

Walking a Mile in their Moccasins

Presenter: Natasha Morley

Email: nmorley@deltasd.bc.ca

What follows is my basic plan for teaching a unit on traditional First Nations People. This is a unit I developed to fit the PLOs for the new curriculum for grade 3 and it is hot off the presses. By the time I present this at the IERG workshop, I will have tested out some of the activities and be able to issue some advice regarding these. However, others will be untested at that point, and should you decide to try them out, I'd love to hear your feedback.

The unit, in a nutshell, involves some background information, games, a multi-day role-play, stories, narratives and a philosophical debate. Another grade 3 teacher on my staff will be doing the same unit with his students. The lessons I describe have been written with that in mind, however, this could easily be altered to be done with just one class. If you'd like me to send you more information or the sets of questions and answers I have developed, please email me. The journey begins now.

The **binary opposites** interwoven throughout this unit are: included vs. left out.

Starting the **Narrative**...

I have found a good YouTube video about how the First Nations people first came to Canada: [A People's First History: Episode 1](#) and the first 3 minutes of [episode 2](#)

Building Some Background Knowledge

There are a number of other videos that are great for displaying customs and symbols ([A Glimpse into History and Culture of Canada's First Nations](#) is one of my favourites), however, be sure to ask me for a list or preview them first. Some get a little graphic. I also used the [Nelson Literacy: British Columbia](#) book. It is written at a grade 4 reading level and it summed up the characteristics of the 6 regions of First Nations Peoples of Canada in a mere 5 pages.

Next, I wanted to make sure my students had a sufficient understanding of the classes and roles of the First Nations peoples who lived on the northwest coast, so that they would perform well in the role-plays and games to follow. I found fairly succinct information about the 3 classes, weavers, gatherers, fishers, hunters, tool makers, the Chief and Shaman in Diane Silvey's [From Time Immemorial: The First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast](#). The writing has proven only a little sophisticated for my grade 3s. It was written by a Metis teacher from Sechelt for grades 4-7. That said, reading it aloud to them first, explaining vocabulary and drawing/ googling images that they have trouble picturing has been all that was needed to make this information accessible. I wrote out questions for each of these categories, based on the text, and organized their pages for answering the questions in a study guide format. Bonus

assignments will include creating their own study guides, stories, pictures or role-plays based on other topics in the book, additional sources I provide or material they track down themselves.

Let the **Role-Play** Begin

Following a review of their answers, the class has been brainstorming ways to act out each job role and I've had the students take turns watching the other half the class perform. It seemed to help when I made comments like "I see some people rinsing their clams in open-weave baskets and some others are scraping animal hides with giant mussel shells."

The Real Role-Play -

Now we can get on to the really fun stuff. The students in each class were made part of 2 separate but nearby villages of Nuu-chah-nulth peoples. These people traditionally lived on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island. (I think making the students in the second class part of a separate First Nations group would also work well.)

The first big event was the naming ceremony. For this, I'd prepared envelopes containing the students' new character ID. The cards I wrote for them included the following information about each character: First Nations name, its meaning, Aboriginal group, clan, class, role, and life stage (child, adult or elder). I also included a coloured paper and a blank paper for their ID cards and a short write-up about their job in the community.

The Naming Ceremony

The students were asked to remove their shoes and brought into a dimly lit classroom with the sounds of the 2010 Olympic Aboriginal welcome in the background (YouTube - Sounds of Vancouver 2010 - 05. Aboriginal Welcome). It runs for 3 minutes. Sage was burned and students took seats on the floor in a circle. After an official welcome and some background information about our tribe, they received instructions from me about the importance of acting as their character whenever they wore their name card and got their envelopes. I have chosen to make the envelope distribution fairly random. The only stipulation being that girls would only receive roles that were traditionally performed by women and boys by men. The Shaman role is the only one that could traditionally be a male or female role.

