

Making Connections with First Nations Communities

The key to using these resources is to focus on local First Nations communities as much as possible. While the resources suggest general ideas for your classroom, they need to be supported by authentic content that relates to local First Nations communities. This means making connections with members of the communities wherever possible, and learning about how First Nations governance works in practice.

How you approach these activities may depend on where your school is located:

First Nations Community

For schools in a First Nations community, students will likely focus on their community. Students may have direct experience with the local government and may have family members who are involved in traditional and band council governments. The First Nations language may be taught in the school.

Public Schools that serve one or more local First Nations communities

For public schools which serve one or more First Nations communities, there likely is a relationship built up between the school and community. They may have a large number of students from one or more local communities, with established formal relationships between school or school district and community. The First Nations language may be taught in schools.


Schools with a significant population of First Nations students from different communities

For town or city schools which have a significant number of First Nations students from different communities, build an understanding of the traditional territories on which the school is located. As well, build on the strengths of the knowledge of the students in the class, where appropriate. (Don't necessarily expect First Nations students to want to or be able to speak about governance related to their home communities.)

Schools with few First Nations students

Even though your school may have few or no First Nations students, it is still important to incorporate First Nations content. For schools with few First Nations students, build an understanding of the traditional territories on which the school is located. Identify ways to establish connections with other schools with significant numbers of First Nations students and First Nations communities. In their studies students could undertake comparative studies of governance systems in different parts of the province.

Wherever possible, it is important to build a relationship with local First Nations so that learning about local governance can be as authentic as possible.

 *Indigenous Relations* (Indigenous Relations Press 2019) by Bob Joseph is a useful book if you are unsure of appropriate protocols when meeting or communicating with First Nations.

Protocols for Connecting with the Community

It is important to understand and practice the local protocols in areas such as:

- Inviting Elders and other knowledgeable community members into the classroom to speak
- Respecting the natural world when going out on field trips
- Visiting First Nations lands and territories
- Interviewing people
- Holding special events such as a celebratory feast
- Developing units with local content

Most communities have protocols in place to be followed when engaging with Elders and knowledge-keepers. This may include showing respect by offering a gift to the person, or perhaps to the land when on a field trip.

Make contact with the local First Nations communities through workers in schools or through the local First Nations Government or Band Council. There may be a School District staff member such as an Aboriginal/Indigenous District Principal, Helping Teacher, Resource Worker or other liaison person to help with the initial contact. Guidance can be sought from local learning centres and community organizations such as Friendship Centres, First Nations government offices, Tribal Councils or cultural centres.

It is important to work with the appropriate agencies to make sure that certain Elders and knowledge-keepers do not get over-worked or called upon too often. Also, note that some smaller First Nations do not have the resources to work directly with school districts.

Some activities suggest that classes visit nearby First Nations communities to learn about governance. Ensure that before such visits take place, you ask permission from appropriate authorities.

All traditional knowledge shared by local First Nations is inherently their intellectual property.

Protocols: Welcome and Acknowledgment

It is important to understand the difference between a Welcome to a First Nations traditional territory and an Acknowledgment of traditional territory. Both are continuations of protocols that have been practiced by First Nations for millennia.

A **Welcome** is a public act made by members of the First Nation on whose territories an event is taking place. The form of the welcome depends on the particular protocols of the Nation. It may be a welcoming address, a prayer or in some gatherings, a traditional dance or song, and is decided upon by the First Nation.

An **Acknowledgment** is an act of respect for local First Nations and their traditional territories. It is a recognition of their ongoing presence on the land in the past, present and future. Respect and recognition are a key part of Reconciliation.

An acknowledgment is usually given at the beginning of an assembly, meeting, class, performance or other public gathering. It is the responsibility of the leader, host, or MC of the event to give the Acknowledgement. In some gatherings, individual speakers may also add their personal acknowledgments. In many schools, an acknowledgment is made at the beginning of the school day.

