

Level 2
Grade 8 & up

Building Bridges

By Building Understanding Through Current Events



2019/2020: Issue 2

“Honour the Treaties” page 8

Land Matters page 14



LesPlan

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Building Bridges

Level 2

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We welcome your comments and appreciate your suggestions.

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Hay swx'qa! Mîkwêc! Thank you!

Mission Statement:

LesPlan Educational Services Ltd. aims to help teachers develop students' understanding of and ability to critically assess current issues and events by providing quality up-to-date, affordable, ready-to-use resources.

Building Bridges:

- **allows for differentiated learning.** **Building Bridges** is available in two levels, and in English and French, to meet your students' varied learning needs.
- **is tech-friendly.** Project each month's pdf on your Promethean or Smart Board to read articles together. Our pdfs also work seamlessly with assistive reading technology, and the Word version of the articles can be uploaded to Google Classroom.
- **is easy to use.** Easily access links referenced in **Building Bridges** by visiting www.lesplan.com/en/links.

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About the cover design:

"[This design shows] two hands, Indigenous and Canadian, working together through reconciliation with a ring of cedar surrounding them to represent the medicine to help through this process." – Coast Salish artist Brianna Marie Dick, August 2018



An Overview

Many educators across Canada have been responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action through their planning and practices. As a non-Indigenous teacher, I know that this work means I will make mistakes. I also know that I can't know everything. Thank goodness! This work isn't about knowing more; this work is about learning and asking questions alongside your students. It's also about learning to ask the right questions in a humble way, and to imagine bridges through our colonial past. But how do we engage in the work of reconciliation alongside curricular learning outcomes in an authentic and meaningful way?

This series of lesson plans is designed to invite you and your students into the complex dialogue that is crucial to any work around reconciliation. By teaching students the tools to ask thoughtful questions, and to think carefully and critically about the questions they ask, we begin the hard work needed to build better relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

In this publication, current events and issues will be presented as opportunities for informed discussions and classroom inquiry that ultimately encourage students to ask the bigger questions that affect the societies we live in: *Is this right? Is this just for all? What is better?*

Setting the tone

Setting a positive and empathetic tone in your classroom is essential to the exploration of Indigenous issues. For instance, at the root of exposing Canada's investment in the Indian Act and residential schooling is the discussion of what constitutes racism and discrimination. These topics are, and should be, sensitive for your students to enter into. A classroom environment that invites perspectives, and critically examines inherited belief systems, must first establish a set of rules to live by.

Also, keep in mind that our colonial history includes some very painful memories for many Indigenous families and communities, and care must be taken to enter into and exit conversations in ways that do not cause unintended emotional upset or harm. Indigenous students should never be called upon to speak to culture or Indigenous politics in the classroom unless they have initiated the input or it is precipitated by private conversation with students and their parents.

Action: Ask your students to come up with a list of body language, words, attitudes, and behaviours that constitute a positive classroom environment. Keep these posted in the classroom as a baseline criteria for entering into the subject of Canada's treatment of Indigenous Peoples.

Creating learning environments that reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning

Aim to nurture a learning environment that embodies the First Peoples Principles of Learning. As the First Nations Education Steering Committee expressed, these principles are not rigid terms or isolated lessons, but more, a way of being with your learners and a way of viewing learning in general. Each Nation may have its own perspectives around learning and teaching, but these principles can be seen as generally agreed-upon starting points that invite all teachers and learners to view learning through an Indigenous lens. I have these posted in my classroom, and I refer to them often.

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions. Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge. Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Action: Ask your students to describe, in their own words, what the FPPL look like, feel like, and sound like in the classroom setting. Have them list their thoughts, words, and feelings on sticky notes and post their responses under each principle. Leave these up on your wall to set a tone for all learning across the curriculum.

You can learn more about these principles at:

<http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PUB-LFP-POSTER-Principles-of-Learning-First-Peoples-poster-11x17.pdf>

<https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com>

Notes on assessment: Moving beyond empathy

We are trained as teachers to measure learning in students. I feel it is important in this particular endeavour that we don't reduce students' learning to a grade or a percentage. What you can measure is the depth to which your students are able to think critically about an issue, and the degree to which they can communicate their thinking through listening, speaking, and writing. Try using self-assessment tools, or a current events portfolio with an oral interview, as assessment strategies. Focus on speaking and listening as important indicators of a student's thinking and communication skills. Use dialogue, discussion, and reflection as a way for each student to express his or her own entry point and degree of critical analysis of each current event. Keep the focus on the quality of questions asked, as opposed to coming up with solutions or answers.

Watch each student's learning unfold, at his own pace, in her own words, and encourage ways to stretch individual learning.

Tasha Henry, Victoria, B.C.

Action: Ask students to keep a reflection journal to record their thoughts after each lesson. Make sure they understand that the journal is for your eyes only. Encourage them to make connections to their own life, stories, and experiences. Make sure you don't use evaluative language when responding to their journal. A simple "thank you" for allowing you to witness their journey is sufficient.

About This Issue

Introduction:

This issue explores Canada's colonial history with a focus on Indigenous Peoples and their land rights as First Peoples in this country. It highlights the complicated relationship between First Nations and the Canadian government, and the ongoing disputes over Aboriginal title and land rights. Personal narratives from two Indigenous writers help students to understand the deep cultural and spiritual connection to land that is at the heart of land treaty negotiations. Current living conditions on some reservations are viewed through the lens of human rights, and in particular the human rights owed to Indigenous Peoples.

