

TRADITIONAL HARVESTING #2: WALKING WITH AN ELDER



Subject/topic

Language, Social studies, Harvesting

Overview/focus questions

Students will learn about the traditional growing and harvesting of plants important to the Métis, and they will create a journal entry from the perspective of a child learning about harvesting from an Elder in the past.

Developed by

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Time

45-60 minutes

Grade level

Grades 4-7

Learning Goals

Students will:

- Recognize the importance of harvesting to the Métis, both today and in the past.
- Be able to identify and describe the uses of several of the plants in the Traditional Harvesting video, using English and Michif terms.

Materials Needed

- *Traditional Harvesting* video
- Harvesting Journal Entry template
- Michif Terms teacher card
- [Gabriel Dumont Institute Michif Dictionary](#)
- [Michif To Go \(Google Play\)](#) and [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.

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 spoken by the Métis, such as Cree or French.

The Métis traditionally obtained food through hunting, gathering, and farming. They lived according to the natural cycles of the land on which they lived or traversed. Métis hunted or trapped bison, wolves, deer, migratory ducks and rabbits (to name a few), with each season bringing different sources of food. Plants such as raspberries, Saskatoon berries and chokecherries were gathered or harvested. The late spring and early summer may have seen some people staying put on the land, growing wheat.

Prior to the lesson, teachers should watch the *Traditional Harvesting* video to learn about traditional Métis foods and harvesting methods and to become familiar with the terms for Métis foods.

TRADITIONAL HARVESTING #2: WALKING WITH AN ELDER

Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Student Activities:

Minds on: Students will have a discussion about what harvesting means and their own personal experiences with it. Students will also learn about the importance of harvesting to the Métis.

Action: Students will watch the video Traditional Harvesting to learn about some of the foods grown and harvested by the Métis. They will also learn some relevant terms in Michif.

Conclusion: Students will discuss the teachings from the video and will create a journal entry from the perspective of a child in the past being taught about harvesting by an Elder. Students will be encouraged to incorporate pictures and Michif words, as well as to draw on their own personal experiences.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Engage students in the topic of harvesting by having a discussion about their own experiences of harvesting. Possible discussion questions:

- What does the word “harvest” mean?
- Have you ever harvested before? What did you harvest and with whom?
- How did you learn to harvest?
- What did you learn from harvesting?
- Why do people harvest?

Create a definition of harvesting by compiling the students’ answers.

Explain to students that today, they will be learning about why growing and harvesting are an important part of Métis culture and history. The Métis have traditionally had a close relationship with the land (*la tayr*). Families worked together, with children learning about medicinal and edible plants and how to hunt and snare from their grandmothers (*noohkooms*), grandfathers (*mooshooms*), mothers (*maamaas*) and fathers (*baapaas*), so that they harvested only what was needed. They understood the life cycles of all of the natural resources they used and recognized the importance of proper harvesting to ensure sustainability for future generations.

Today, students will get the chance to learn about some foods grown and harvested by the Métis, and they will understand why the connection to the land is so important for the Métis.

Action

Explain to students that they will be watching a video on traditional Métis harvesting practices. In this video they will meet two Métis that will teach them about foods, the growing and the harvesting of those foods, and the importance of harvesting to the Métis. Daryl will take them along for a walk as he searches for

TRADITIONAL HARVESTING #2: WALKING WITH AN ELDER

different plants to harvest. Darlene will provide a tour on land in Crescent Lake, Sask., where students will see gardens used to grow food and teach children about gardening, harvesting, and preserving.

As students are watching the video, have them make notes about what they are learning about traditional Métis harvesting. Students should note Michif words that they hear and what they mean. Have students think about why harvesting is important to the Métis. Encourage students to think of Daryl and Darlene as teachers, taking the students on a walk to teach them about the traditional Métis ways of growing and harvesting. Discuss with students the importance of properly identifying plants and their suitability for consumption. Possible discussion questions for the video:

- What do you notice about the landscape? How do you think the landscape affects the growing and harvesting of food and medicine?
- Daryl talks about how to use the different parts of the bullrush (the lower part and the roots). Why do you think it is important to use multiple parts of a plant? How does this connect to the Métis relationship with *la tayr*? (*Things that are harvested are gifts and should not be wasted. When we use as much of a plant as we can and do not waste it, we are treating the resource with respect.*)
- How do you think gardens and harvesting helped Métis survive winters in the past?
- How is the Métis value of sharing demonstrated by Darlene? (*By sharing chicken, Darlene is caring for others in her community and not keeping what she does not need.*)
- Understanding the life cycles of plants is very important. How do Daryl and Darlene demonstrate that they understand the life cycles of different plants? (*Darlene knows the hazelnuts will be ready in August and that the Saskatoon berries are ready before the chokecherries. Daryl knows the importance of scattering the wild onion seeds for regrowth.*)

Ask students why they think harvesting and gardening was important to the Métis in the past, and why it is still important to Métis today. Discuss the Métis relationship with the land and how knowledge has traditionally been shared in Métis communities.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Have a discussion with students about what they learned from the video and what new Michif words they have discovered. Practise saying these words. Use the Michif Terms teacher card for reference. Next, tell students that they will travel back in time by imagining that they are walking and talking with an Elder. Traditionally, knowledge was passed on to children as they helped their grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles. This is still the way for many Métis today. Elders also played, and still play, an important role in the passing down of knowledge. Inform students that they are going to write a journal entry from the perspective of a child learning about harvesting from an Elder.

TRADITIONAL HARVESTING #2: WALKING WITH AN ELDER

Have students imagine that they are in the past, out on the land, with an Elder teaching them. Students can also use a personal experience they have had with learning from an Elder. Have students close their eyes and create an image in their head of where they are. Possible questions to engage students in the activity:

- What does the landscape look like where you are?
- What plants, animals, people and structures do you see?
- What is the Elder teaching you (e.g., about the life cycle of a specific plant, about the harvesting of a vegetable, about the preservation of a food, about where to find a wild plant)?
- Can you think of any Michif words that the Elder may use?

As a class, brainstorm ideas of what could be learned on this visit with an Elder. Model for students what their journal entry could include and give students the option to include a picture of their place. Encourage students to include as many Michif words in their journal entry as possible. If needed, have students use an online dictionary or a Michif language app for assistance. Include journal prompts if necessary to get students started. Possible prompts:

- Describe the sights, sounds, smells, taste, and feel of your place.
- Why might an Elder say that harvesting is important to the Métis?
- What types of plants might an Elder show you? What are their names in Michif?

Extend your geographical thinking

- Create a Michif word wall.
- Use *Plants Growing Along the River (Plant Guide)*, published by the Gabriel Dumont Institute, to learn about plants that grow in around the Métis community of Batoche, Sask.
- Use the resource *Medicines to Help Us* to learn and teach about the different plants found in Christi Belcourt's painting and their uses.
- Go on a plant identification walk around the school yard and have students document what plants they see and their traits. Have students discover the Michif word for each plant, as well as uses (if any) and how each plant benefits the environment.
- Create a classroom or school garden and have students experience the life cycle and harvesting of different plants. Incorporate the teachings of the Métis relationship with the land and how to plant and grow for sustainability. Use the opportunity to talk about seed saving, preserving food, and using multiple parts of a plant.
- Invite a Métis Elder to speak to students about traditional growing, harvesting, and usage of plants.

Modifications

- Students can create a journal entry using mainly pictures.
- Students can use images from magazines to create their journal entry.

TRADITIONAL HARVESTING #2: WALKING WITH AN ELDER

- Students can dictate their journal entry to a scribe, educational assistant, or helper.
- The number of Michif words required to be used in the journal entry can be set depending on students' grade level and ability.
- Bring in examples of some of the plants featured in the video for students to see, touch, and smell.
- Extension: Have students create a map of where certain plants featured in the video are found in their area or throughout Canada.

Assessment Opportunities

- Assess student's ability to name various plants (either learned in the video or from personal experience) and to describe their uses.
- Assess students' ability to incorporate Michif words into their journal entry.
- Assess students' understanding of the importance of harvesting to the Métis through class discussion and their journal entries.
- Make observational notes of students' responses during the discussion portions.

Sources and Additional Resources

- Metis Nation of Saskatchewan
- *Relatives with Roots* by Leah Dorian and translated by Rita Flamand
- *The Giving Tree* by Leah Dorion and translated by Norman Fleury
- *Gee mee pimawatshinawn (It was a Good Life)* published by the Gabriel Dumont Institute and Heritage Saskatchewan
- Gabriel Dumont Institute Michif Dictionary
- Michif To Go (Google Play) or the Heritage Michif To Go (The App Store) apps
- *Medicines to Help Us* by Christi Belcourt with Rose Richardson and Olive Whitford, translated by Laura Burnouf and Rita Flamand
- *Plants Growing Along the River* from the Gabriel Dumont Institute
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada - Métis