

EDUCATION

Day 2004

CANADIAN ABORIGINAL FESTIVAL

November 26, 2004 • Toronto Skydome

Curriculum Connections

Métis

Grade 3

3z11 Identify contributions of Aboriginal peoples to pioneer settlement (e.g. medicine, food, and exploration)

Grade 6

6z3 Demonstrate understanding of social, political and economic issues facing First Nations people

6z5 Describe the relationship between Aboriginal people and their environment

6z9 Identify some of the consequences of Aboriginal and European interaction (i.e., economic impact of fur trade, European diseases to Aboriginal people)

Grade 7

7h3 Describe the relationships between various cultural groups in North America

7h4 Describe the early European and Aboriginal settlement patterns in North America

7h7 Demonstrate an understanding of the interactions between the French and Aboriginal people

Grade 8

8h17 Demonstrate an understanding of the growth and development of the West from the points of view of the Canadian Government, Aboriginal peoples, Métis, and new immigrants

8h21 Describe the everyday life of various groups (e.g., Aboriginal peoples, Europeans, Métis) in Western Canada at the time of settlement by Europeans

8h22 Describe the causes, results, and personalities of the Red River Rebellion of 1870 and the North West Rebellion of 1885

8h42 Describe the impact of the *Indian Act* of 1876 on Aboriginal people

Key Concepts

- Definition of the term “Métis”
- Louis Riel and the history of the Métis in the West
- Traditional “Red River” Métis culture
- The Métis in Ontario

Background Information

Who are the “Métis”?

- Most people, upon hearing the term “Métis” think of Louis Riel and his people of the Red River in Manitoba. The term Métis is derived from the Latin word “mixtus”, meaning mixed, and is used to describe anybody having both native and non-Native heritage.

- How did this population evolve into its own distinct culture and society?
- At the time of European arrival in Canada, French and British fur traders saw great utility in taking Native wives as they were hard workers and also could act as translators in business transactions. The more such unions occurred, the more children were born of mixed heritage. Eventually the population of mixed offspring adopted their own culture and way of life, which was literally, and intermarriage of the two cultures. A Métis language also resulted—Michif. Michif is a blend of French and Cree and is still spoken today by very few Métis, most with their roots in Manitoba and Northern Ontario.

Louis Riel and the Red River Métis

- As the fur trade grew more and more young men were sent to Canada from Europe to work in the trade, again in most cases without females and this resulted in somewhat of a population explosion of the Métis. The expansion of the fur trade into the north and western Canada resulted in a number of settlements being established with a high percentage of Métis people. By the mid 19th century, Métis villages appeared in and around fur trading posts from the Great Lakes to the Mackenzie Delta.
- One of the best known Métis leaders was Louis Riel. The Métis of the Northwest formed a provisional government under the leadership of Riel in 1869 and laid the foundation for the creation of the Province of Manitoba. It was the Métis who insisted on becoming a part of the federation of Canada and fought against being a part of the United States.
- Louis Riel (1844-1885)
- During the 1860's, when the Canadian Government was expanding into Western Canada, Louis Riel was emerging as the leader of the Métis people. He was born in the Red River Settlement and sent to Montreal to study. He returned a persuasive, energetic and well-spoken orator. He was fluent in French and English. He assembled a united front to the Canadian Government, in which they fought for the formation of a Provisional Government. He is known as the

Father of Manitoba because of his work to make Manitoba a province.

- Riel led the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 where he and his followers executed Thomas Scott. He was later unable to take his parliamentary seat because the Ontario government had offered a \$5000 reward for the arrest and conviction of Thomas Scott's "murderers". He had a colourful and often controversial career in Canadian politics. For his part in the 1885 resistance, Riel was hanged and his sentence remains controversial to this day. To mark the anniversary of Riel's death, Métis across the nation observe Louis Riel Day every November 16th to honour the man who has become an icon for their culture.

Traditional Métis Cultural Symbols

- The Métis Sash—Perhaps one of the most easily identifiable Métis cultural symbol, the Métis sash is a brightly coloured sash made from a traditional finger-weaving technique. The men's sash is slightly wider and is worn around the waist. Women's sashes are narrower and usually worn over the shoulder, across the body and tied at the opposite hip. Métis who have made a significant contribution to their community as a whole are often awarded "The Order of the Sash" to recognize their accomplishments.
- The Métis Flag—The flag representing the Métis people is quite simple, yet carries much symbolism. On a plain blue background is a white infinity symbol. The two adjoining loops of the symbol signify the intermarriage of the two cultures—Native and European—into one strong community. Of course the infinity symbol represents a culture whose people's strength and pride will ensure the Métis' survival for generations to come.

Métis in Ontario

- Métis people have a rich and long-standing history within the province of Ontario. It is estimated that there are over 50,000 Métis in the province today. However, exact numbers are nearly impossible to calculate as there are thousands of people in Ontario who could claim Native ancestry and either are unaware of their heritage, or choose not to

self-identify as Métis. Many established Métis communities, particularly in Northern Ontario and the Great Lakes region, possess a culture, which is a blend of French and either Cree or Anishinabe heritage.