Learning outcomes:

- I can make reasoned, ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond. (B.C. Grade 8-10 Social Studies Curricular Competency)
- I can explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, beliefs, and perspectives. (B.C. Grade 9 Social Studies Curricular Competency)
- I can think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts and personal stories. (B.C. Grade 9 Language Arts Curricular Competency)
- I can synthesize ideas from a variety of primary and secondary sources (B.C. Grade 9 Language Arts Curricular Competency)

Skills:

- I can assess the long-term consequences of historical legislation (like the Indian Act).
- I can identify how colonization continues to affect the land claims process for First Nations.
- I can interpret and present data in a variety of forms (e.g., oral, written, graphic, maps).
- I can analyze cultural and personal perspectives, meanings, and values from personal stories.

Essential questions:

- How have land treaties affected the living conditions and livelihood of Indigenous Peoples historically, and currently?
- What are the systemic impacts of the Indian Act?
- How is connection to the Land an integral part of Indigenous Peoples' ways of being?

Territory Acknowledgement

Acknowledging the traditional territory of First Nations is a wise practice that honours the Peoples who have lived, since time immemorial, on the land that we now occupy. The act shows respect and recognizes First Peoples' ongoing presence on the land.

A Territory Acknowledgement is usually given at the beginning of an assembly, meeting, performance, or other public gathering. It is also an appropriate way to start your lessons.

The following resources may help you write an appropriate Territory Acknowledgement with your class:

1. Find out whose traditional territory your school or community is built on. Use this interactive map of traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples across Canada developed by Native Land to help you: <https://native-land.ca/>.
2. Learn more about the protocols for acknowledging territory by reading the information shared by Native Land at: <https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>.
3. Look at examples of acknowledgements by various post-secondary institutions across Canada on the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) website at: <https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>.

Talking Circles

Talking Circles originated with First Nations leaders. They were used to ensure that all leaders in the tribal council were heard, and that those who were speaking were not interrupted. Usually the Chief would begin the conversation. Then, other members would respond and share their own thoughts and feelings.

It is appropriate to use Talking Circles to structure discussions based on the curriculum in this publication. The format highlights how everyone is connected. It also ensures that everyone taking part has an equal voice.

Before conducting a Talking Circle, students must understand and respect the process. Here are some guidelines:

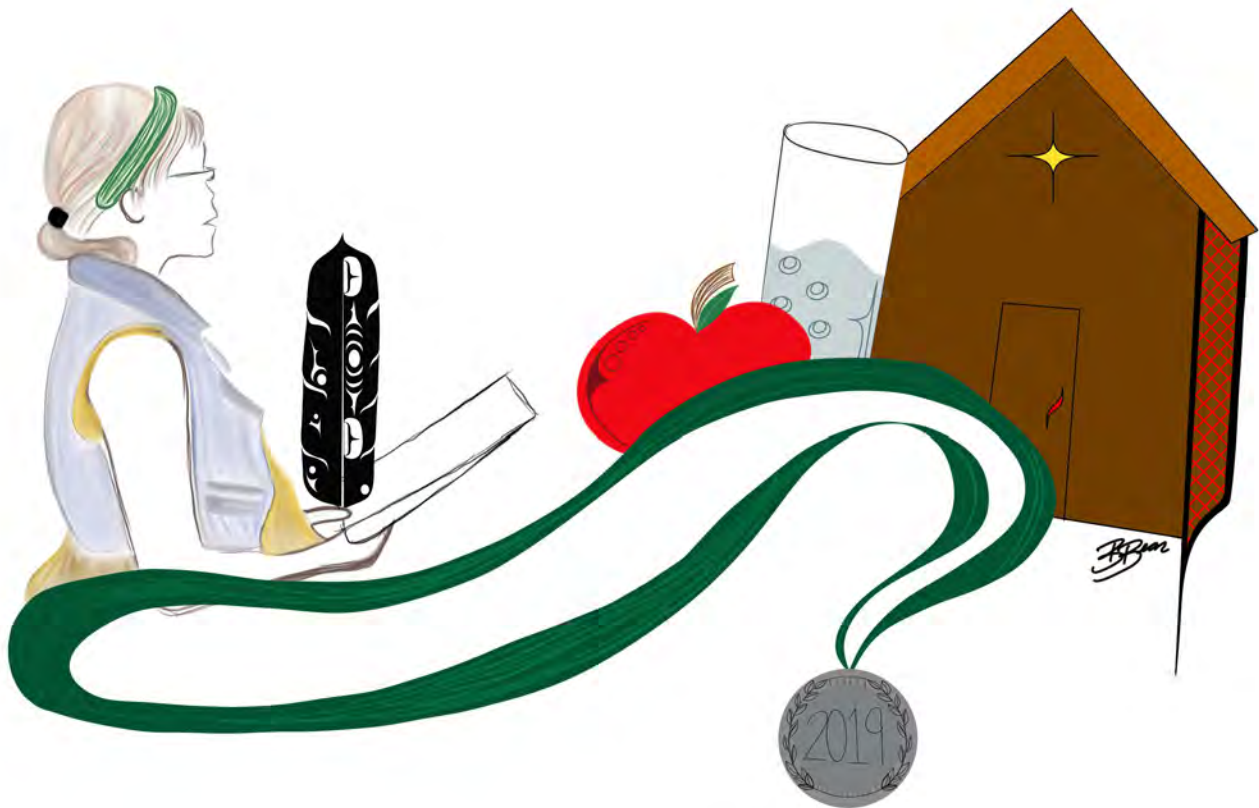
- The group sits in a circle so that everyone can see each other.
- One person introduces the topic for discussion – this is usually the teacher or group leader.
- An object, like a talking stick or feather, may be passed from person to person during the Circle. Only the person holding it may speak. Any item that is special or has meaning to the class is appropriate, as long as it is only used during Talking Circles.
- Everyone listens respectfully. This means giving the speaker their full attention.
- Everyone is given a chance to speak. However, participants may pass the object without speaking if they wish.
- It is respectful to introduce oneself before speaking. Speakers should use ‘I’ statements and ‘speak from the heart’, stating what they are thinking or feeling. They should avoid commenting on what other people have said.
- When everyone has had a chance to speak, the object can continue to be passed around until the discussion concludes.