If you are not sure of the correct Acknowledgement to use, see your district Aboriginal or Indigenous Education Department.

First Nations Guest Speaker Considerations

It is important to follow protocols when inviting a member of a First Nations community or Aboriginal organization to a classroom or school. Below are some general considerations and processes. There are also often protocols specific to local communities. School district Aboriginal education departments or community education departments can also provide guidance regarding those specific protocols.

These considerations can also be adapted when taking students on field trips or into field learning experiences that will be led by, or facilitated by, a member of a First Nations community or Aboriginal organization.

Some of the topics included in this Teacher Resource Guide may be political in nature, with different opinions held within the same community. Be aware of remaining neutral, and where applicable invite speakers that represent different perspectives.

BC FIRST NATIONS LAND, TITLE, AND GOVERNANCE: INTRODUCTION

Before the Visit

- Determine the purpose of the visit (how it is connected to the curriculum or learning standards for the class or course). If it is not directly connected to the curriculum, be clear about the intended learning standards so that the guest visit is meaningful experience for all involved.
- It is a culturally appropriate protocol for guest speakers to be provided with a gift and/or honourarium for sharing their time and knowledge.
 - Consult with the school district's Aboriginal/Indigenous education department or First Nations community to determine the appropriate amount or gift (if the speaker has not already indicated an amount for an honourarium).
 - Determine where funds will come from in advance. Check to see if the school or PAC can contribute.
 - If the school and/or school district requires any paperwork to be completed before payment can be issued, ensure that this is done well in advance of the visit so that payment can be issued at the time of visit or as soon as possible afterward.
- Talk with the speaker about the details of the visit:
 - Date and time of the visit
 - The course and grade levels of the students
 - Approximate number of students
 - Let the speaker know what content/learning has led up to the visit.
- Ask the speaker about any specific needs:
 - Are there any hand-outs that need to be photocopied in advance, or any equipment or supplies needed?
 - Is there any specific information that students should know before the visit?
 - Are there any specific protocols that the students and adults need to be aware of and follow during the visit?
 - Is there anything else that will help make the visit more comfortable for the speaker (especially if it is an Elder)?
 - Would it help to have the classroom/space organized in a specific way?
 - Ask for permission to take photos or videotape (if desired).
- Ask the speaker for some background information that can be used to introduce the speaker to the students (for example, where the speaker is from, his or her role or occupation, noteworthy experiences or accomplishments).
- Arrange arrival details:
 - Ensure everyone knows where the speaker will be met. For example, arrange to have the speaker met in the parking lot, at the front door of the school, or in the main office.
 - In some situations, the speaker may need transportation from home.
 - If possible, include students in the greeting.

BC FIRST NATIONS LAND, TITLE, AND GOVERNANCE: INTRODUCTION

- Ensure the students are prepared prior to the visit:
 - Connect speaker's visit to students' previous learning
 - Review respectful behaviour with students, including non-verbal communication
 - Model for students how to introduce themselves
 - Brainstorm with students questions that they can ask
 - Prepare students to provide a thank-you to speaker
- Ensure office staff and administrators know that a guest is expected.

Day of Visit

- Prepare physical space of classroom. Set up any necessary equipment.
- Welcome guest, offering water/tea/coffee. Let them know where washrooms are located.
- Introduce speaker to students and if appropriate do acknowledgment of territory.
- If students will be introducing themselves to the speaker, consider a talking circle format, saying name and where they are from.
 - Ensure there is time for questions/discussion at the end of the session.
 - Have student(s) formally thank the speaker and present gift or honourarium.
 - If possible, debrief the session with speaker.
 - Walk the guest out.

*It is important that the teacher stay present for the session as this models for the students a valuing of the knowledge and time of the speaker. If any behavioural challenges occur, it is the teacher's responsibility to address them, not the speaker's.

After the Visit

- Debrief the session with the students.
- Do follow-up activity with students.
- Have students follow up with thank-you letter.
- Touch base with speaker to ensure that honourarium was received (if not presented on day of session).