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# INTRODUCTION

The User’s Guide is designed for teachers, facilitators and many others — for example, Elders, administrators and other community stakeholders. Every component in the Kit is described under the following headings:

**WHAT:** title and general description.

**WHY:** purpose, reason for inclusion, application, the advantages of having the information.

**HOW:** using the component— topics for discussion; suggested activities to explore content and engage students.

For some components, there may be additional suggestions for other potential audiences who might benefit or suggestions for incorporation — time of the school year, possible links to curriculum, or community situations or circumstances that might be appropriate.

The content and resources included in the **It’s Our Time First Nations Education Tool Kit** are not a curriculum. However, these resources are relevant to, and can align with curricula across all provinces and territories, especially in the following content areas:

- oral tradition
- stories and legends
- teachings
- art: music, dance, writing, theatre, singing
- traditional values and their importance
- barriers to the preservation of the oral tradition
- history

# Cultural Competency

*Since the beginning, Native Peoples lived a life of being in harmony with all that surrounds us. It is a belief that all humankind are related to each other. Each has a purpose, spirit and sacredness. It is an understanding with the Great Spirit or Creator that we will follow these ways. And in this understanding we believe we are related to all other living species. . .*

— Dennis Banks

*I think the most important issue we have as a people is what we started, and that is to begin to trust our own thinking again and believe in ourselves enough to think that we can articulate our own vision of the future and then work to make sure that that vision becomes a reality.*

— Wilma Mankiller

## **WHAT**

The cultural elements in the ToolKit include a piece of string, a dream catcher, a stone, and Indian corn.

## **WHY**

It is important to underscore that for First Nations, aspects of culture are learned. Other aspects come from personality traits, gifts, and talents. It exists in each person as a member of a society or a nation. Culture along with the influence of his or her environment shapes the individual. It is interwoven with language. Culture forms the basis of one's worldview, philosophy, beliefs, spirituality, and lifestyle. In this way there are two levels of culture for First Nations: the surface culture of skills, knowledge and adaptations and the deeper more spiritual aspects of culture having to do with perceptions of time and space.

For Indigenous peoples, language, culture, and the land are inseparable. Indigenous peoples' cultures include tangible and intangible manifestations of their ways of life, achievements and creativity, are an expression of their self-determination and of their spiritual and physical relationships with their lands, territories and resources. Indigenous culture is a holistic concept based on common material and spiritual values and includes distinctive manifestations in language, spirituality, membership, arts, literature, traditional knowledge, customs, rituals, ceremonies, methods of production, festive events, music, sports and traditional games, behaviour, habits, tools, shelter, clothing, economic activities, morals, value systems, cosmo-visions, laws, and activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. Indigenous cultures are influenced by their environment, which impacts on a people's common perspective of the world and underlines its connection with nature. Indigenous cultures shape their views of the world and life.

Students will acquire a deeper understanding of First Nations culture and beliefs through the exploration of tangible elements that reflect both culture and ceremony. These items also invite the engagement and involvement of Elders and resource people to adequately explain the teachings, traditions and ceremony in an informed and respectful way. First Nations and non-First Nations people benefit from coming to understand the teachings behind the cultural items.

## HOW

- Invite a knowledgeable Indigenous guest speaker or an Elder to share information relevant to Indigenous philosophy, to explain the symbolism of cultural tools, the ceremony and teachings associated with sacred medicines, to share the stories and to examine the teachings contained within the items.  
NOTE: Ceremonial items and medicines should be shared only by a traditional Elder.
- Discuss the idea of culture and try to arrive at a definition. Some characteristics of culture may include language, dress, appearance, food and eating habits, attitudes about time, relationships, values and norms, beliefs and attitudes.
- Discuss the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.
- Discuss quotes depicting perspectives of Indigenous worldview, philosophy, and knowledge. You could start with the Wise Words cards included in the iTunes U course.
- Review the significance of the circle in Indigenous worldview. Emphasize the ideas of interconnectedness and interdependence as they relate to First Nations issues.
- Students can be asked to express artistically an important idea, learning or perspective from an Indigenous worldview or perspective.
- Use storytelling to enhance cultural literacy.
- Relate course materials and cultural tools to the four dimensions of mind, body, heart and spirit.
- Begin and end each day with a greeting and goodbye in a First Nations language.
- Discuss the role and importance of symbols to First Nations people.
- What symbols are found in First Nations stories and legends?
- What visual symbols are used commercially for the marketing of consumer products? Is this appropriate or is it cultural appropriation/exploitation?
- Have participants examine the AFN logo with the focus on describing the graphic elements that make up the logo.