Consider giving students time to reflect following the discussion. They can think about how the discussion influenced their opinions or ideas. They can also assess how they felt during the activity, what they learned, and what they might do differently next time.

Sources:

- BC First Nations Land, Title and Governance Teacher Resource Guide, First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association, c. 2019 (p. 20). <http://www.fnesc.ca/governance-2/>
- <http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html>

“Honour the Treaties”



Speaking out

Nine-year old Bella Morriseau Whiskeyjack is a member of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation in central Alberta. When she was younger, she lived on the **reserve** with her mother.

Later, she moved to Edmonton to live with her grandfather, a member of the Grand Rapids Cree. That’s where she was encouraged by a teacher to enter

a speech competition put on by the school district.

She decided to talk about Treaty 6, an agreement between the Canadian government and First Nations – including Saddle Lake Cree Nation – that was signed in 1876.

In her speech she also told her personal story of living on the Saddle Lake reserve.

“The housing was terrible and not clean... the ceiling would leak,” she wrote. “The basement was covered in black mold.”

“The conditions I experienced in Saddle Lake is what a lot of First Nation families go through,” she said. “The First Nations people are still waiting for what they were promised 143 years ago.”

Definitions

reserve: under the Indian Act, an Indian Reserve is land held by the Crown “for the use and benefit of the respective bands for which they were set apart” under treaties or other agreements

“Honour the Treaties”

Strong and proud

Bella’s description of living conditions on the reserve is hard to listen to, and her grandfather (her “biggest fan”) encouraged her to speak her truth.

“Way back when, you were simply told don’t say anything,” he said. “So now a nine year old steps up and says, ‘This is how things are.’”

According to Bella, she chose to talk about hardships on the reserve because, “the kids don’t really know about it.”

“My home is now well made, clean, and contains good food, clean water, and plenty of medicine. We even have a hospital nearby our home. Other First Nation children are not as lucky as me.”

Going global

Bella’s speech has opened doors to more conversations. She was encouraged to turn it into a story for a 2019 Indigenous Child Author Competition. The writing competition was open to Indigenous children from all over the world. It is a project of UNESCO, a United Nations organization that encourages international peace and respect for human rights.

Bella spent hours each day working on chapters of the story she called “Honour the Treaties”. “I even skipped watching TV with my brother,” she said. Her grandfather typed them out. Then she edited them until she felt the work was finally ready to submit.

Bella won silver (second prize) for her story. It will be published in a book and translated into six languages. She will also be a child ambassador for UNESCO. Not bad for a kid not yet in Grade 5.

“I am one of the many strong and proud members of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation who have walked these lands for thousands of years,” she wrote. “I will not allow my people and the problems they face to be ignored any longer.”

Did you know?

You can find out more about the Saddle Lake Cree Nation on the Nation’s website at <http://saddlelakecreation.ca/slc-home.html>. The reserve now has better drinking water and a new health centre. It also has new heroes! Click on ‘SLCN Local Legends’ to read about Bella Whiskeyjack as well as Dr. James Makokis, another member of the Nation who – together with his partner, Anthony Johnson – won The Amazing Race Canada in 2019.

Before Reading

1. Tasha Spillett-Sumner is an educator, author, and PhD candidate of Cree and Trinidadian ancestry who currently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Treaty 1 Territory. For this issue, she wrote a reflection on land, **Tasha's Story** (p. 11). Before reading this story with the class, ask students to consider the following questions:
 - What place do you feel most connected to? What feelings arise when you think of this place? Are any of your other senses engaged when you think of this place?
 - How would you describe this place to someone who might never have the chance to visit it? What are the most important aspects of this place? Are there any specific land-markers that are important to note?
 - How would you feel if this place didn't exist anymore, or if it was no longer accessible? Is there anything you can think of right now that is important to do in order to ensure that this place is always protected?
2. Read Tasha's Story aloud to your students to capture the poetic quality of her words. After reading, engage students in a class discussion using the following questions as a guide:
 - What is the difference between a poem and prose? What reasons can you suggest to explain why Tasha might have chosen to write her story as a poem, rather than in prose? Explain.
 - What feelings arose when you were listening to Tasha's story?
 - What connection is Tasha making between her Father-in-law's sharing about the trees on the land and ancestral knowledge?
 - Why do you suppose Tasha intentionally capitalized the "L" in "Land"?
 - What reasons can you suggest to explain why Tasha's Father-in-law chose not to leave his community even though it was under an evacuation order?
 - How do you think it felt for him to see so many of his friends and relatives leave the community because of the flood and be away for so long?
 - How do you think it felt for the people who did leave because of the flood to be gone for so long and return after eight years?
3. Ask students to imagine that the place they feel most connected to (from question 1) is threatened in some way, or unliveable. How would students feel? What would they do? Invite them to write their thoughts or share them with a partner. Then, tell students that they will be reading an article that addresses these themes of land and loss.

