

Planning For Instruction

Building A Local First Nations Library

To enhance students' knowledge about local First Nations communities, you can gather materials, or work with your school or district Aboriginal support teachers and your teacher-librarian to create such a collection of reference materials. Older students could also help to collect information.

Items in the collection can include books about the local First Nations, maps of the communities and traditional territories, tourism brochures, photographs (historical and contemporary), and copies of First Nations community newsletters.

These materials can be put on display for the duration of the unit, and kept available at other times of the year.

Monitoring Governance and Treaty in the News

Today many changes are happening in the realm of First Nations governance and treaty negotiations, including the devolution of the Indian Act. As well, some media have a growing awareness of Indigenous issues and often present special departments or features created by Indigenous people to discuss important topics.

Help students understand the relevancy of the topics they are studying by following developments in the news. Students and teachers can bring in articles or report on items that they have seen that relate to topics under study.

As well, many of the activities can be enhanced by having students find out the latest information regarding topics such as treaties, moves towards self-government, court cases or economic agreements.

Talking Circles

Circles are a traditional First Nations format for discussion and decision making. There are different types of discussion circles, such as Talking Circle, Sharing Circles, or Healing Circles, and the protocols for usage depend on the purpose. The term Talking Circle is sometimes used interchangeably with Sharing Circle. Definitions of these terms may differ depending on the context of the user.

It is important to understand that the type of discussion circles generally used in classrooms are not intended to be used for any therapeutic purpose. Classroom-based Talking or Sharing Circles are not Healing Circles (the latter needing to be facilitated by skilled leaders in specific contexts, and in First Nations contexts, often include additional cultural protocols).

BC FIRST NATIONS LAND, TITLE, AND GOVERNANCE: INTRODUCTION

Talking Circles in classrooms are usually used to demonstrate that everyone is connected and that every person in the circle has an equal voice. They also ensure that everyone can see and hear the speaker.

In classrooms, they can be used for a variety of reasons and at different grade levels (i.e. be a part of consensus building for decision-making, as ways to help debrief students' experiences, or supporting learning from each other). It is appropriate to use Talking Circles to discuss some of the topics in these resources.

It is important to ensure that students understand and respect the Talking Circle process. This may require some teaching and modelling of expected behaviours in a Talking Circle. As well, students should understand the reasons for using a Talking Circle instead of other types of discussion.

In traditional settings, an object like a talking stick or feather may be used to denote who is the speaker of the moment. It is passed from person to person, and only the person holding it may speak. You can use any item that may be special or has meaning to the class. You could engage the class in choosing what that object is. For example, it could be a feather, shell, a unique stone, or a specially made stick. It should only be used during Talking Circles so it retains its significance.

Here are some basic guidelines for a Talking Circle:

- The group sits in a circle, so everyone can see each other.
- One person introduces the topic for discussion (often the leader of the group).
- Only the person holding the special object speaks; everyone else listens respectfully giving the speaker their full attention.
- Everyone is given a chance to speak, but someone may pass the object without speaking if they wish.
- Speakers use “I” statements, stating what they are thinking or feeling, rather than commenting on what other people have said.
- Once everyone has had a chance to speak, the object can be passed around again giving people a chance to continue the discussion.

When using a Talking Circle to discuss topics introduced in these resources, it is important to give students time to reflect following the discussion. They can consider how the discussion affected their opinions or ideas, and they can assess how they felt during the activity, what they learned, and what they might do differently next time.

More suggestions for learning more about using Talking Circles may be found at First Nations Pedagogy Online, <https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html>.

Dealing with Sensitive Topics

Some of the topics discussed in these activities may be sensitive for some students. How you deal with them depends on the age, maturity, and backgrounds of students, and teachers will be the best judge of how to approach the material.

In presenting sensitive issues, teachers are not expected to be experts on all topics. Rather their role is as guide and facilitator. As students work through material that might be sensitive, teachers should be aware of the students' potential reactions to the topics examined.

It is important to convey to students that the purpose for understanding the past is to be part of a more positive future.

For some students, the topics discussed may be sensitive if they have personal connections with the topic. For others, the topics may be controversial, particularly if students feel they have no connection with the issues. Also, in classrooms with new Canadians, teachers will need to be aware that some topics may echo feelings that resonate with some immigrant experiences.