## Cultural Protocols

Protocols are the standards of behaviour that people use to show respect to each other. The important things to remember are:

- Respect for First Nations' protocols and cultural practices.
- Respect for the right of First Nations people to keep cultural knowledge sacred.
- Silence does not mean a lack of understanding. People may be listening, remaining noncommittal, or waiting until others have an opportunity to speak.
- Pointing is considered rude in some First Nations cultures.
- Speak in a manner that can be easily understood as English may be a second or third language. Keep technical words to a minimum. Be careful not to speak too quickly.
- Learn a few words of the local language.
- Indigenous people should be given proper credit and appropriate acknowledgement for their contributions and roles in the development of stories and for the use of their cultural material.
- There are no hard and fast rules when interacting with First Nations peoples and every community is unique. Lessons and projects can be built around the cultural elements in many different classes including Native Studies, language studies, storytelling, arts and crafts, history, geography or mathematics.

## Talking Circles

Talking circles are common in Indigenous cultures. Talking circles give people an opportunity to interact around the key ideas of an issue in an informal way. Talking circles are not designed to produce consensus or even to strive towards commonality. Their intention is to find a common ground of shared meanings and experiences in which differences are recognized and respected. The main thing is listening and respect for varied viewpoints rather than criticism and confrontation. The rules are simple. Group members typically sit in a circle. The talking stick or other object is passed around the circle, and only the person holding the talking stick may speak. Participants are not required to speak. If someone feels unable to speak they can simply pass the talking piece to the next person.

The circle process establishes a very different style of communication. Rather than active verbal facilitation, communication is regulated through the passing of a talking piece (an object of special

meaning or symbolism to the circle facilitator who is usually called the circle keeper). The talking piece fosters respectful listening and reflection. It prevents one-to-one debating or attacking.

- Have students choose an issue and then participate in a talking circle. Students learn listening, respect, patience, and an openness to different ideas and perspectives. Use the talking circle process to explore concepts of culture.

## **Dream Catcher**

A dream catcher is a handmade object with a loose net or web woven onto a willow hoop. It is traditionally hung above the bed and is used as a charm to catch bad dreams. The Ojibwe believe that only good dreams would be allowed to filter through...bad dreams would stay in the net, disappearing with the light of day. There are many wonderful short videos and online tutorials on making dream catchers. Build lessons around the dream catcher in many different classes including Native Studies, language studies, storytelling, arts and crafts, history or mathematics.

## **Stone**

Ask each student to bring a stone to the classroom. In a talking circle format, have each student speak about how and where they found their stone and what it means to them. First Nations believe there is a spirit in everything. What do you feel when holding the stone? Weight? Strength? Endurance? Weathering? Worn smooth by external forces?

## **String Games**

String games with their origins deep in Indigenous culture are found everywhere from the High Arctic to the coral islands of the Pacific. The Navaho and Apache are adept at making tipis (tents) and little animals like coyotes and rabbits with a simple piece of sinew or string. The Inuit tell stories that they illustrate with figures of arctic birds, polar bear and kayaks. String games exercise memory and imagination. They are great for hand and eye coordination.

## **Indian Corn**

Corn also known as maize was domesticated by Indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica many thousands of years ago. By 2500 BC the crop had spread through much of the Americas. After European contact in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, explorers and traders car-

ried maize back to Europe and introduced it to other countries. It is the most widely grown grain crop in the Americas, with 332 million metric tons grown annually in the United States alone. Maize is remarkable because of its ability to grow in diverse climates, and there are thousands of varieties. Flint Corn is called this because each kernel has an outer layer that is said to be as hard as flint.

## **Mascots, Myths, & Stereotypes**

Discuss the widespread use of Indian names and images in advertising and as mascots for schools and sports teams.

