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Lesson  
Plans

# FIRSTS

from Aboriginal Peoples to Pioneers

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario has published a new resource *Firsts – from Aboriginal Peoples to Pioneers*. Intended to present the historical perspective of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, it is also a resource for teaching pioneer studies.



## About Firsts

This ETFO resource complements the Ontario curriculum. It is appropriate for the heritage and citizenship strand of the grade 3 Ontario Social Studies Curriculum. It is also suitable for the heritage and citizenship strand for grade 6 – *Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers*. The grade 3 expectations are outlined at the beginning of each focus. Grade 6 expectations are found in the Ontario Curriculum Social Studies Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8.

The resource is divided into 12 sections. Each section contains a series of learning experiences. Social Studies curriculum expectations and related curriculum expectations are identified for each focus. There are opportunities for extended learning and making home connections within the experiences, as well as suggestions for modification and assessment.

Each learning experience is outlined under the following headings

- Materials and Resources
- Multiple Intelligences Addressed
- What the Teacher Does
- Modifications and Extensions
- Assessment

The following is a brief excerpt from *Firsts*. This section has been selected because every teacher is a storyteller and because storytelling builds on the strong oral tradition of First Nations peoples in Canada.

## Storytelling and the Circle

### Materials and Resources

- *This Land is My Land* by George Littlechild.
- Chart paper and markers.
- Instructions on making a dream catcher.\*
- The Legend of the Talking Feather.
- Mural paper and art supplies.
- Assignment for environmental problem-solving: urban vs. environment.
- Books on the habitats of waterfowl and on cities.
- The Native Stories from *Keepers of the Earth* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac.
- Storybooks about cultural myths.

### Multiple Intelligences Addressed

- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Visual Spatial
- Logical Mathematical
- Verbal Linguistic

### What the Teacher Does

Discuss the importance of elders.

- Talk about the importance of elders in Aboriginal and many other cultures.
- Have children bring pictures of elders in their own lives, or they can choose a special person.
- Ask the children to write a story told to them by an elder.
- Create an “elder board” with the pictures and the stories.

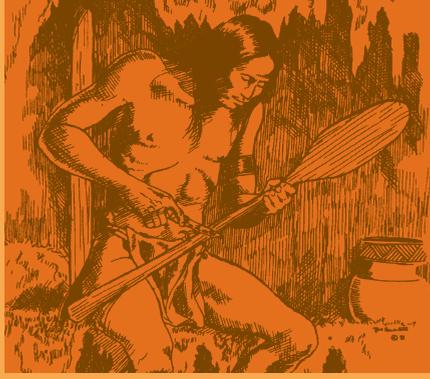
### Discuss the Importance of the Circle

- Ask the children to sit in a large circle and explain that the class will form the talking circle whenever issues need to be discussed.
- Explain that the importance of the talking circle in Aboriginal cultures is to ensure that everyone is listened to with respect.
- While discussing the circle with the children, make a talking feather to be used in the talking circle.

- Read the selection from *This Land is My Land*, entitled *This Warrior Goes Dancing*, and introduce the symbol of the circle in Aboriginal culture.
- Ask the children why they think the circle is better for communication than sitting in rows or at their desks.
- Discuss the reasons why the circle is very important to Aboriginal people:
- Circle of Life; Medicine Wheel (Ojibwae Circle of Life); Talking Circle; Giving Thanks.
- Demonstrate how to make a dream catcher\*. The dream catcher demonstrates the web of life and the interconnectedness of all living things.
- Set up a center where children, working in pairs, can make dream catchers.
- Give a lesson on the circle of life and record the students’ response on chart paper.
- Discuss the following Aboriginal beliefs:
  - Everything in nature is connected and all things in life are in a circle. The earth, sun, moon and planets are spheres, the cycle of days and nights (moon and sun), the cycle of seasons, the life cycle from birth to childhood to adulthood to old age to death and rebirth.
  - The circle can be broken by the actions of humans.
  - The food chain and the ecosystem.

### Environmental Problem Solving

- Have the students research the habitat of waterfowls and make a mural in groups. Include: appropriate foods, rivers, lakes, marshlands, forests and a small village.
- Give each group a problem-solving activity. The area is on a migratory route for Canada geese.
- The village will be expanded so that it will be a city with tall buildings, power lines, an airport and a highway.



