

Wapos Bay SERIES

The series and accompanying lesson ideas are appropriate for Grades 1 to 6. Teachers can adapt the material to suit the age level and learning objectives of their class.

The **Wapos Bay** study guides were written by Lyn Daniels, an Aboriginal Education Program Consultant in B.C. who is of Cree ancestry.

Introducing *Wapos Bay* to Students

Before watching the **Wapos Bay** series in class, teachers should give students a general introduction to northern Cree culture and the Cree language. Reading these background sheets will help teachers prepare their lesson and discuss the preview questions with the class (page 8).

The main curriculum areas covered by the **Wapos Bay** episode guides are:

- ▶ **Aboriginal studies**
- ▶ **Social studies**
- ▶ **Social, emotional and ethical responsibility**
- ▶ **Language arts**
- ▶ **Media studies**
- ▶ **Science**

See page 7 of this guide for learning outcomes related to these curriculum areas.

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The *Wapos Bay* Series: An Overview

The **Wapos Bay** animated series is a charming and often humorous look at the contemporary life and culture of the northern Cree. The fictitious community set in northern Saskatchewan is home to the main characters: young Raven, Talon and their cousin T-Bear. Educators can use the series to teach children about northern Cree culture through the exploits of the young characters and their extended family: kohkum (grandmother), mushom (grandfather), Sarah, Jacob and Alphonse.

Episodes can be watched in any order and teachers may choose a particular episode to suit a certain lesson plan or learning objective. Each episode is an illustration of the values and ethics that northern Cree families impart to the next generation. Some of these values will also have a broader appeal:

Teamwork and cooperation can be learned at any age as Talon, T-Bear, Raven and their kohkum (grandmother) find while competing in the winter festival in ***There's No 'I' in Hockey*** (episode 1).

Raven, T-Bear and even Jacob ***Journey Through Fear*** (episode 2) one step at a time with support from family members and elders.

A respectful spirituality must be observed daily to balance old ways with new in ***They Dance at Night*** (episode 3).

T-Bear and Raven acquire ***Something to Remember*** (episode 4) as they explore the full meaning of sacrifice and appreciation leading up to the Remembrance Day ceremony for the Wapos Bay community.

Taking ***A Time to Learn*** (episode 5) and working on the trapline have been an important part of family activity for generations. The intense preparation for a trip to the trapline offers opportunities for Talon and his mushom (grandfather) to negotiate responsibilities with care.

The Elements (episode 6) shows the work and effort the Wapos Bay community must perform in order to create opportunities for the youth to learn about and value their Aboriginal traditions, including finding ways to counter the pervasive influence of electronic technologies.

DENNIS AND MELANIE JACKSON

Creators, Directors and Writers of Wapos Bay

Dennis and Melanie Jackson use stop-motion animation to create the Wapos Bay community and characters. Both draw inspiration from their experiences growing up in Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan—Dennis from his community of Sandy Bay and from his mushom (grandfather), who hunted and trapped to make a living for his twenty-two children, and Melanie from her family and her own Saulteaux people in southern Saskatchewan.

Married for twenty years and parents to two children, Dennis and Melanie founded Dark Thunder Productions (DTP) in 1998. Their first project, *Journey Through Fear*, won the Telefilm Canada/Television Northern Canada Award at the 1998 Banff Festival. The enchanting world of Wapos Bay was first brought to life in *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, an animated special directed, produced and written by Dennis and edited by Melanie, which premiered at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival. Drawing on this success, they joined forces with the National Film Board of Canada to produce the **Wapos Bay** series.

Dennis's interest in filmmaking began in elementary school while watching 16 mm prints of animated Aboriginal creation tales. In 1998 he obtained a B.A. in Film and Video Production from the University of Regina. As producer and director he has received recognition and awards for the series *Heartbeat of the Earth* and *Open Fire*, a documentary on the Aboriginal men and women involved in fire suppression in northern Saskatchewan.

Melanie began her career in film and video with her volunteer work at the Saskatoon cable channel, where she co-produced the 13-part series *Voices of Aboriginal Youth*. She made her directorial debut with Episode 2 of the **Wapos Bay** series—*Journey Through Fear*. She was also editor on *Heartbeat of the Earth* and *Open Fire*.

Cultural Traditions of the Northern Cree

The northern Cree have made their homes for millennia in a vast area of northern Canada that includes land in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. The material aspects of northern Cree culture include the use of animal resources such as moose, deer, beaver and rabbit—initially as a basic source of food and skins for clothing and later to harvest furs, by maintaining traplines, for trading with the newcomer Europeans. The less visible aspects of the culture include a spiritual respect for maintaining balance and harmony with daily hunting and gathering. In contemporary life there are fewer families able to make a living from trapping, and some have to leave their communities to find work in more urban areas.

Festivals and celebrations are an important part of northern life and provide opportunities for relatives and friends from other communities to visit and participate in competitive events ranging from hockey to bannock-making contests.

Television and other media bring mass culture to even the most remote communities to influence the culture in a multitude of ways. Participating in spiritual ceremonies, traditional activities and cultural retreats are important ways to counter the negative influences of mass culture.

The Cree Language

Cree is one of the most widely used North American Indigenous languages. It is spoken in many Cree communities in parts of north-eastern British Columbia, north-central Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and in northern Ontario and Quebec. Many Cree speakers live in the urban areas of all of those provinces.