- Do these mascots or products honour First Nations people or are they insulting and degrading? Should teams be required to change their name or mascot if some people find it offensive?
- Why are the Washington Redskins, and Jeep Cherokee popular and largely uncontested names when the Washington Whiteskins or Jeep Chicanos would be considered offensive?
- Why is the Cleveland Indians baseball logo, Chief Wahoo, acceptable when other racial caricatures, such as Little Black Sambo, are not?
- Have students think critically about stereotypes. Brainstorm a list of false stereotypes about First Nations people and/or other ethnic groups, and discuss where these stereotypes come from and why they are wrong.
- Discuss reasons why stereotypes may be harmful to individuals or groups, and have students write either a true story or a make-believe story showing how this can happen.
- What is meant by the use of the derogatory term Apple? Banana? Oreo?
- Discuss the fascination in parts of Europe with anything First Nations. Is this appropriate or not?
- Should First Nations arts and crafts be licensed to be mass-produced in Asia?

# Kinikinik: A Play

## WHAT

Kinikinik is a short instructive piece of theatre. Commissioned by the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba (TRCM), Governor General Award winning playwright Ian Ross created the play that serves to educate and share experiences relative to Treaties and the Treaty relationships. Kinikinik is written for all ages with a focus on a youthful audience. The story and issues are explored through three main characters who act as guides.

© 2010 Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba. Kinikinik the play is available in the assignment section of the iTunes U course. It can be downloaded at <http://www.trcm.ca/>

## WHY

Kinikinik serves as an adaptable tool for exploration of themes surrounding Treaties. It provides a powerful, entertaining and interactive way for students to experience and understand the concepts of sharing and ownership. Ultimately, the message of Kinikinik lies in the fact that We Are All Treaty People.

## HOW

- Discuss Kinikinik: The following study questions are provided with the script:
  - Who is your favourite character in Kinikinik?
  - Give some specific examples of new facts and ideas you have learned from Kinikinik.
  - What did you learn about Treaties and Treaty Relationships?
  - What does Treaty mean to you?
  - What does the phrase We Are All Treaty People mean to you?
- Present the Play. Read it. Act it.
- Have the older students present it to younger students.
- Present the play to the community.
- Make masks or puppets of the characters.
- Tell stories based on the play.
- Incorporate this material whenever and wherever appropriate. It is relevant, entertaining and powerful for virtually anyone, including students, teachers, community members and the broader First Nations and non-First Nations audiences who want to explore



the complexities surrounding treaties and treaty relationships and their importance to today. It would be especially useful when treaties are being studied but also to help explore First Nations concepts for respect, sharing, ownership, culture, and self-determination. According to First Nations Elders, a Treaty was expected to be in place “. . . as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows. . .”.

# Don't Misuse Tobacco: Keep it Sacred

## WHAT

Don't Misuse Tobacco is a colour booklet, produced by the AFN, that contains a variety of messages relating to tobacco. The booklet and a companion poster are available in the assignments section of the iTunes U course.

## WHY

Traditionally, tobacco has been used by many First Nations for healing, guidance, spiritual strength, discipline and protection. The Elders teach that all medicine is powerful and that each has a good side and a bad side. If misused, tobacco has the power to hurt.

Many First Nations youth are exposed to tobacco use by older family members and other adults in the community. They are pressured to use tobacco by friends and classmates. They are motivated by multi-million dollar marketing campaigns aggressively aimed at young people by the tobacco companies. This booklet targets First Nations students with factual information about smoking, health, fitness, self-esteem and pregnancy.

It is important that students come to appreciate the traditional teachings about tobacco, as well as the unhealthy impact that tobacco has come to have on mental, physical, emotional and spiritual fitness.

## HOW

- Have a discussion about the traditional cultural uses of tobacco.
- Examine personal and group values. What effect does peer pressure have on smokers?
- Do you believe the experts who say that smoking is linked to other risky behaviours like unprotected sex, abuse of alcohol, use of marijuana and prescription drugs?
- In your experience, are attitudes about smoking changing? In the school? In the home? In the community? How would you describe these changes?
- Have students make presentations to younger kids about smoking.
- Have students design an informal survey that they can use in the school and the community to discuss smoking.

