

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

PRE-TEACH/PRE-ACTIVITY

Have students look at the Indigenous languages and/or language groups that are displayed on the map. Discuss where this data came from (the 2016 census) and what biases or problems this data may have, such as the fear of self-identifying based on historical reasons or current gaps in data. Take some time to look at how censuses are performed, who participates in them, and what they can learn from the data that is and is not collected. Refer to the online and poster map of Indigenous Languages in Canada featured in the 2017 November/December issue of *Canadian Geographic*, and explore how students feel about the number of speakers each language has and what the current data means for the people who speak each language. Additionally, look at the language families listed and the names of each language used by the federal government in collecting this data. Discuss with students why these may not be the correct names and how they can help in the reconciliation process by using the correct language names.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will learn about the number and diversity of languages and language groups spoken by Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
- Students will learn that Indigenous Peoples in Canada speak many languages and that some languages are endangered.
- Students will learn about the importance of language and the ties it has to culture.
- Students will become engaged in learning a local Indigenous language.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

FIRST NATIONS

“One of the first acts of colonization and settlement is to name the newly ‘discovered’ land in the language of the colonizers or the ‘discoverers.’ This is done despite the fact that there are already names for these places that were given by the original inhabitants. These names are more significant because they have some sort of connection to the people. This connection may have a spiritual, cultural or historical significance as other First Nations often call these places by the same names.”

“The land provided the people with all that was needed to exist. It contained a memory of activities that ensured life and survival. This is embedded with the names of the many landmarks. Manahcâ pânihk is ‘where the bows were harvested.’ Manawânis was ‘where eggs were gathered.’ Astahcikowin was ‘where food was cached.’ Pionapiwin was ‘where the winter camp was established.’ sokanihk was a name given to areas ‘where rivers were crossed.’ Some names had animal or human connections — Kiseyinô Kâsâsakitisihk is the ‘old man lying on his back,’ while Kakwayohk is the ‘porcupine hills.’”

— from “Language” by Bruce Cutknife, in the *First Nations volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*

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Our languages are central to our ceremonies, our relationships to our lands, the animals, to each other, our understandings, of our worlds, including the natural world, our stories and our laws.

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— National Chief Perry Bellegarde, *Opening Remarks to the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Culture and Heritage, Orford, Que., Aug. 22, 2017*

In 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that an Indigenous Languages Act was under development to help support the recovery, reclamation, revitalization and maintenance of First Nations languages. The Assembly of First Nations has been advocating for and advising on this legislation. There is also an ongoing process of community engagement in the development of this act.

In some of territories in Canada, there already exists legislation that recognizes the official status of Indigenous languages. In the Northwest Territories, Chipewyan, Cree, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey and Tłı̄chǫ are official languages alongside English and French (N.W.T. Official Languages Act of 1988).

— from *Assembly of First Nations website* (<http://www.afn.ca/policy-sectors/languages/>)



INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

MÉTIS

“The Métis are primarily known for speaking Michif, the official language of the Métis Nation. However, the Métis speak other languages, including French Michif, a dialect of Canadian French with some Algonquian linguistic features, which is spoken in St. Laurent, Man., St. Ambroise, Man., and St. Louis, Sask.; Northern Michif, a Plains Cree dialect with extensive borrowing of French nouns, which is spoken in northwest Saskatchewan in and around Île-à-la-Crosse; nêhinawêwin (Swampy Cree or the ‘N’ dialect), which is spoken by the Métis in Cumberland House, Sask., and in bordering areas of Manitoba; nêhiyawêwin (Plains Cree or ‘Y’ dialect), which is spoken in southern Saskatchewan, Lac La Biche, Alta., and on the Alberta Métis Settlements; nakawēmowin (Saulteaux or Plains Ojibwa), which is spoken in the Interlake region of Manitoba in such places as Duck Bay; dënesų́tiné (Chipewyan/Dene), which is spoken by Métis in La Loche, Sask., Fort Chipewyan, Alta., and throughout Northwest Territories. The Métis also spoke Bungi or Bungee, a Métis dialect of English that includes many Cree and Scots Gaelic words. It was spoken in Manitoba wherever Scots-Métis settled. Métis working in the fur trade also spoke Slavey Jargon (Slavey mixed with French and Cree) in what is now southern Yukon, and Chinook Jargon or Chinook Wawa (a trade language made up of Nootka, Chinook, French and English words) throughout the Pacific Northwest.

