

Wapos Bay A MOTHER'S EARTH episode 14

Episode Description

Raven is having a crisis after her teacher assigns a research report on identity. To answer the question “Identity, what does it mean to you?” Raven talks to her mom, visits the library, goes to see Kohkum Mary, and drops in on her uncle Jacob and the Chief of their First Nation band. Raven has to contend with a multitude of terms such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, Cree, Metis, Dene, and Inuit. Meanwhile, Talon and T-Bear are involved in their own process of developing identity. They are assisting Old Man Gabriel to prepare for a sweat lodge ceremony. This involves collecting the rocks that will be heated to provide steam and chopping wood for the fire that will heat the rocks. Providing this assistance earns Talon the name of Wing Brother and T-Bear, the name Spirit Walker. Identity for Aboriginal peoples is informed by history, cultural traditions, language and agreements such as treaties. Devon recognizes that the laws regarding identity, such as the Indian Act, create divisions among Aboriginal peoples and Raven recognizes that she is many things to the people who love and care about her, and that is what is most important.

Background information

The freedom to be self-defining is an important aspect of Aboriginal identity. When this right is extended to Aboriginal peoples, the ethics of respect and autonomy are observed.

Identity is a concept that has contributed to Aboriginal peoples realization of who they want to be; it helps them to resist those forces that deny and even attack Aboriginal ways of being. Aboriginal rights are an aspect of Aboriginal identity and are defined by laws such as Bill C-31, an amendment to the Indian Act that recognizes the rights of First Nation bands to define their own membership. The sources of identity for many Aboriginal peoples include history, language, relationship to the land, ceremonies and how you conduct yourself with others in the world.

The history of Canada often begins with “discovery” and implies that the European explorers were the “first” to “occupy” North America. Indigenous peoples have occupied North America for at least 20,000 years – longer than most of the European nation states have been in existence. Canada guarantees Aboriginal rights in the Constitution, but many First Nations are also subject to the Indian Act: the law that defined membership in First Nation bands until 1985, when Bill C-31 allowed First Nation bands to control their own membership.

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Key themes

- There are many aspects to identity including history, language, culture, law, and family.
- There are many forces and influences that shape identity. Understanding what is most important contributes to the evolution of one's identity as one changes and grows over time.

PREVIEWING ACTIVITIES

- 1 ► What languages are spoken in your family/community?
- 2 ► Are you a speaker of the Cree language?
- 3 ► What words do you know in Cree?
- 4 ► Introduce the Cree language glossary words used in the Wapos Bay episode 14 entitled, "**A Mother's Earth.**" Ask students to listen out for these words when the time comes to view the episode, to determine their meaning.

CREE LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

kohkum – grandmother

mushom – grandfather

Tapwe – Just wait

A ho – Expression of affirmation at the end of a prayer

- 5 ► Has anyone ever asked you "who are you"? What was your response? What does autonomy mean? What does respect mean?
- 6 ► What is meant by the term identity? What is your identity? How do you develop an identity? Does it stay the same throughout your life?
- 7 ► What contributes to your identity? What does it mean to have an identity crisis? Why is identity important to Aboriginal peoples?
- 8 ► What is meant by the term "Aboriginal rights"? Why do such rights exist? What should be included in Aboriginal rights? Is practicing cultural traditions an Aboriginal right?
- 9 ► How does the literature we read contribute to our identity?
- 10 ► How does viewing such programs as *Wapos Bay* contribute to your identity?
- 11 ► How does viewing television, film and surfing the web contribute to your identity?

VIEW EPISODE

Introduce and View "**A Mother's Earth**"

POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- 1 ► Review the glossary words. How do you say _____?
Grandmother
grandfather
rabbit
just wait
- 2 ► Discuss: Which members of the Wapos Bay community showed respect? How so? Do the members of Wapos Bay have autonomy? Are there times when the members of Wapos Bay could not have exercised autonomy with respect to practicing such cultural traditions as giving names and holding sweat lodge ceremonies?
- 3 ► Discuss: What is meant by the term identity crisis? Which member of Wapos Bay was having an identity crisis? Have you had one? What is your identity? How do you develop an identity? Does it stay the same throughout your life? What contributes to your identity? Why is identity important to Aboriginal peoples?
- 4 ► Was there anything about this episode that referred to "Aboriginal rights"? Why do such rights exist? What should be included in Aboriginal rights?
- 5 ► Discuss: How do books and other literature we read contribute to our identity?
- 6 ► Discuss: How does viewing such programs as Wapos Bay contribute to your identity? How does viewing television, film and connecting to the internet contribute to your identity?



PROJECT IDEAS

- Research Aboriginal rights to cultural identity; was there a time when these rights were not respected?
- Research the art of George Littlechild. What can you say about his artwork and how it relates to identity? *This Land is Our Land* by George Littlechild explores identity through art, family, history and cultural traditions. Create a collage in the tradition of George Littlechild to illustrate your identity. Use a shoe box to create a three dimensional “identity box” that contains items that inform your identity. Create an art display of the identity boxes.
- Research the Aboriginal rights that are included in the Canadian Constitution. What are they? Which Aboriginal rights are exercised by the Aboriginal peoples in your community?
- Write a research report about identity and what you think contributes to your identity. Create a collage that shows who you are. Draw on the artistic traditions of your particular cultural group. Include photocopies of historical family photographs. Create poetry to accompany the collage.
- Read poetry by Aboriginal authors Rita Bouvier, Louise Halfe, Kevin Paull and David Daniel Moses and discuss how they understand identity.
- Read the novel *My Name is Seepetza* by Shirley Sterling. Discuss how attending an Indian residential school in the 1950 shaped Seepetza’s identity. Other novels that have identity as a theme are *Little Voice* by Ruby Slipperjack and *Will’s Garden* by Lee Maracle.
- Create short videos that explore the theme of identity. Share the videos with other members of the school and larger community. Post the videos on Youtube. Caution: Do not include personal details such as address and phone numbers.