- Each group is responsible for one of the urban developments.
- The groups are urban planners who must design an urban plan that will cause the least harm to the geese.
- Students can draw and cut out objects that can be used on the mural.
- All groups must reach a consensus on the solution.
- The teacher then holds a discussion about the solutions in the talking circle and discusses the hazards that humans pose to nature and our responsibility to look after the earth.
- This activity is adapted from *The Learning Circle, Classroom Activities on the First Nations in Canada*, Ministry of Northern Affairs, Ottawa.

### Storytelling and the Circle of Life

- In the talking circle, talk about the Aboriginal storytelling tradition which explains how all things on earth came to be.
- Read the story *The Coming of Corn* from the book *The Native Stories from Keepers of the Earth*.
- Discuss how people in many cultures, not just Aboriginal cultures, have stories to explain how things came to be in the world.
- Assign home reading and book reports of Aboriginal stories and stories from other cultures which explain natural phenomena.
- Have the students role play *The Coming of Corn* or prepare and present a puppet play.
- Tell about the three sisters, Corn, Squash and Beans in Aboriginal mythology.
- Explain that Aboriginal peoples showed European settlers how to grow these three vegetables, which were the main crops grown by Aboriginal peoples.
- Talk about other contributions of Aboriginal peoples that were shared with or adopted by the settlers.

- Put students in pairs to research books and the internet to find some of these contributions that have since been adopted by other people in the world.

### Assessment

- Recount an elder's story. See the rubric for Language
- Research waterfowl habitats and establishing a conservation area. See the rubric for Science and Technology.
- Paint a mural. See the rubric for the Arts.
- Problem-solving and the environment. See rubrics for Language, Mathematics and Social Studies.
- Observation checklist for the talking circle.
- Reading stories. See the rubric for Language.
- Role play or puppet play. See the rubric for the Arts.

### Modification

- Special emphasis on storybooks from the cultures of ESL students.
- Ask ESL students to share stories told to them by elders in their families.

### Extensions

- Take a field trip to a museum or Aboriginal Cultural Education Centre to learn more about traditional Aboriginal ways of life, their homes, clothing, arts and tools.
- Go the Museum of Civilization web site to learn more about Aboriginal peoples. [www.civilization.ca/cmcc/cmce.asp](http://www.civilization.ca/cmcc/cmce.asp).
- Invite elders from different cultures in the community to tell stories.

### Contributions by Aboriginal Peoples

See the video *More Than Bows and Arrows* from the Alaska Native Film Production Co. (1977-78). Contributions include government; environment; vegetables; urban planning; architecture.

### The Talking Circle

By forming a talking circle in the classroom, children can understand how Aboriginal people honoured and respected one another. A long time ago, all Aboriginal peoples used to pass on their history and learning through the oral tradition of the elders in the circle. It was very important to listen well.

To help children focus on the speaker, a talking feather or a talking stick is held by each speaker in turn. Use words such as honour, respect, values, tradition, and trust frequently.

### Giving Thanks

Traditional Aboriginal people always thanked the spirit of an animal they had to kill and never killed for sport or fun. They also used every part of the animal and wasted nothing. They had great respect for all creatures.

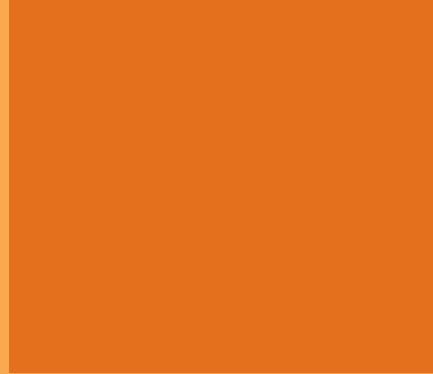
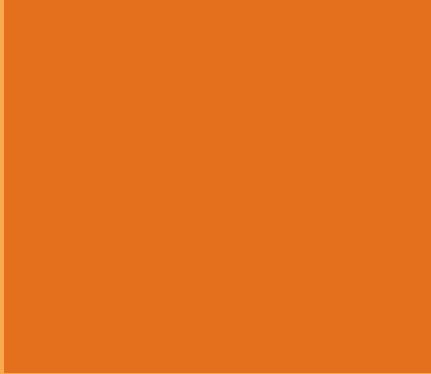
### Elders and the Community

Elders have many roles. They are the keepers of all of the accumulated knowledge of the community. They are advisers to young people. They are teachers, healers, historians, counsellors and guardians of spiritual ceremonies which are thousands of years old. One must earn the right to be an Elder, who has gifts of understanding and insight.