Tasha's Story

I woke up thinking about my Father-in-law's love for the Land.

He likes telling us about things like, where the geese are and how many compared to last year, how the fish are doing and when the ice will be thick enough to go out, and the many changes he's seen in the weather over the years.

He calls us to tell us when a single tree falls in the yard. Which might be an insignificant event for some, but for him and many others, it's important to mark and remember.

When my husband's community was flooded in 2011, his parents stayed back during the evacuation to care for the community and the Land.

His community of Little Saskatchewan has just returned home after being displaced from their homeland for 8 long years. Now, because of the most recent storm, they are evacuated once again.

During the storm, my husband's father was with us in the city. I was grateful for his safety but I know the city is always just a quick visit for him and it wouldn't be long before he tried to get home.

Sure enough, at the first opportunity he went back home, with heaters and generators, to check on the community and the Land.

We called to check in and he told us of the trees that fell.

I learn so much about what it means to be in relationship with the Land from him.

It's been heartbreaking to watch the communities be displaced again but I also have so much love and respect for the ways people have activated our kinship systems to care for one another and the Land.

Thank you to everyone who is working so hard and from a place of love to ensure people are safe and as comfortable as they can be.

I hope we all remember the Land in our prayers and in how we care for our communities.

After Reading

A. Discussion

1. How does Bella's story help raise awareness of the living conditions on many First Nations reserves?
2. Bella is an advocate for Saddle Lake Cree Nation. Why is her voice, in particular, making a difference in helping others understand the past and in influencing the future for Indigenous Peoples in Canada? List the names of family members, community members, and global organizations who support her message.
3. Who would you say is Bella's main champion? What evidence can you find in the article to support this?
4. What connections can you make between Tasha's Story and the article? Explain.

B. Exploration and Reflection

1. Encourage students to think about the themes of the article by creating a **sensory poem**. Instructions on how to write a sensory poem can be downloaded at <https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/sensory-poems>. Alternatively, students could write a **found poem**. Instructions on writing a found poem are available on the IRA's ReadWriteThink website, at: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson33/found-poem-instructions.pdf. (Samples of found poems can be seen in this short Youtube video: Found Poetry Short Movie Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a74gzxOvPQ> [2:39].)
2. Invite students to illustrate their completed poems, then read them aloud in a Sharing Circle.

Extensions

1. Learn more about Bella Morriseau Whiskeyjack and her story by visiting these links:
 - Voices of Future Generations: <http://www.vofg.org/bella>
 - CBC Kids News: <https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/watch-my-family-did-not-have-a-decent-home-this-girl-shares-her-story>
 - The Contract of Treaty 6: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1584458819623>
2. The Safe Water Drinking Foundation has created a lesson plan to help students learn more about the water treatment system that was introduced to the Saddle Lake Cree Nation and how it is restoring water quality to the community. Check out the lesson plan, at: <https://www.safewater.org/operation-water-spirit-1/2019/4/9/grades-10-12-lesson-5-the-tale-of-saddle-lake-cree-nation>. Although designed for high school students, viewing and discussing the PowerPoint document cited in the lesson plan may help students visualize the condition of the water before treatment and learn how a biological water treatment system can naturally ‘clean’ the water. The accompanying worksheet may be too advanced but the discussion questions on the website are useful in having students reflect on the impact of unclean water. Conclude by checking out an article on the biological water treatment system used: <https://www.sapphire-water.ca/biological-water-treatment-system-ends-a-boil-water-advisory-at-saddle-lake-cree-nation/>
3. As a class, read about Autumn Peltier, another Indigenous youth, who is raising awareness about the importance of protecting water, at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/i-am-indigenous-2017/peltier.html> Then, compare Autumn’s story with Bella’s story. Use a **Venn diagram** to explore the similarities and differences in how both youth are ambassadors for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Consider topics such as personal characteristics, message, influence of elders, and issues facing First Nations communities today. You may wish to use this online Venn diagram created by the IRA’s ReadWriteThink to make your comparison: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/venn_diagrams/. Finally, ask students to consider: Why might a child’s voice have a stronger impact than an adult’s when it comes to issues such as protecting water and honouring treaty rights? Explain.

Land Matters

In 2016, 744,855 people in Canada identified as **First Nations** with **Indian Status**. Just over 44 percent lived on reserves.

The land that is now Canada has been home to **Indigenous Peoples** since time immemorial. Before contact, each First Nation had its own wide-ranging territory, laws, and government. So how did many Indigenous Peoples end up living on **reserves** owned by the federal government? The answer lies in Canada's **colonial** history.

The Doctrine of Discovery

When European explorers first came to North America, their actions and interactions with the Indigenous Peoples who lived there were guided by the Doctrine of Discovery. This set of beliefs, first communicated by the Pope in 1493, stated that Christian explorers could lay claim to territories uninhabited by Christians. Why? Because non-Christians were not considered to be human. Their land, therefore, was empty of people.

