

SYMBOLS



CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION'S

ONLINE
Classroom

Subjects:

Symbols, Art, Language, Culture, Community

Time:

45 minutes

Grades:

4-9 (can be modified for other grades)

What to know before getting started:

Symbolism is important in all aspects of life. A symbol is a thing (often a visual sign or image) that represents something else. Sometimes, the same symbol can be used for multiple purposes. It may look the same, but it could have a very different meaning depending on the context or circumstances. Colour choice, size, placement and orientation can also play a significant role in interpretation. For example, the infinity symbol has a mathematical application but has also been adopted by the Métis in modern times to represent the immortality and unity of the Métis Nation. **Use the following activity to learn about symbols that have important meanings to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and consider the use of these and other symbols (and their meanings) in your daily life.**

Materials you will need:

- Writing/drawing materials
- Paper
- The Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada logo breakdown sheet

Activity time!

Shaun Vincent, a Winnipeg-based leader in Indigenous design, was responsible for creating the logo that adorns *Canadian Geographic's Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*. In coming up with the design, Vincent said, "Designing logos for Indigenous organizations often presents a unique challenge in situations where many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities are represented by a single visual icon. In these circumstances, my goal is always to create a balanced image that will connect with all nations, respectfully and fairly." Vincent's overall objective was to create a multifaceted logo that geographically highlighted all Indigenous culture in Canada.

Look at the logo and the different elements hidden within it using the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada* logo breakdown sheet. The symbols, and their meanings, are described individually. Take a look at each element, noting how they each have their own dedicated space within the logo, and the meaning that Vincent was trying to convey by including them.

Visit the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada* [website](#) and open one of the Métis, Inuit or First Nations volumes. Browse the table of contents, choosing a few topics to explore in greater detail. As you do, try and pick out different symbols shown in the artwork or mentioned in the text. Are these symbols related to the history, material culture, economy, language or hunting practices of the associated community, or something else?

Now, discuss with your classmates, friends or family, the power of a symbol and the underlying meaning it can have. Pick three symbols you have seen in the past; these can be from anywhere (i.e., the internet, places you've travelled to, food products, on the television, in books or magazines). Draw them as best you can, and label each one with one or two keywords that describe their meaning.

Brainstorm what kinds of symbols you see most often in your community (i.e., in stores, in parks, on road signs, in newspapers). Are those symbols unique to your community or are they used elsewhere in Canada or the world? Do they always have the same meaning or can they represent different things when used in different situations? Do these symbols need to be accompanied by words to have meaning or is their meaning clear from the symbol alone?

Finally, compare the symbols you came across in the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada* logo and website with the symbols you identified from your community. This exercise reminds us that it is important to embrace multiculturalism and appreciate diversity. In looking at these symbols, what are some of the things you learned about different cultures? Did you identify any similarities between the meanings of certain symbols used in your community and in others?



Use your remaining time to brainstorm and create a logo that represents your life history. Think of the different aspects in your life that shape your identity or are important to you. Think of where you are from, where you have been, and where you are going. Think of the people who have had an influence on your journey and the lessons you have cherished along the way. Your logo can take any shape, can be any colour, and can have any number of shapes and symbols that you feel best represent you.

Stop and think: Do you think your personal logo will change over time?
Why or why not?

Share your learning adventure with us!

We want to see your amazing logos! Share them on social media by tagging [@CanGeoEdu](#) on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram and using the hashtag [#OnlineClassroom!](#)

Other ways to complete this activity:

- Arrange a walk around your community to identify symbols that are commonly used.
- Create your logo using digital software.