### Importance of Listening Skills

Why was listening important to Aboriginal peoples?

- No written system of communication.
- Difference between life and death.
- Roles as witness.
- Keeper of oral history.
- Teaching patience.



### The Number Four

The number four is very important to Aboriginal peoples.

- Four seasons.
- Four cycles of life (birth, childhood, adulthood, old age).
- Four directions (north, east, south, west).
- Four elements (earth, wind, fire, water).
- Four kinds of animals (those that fly, walk, swim, crawl).

### Elders and Storytelling

Through myths, stories and legends, elders taught the children the beliefs and values of the people. The stories explained how things came to be and illuminated the relationship between the people, the earth and the spirit world. Stories also taught morals and values to the young. Elders hold a place of high esteem in Aboriginal cultures. At major powwows, Aboriginal war veterans are the first to enter.

### Rubrics

When rubrics are mentioned in this resource, it is a reference to the achievement levels in the Ontario curriculum documents. Teachers can use the descriptions to assess students' achievement levels.

### The Legend of the Talking Feather

The talking feather was usually an eagle feather. The eagle is the symbol of truth, since it is the creature who flies the highest and is closest to Creator, Gitche Manitou. The eagle is the messenger between the people and Creator. The Eagle saved people from destruction by interceding for us with the Creator.

It was a time when people had forgotten how to live in harmony with the earth and so Creator was going to destroy everything and start over. Eagle pleaded

with Creator to wait and see if Eagle could find some people who still remembered how to live in a good way. Eagle told Creator that he would fly out each morning at sunrise and if Eagle could find only one person who still remembered to live in a good way, Creator would have to spare the Earth. Eagle found a good family, who spoke the truth and lived the way people should, with respect and honour. And so Creator spared the earth.

The talking feather is used in the talking circle to keep the speaker honest, for the person who holds the feather must speak the truth. The person holding the feather is also the only one who is speaking in the circle.

### How to Make a Talking Feather

#### Materials

- Beads
- Embroidery thread.
- A large feather. Schools may use other feathers to symbolize eagle feathers, which are rare.

#### Steps to Make the Feather

- Cut off a piece of embroidery thread 30 cm long
- Tie the middle of the thread around the quill of the feather.
- String some beads on one side of the thread hanging down.
- Tie the two ends of the thread together to form a loop of beads.
- The feather is decorated with beads to make it special and to indicate that it is used for a significant purpose.
- Each student could make a talking feather to take home and use in their family circle.
- Allergies and the cleanliness of the feather must be considered.

### About the Authors

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### Visual Content Recognition

The richness of the visual content of this resource is designed to enhance the message and to facilitate student learning. ETFO would like to express sincere thanks to Aboriginal artist **BILL POWLESS** for the sketches used.

*Firsts, from Aboriginal Peoples to Pioneers* is available from shopETFO for \$23.50. *The Canadian Firsts Game* – a game in a book designed to complement *Firsts*, costs \$9.25. Taken together, the two resources are available for \$30.00 + GST. shopETFO on line at [www.ETFO.ca](http://www.ETFO.ca).

While *Firsts from Aboriginal Peoples to Pioneers* does include instructions on making a dream catcher, there is no room in this Voice to publish them. However, some instructions can be found at <http://web.onramp.ca/rivernen/>

### Resources Available

Beaver, Jan; Blakey, Lillian; Arnold, Julia. *Aboriginal Voices – Then and Now – An Integrated Program with a Focus on Social Studies and Language*. Grade 6. ETFO. 2001. [www.etfo.ca](http://www.etfo.ca).

*Community Role Model Resource Inventory*. Thames Valley and Toronto. ETFO 2001. [www.etfo.ca](http://www.etfo.ca).

*Learning Circles – Grades 3-6. Curriculum Links for Ontario Teachers*. ETFO 2002. [www.etfo.ca](http://www.etfo.ca).

*We're Erasing Prejudice for Good*. A complete resource for kindergarten to grade 8. Revised 2002. [www.etfo.ca](http://www.etfo.ca).

The Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's website lists a broad range of resources, including an Aboriginal Book List for Children and an annotated list of Canada's best resources for teaching First Nations studies, all available in English and French.

Visit [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca).