

# CONVERSATIONAL MICHIF #2

## Subject/topic

Language, Social Studies, Arts

## Overview/focus questions

This lesson focuses on the values of the Métis by examining Michif words and phrases used in the *Conversational Michif* video. How can phrases represent certain values?

## Developed by

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## Time

60 mins

## Grade level

Grades 4-8

## Learning Goals

Students will:

- Connect words and phrases to values.
- Examine and discuss Michif phrases.
- Listen to phrases in Michif.
- Practise speaking Michif.

## Materials Needed

- Conversational Michif card (one per student)
- *Conversational Michif* video
- Whiteboard or blackboard
- Writing tools
- Michif dictionary or access to an online dictionary or app:
  - Gabriel Dumont Institute - [Michif Dictionary](#)
  - [Michif To Go \(Google Play\)](#) or [Heritage Michif To Go \(The App Store\)](#) apps

## Lesson Description

### Teacher preparation and background information:

In Canada, there are three recognized groups of Indigenous Peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. The Métis Nation are self-defining people from a specific region (mainly the Canadian western prairies but also parts of British Columbia, Ontario, Northwest Territories, North Dakota, and Montana) with a unique culture, language, and history. The Métis are those who self-identify as Métis and are descended from Indigenous and European/Euro-Canadian people, and who acknowledge the conscious choice of their ancestors to identify as Métis because of a common history and past.

The official language of the Métis Nation is Michif, though there are other languages spoken by the Métis as well. Michif is spoken in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba, as well as Montana and North Dakota. Dating to the late 18th century, Michif is a hybrid language that blends together different languages, most commonly English, French, and Cree.

In the past, the Métis spoke many different languages: those of different settlers, First Nations, as well as their own. Michif, French Michif, Northern Michif, and Bungi are all languages that were invented by the Métis and these languages are all endangered due to colonization and its impacts. Losing these heritage languages would mean losing Métis traditions and values.

In this lesson plan, Heritage Michif (Michif) will be the language used. Words are spelled phonetically, and the words do not have a set spelling. The Métis' ability to blend contrasting cultures' languages into one demonstrates the ingenuity of the Métis, and the uniqueness of the Michif language.

Michif is an oral language and, until very recently, had not been written down. There is no standardized orthography, and so spelling will vary depending on the speaker and region, as words are spelled phonetically. When learning Michif, the focus is not so much on the spelling and the writing of the words, as on the speaking. There are also other Michif languages, including French Michif and Northern Michif. As such, teachers will see words spelled in numerous ways throughout the lesson plans and videos in the Future of Michif project. The Michif primarily referred to and used in these lesson plans and through the online dictionaries and apps is known as Michif or Heritage Michif; however, you will see other spellings and pronunciations.

You will also hear some speakers in the videos use the term "Michif" to describe a people, and not only a language. The Michif are Métis who speak Michif, versus other languages that the Métis speak such as Cree or French.

Teachers should watch the *Conversational Michif* video prior to the lesson to become familiar with the Michif words and phrases that will be used in the lesson.

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Optional:

- *Conversational Michif* video script cards (for reference)

## Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

### Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Geographic perspective

### Inquiry Process

- Communicate

### Student activities:

**Minds on:** The teacher will share a value that is important to them and provide examples of how they practise that value.

**Action:** Students will watch the *Conversational Michif* video, discuss values that are shown, and create a short Michif conversation with a partner.

**Conclusion:** The students will share their scripted conversations and they will begin to have a greater understanding of Michif.

## Lesson Implementation

### Minds on

The teacher will discuss a value that is of importance to them by making a personal statement and connection to that value. For example:

“Today we are going to be talking about values. Respect is a value I try to practise daily. It is important to me because I was taught how to be respectful by my parents when I was growing up. I show respect through actions and words by being thankful, kind, caring, and welcoming to others. To show I am being respectful and thankful I might say “thank you” or “maarsii.” I show students that they are welcome in the classroom by saying something like “Hello, come on in, good to see you.” I may ask the older people or pleu vyeu in my life if they want food or drink to show I care about and respect them.”

Prompt students by asking them what values are important to them. Ask them how they show or honour those values in their daily lives, including the words and phrases they use. Possible discussion question: What are some things you say to ensure you are practising the good values that are important to you and your family?

Create a table on the white board with the headings Value, Michif Phrase, English Phrase, and write down the expressions and values that students share on the board as you are gathering their answers. Pause to discuss and guide students throughout this process. If needed, use a physical or online Michif dictionary to assist in the Michif translation.