The phrase used to describe this 'vacant' land was *terra nullius*, and the doctrine became the legal and moral justification for European monarchs to take over the land of sovereign Indigenous Nations and use it for their own purposes.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763

What did European Kings and Queens want the land for? To expand their empires. That's why in the 1500s, they began sending colonists to North America to live on First Nations lands without their consent.

In the 1700s, European countries fought against each other in North America. Eventually, Britain took control of most of the continent, with help from some First Nations in key battles.

When the fighting ended in 1763, the British government issued a Royal Proclamation. It stated that the British Crown had ownership over North America. At the same time, it recognized that First Nations had Aboriginal title to their traditional lands. This Aboriginal title could only be

extinguished through negotiated treaties.

The treaty process

First Nations had been making treaties with each other long before colonists arrived. Some treaties set out ways that neighbouring Nations would share resources. Others established guidelines for trade, or rules for peace after a war.

The idea of making treaties to transfer land ownership, however, was new. That's because most First Nations do not see land as something that can be owned or given away. Instead, Indigenous Peoples have a relationship with the land that sustains them and a responsibility to look after it, so it can nourish future generations.

That's why when land treaties were being negotiated, the government and First Nations had different understandings about what that meant. In many cases, First Nations believed they were sharing the land, while the government believed First Nations were selling or giving away the land.

Definitions

colonial: relating to a system or period in which one country rules another nation, region, or territory

extinguish: to put an end to

First Nations: Indigenous Peoples in Canada excluding Inuit and Métis

Indian Status: the legal status of a person who is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act

Indigenous Peoples: all peoples indigenous to a region. In Canada, the term includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

reserve: under the Indian Act, an Indian Reserve is land held by the Crown "for the use and benefit of the respective bands for which they were set apart" under treaties or other agreements

Other factors also contributed to differing views of the treaty process. Communication was one. Often the two parties didn't speak each other's language. The manner of negotiations was another. The government was used to making written agreements. Indigenous Peoples made oral treaties.

No choice

In all, between 1701 and 1923, the colonial government and First Nations signed 56 land treaties. In most cases, the treaties forced Nations to relocate onto small areas of reserve lands, usually in less desirable areas. Sometimes they also received payments, farming equipment, some hunting and fishing rights, and promises of goods or services, such as a school or medicine. The treaties did not give First Nations any share in the value of the resources that they gave up.

Many chiefs were opposed to the treaty terms, and to the idea of another Nation governing them and applying its own laws.

"This is our land, it isn't a piece of pemmican to be cut off and given in little pieces back to us. It is ours and we will take what we want," the legendary Chief Poundmaker is said to have stated.

Yet often, Indigenous leaders felt they had no choice but to sign the treaties. Bella's home community of Saddle Lake Cree Nation in Alberta is a good case study to show why.

In the 1870s the Cree, the Assiniboine, the Saulteaux, and the Chipewyan of the prairies were facing many challenges. The buffalo, their main food staple, was being deliberately hunted to extinction. In addition to the looming threat of starvation, Indigenous communities were weakened by diseases such as smallpox that had been

introduced by the Europeans – also, in many cases, deliberately. Meanwhile, surveyors were staking out land in preparation for future telegraph lines, railroads, and settler homesteads. That created fear among the Cree who worried that their land would be taken over outright.

It was in this climate of increasing desperation that First Nations, including Bella's community, negotiated Treaty 6 with the government.

The Indian Act

Canada became a nation in 1867, and in 1876, the federal government brought in the Indian Act. This legislation dismantled traditional systems of Indigenous governance. It replaced them with external government control on Indigenous Peoples and communities with the aim of **assimilating** them into non-Indigenous society.

With their land gone, and now no rights, Indigenous Peoples' whole way of life changed. It became impossible for First Nations to independently look after and support themselves and their communities. They were forced to become dependent on government assistance, and the impacts have been deep and long-lasting.

Moving forward

Over time, the legal relationship between the Canadian government and Indigenous

A different story in B.C.

Not all First Nations in Canada signed historical treaties. There are 200 **bands** in B.C., and 160 do not have land treaties. Why? Because the British Columbia government at the time refused to recognize the existence of Aboriginal land rights. That meant there was no need to negotiate treaties to purchase land rights. The result was that Aboriginal title was never officially extinguished, so Nations in B.C. retain rights and title over their territories. It wasn't until the 1990s that the provincial government established a treaty commission to begin negotiating modern-day treaties.

Definitions

assimilate: to make similar

band: the basic unit of government for Indigenous Peoples subject to the Indian Act (Status Indians or First Nations)

UNDRIP

UNDRIP stands for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is an international agreement that advocates for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world.

The declaration took 25 years to craft and was adopted by the UN in 2007. It guarantees the rights of Indigenous Peoples to enjoy and practice their cultures and customs, their religions, and their languages, and to develop and strengthen their economies and their social institutions. It recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination.

It also states that "Indigenous Peoples have the right to the lands, territories, and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired."

In October 2019, the B.C. government introduced legislation to implement UNDRIP. The Canadian government **endorsed** the declaration in 2016, but it has not yet implemented its recommendations.

Truly acknowledging Indigenous rights to land and self-governance would change the face of Canada. It would result in significant shifts in power around land and resource management decision-making in this country.

Peoples has evolved through court decisions and negotiated agreements.

In a landmark 1973 decision, Canada's Supreme Court confirmed that Indigenous Peoples have Aboriginal title and rights to traditional lands and resources because they were living on the land long before settlers arrived.

This court decision was a turning point. In the decades previous to that, the federal government had refused even to entertain the concept that Indigenous Nations had land rights.

Subsequent court cases have **affirmed** these Indigenous land rights. They are now **entrenched** in the **Canadian Constitution**. The courts have also confirmed

that the government has a 'duty to consult' Indigenous Peoples about developments that might affect lands to which they have Aboriginal or treaty rights.

Meanwhile, some Indigenous Nations that are not bound by historical treaties have negotiated modern treaties with the federal government. Most of these Nations are located in British Columbia, Quebec, Labrador and in Northern Canada. The treaties are all distinct, but most include ongoing rights to land and natural resources, participation in land use management, as well as limited self-government.

Challenges ahead

However, there is still a lot of work to be done and there are many thorny questions that need to be settled. For instance, although the courts have ruled that Aboriginal title exists, they have not determined exactly what Aboriginal title means. What are the specific rights that Indigenous Nations have on these lands?

Reconciling the Canadian legal understanding of Aboriginal title with Indigenous understanding of Aboriginal title is another huge challenge. And how can Canada accommodate these Indigenous rights within an existing system that previously didn't acknowledge they existed?

Definitions

affirm: to support something or make it stronger

Canadian Constitution: the supreme law that outlines Canada's system of government and the civil and human rights of citizens and non-citizens

endorse: to give support or one's approval to

entrench: to establish firmly or securely

reconcile: to find a way to make ideas, beliefs, needs, etc. that are opposed to each other capable of existing together

Back home on the reserve

Today, there are 2267 reserves in Canada, located in both urban and remote parts of the country. The total land base of these reserves is approximately 2.6 million hectares, or 0.2 percent of the total land area of Canada.

Conditions on reserves vary a great deal depending on factors beyond First Nations' control, like access to education and training, housing, jobs, and employment opportunities.

A recent study of poverty on First Nations reserves found that the on-reserve child-poverty rate is roughly three times the national rate – the highest in the country. In response to these findings, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde called on the federal government to fulfill its responsibility to adequately fund reserves.

“The findings of this report are shameful and underscore the urgent need to invest in First Nations children, families and communities,” he stated.

Easy question, complex answer

Non-indigenous Canadians may hear Bella's story about hardships on the reserve and ask, “Why do people stay there?”

The main reason is that many Indigenous Peoples have nowhere else to go. They can't return to their ancestral lands, and many don't feel safe – physically, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally – in non-indigenous communities. Their reserve may be a difficult place to live in some ways, but it is often the only connection remaining for

Acknowledging traditional territory

In Toronto, each city council meeting begins with an acknowledgement that council is meeting on “the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat and home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples.”

Land acknowledgements like Toronto's have become increasingly common since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its Calls to Action in 2015.

Craig Waaboose, a member of the Eabametoong First Nation in northern Ontario, helped with the city's acknowledgement.

“A lot of people are unaware of Canada's actual history and this gets people talking and conversations starting,” he says.

Land acknowledgements are a fairly new idea for non-indigenous Canadians. But for Indigenous Peoples, this is a tradition that has dated back centuries. It is what Indigenous People do when they speak at a gathering.

“Acknowledging relationships to space and place is an ancient Indigenous practice,” says Karyn Recollect, an urban Cree woman and associate professor at the University of Toronto.

Sometimes it's a complicated history, which makes it important to get it right.

“In Toronto we've had many Indigenous People who have lived here, called this territory home and passed through.”

Alison Norman of the Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation says the acknowledgement should lead to more questions about the people listed in the acknowledgement, who they are, and how their land came to be possessed by settlers. It should also prompt people to ask themselves how they are benefiting by living on the traditional territory of Indigenous Peoples, and what responsibilities come with that privilege. How can non-indigenous Canadians make space for the knowledge and practices of Indigenous Peoples in their community?

“It needs to be the beginning of a learning process,” she says.

some Indigenous Peoples to their community and the land.

“When listening to a news item about a remote Indigenous community that is struggling with ongoing water advisories, unhealthy housing, subpar education, unemployment and the tragedy of losing members of the community to suicide you might have asked yourself ‘why don’t they just leave?’” says Bob Joseph, a member of B.C.’s Gwawaenuk Nation who heads a company that helps Canadians understand and work effectively with Indigenous Peoples.

“They don’t leave because, despite all of the above... the connection to community and land ties them to their culture, their ancestors, their history as well as all the animals, plants that live on that land.

“To really understand how deeply important that connection to land and culture is, you have to look at Indigenous Peoples through the lens of history since Confederation (1867) and their fight to protect their future, their traditions – their very existence – in the face of crushing government policies designed to erase them via assimilation.”