In earlier generations, the Métis were probably the most multilingual people in Canada — they spoke their own languages as well as a variety of First Nations and settler languages. Today, the Métis may speak Michif as well as Cree, Saulteaux, Dene and various settler

languages. Besides speaking several First Nations and European languages, the Métis also invented Michif, French Michif, Northern Michif and Bungi (a Cree/Scots-Gaelic Creole). All Métis heritage languages are endangered. Losing any of them would be tragic because that would mean losing a rich Oral Tradition, healing traditions, spiritual systems, communitarian values and harvesting strategies.

Michif is spoken in all three Prairie provinces, and into Montana and North Dakota. Michif-speaking communities include those in central and southeastern Saskatchewan (from the Battlefords north to Debden and south-

east towards Yorkton and into Qu’Appelle), southern and central Manitoba (St-Lazare, Camperville and Duck Bay), and northern North Dakota, where, in the Turtle Mountains, the language is known as ‘Turtle Mountain Chippewa-Cree.’

While Michif is one of many hybrid languages throughout the world, linguists maintain that it is unique, demonstrating the

Métis’ genius for fusing disparate cultures into a coherent synthesis. It is composed of the Plains Cree dialect (with some Saulteaux) verbs/verb phrases and French (with some English) nouns/noun phrases. Its origins date to the late 18th century. It is spelled phonetically and does not yet have a standardized orthography. Traditionally, many Elders called Michif ‘Cree,’ while referring to themselves as ‘Michifs’ or ‘métchifs’ — a variation of ‘métif’ or ‘mitif,’ an archaic French spelling of Métis.

French Michif, or Métis French — traditionally spoken by the Métis in St. Louis, Sask., St. Laurent, Man., St. Eustache, Man., and other communities in Western Canada

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— is considered by linguists to be a dialect of Canadian French. However, French Michif is not easily intelligible to francophones. It differs from standard Canadian French in numerous ways, including its lack of gender differentiation for personal pronouns, its occasional borrowing of Cree and Saukteaux syntax and its different French vocabulary, vowel pronunciation and possessive construction. French Michif is one of the ancestor languages of Michif, since both languages have nearly identical French components (which evolved from the French spoken by the French-Canadian voyageurs). Until recently, francophones stigmatized French Michif speakers for speaking ‘bad’ French in communities such as St. Laurent, Man., and St. Eustache, Man. Consequently, the language was not handed down to succeeding generations. Like Michif, French Michif is spelled phonetically and does not have a standardized orthography.

Northern Michif is spoken in northwest Saskatchewan, with most speakers living in or near Île-à-la-Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, Beauval and Green Lake. According to linguists, Northern Michif is a Woods Cree dialect (sometimes referred to as the Rock Cree) with some French (noun) word borrowings. This form of Michif is strongly supported by community members and is taught in schools, most notably Rossignol Elementary School in Île-à-la-Crosse. This language has a standardized (Cree) orthography, although its few French words may be spelled phonetically or in standardized French. Oral history indicates that Heritage Michif was spoken in northwest Saskatchewan but that it was replaced by Cree, Dene and Northern Michif.

Unfortunately, colonization has had a devastating impact on the Métis’ collective identity, particularly

through the near eradication of Métis heritage languages. For almost a century, the Métis bore the stigma of having Indigenous heritage, having mixed ancestry and of being labelled as ‘rebels.’ This meant that many Métis downplayed or hid their heritage for cultural safety in order to better fit into the non-Indigenous mainstream. Moreover, non-Indigenous people often ridiculed the Métis for speaking Michif in the school system and in the community. This teasing led many Métis to become ashamed of their identity. Moving to cities also meant that most Métis lost their Michif language and culture. The end result was a loss of heritage language retention among at least three generations of Métis, which means that most Métis today (perhaps 90-95 per cent) are unable to have a simple conversation in any of their heritage languages. The vast majority of those who still speak Métis heritage languages regularly are elderly. As a result, English has become the working and living language of the Métis Nation, with French still used in some Métis communities.

Today, passing on the Michif language to young people is a concern for many Métis. Michif speakers and Métis institutions such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute and the Louis Riel Institute are producing Michif language books, music and websites. The push to revive Michif and restore it as a functional language has also been undertaken by the Métis National Council and its governing members. Michif is the official language of the Métis Nation.”

— from “Languages” in the Métis volume of the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

INUIT

“Globally, Inuit divide themselves into two closely related groups based on language, environmental factors and certain cultural features. The first is the Yupik who occupy coastal southwestern Alaska, including the Nunivak and St. Lawrence islands, and a small sector of the south-eastern Chukchi Peninsula in Russia. The second group includes the Inupiat of north Alaska and eastern Russia, the Inuit of Canada, and the Inuit of Greenland.