Some considerations for dealing with topics with sensitivity include the following:

- Some sensitive topics are best taught through discussion rather than direct instruction.
- The teacher is responsible for ensuring exploration of sensitive issues so that discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance.
- Additional time may be needed to deal with students' concerns and questions.
- Issues may arise for students both in formal discussions and informal conversations in and around the classroom.
- Discussions will need to be closed appropriately. The teacher may need to play a role in ensuring potential conflict is contained in the context of the classroom.
- Students may need to be taught or provided with the tools and skills to discuss some of these topics rationally in the school and community.

Encouraging Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning fits well with a First Peoples' pedagogical approach and First Peoples Principles of Learning. Inquiry-based approaches range from teacher-directed to student-directed. Approaching a topic from different levels of inquiry can help with customizing activities to students' needs

Structured Inquiry: Students investigate a teacher-presented question through a prescribed process.

Guided Inquiry: Students investigate a teacher-presented question using student designed or chosen processes. Students develop processes for inquiry, synthesize, and communicate the learning independently. Teacher is a guide, providing ongoing feedback and posing further questions.

Open or Independent Inquiry: Students participate in an activity in which they generate the questions based on an area being studied, design the processes for inquiry, synthesize, and communicate the learning independently.

Generally, inquiry-based learning:

- involves some direct instruction: this occurs as needed—primarily when students require specific information or skills to move forward
- is student driven: students make decisions and take responsibility for their learning rooted in the Big Ideas set out in the curriculum; the teacher's role is to connect the ideas with the interests and ongoing questions of students
- is authentic: students are provided with opportunities to explore real-life experiences based on curricular expectations
- encourages reflection on learning: students discuss daily why, how, and what they are learning
- requires patience and time: students are given the time needed to explore their ideas and thinking
- needs modelling: teachers model curiosity, how to create questions, engage with texts, and reflect
- requires teacher support: teachers intervene at appropriate moments to make sure students understand the concepts and processes, and are engaged in learning

More information about inquiry based learning can be found at the website Edutopia.org. See the page, "What the Heck is Inquiry-Based Learning," online at <https://tinyurl.com/fnesc902>.

Tips for Implementation

This resource guide is meant as a starting point, a place to find background information and inspiration for developing appropriate learning activities in your class. But it can't be everything to every teacher. It is expected that teachers will bring their own teaching styles and their students' learning styles when developing lessons based on the suggested activities.

Here are a few suggestions for adapting the units for your students.

- Use all parts of the resource guide with your students.
 - For example, share the unit's Overview, Essential Understandings and Guiding Questions with the class as you introduce the unit.
 - For older students you may find parts of the Introduction useful, such as the First Peoples Principles of Learning (page 7) or The Story of First Nations Governance in BC (page 14).
 - Use the Backgrounders as a starting point when discussing a topic. These can be read aloud for younger students. For older students they can be used for group analysis in a station approach, with follow-up in class discussions.
 - The Glossary can be a valuable reference not only for teachers but also for students. One idea that has been used is to build vocabulary flash cards for the unit based on the glossary.
 - Use the Sample Response Keys for some of the Blackline Masters for students as self-assessment.
- Check out the activities at different grade levels and adapt them to your lessons.
- If your students find some of the textual materials (Blackline Masters and Backgrounders) too difficult to read independently, you can use a variety of strategies to ensure they engage with the new information. For example:
 - Some Blackline Masters have similar information written at an easier reading level.
 - Use a projector to show pages on the white board rather than making hard copies. As a class, read through the information and highlight key pieces of information. All students are able to see the information at the same time, and working together as a class helps overcome readability challenges.
- Use a variety of approaches to engage students, such as:
 - Station activities in small groups
 - Inside-Outside discussion format
- Springboard off ideas in the resource guide to create activities appropriate to your students. If the activity or Blackline Masters aren't a fit for your students, adapt and change them.
- Go outside! If the weather cooperates, take the class outside for activities such as discussion circles or four-corner activities. It may be possible to meet with guest speakers in an outdoor location.