Before Reading

1. Ask students to consider what the word ‘land’ means to them. Do they understand ‘land’ as being concrete or abstract? As something that is living or non-living? What is the value of land?
2. Suggest to students that people’s relationship to and understanding of the word ‘land’ varies depending on their worldview, and often dictates their actions. For instance, when we look at the current state of the planet we can see how the western worldview of land as a resource that has economic value has impacted the environment. Given the current climate crisis, many governments are turning to Indigenous Peoples around the world for guidance because in general, they share a different worldview – one that values living in sustainable and harmonious ways on the Earth
3. Tina Savea* is Saulteaux/Cree from Peepeekisis First Nation on Treaty 4 territory in Saskatchewan. She resides on traditional WSÁNEĆ territory with her husband Niu and their three children. Tina is an entrepreneur, motivational speaker, and Trainer and Facilitator of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. She wrote the letter **To My Children: Land** (p. 20). The letter connects the history of the land to the history of Tina’s family, and communicates her thoughts on the meaning of land. Read Tina’s letter with your students.
4. After reading, engage students in a class discussion using the following questions as a starting point:
 - What is your understanding of the term ‘stewardship’? (*The way in which someone organizes and takes care of something.*) How is the concept of stewardship at the core of this letter?
 - What is the ‘western view’ that Tina references?
 - How would you describe an Indigenous worldview based on the information in Tina’s letter? Give evidence to support your response.
 - As you see it, how does tracing her ancestors’ relationship to the land inform Tina’s message to her children?
 - What words in the letter jump out at you as being emotional or powerful? Why?
5. After discussing Tina’s letter, invite students to individually reflect on and respond to the following writing prompt: *Where do you live? What are your connections to the land there, and how much is this land a part of your identity? Why?*
6. Conclude by telling students that they will be reading an article that outlines the history and importance of land to Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

* Tina is the creator of “To My Children: Every Child Matters – Even You”, a video that describes beautifully and powerfully the impact of Residential Schools on her family and the hope she has for her children, as well as the importance of understanding history, being kind, and having children know they matter. You can preview this video at <https://youtu.be/a7eXhB6LQck>. To find out how to purchase rights to show this video to your students, contact Tina at tinasavea@gmail.com.

To My Children: Land

Land: This word has so much meaning, yet is so misunderstood. The other day I asked some friends, “What comes to mind when you think of the word ‘Land’”? A few responded with nouns: “fields”, “islands,” “mountains”, “grass”. Some thought of it as a verb, as in “a plane landing”. But the responses that stood out to me most were “grandpa working in his potato garden”, “ancestors”, “protection”, and “home”.

I thought long and hard about this word, Land. I struggled going from my adopted Western view of the land as dirt, rocks, and something that could be bought and sold, to our ancestors’ truth as “Land” not being a word or thing... but the source of life!

I am thinking about our very own family. We have two different stories: both hard, both true.

First, there are our people from your Coco’s side who are Cree and Saulteaux. They were part of the File Hills Colony created by the Indian Agent William Graham on the Peepeekisis First Nation, our family’s home.

Graham had a plan to continue the colonization of Indigenous men from all different communities after leaving Residential School. Why? Because the government found that after leaving the school, the men were going back to their cultural ways of living. He said he would give them the opportunity to continue their education and become farmers, but of course, under his complete control. There was so much wrong with this plan.

According to the Indian Agent, the plan was successful because after only 6 years, many men were settled in homes, married with children who were being brought up as settlers and now did not know their Indigenous languages. A success, but not according to us. Land was being taken from original Peepeekisis band members and now given to the new File Hill Colony members. In the end, they did become successful farmers but were only given a small piece of land to farm on so they would not become competition for their settler farming neighbours.

Second, there are our people from your Papa’s side, the Ojibwe. We originally lived around the Great Lakes. We were hunters and fishermen. We lived off the land. Soon we began to trade with French, British, and later Americans who eventually pushed us out of our region. We moved west to now what is known as Manitoba. We were named the “Saulteaux,” which is a French word meaning “people of the rapids”.

Because this was new land, we had to adopt some new ways of living. We hunted bison. But soon the hunting for “business” almost ran the bison to extinction. Our chief, Chief Kiishikouse (Little Sky), became concerned that we may go hungry, so in September of 1874 he signed Treaty # 4. Swan River First Nation was established for our people. But then flooding hit our reserve and once again we were forced to relocate to the shared land with the local Saulteaux of that area. Later we became our own band, the Keeseekoose First Nation, in what is now Saskatchewan.

This is where I spent the majority of my life as a little girl, biking with my cousins, creating forts in the bushes, playing in the hay bales... but not understanding the journey my people took to finally call this place home.

My children, despite the hardships of your ancestors, we are still here and you have been trusted as keepers of this land. Don’t take that lightly. This is a big responsibility. But you got this. Listen to your heart over your mind. It will guide you to what is truth, what is right. Treat all people with love. And no matter what, don’t ever forget your value. Because knowing your value will give you the courage to speak up when everyone else around you stays silent.

Love, Mom (Tina Savea)

After Reading

A. Discussion

1. According to this article, how did many First Nations in Canada ended up living on reserves?
2. Explain why Indigenous leaders signed land treaties in the past.
3. Respond to Chief Poundmaker’s quote: “***This is our land, it isn’t a piece of pemmican to be cut off and given in little pieces back to us. It is ours and we will take what we want.***” What’s important about this quote, and why?
4. What legal initiatives have been attempted by the Canadian government and courts to recognize Aboriginal land title and self-governance? What are some of the challenges that still exist?
5. What connections can you make between Tina Savea’s letter to her children and the article?

B. Exploration and Reflection

Distribute a piece of chart paper and a copy of **Impact of Colonization on Aboriginal Land Title** (p. 22) to each pair or small group of students. Direct them to cut and organize the dates and events into a meaningful sequence to show the history of Aboriginal land title in Canada.

Once the dates and events have been glued into place, invite students to annotate the time line, explaining the impacts the events had on both European colonists and Indigenous Peoples.

For example:

TIME IMMEMORIAL – First Nations had their own wide-ranging territory, laws, and government, living in relationship with the land that sustains them.