Following this, the students have begun preparing their ID cards. They are writing their First Nations name at the top and its English meaning at the bottom of an 8 1/2 x 11 paper. They are gluing their ID information on the right side and creating an image to suit their name on the left. I am having them glue this on the colour associated with their clan (blue- Orcas, red - Ravens, yellow- Wolves). Then the

whole thing will be laminated and hole-punched so it can hang around their necks on a string.

Getting Ready for the **Games**

With ID cards ready and a little group practice of each role done, they will move into their clans and try to put together a short skit in which all characters are given the opportunity to demonstrate their craft.

Game Time

The 2 classes will meet and perform their skits over 2 days. The students in the other class will guess the roles/ jobs of each of the students in the role-plays and explain briefly how they knew.

More Role-Play - Building to the Climax

The students will bring their desks together in their clans and colour the small spirit animal pictures I make for them before taping them to their belongings. They will learn to create some traditional Nuu-Chah-Nulth art, try weaving and attempt to build some tools. My biggest clan, the Ravens, will organize a potlatch for the students from both classes. This celebration, which will involve some food and traditional dances (with permission), will be the high point of the unit.

Role-Play - the Darker Parts of the History

On a separate day, we will have all the students come together again and stand in a circle formation which has from its centre to its exterior: the children, the elders, the women and the men. The significance of this formation will be explained. Then we will place a red sticker dot on 80% of the students and ask them to sit down. Smallpox or war will have taken their characters' lives. The remaining people (3 of which will be children) will relocate to another part of the room until 2/3 children are taken to residential schools while one hides. A father, trying to stop this, will be brought to jail. The 2 students will leave the room and return to their happy parents and sibling but speak a made-up language that no one on the reserve understands. I'll give them a heads-up in the hall before they come back in. A debrief will follow these scenes and an abbreviated version of the history that followed.

The Whale Hunt **Debate**

If I have done a good job of presenting how important the whale hunt was to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people, I should have 2 groups that will want to prepare arguments. Then, they will each send 3 representatives to a debate centring around whether or not this tradition should be continued and whether amendments to it are necessary.

Stories to Support My Lessons

(I read aloud to the kids for 15-20 minutes every day. Unless otherwise stated, these stories were compiled by Diane Silvey and published in From Time Immemorial.)

Legends with Lessons

Whale Riders - use every part of a hunted animal's body

Weavers of Pride - it's not important what others think about you, only what you know to be true

The Spirit of the Cedar People - only cut down the trees you need

Spirit of a Hunter - you must do/be who you are meant to be, not who you think you should be

The Training of Tanu - work hard or no one will want to work with you

A Man Called Raven by Richard Van Camp - do not hurt animals for sport

To Help Them Imagine Residential Schools and Banned Traditions

Secret of the Dance by Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow

Shi-Shi-etko by Nicole I. Campbell

Shin-chi's Canoe by Nicole I. Campbell

Narratives for an Uplifting Finish to the Unit - Current Heroes

I intend to touch on stereotypes associated with First Nations Peoples and then tell Diane Silvey's *A Journey of Hope*. It is about a woman, named Frances, brought up on a reserve who moves with her children to Vancouver, attends U.B.C. and becomes a teacher before returning to her reserve.

In addition, I found a lot of short, inspirational write-ups at www.steambtt.ca on recent or current First Nations Heroes. Amongst my favourites were:

Mary Spencer - at the Olympics for boxing in 2012

Tom Longboat - ran the Boston Marathon 4:59 seconds faster than anyone previously

Ted Nolan - NHL player and coach (2 sons are now NHL players)

Susan Aglukark - 3 Juno Awards & a single that was #1 on country music charts

Douglas Joseph Cardinal - founded the indigenous Canadian style of architecture

Historic Heroes - Inclusion, depth and number studied will depend on time.

I found a comprehensive list of page-long narratives on the following people at www.legendsofamerica.com. I was particularly moved by:

Kaitchkona Winema - brave female interpreter and political activist

Chief Tecumseh - skilled warrior and statesman advocating a civilized resistance

Lozen - skilled female warrior and Shaman

