topic of study. Interviewing people who were participants in events or the keepers of knowledge transmitted over time makes students realize that history resides not just in facts and dates on paper, but in the memories of people. Oral history interviews often lead to perspectives that may not be available through any other source.

**Before** the interview, students should prepare by:

- Researching background information; a knowledgeable interviewer is more likely to obtain relevant information.
- Studying good interview techniques and developing listening skills.
- Being aware of how personal values and biases might influence the manner in which they interact with the interviewee.

- Writing a list of appropriate questions.

**During** the interview, students should:

- Ensure that the setting supports two-way communication between the interviewer and the interviewee.
- Be cautious when dealing with sensitive content.
- Document the interview, ensuring that wishes of the interviewee are respected.

**After** the interview, students might:

- Review and organize the information.
- Present results of the interview in a predetermined format. Ensure that the person who has agreed to share the story is thanked correctly.