Indigenous Peoples: had unlimited access to resources, strong spiritual and cultural connection to the land, freedom to live according to their own laws and culture on their ancestral lands

Europeans: [pre-contact, so no impact]

Impacts of Colonization on Aboriginal Land Title

TIME IMMEMORIAL	ROYAL PROCLAMATION 1763
FIRST COLONISTS 1500	TREATY 6 1876
56 LAND TREATIES 1701-1923	UNDRIP 2007
INDIAN ACT 1876	COLONIAL GOVERNMENT 1791-1841
SUPREME COURT RULING 1973	DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY 1400s

Impacts of Colonization on Aboriginal Land Title

<p>By signing these treaties, First Nations gave away the title to their traditional lands in exchange for reserve land, certain rights, and some other promises.</p>	<p>First Nations had their own wide-ranging territory, laws, and government, living in relationship with the land that sustains them.</p>
<p>This Act put an end to traditional systems of Indigenous governance and imposed external government control on Indigenous Peoples and their communities.</p>	<p>This treaty was signed by the Cree, the Assiniboine, the Saulteaux, and the Chipewyan of the prairies who were facing many challenges, including starvation, disease, and the encroachment of their land.</p>
<p>The British Crown introduced policies and practices that prevented Indigenous Peoples from carrying out traditional activities and displaced them on their own land.</p>	<p>This Proclamation stated that the British Crown had ownership over North America and that Aboriginal land title could only be extinguished through negotiated treaties.</p>
<p>This international agreement recognizes Indigenous Peoples' rights to their traditional lands, territories, resources, and self-governance.</p>	<p>This court decision confirmed that Indigenous Peoples have title and rights to traditional lands and resources.</p>
<p>European colonists began settling on First Nations' land without Indigenous Peoples' consent.</p>	<p>A set of beliefs, first communicated by the Pope, that stated that Christian explorers could lay claim to terra nullius –territories uninhabited by Christians – because non-Christians were not considered to be humans.</p>

Extensions

1. Invite students to create a mind map showing all the ways they benefit from “living on this land that is a traditional territory of Indigenous Peoples”. To learn how to make a mind map, watch ‘How to Make a Mind Map – The Basics’ at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLWVOXN7K1g> [2:51]
2. Take a walk to a local park or nature trail. Ask students to find a spot where they can sit quietly away from others for 10-15 minutes and be with nature. Invite them to use their senses to connect with the land around them—what do they see, hear, feel, and smell? Tell them that it may feel strange at first because many of us are not used to being still and quiet or connected to nature in this way. Ask them to notice their feelings and thoughts. You may wish to have students sketch or create a word web to capture their experiences. At the end of the activity, direct partners to take turns sharing how they connected with the land.
3. Invite students to imagine that they are parents. Have them write a letter to their children, describing what they know about their ancestry and their ancestors’ ties to the land. What is their wish for their future children or grandchildren?
4. Watch the music video “Big River People” made by students on the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation in the Yukon at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhgMNI9H8Uc> The lyrics say: “We live on the land, now we stand even stronger.” How can this video be seen as a letter to the land? What connections can students make between this music video and its message and Tina and Tasha’s letters?
5. During the Kairos Blanket Exercise, participants walk on blankets representing the land while assuming the role of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples by reading scrolls and carrying cards which ultimately determine their outcome. The exercise allows participants to experience 500 years of history. For more information, go to: <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/>
6. Find out more about the File Hills Colony that Tina Savea’s family was a part of by visiting ‘Shattering the Silence: The Hidden History of Residential Schools in Saskatchewan at: <http://www2.uregina.ca/education/saskindianresidentialschools/file-hills-indian-residential-school/file-hills-colony-a-failed-experiment/>. More information is available at ‘The Children Remembered: Residential School Archive Project’ at: <https://thechildrenremembered.ca/school-locations/file-hill/>
7. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) has developed an excellent, in-depth resource for teachers to use to explore land issues with students. Titled “BC First Nations Land, Title, and Governance Teacher Resource Guide”, it’s aimed at both elementary and secondary classrooms and is available on the FNESC website at: <http://www.fnesc.ca/>.
8. Check out this infographic in The Canadian Encyclopedia: ‘30 Indigenous Place Names and their Meanings’ (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/30-indigenous-place-names-and-their-meanings>). Then, ask students to reflect on this question: What can you learn about Indigenous Peoples’ relationship with the land from this infographic?
9. To learn more about Indigenous territory, the challenges mapping Indigenous territories, and Indigenous land laws in Canada, read this article in The Canadian Encyclopedia: ‘Indigenous Territory’: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-territory>
10. Watch this Heritage Minute: Naskumituwin (Treaty 9): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVVD9yYCKiI>. After viewing, invite students to revisit the questions in the article: Was the treaty fairly negotiated? Did both sides really understand the terms of the agreement?

Extensions

11. Read the book *The Elders are Watching* by David Bouchard and Roy Henry Vickers aloud to the class. Facilitate a discussion inviting students to share how they felt about the messages of the story. Then ask students to connect these themes back to the article (e.g., European destruction of the land through over-hunting, over-fishing, deforestation, mining, and destruction of habitat; Indigenous ways of knowing, valuing of land, teachings of the elders, hope that Canadians will see the negative impacts their actions have had on the land and take a stand to change their attitude and take action). Ask students to share one action that they can personally take to honour and respect the land.

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