

# User Guide: Pre-contact

## What

The First Nations peoples are the original inhabitants of Canada and continue to live here today. This Plain Talk provides a description of First Nations prior to colonization and occupation by Europeans, a time that is generally referred to as pre- contact.

## Why

First Nations have lived on Turtle Island, what is now referred to as North America, since time immemorial, and have survived in despite enormous pressures and challenges. By the time Europeans appeared, the population of First Nations numbered in the millions, living and prospering from coast to coast to coast—with a variety of social, economic, political, spiritual and cultural systems and practices. It is important to understand that prior to contact First Nations peoples had developed sophisticated and intricate ways of living and thriving in their environments and on their lands.

## How

- Brainstorm a list of distinctive aspects of First Nations life and culture (for example, meaning of land, traditional education, sacred medicines, potlatch, storytelling, wampum belts, totem poles).
- Organize students into groups. Divide the topics for further study. Each group will research the history, basis, and examples of their assigned topic. Students may present their findings in a variety of ways, including trading cards, posters, stories, or reports.
- Ask students to develop personal criteria for terms used to describe themselves. Encourage students to utilize organizers such as cultural, linguistic, regional, legal and personal to develop criteria. Organize a talking circle for students to share their criteria.