- Have students improvise skits that illustrate Peer Pressure about smoking.
- Invite an Elder or traditional healer into the classroom to discuss sacred medicines, the protocols of ceremonies, and the traditional cultural uses of tobacco.

# Say Mag

## WHAT

Established in 2002, the magazine has enjoyed impressive growth while remaining true to its vision of providing messages of hope and inspiration through positive stories and role model profiles. Key editorial themes include Economic Development, Entertainment, Sports, Education, Careers, Health, Lifestyle. SAY MAG is Native-owned and operated and is headquartered in Winnipeg.

## WHY

SAY MAG is energetic, contemporary, and relevant. Issue after issue the magazine includes masses of up-to-date information—what’s going on, who is leading the way, where you can get more information, how you can get involved.

It is a rich resource for career and employment exploration, for programs and services for young entrepreneurs, sources of scholarships and student loans, practical how-to articles on self-esteem, health, and wellness, and for inspirational stories and profiles of young First Nations talent and seasoned First Nations leaders, mentors and role models.

SAY recognizes that First Nations young people represent an increasingly educated and readily available workforce prepared to assume an active role in the Canadian economy and every issue is focused on inspiring, motivating, and supporting young people on their journey.

## HOW

- Interview influential young leaders in your community and write a piece about them. Send it to the community newspaper or radio station. Send it to SAYMAG.
- Using SAY MAG as a model, make your own edition of a magazine. Distribute it throughout your community. Invite local officials and media to cover the launch of your project.
- The SAY MAG website contains a great deal of valuable information [www. saymag. com](http://www.saymag.com).
- Investigate the links of the SAYMAG website for scholarships and financial aid. Have each student pursue one source of scholarship and share the application information with the class.
- Acquire a copy of the 2014 Annual Education Guide for Native Students containing a Directory of Institutions, Labour Section,

Financial Aid, Scholarships, plus much more. Discuss ways to use the information.

- Every issue of SAYMAG includes a Going Places section. Look for a career event or conference near you.
- Every issue showcases favorite photos from visits to various locations.
- Write to SAY MAG and invite them to visit your school. Plan a program. • Download the free SAY MAG App from iTunes.
- Visit various websites of one or more of the advertisers in the magazine. Think about what makes a website inviting, well designed, and user-friendly. What would make someone motivated to get more information? Design a website for your school or community or prepare an assessment of the existing website. What might be done better?
- Check the websites of various companies and organizations identified in the magazine and identify career and employment opportunities. Design a job description appropriate to that company and institution. Then apply for it.
- Do a photo project of your community and send it to SAY MAG.

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# Healthy Aboriginal Comics

## WHAT

A series of 40-page comic books on contemporary health and social issues created for youth by the Healthy Aboriginal Network. Other topics in the series include staying-in-school, youth gangs, sexual health, mental health, youth in care, substance use, and many more.

## WHY

Comics have always been a vehicle for escapism and fantasy, romance and adventure, but the themes, the messages, the heroes and villains can be every bit as real and as compelling as anything in serious literature or real books. What readers want is to see themselves reflected in a story, to feel connected to a world, to feel a part of something, to feel validated and understood.

Comics have always been a reflection of our world. People want to see a reflection and, chances are, if the reflection is something that rings through with their world, their life, their family and their friends, they can relate and laugh. Brendan Burford, comics editor, King Features Syndicate, New York.

By reflecting the realities of the lives of First Nations young people, their world, their realities, their truth, and their values, the Healthy Aboriginal comics are connecting with young people, and reaching them with serious messages on health and social issues.

There is nothing patronizing or condescending about these comics and they resonate with both youth and adults. The stories are powerful, and compelling. The issues are not sugar coated. The characters have surprising depth. The situations are nuanced. The dialogue feels real. The messages are unequivocal. And the graphics, while powerful and effective, add to, rather than muddy the stories.

## HOW

Comics are an ideal vehicle for exploring tough issues and challenges. They work especially well with readers who may be less literate, less fluent in English, and less able to express themselves. Discussions and explorations of the issues arising out of the stories often come more easily to young people than discussions and explorations of personal stories and feelings.