Of these 172,000 Inuit, 2,000 live in Russia, 50,000 in Alaska, 65,000 in Canada and 55,000 in Greenland. Although certain differences in culture and language should be expected over such a vast expanse of Arctic and Subarctic territory, one of the truly amazing aspects of our culture is the extent of similarity from one group to another. You will find commonalities in tools, language, stories and traditions as you travel from the eastern shore of Greenland west across Canada and Alaska to the shores of Siberia.

In the 1920s, for example, Knud Rasmussen, an Inuit-Danish ethnographer born in Greenland, travelled by dog team from Greenland, west across Canada to the north coast of Alaska. As he did so, he was able to collect a vast quantity of information that we as Inuit can now use to help us understand our history and our cultural traditions. During his epic voyage, Rasmussen was able to understand, without great difficulty, all of the dialects he encountered along the way. In addition to language, Inuit from Siberia to Greenland share a similar cultural history — at least up to the time of contact with the outside world. We share many of the same values, stories, traditions and technology; and of course, Inuit

everywhere take pride in being able to make our life comfortable and sustainable in what is so often described by outsiders as a hostile, even unlivable environment.

In Canada, the introduction of writing systems to Inuit varied from region to region as a result of colonization. It was mainly through contact with missionaries, but also under the influence of government officials, Inuit and non-Inuit linguists that strong regional views about the language developed.

In northern Labrador, now called Nunatsiavut, Moravian missionaries from Germany opened their first mission in Nain as early as 1771. The first written form of Inuktitut in what is now Canada was soon introduced, following the writing system that was similar to that used in Greenland, using roman orthography.

Anglican, Roman Catholic and other proselytizing missionaries introduced other writing systems in other regions, based on both roman and syllabic scripts. Roman orthography was used in Labrador and in the west-

ern Arctic, and syllabics were used in the central and eastern Arctic, yet the ways in which roman and syllabic orthographies were used to represent particular Inuktitut sounds differed from region to region.

The syllabary was introduced in the 1870s to Inuit in northern Quebec, now Nunavik, when a Church of England (Anglican) missionary, Edmund Peck, adapted syllabic script for translation of parts of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and several hymns. Peck adapted the script that was already in use for the Cree



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INUIT

language, just south of Nunavik in the James Bay area. The syllabics had been developed in 1845 by James Evans, a Wesleyan (Methodist) missionary and then later adapted to Inuktitut by the Anglicans Edwin Watkins and John Horden.

In 1894, Peck returned to Cumberland Sound, an area in what is now Nunavut, and founded the first Anglican mission on Baffin Island, building the first church at Blacklead Island. Syllabics were subsequently introduced in the central Arctic, Kivalliq and Natsilingmiut by Catholic and Anglican missionaries in the early 1900s through Bible translations, but as noted above, the syllabic systems in use at that time were not always consistent.

This historical and religious history of syllabic script adopted by Inuit in Nunavik and Nunavut explains some of the social and cultural attachments around its

continued use today. This includes attachments to syllabic scripts in church literacy practices, but also in other contexts. This resulted in a number of inconsistencies that still exist, forming a total of nine writing systems now in use. These inconsistencies and the sheer number of scripts for a relatively small population of speakers inform the current drive to attempt to unify a writing system for Inuktitut, the term used for the Inuit language in all of Canada, across Inuit Nunangat.

There are 12 main dialects, and nine different writing systems and, in some cases, three ways of writing Inuktitut: the old unique syllabic orthography, the new Inuit Cultural Institute syllabic orthography and the roman orthography.”

—from *“Inuktitut Writing Systems”* in the Inuit volume of *the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Points of inquiry and activation related to the Giant Floor Map