### Action

Hand out the *Conversational Michif* worksheet. Tell students they will be viewing a video titled *Conversational Michif* and that they will be looking for different values that are expressed throughout the video.

Show students the section of the video where the teacher Lyla is teaching Jaylin. Ask students to raise their hand if they hear an expression in Michif that represents a specific value. Pause the video so that students have time to write things down in their worksheet.

Some values that may be heard are:

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- Caring: Taanishi kiiya?/How are you?
- Kindness: Ni miyeutayn aen nakishkataan./It's nice to meet you.

Next, watch the scripted conversation at Lyla's house when she is welcoming guests and ask students to independently record at least four values and expressions in Michif that demonstrate those values on the provided worksheet.

Examples of values that can be heard when Lyla is welcoming the guests into her home are:

- Hospitality: Pihtikway miiz zaamii./Welcome/come in my friends.
- Generosity: -Lii fleur poor kiiya./Here are flowers for you.
- Gratitude: Maarsii./Thank you.
- Caring: Taanishi ta faamii?/How's your family?

Have students share their findings and discuss as a class the values connected to the phrases heard.

Next, pair students together to create their own short conversations in Michif that will showcase a specific value. Let them know that they will be presenting their conversations in Michif and English and their classmates will be guessing which value(s) they chose to highlight in the conversation.

Show or perform for students the example conversation below which highlights gratitude and appreciation. Give the partnered students a few minutes to discuss what values are represented.

**Student 1:** Boozhoor! Taanishi kiiya moon naamii? (Hello! How are you my friend?)

**Student 2:** Taanishi! Maarsii! Ji bayn, kiiya maaka? (Hello! Thank you! I am good, what about you?)

**Student 1:** Si kwareek, maarsii! Miiyooshin aen waapamitaan miina. (I'm okay, thank you! It is good to see you again.)

**Student 2:** Sa si boon. Niishta miiyiishin aen waapamatin miina! (That is good. It is good to see you again too.)

## Conclusion and Consolidation

Students will gain a greater understanding of the Métis/Michif culture by looking closely at language used in everyday conversations and by sharing examples and discussing the values that are found within conversations.

Give students 10-15 minutes (or longer depending on students' level) to create conversations. Have students use the Michif To Go or Heritage Michif To Go app, the Heritage Michif Dictionary, or another Michif dictionary to assist them in the process. Students can write down their script in the space provided in the Conversational Michif worksheet.

When students are ready to perform their conversation, have them do so in

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both Michif and English. Ensure that the class is encouraging and supportive of their peers who are speaking Michif. Have the audience guess which values the students were highlighting in their conversation based on the phrases used.

When all groups have shared, tell students, “Today we connected many values to words and expressions in Michif. As you continue to learn Michif, you gain a greater understanding of how the language has helped to create the world view of Métis/Michif people.”

## Extend your geographical thinking

- Create a wall of words and phrases in Michif.
- Investigate the cultural, political, and geographical history of the Métis Nation.
- Explore the history and development of the Michif language.
- Research Métis values.

## Modifications

- Scaffolding: Complete all activities together with pre-selected phrases that emphasize specific values.
- Use think, pair, share strategies when discussing values represented in the video and conversations to ensure everyone has a chance to share.
- Use print resources like the Taanishi Books Series by Wilfred Burton and Angie Caron to extend the lesson.
- Have the script or subtitles available for the Conversational Michif video.
- Use a projector to display students’ scripts for the class to allow students to read along as they are listening to the performance.

## Assessment Opportunities

- Observational notes can be taken during the video to assess connections students make between the Michif phrases and values.
- Observational notes can be taken of students who are sharing during the video and during classmates’ presentations to assess level of participation.
- Assessing students’ written work: The Michif Conversation worksheet can be assessed for students’ ability to connect Michif words and phrases to values and to examine Michif phrases used in scripts.
- Observational notes can be taken to assess students’ ability to create and perform a short conversation in Michif.
- Students can exchange their script with another group prior to performing for peer feedback.

## Sources and Additional Resources

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- *The Giving Tree: A retelling of a Traditional Métis Story* by Leah Dorion
- *Michif Dictionary 2013* by Norman Fleury
- Gabriel Dumont Institute Michif Dictionary
- *Taanishi Book - Emergent Readers Series* by Angie Caron and Wilfred Burton
- Michif To Go (Google Play) or Heritage Michif To Go (The App Store) apps
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada - Métis