- Discuss the issues raised in the comic. Do they seem real to you?
- What emotions do you feel when you read the stories?
- Examine the comic from the perspective of the graphics. How do

colour, shape, angle and framing create a mood, convey emotion and feeling, and impact the message?

- Discuss some of the emotional moments that are present in the story. Choose one moment and make a drawing that captures the feeling with one image.
- Use the story as a way to examine personal and group values. What effect does peer pressure have on the issues raised in the comic? How do relationships with family affect an individual negatively and positively?
- Have students make presentations to younger kids about important health or social issues.
- Have students write a script or improvise skits that illustrate an important health or social issue. Invite an Elder or traditional healer into the classroom to discuss important health or social issues from a traditional and cultural perspective.
- Using the comic as a model, make your own version of a comic.
- Develop activities around the vocabulary in the comic. Definitions. Word Search. Use in a Sentence.
- Comic books use a lot of slang and expressions. Have students discuss the various expressions and explore different ways to say the same thing.

## Other Resources

The Healthy Aboriginal Network creates comic books on health and social issues for youth. Topics include youth gangs, sexual health, mental health, substance use, and many more. These are some of the other titles in the series.

*\*Dropping Out: Level Up.* In this comic, Terry is contemplating dropping out of school but before he does, he's asked to spend some time with his cousin Dave, a successful game developer. Rather than lecture Terry, Dave makes the importance of school relatable. He compares education to moving up a level in a video game.

*Financial Literacy: The Game Plan.* We all think we know what happens to our money—how much we make and where we spend it. And if we're asked whether impulse buys and payday loans are a good idea, we all likely know that the answer is no. But making the right decision at the right time can be hard to do. Check out how money finally makes sense to Jake once he relates it to his lacrosse aspirations.

*Dog Bites: The Gift.* Dog bites are a real problem in some rural communities. Knowing what to do, but maybe more importantly what not to do, could help avoid a painful bite. It's up to all of us to respect our relationship with dogs.

*Residential School: Lost Innocence.* This is a fictional story (but based on documented real life experiences of survivors) of a brother and sister's residential school experience in the 1930's.

*Maternal Child Health: It Takes a Village.* The maternal child health book is about Lara, a young mom-to-be that is visited by Danis, a stranger. Danis teaches Lara the importance of eating healthy foods, avoiding alcohol, breastfeeding, keeping dad involved and bonding with your baby.

*Sexual Health: Kiss Me Deadly.* A range of issues are covered in this sexual health comic book— from respect and communication in relationships, to pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, two-spirit people and sexual health as a career or youth led project.

*Living with FASD: Drawing Hope* is a collection of five stories, based on stories told by members of the Whitecrow Village community. The stories are about struggling in school, the importance of friendships and receiving support from friends and family.

*Youth in Care: Lighting up the Darkness.* Jenny returns to her community after living in the city with her aunt and uncle. While visiting family, she has a series of painful flashbacks to when she was a little girl. Jenny's story is one girl's struggle. But many youth will be able to relate to events in her young life.

*Smoking Prevention: River Run* is the story of a group of youth that learn the traditional use of tobacco while on a canoe trip. One of the youth, who smokes, gets her world opened up along the way.

*Mental Health: Just a Story.* Wendy doesn't have any friends her age and feels overwhelmed at school. Her little brother is more social but he's quick to lose his temper and get into fights. Something is clearly bothering them both. Good thing they're open to getting help and breaking down the stigma of mental health.

*Diabetes Awareness: An Invited Threat* is about a family's realization that the food they eat and make available to their community is not good for them. It's about making healthy decisions now, rather than waiting until it's too late.



*Sports/Gang Awareness: Path of the Warrior.* Cullen gets rolled out of his gang and is forced to reconnect with his family and community. Team sports and culture become his new support system.

*Youth Health Issues: Standing Together* was HAN's first comic book. It was created by youth, on the issues that they felt were important to their community.

*Gambling Awareness: On the Turn* is about a young woman that learns how to play poker at school. Peer pressure gets the best of her and she learns what it feels like to hurt someone she loves.

## Posters

The Healthy Aboriginal Network also created a series of 42 posters on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a First Nations youth focus. Previews of a few of the posters can be seen on the website.

\*NB: Descriptions taken from the Healthy Aboriginal Network.

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