

MÉTIS CULTURE • SYMBOLS, VALUE SYSTEM, ART AND MUSIC • MICHIF

Learning goal: Students will understand the importance of Michif.

Suggested timeline: 1 x 75-minute periods

Subjects: Canadian History, Languages

Lesson opener

See it:

“...culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs...”

— **United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2003)**

“Language gives pride and identity; it gives people confidence to know their own mother tongue, and is the basis for their being able to live their lives, for being related to each other, and for knowing their histories. All Indigenous peoples deserve to have the ability to nourish their culture in order to sustain them for their continuing life in a Canada that continues to evolve and to welcome people from all over the world.”

— **The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, the 26th Governor-General of Canada, and the co-founder and co-chair of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship**

“No longer should Indigenous peoples feel that somehow they and their languages, and therefore their culture, have been left behind deliberately in order to favour those who came to live in this land. All of us must be aware and sympathetic to how important language is—not only for expression, but also as a continuing and evolving means of identity and the basis of citizenship. Losing one’s language is like losing all freedom of expression. It is the loss of a human right.”

— **The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, the 26th Governor-General of Canada, and the co-founder and co-chair of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship**

Michif is the language of Métis people once spoken all across the homeland. Like most Aboriginal languages, the number of Michif speakers declined due to the colonization process that attempted to stamp out the use of languages other than English and French.

Efforts are now underway to preserve Michif, and introduce Métis youth to their heritage language.

Strategy/Lesson activity

Feel it:

Watch EIR 4 Elize Hartley “Michif Losing Metis Language” [youtube.com/watch?v=bBc_Q56wH7k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBc_Q56wH7k)

How does it impact students to study in a language that is not their mother tongue? Could you go to a school where a different language is spoken and do as well? How do you think First Nation, Métis and Inuit students feel when they are not allowed to speak their language? How do you think it impacts a Métis person’s identity when they are not allowed to speak Michif? How does preserving the Michif language help Métis people? How do you think Métis people feel when people of other cultures make an effort to speak Michif?

Know it:

Discuss the importance of language

How did Michif evolve? What can you infer about Métis values from what you know about the evolution of the Michif language? How did the Métis knowledge of many languages help to create the Michif language? How and why do different versions and dialects of Michif languages vary across Canada? When and why did the use of Michif decline? What are the challenges Métis must overcome to protect their language? How would you suggest reinvigorating the use of Michif?

Assessment

Do It:

Compare and contrast Michif and French. Explain why the two are similar.

Extension:

Do the Language of Trade exercise

The Language of Trade	
Suitability	Junior/Intermediate/Senior
Purpose	Participants will learn the importance of languages and the role of Métis people during the Fur Trade.
Storyline	European fur traders and First Nations people worked together during the Fur Trade, but they generally spoke different languages and could not understand each other. In the early years of the fur trade, Half-breed children learned their First Nation language from their mothers and their European language from their fathers. As the Métis culture evolved, the knowledge of many languages, cultures and skills created a hybrid culture and a specialized niche for Métis as interpreters, diplomats, guides, couriers, freighters, traders, trappers and suppliers.
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select three students—<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student #1 The Trapper—Speaks a language other than English or French. Ideally, this should be an Indigenous language, but can be any language.• Student #2 The Fur Trader—Cannot understand the language that student #1 speaks. It is best if he/she speaks a language student #1 does not speak, but it may be limited to a language the translator understands.• Student #3 The Interpreter—Speaks the languages of both student #1 and student #2.• Have them role play a First Nation trapper and an English or French fur trader.• Give the first two participants the task of making a trade, without them knowing what the other person will be wanting. One participant has beaver furs that he/she would like to trade for a blanket. The second participant has trade goods, and would like to acquire as many prime beaver pelts as possible.• Each participant is only allowed to speak one language. It will be very difficult for them to complete the trade.• Then include the third student, who is Métis, and can speak both languages.• The Métis student can take part in the trade and can help the others complete their trade by translating.

How does it impact trade if you cannot understand each other? How does it impact trade when there is an interpreter? How did multilingualism and multiculturalism of Métis people impact their role during the fur trade? How did their roles during the fur trade impact the creation of the Michif language? How did the role of Métis people help First Nation and European people during the fur trade? Does it help today if you speak more than one language?

Suggested Resources:

Michif Workbook metisnation.org/media/587533/mno-michif-workbook-final.pdf

Michif Audio Recordings
metisnation.org/culture-heritage/michif/michif-vocabulary

Bakker, P. (2001). "The Michif Language of the Métis" in *Métis Legacy*. Eds Barkwell, L., Dorion, L., Prefontaine, D. Pemmican Publications Inc.: Winnipeg, MB. P. 177

EIR 4 Elize Hartley "Michif Losing Metis Language"
youtube.com/watch?v=bBc_Q56wH7k

Michif Speakers Talk Language Preservation
ammsa.com/publications/ontario-birchbark/michif-speakers-talk-language-preservation

Métis Nation of Ontario Website – Culture and Heritage:
metisnation.org/culture-heritage/who-are-the-m%C3%A9tis

Métis—The Canadian Encyclopedia: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis

Our Legacy; Métis Culture: scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/exhibit_metisculture

Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Inspirations (student textbook)—ISBN:978-0-13-510651-8 Co-published by Pearson Education Canada and GoodMinds.com