There are regional differences in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as Cree was widely spoken in North America long before the newcomers brought English. An example of the regional differences in Cree are the words for 'I' and 'you' which are *ni'ya* and *ki'ya* in most of Alberta and Saskatchewan, *ni'na* and *ki'na* in most of Manitoba and Ontario, *ni'tha* and *ki'tha* in parts of Manitoba, *ni'la* and *ki'la* in part of Ontario, and *ni'ya* and *ci'ya* in part of Quebec. The Cree spoken in a given area—the dialect—varies across North America; therefore, the Plains Cree spoken in the **Wapos Bay** series differs from the Cree spoken in other parts of Canada.

Cree language glossary

CREE – ENGLISH

kohkum – grandmother

mushom – grandfather

wapos – rabbit

awus kiya – Go away, you!

wan ska – wake up

wee kay – medicine

tansi – Hello, how are you?

astum – come here

akosi – that's it

na moya natow – no problems

ow e ya – ouch

bannock – bread biscuits

muskwa – bear

ah ho – (expression of affirmation at the end of a prayer)

Learning Outcomes

The **Wapos Bay** Series can be used in a range of curricular areas such as those outlined below:

Social, emotional and ethical responsibility activities are aimed at having students understand the Wapos Bay community's desired attitudes towards others and all life forms, including plants, animals and the spiritual realm, and relate them to their own. Some ethics are more universal such as respect, keeping promises, care and gratitude.

Aboriginal Studies activities are aimed at having students understand Aboriginal peoples, cultures and histories. The northern Cree way of life in this fictitious northern community illustrates traditional ceremonies and trapping along with contemporary practices such as participation in Canadian military efforts and the mixture of English and Cree languages that is spoken.

Social Studies activities are aimed at having students understand that Canada is made up of diverse populations such as the First Nations, of which the Cree is only one of many. Landscape and environment play a significant role in these societies, as we see with the northern Cree community depicted in **Wapos Bay**.

Language Arts activities are aimed at understanding how the characters develop and how humour and various storytelling strategies (including the use of animation) can engage the audience. The activities also encourage students to make connections between their own lives and those of the characters, and to articulate these insights orally or in writing.

Science education activities are aimed having students use science to understand the diverse environments and how our way of life has an impact on the land and its resources.

Media Studies activities are aimed at having students understand how television, newspapers, magazines, the Internet and other media can influence human behaviour and daily life in all parts of Canada, including northern communities similar to the fictional Wapos Bay. Students can learn more about how stop-motion animation is made and assess its effectiveness in communicating ideas and storytelling.

BEFORE VIEWING THE *WAPOS BAY* SERIES

Suggested Preview Questions for Students

- 1 ➤ Who are the First Nations?
They are the original inhabitants of North America. In Canada there are so many diverse First Nations it would take a long time to name them all. The Cree are one of the largest groups in Canada. There are James Bay Cree, Western Cree, Woodland Cree, Plains Cree, Northern Cree, etc.

- 2 ➤ **A)** What parts of Canada make up “the North”?
(Students can identify this part of the country in relation to the rest of Canada on a map.)
B) What cultures and peoples are represented in “the North”?
Most northern Canadian communities have large First Nations populations.
C) For northern students, how would you describe where you live? For other students, what do you imagine the northern environment and way of life to be like?

- 3 ➤ What is Cree?
It is a language and the name for one of the First Nations of Canada. The First Nations are one of the major Aboriginal groups, which also include the Métis and Inuit. Cree people today speak a mixture of English and Cree.

- 4 ➤ If you are a speaker of the Cree language, what words do you know in Cree?

- 5 ➤ What languages are spoken in your family... in your community?

Suggested Activity

Cree language: Review the glossary words by creating a matching exercise using the Cree vocabulary.

Resources mentioned in the lessons and for further reading or viewing

Ahenakew, F. (1987) *Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach*.

Ahenakew, F., H. C. Wolfart (1998) *Our Grandmother's Lives: As Told in Their Own Words: Kokominawak Otacimowiniwawa*. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Fifth House Publishers.

Bear, G., F. Ahenakew, H. C. Wolfart (1992) *Wanisinwak Iskweesak: Two Little Girls Lost in the Bush*.

Loyie, L. (2002) *As Long As the Rivers Flow*. Toronto, Ontario: Groundwood Books, Harper Collins.

Loyie, L. (2006) *When the Spirits Dance*. Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books.

Minde, E., F. Ahenakew, H. C. Wolfart (1997) *Their Example Showed Me the Way: kwayask e-ki-pi – kiskinowapahtihicik A Cree Woman's Life Shaped By Two Cultures*.

Richardson, B. (1974) *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*. NFB documentary.

Wheeler, J., D. Jackson (2005) *Christmas at Wapos Bay*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Coteau Books.

Whitecalf, S., H. C. Wolfart, F. Ahenakew (1993) *The Cree Language is Our Identity: The La Ronge lectures of Sarah Whitecalf: Kinehiyawiwiniwaw Neheyawawin*. Publications of the Algonkian Text Society.

www.goodminds.com

Search for books and music by and for Aboriginal people by subject, title, author, or publisher.

www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Links to a host of resources for knowing and teaching about Aboriginal peoples in Canada including political organizations and federal government initiatives.

www.native-languages.org/cree.htm

Offers information about the Cree language and links to additional Cree language resources.

www.aptn.ca

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network schedules, series and program descriptions and upcoming features.

www.schoolnet.ca

Links to learning resources in a wide range of subject areas including Native Studies.

www.vcn.bc.ca/~jeffrey1/tribute.htm

Aboriginal Veterans Tribute Web site with over 3400 veterans listed.

www.sicc.sk.ca/native_arts

Aboriginal arts and crafts produced by Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Peoples.

www.nfbkids.ca

NFB Web site for kids where they can learn about animation through on-line activities.