- **Have students use List of Languages card to get an understanding of the estimated number of speakers in each Indigenous language family.** Discuss what students see and how the numbers will affect the future of these languages. Be sure to focus on the strong links between language, culture and identity.
- **Play a game on the map using the Simon Says cards, exchanging words or phrases from English or French with words or phrases in Indigenous languages.** Eliminate participants when they don't understand an instruction. Discuss their frustrations about the game as the languages changed and they understood less and less. When it is over, draw a connection to the experiences of students in residential schools, who were being punished for not understanding the language of instruction. Further along in your learning, play the game again to demonstrate students' learning of the new words.
- **Divide students into groups, and have each group use the ropes to broadly outline the different Indigenous language families displayed on the map.** For each group, have one student stand on the largest font size of language labels on the map and another student stand on the smallest font size. Explain that the font size represents how many people currently speak each language. Using a ruler to compare font sizes, have students put different coloured sticky notes on each language label to determine the most and least spoken languages. Once they are all labelled, have students make a graph to show the results and discuss the implications for each.
- **Using handheld or mobile devices, download the apps discussed in the resource section under languages, and have students learn new Indigenous words.** Have students use the blank cards provided in the teachers' kit to write down a new word. Once each student has learned a new word, have the student locate the language on the Giant Floor Map and place the word there.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Age appropriate application and experiential learning

ELEMENTARY

K-6

- **Have students design** labels and posters for things in their school in a local Indigenous language. When doing this, explore the spelling of First Nations, Métis and Inuit words for each item. Ask students if they notice anything about the words. Take a moment here to draw students' attention to the words and some of the similar but different spellings in different Indigenous dialects. Explain how this results from the lack of linguistic understanding from when languages were first recorded, which made spelling inconsistent. Traditionally, Indigenous languages have been passed on orally, not in written form. In addition, the practice of replacing Indigenous words with European words made it more difficult to retain and maintain Indigenous languages. Discuss how this is still an issue today.
- **Reach out to a local Indigenous group** and ask an Elder or community member to come to your class to teach students different words and phrases in their language. Once students are comfortable, have them teach the rest of the school on the morning announcements in a "Word of the Day" announcement.
- **Ask students to name (or rename)** things in their classroom, home or community using Indigenous ways of thinking (refer to the activities in Original Place Names). Have them explain their naming selection.

INTERMEDIATE

7-9

- **Explore the terms used by UNESCO to classify language vitality** (unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/language-vitality/), and determine who makes these decisions. How accurate are the classifications? For instance, although Tagish is listed as extinct, there are a few language learners today. Is it actually extinct? If there are recordings and documents out there, then it is not extinct. What can students do to help ensure that languages don't become extinct?
- **Have students research the Indian Act** (aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010193/1100100010194) and create skits or poems outlining how this document led to the destruction of Indigenous languages. Ask students to read different sections of the document and identify the type of language used and how it may have changed over the years. Have students identify key points that outline the rules and restrictions that this act enforces and discuss how these regulations affect the daily lives of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Ask your students to identify which policies would affect students the same age as them.
- **Using an online Michif dictionary** (metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php), or another Indigenous language dictionary, find all the names and terms that could relate to the Earth's physical system, particularly the atmosphere, biosphere and hydrosphere, as well as basic astronomy. Why do you think Métis chose to call these items the way they did in Michif?

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Age appropriate application and experiential learning

SECONDARY

10-12

- **Have students complete a survey** of languages spoken at home and graph the class' results. Discuss the diversity or homogeneity of the results and how this affects students' lives. Can they make connections between the spoken languages and the cultures of students?
- **Using the Endangered Languages card, have students research the Indigenous languages** in their area. Have students consider the data that is presented and why it differs from the data in the List of Languages card (e.g., several years have passed and demographics have changed, the way that languages are classified or identified may have expanded, the way language speakers are counted may differ). Create poster displays on each, noting their level of endangerment (or not). Be sure to reach out to local organizations, communities or post-secondary institutions to find out if there are current language programs in place to support the revitalization of local languages.
- **Discuss what exactly it means to learn a language.** Truly knowing a language means absorbing the very foundations of Indigenous identity. Learning the language engenders respect for self, for others and for all facets of nature. This in turn strengthens the human capacity to stand together. How does this statement relate to the process of going to a residential school?

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES



DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING

- **Have students reflect** on their own connection to language and the important role it plays in their lives. Have students present this in the format of their choosing.
- **Have students greet each other** in the morning using the local Indigenous language.
- **See how many words in Indigenous languages** you can incorporate into your classroom. Make multilingual tags for objects, and have students go about the classroom placing them on the correct objects.



LEARNING TO ACTION

- **Incorporate the goal of learning one new word** in a local Indigenous language each day into your classroom routine.
- **Have students research how to revitalize or maintain Indigenous languages.** There are multiple free apps students can download to explore and learn about a specific Indigenous language in Canada.
- **Invite an Elder or language speaker** into your classroom and have them share with your class stories in their language. Create an Indigenous message board using key words so students can use and practise Indigenous languages throughout the school year.
- **On the morning announcements,** provide a greeting or welcome in your local Indigenous language.