Resources

BOOKS

Bakker, Peter; *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Campbell, Maria; *Halfbreed*, University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Campbell, Maria; Humber Clements, Marie; Daniels, DraMétis: *Three Plays by Métis* Authors, Theytus Books Limited, 2001.

Culleton, Beatrice; *In Search of April Raintree*, Portage and Main Press, 1999.
(***strong content- recommended for more mature readers)

Sprague, D.N. *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988.

TEXTBOOKS

Arnold, P.A., Clark, P., Westerlund, K., *Canada Revisited 8: Confederation, The Development of Western Canada, A Changing Society*. Edmonton: Arnold Publishing Ltd, 2000.

WEBSITES

Métis Nation of Ontario (M.N.O.)
www.Métisnation.org

Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association (O.M.A.A.)
www.oma.org

Turtle Island- History of the Métis People
<http://www.turtle-island.com/Métis.html>

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Métis Activity

Background Information

The Métis have historically been a very social and festive community. Despite harsh winters, semi-nomadic lifestyles and few resources, Métis families came together in various community events, and were bonded by their common culture—a combination of tribal cooperation and French Canadian good-humour and extroversion.

Some very simple pastimes enjoyed by the Métis which required very few materials were card games, string games, dancing, singing and playing culturally-flavoured children's games such as tag, hide-and-go-seek and "pretend" where children would imagine themselves on hunting expeditions. One particular Métis game was a map game whereby children were required to give and follow written and verbal directions to find other players. The underlying skills that were developed through children's play were those of co-operation, communication, problem solving, precision and manual dexterity. These skills served Métis children well in their adult years as hunters and harvesters.

Métis String Games

- Many Métis string games were adopted from their Cree and Dene ancestors. One such game was a toss and catch game often constructed from a pin made of bone attached by a sinew or hide tether to a leather patch with carefully

placed holes. The object of this game was to hold on to the pin and swing the patch up by the sinew to spear one of the holes.

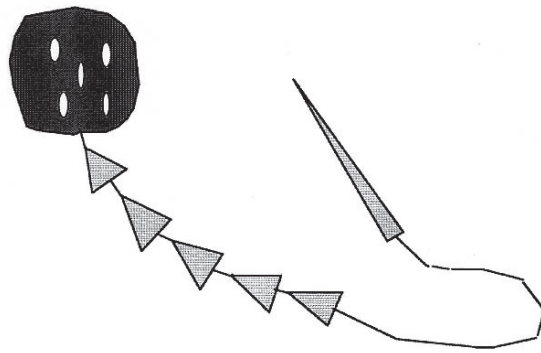


Figure 1: Pin toss game (from Paquin, Prefontaine & Young, 2003)

- Another popular game learned from First Nations and Inuit was “cat’s cradle”. This game is played with two or more people, the object being to create different intricate designs with the string as it is passed from person to person.



Figure 2: Cat's cradle (from www.metismuseum.ca)

- A very common string toy enjoyed by Métis children was the “buzzer”- also with its origins in traditional First Nations culture. By threading a loop of string through a two-holed button or wooden disk, children would hold the string with both hands, with the button as the centerpiece, wind up the string, then by alternately pulling out from the center, then releasing the tension the button would make a “buzzing” sound. The faster the button would spin, the louder the buzzing would become.
- This game then became a quasi-science experiment. Children would try different size disks, types of string and lengths of string to discover the effects on the buzzing sound produced.

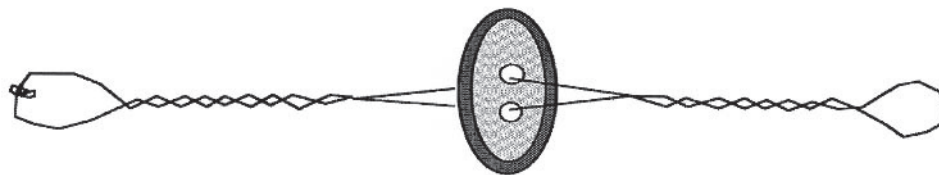
MAKING YOUR OWN “BUZZER” BACK AT SCHOOL

Each student will need

- 1 metre of resilient string or line (fishing line or embroidery thread is suggested)
- a two-holed button

Directions

- Thread string through both holes in the button. Tie the string to form a loop.
- Arrange the string so that the button is in the center. Loop the ends around each hand.
- Swing the button around up from the centre so that the string becomes wound up.
- Gently pull out from the centre with both hands and watch the button twirl as the string unwinds, producing a “buzzing” sound.
- To keep the buzzing going requires alternating motions of pulling the string outwards from both ends, then releasing the tension etc. This keeps the button winding continuously in alternating directions.



Buzzer made from a button and a loop of string

Figure 3: "Buzzer" toy (Paquin, Prefontaine and Young, 2003)

RESOURCES

Metis Nation of Ontario
www.metisnation.org

The Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture
www.metismuseum.ca

Paquin, T., Prefontaine, D., Young, P., "Traditional Metis Socialization and Entertainment", Gabriel Dumont Institute, May 30, 2003.