

GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS #2

Subject/topic

Language, Social Studies

Overview/focus questions

Students will watch the Geographical Terms video and read excerpts from *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminiscences of Edwin St. Pierre* by Edwin St. Pierre to help them reflect on their own experiences connected to land and stories. Incorporating Michif words, students will create a piece of writing that highlights their own experiences on the land in each of the seasons.

Developed by

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Time

Approx. 120 minutes
(Over 2 learning blocks)

Grade level

Grades 8 - 12

Learning Goals

Students will:

- Understand how stories and spending time on the land influence Michif/Métis worldview.
- Use a “mentor text” to create a story in the style of Edwin St. Pierre.
- Share their written stories in small groups and make personal connections between their own experiences and a story/stories shared by classmates.
- Use at least four new Michif words in their seasonal recollection stories.

Lesson Description

Teacher preparation and background information:

In Canada, there are three recognized groups of Indigenous Peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. The Métis Nation are self-defining people from a specific region (mainly the Canadian western prairies but also parts of British Columbia, Ontario, Northwest Territories, North Dakota, and Montana) with a unique culture, language, and history. The Métis are those who self-identify as Métis and are descended from Indigenous and European/Euro-Canadian people, and who acknowledge the conscious choice of their ancestors to identify as Métis because of a common history and past.

The official language of the Métis Nation is Michif, though there are other languages spoken by the Métis as well. Michif is spoken in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba, as well as Montana and North Dakota. Dating to the late 18th century, Michif is a hybrid language that blends together different languages, most commonly English, French, and Cree.

Michif is an oral language and, until very recently, had not been written down. There is no standardized orthography, and so spelling will vary depending on the speaker and region, as words are spelled phonetically. When learning Michif, the focus is not so much on the spelling and the writing of the words, as on the speaking. There are also other Michif languages, including French Michif and Northern Michif. As such, teachers will see words spelled in numerous ways throughout the lesson plans and videos in the Future of Michif project. The Michif primarily referred to and used in these lesson plans and through the online dictionaries and apps is known as Michif or Heritage Michif; however, you will see other spellings and pronunciations.

You will also hear some speakers in the videos use the term “Michif” to describe a people, and not only a language. The Michif are Métis who speak Michif, versus other languages spoken by the Métis, such as Cree or French.

The Métis have traditionally had a strong connection and relationship with the land. They relied on the land for food, medicine, clothing, building supplies, and more. Communities would travel across the land, living and eating according to nature’s cycles and seasons. The cultivation of crops and employment opportunities also impacted the movement of the Métis. Today, some still follow the traditional Métis lifestyle, paying attention to signs from nature that tell them when certain tasks need to be started or finished. Gifts (often tobacco or tea) are left for the Creator whenever resources (gifts from the land) are harvested. Knowledge of the land is learned through experiences, stories, and teachings. When people celebrate and perform tasks such as harvesting with their families, visiting the land, and listening to others, it allows for them to know the land. Through this knowledge, it is possible to gain an appreciation of the land, the gifts it has to offer, and its teachings. This allows for a connection to the land to be formed.

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Materials Needed

- *Geographical Terms* video
- *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminisces of Edwin St. Pierre* by Edwin St. Pierre
- Writing tools
- Notebook or paper
- Making Connections card
- [Michif To Go \(Google Play\)](#) or the [Heritage Michif To Go \(The App Store\)](#) apps for Michif/English translation
- [Gabriel Dumont Institute Michif Dictionary](#)

Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Teachers should watch the *Geographical Terms* video prior to the lesson to become familiar with Michif geographical terms.

Student Activities

Minds on: The teacher will read aloud the story *Deer* (p. 20-22) in *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminisces of Edwin St. Pierre*. Students will turn and talk to a partner and share a memory connected to being on the land.

Action: The teacher will read *The Four Seasons of the Crescent Lake Métis* (p. 45-48) from *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminisces of Edwin St. Pierre*. Incorporating Michif words, students will write a story about their own connection to the land in each of the seasons.

Conclusion: Students will visit and share their stories to gain knowledge of Michif words and to make connections with classmates' stories.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Read aloud the story *Deer* (p. 20-22) in *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminisces of Edwin St. Pierre*. Have students turn to a partner and share a memory connected to being on the land. The purpose of this exercise is to get students thinking about their own experiences on the land in preparation for the writing assignment later in the lesson.

Possible inferences from the story for the teacher to share:

- In earlier times, survival was easier if you had knowledge of the land, plants, and animals.
- The Métis knew how to respect and support the environment so that it remained healthy.
- Knowledge was passed down when families went hunting, trapping, and harvesting together.
- Métis are hardworking people and never waste what is provided to them.

Action

Tell students they will be watching a video where the speaker will share with them some Michif terminology. Explain that in Michif/Métis culture, knowledge is gained through sharing stories and spending time on the land.

Watch the first part of the *Geographical Terms* video, where Lyla shares how being on the land allows a person to develop a strong relationship with the land and how this knowledge influences language and culture. The purpose of this clip is to begin to understand the Michif/Métis worldview and to build the background knowledge needed to continue engaging in the remainder of the lesson.

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Explain the following to your students: Today we are going to continue reading excerpts from *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminiscences of Edwin St. Pierre* by Edwin St. Pierre. St. Pierre shares what life was like for the Métis in the 1940s in the area of Crescent Lake. As I read, I want you to think (itayhta) of any connections you have to the stories that are shared and write them down.

Example:

- Prairie crocuses are a sign of spring and they also grow in the area where I live.
- There is a place in my own community where the river basins meet up and drain into a bay/lake/ocean.
- I have gained a knowledge of plants around my own home through observation while walking my dog.
- I have gained a knowledge of how to harvest and eat acorns from my Dad.

Read aloud *The Four Seasons of the Crescent Lake Métis* (p. 45-48). Pause after reading each season to allow students to discuss what was read and share any connections that they have written down.

After reading all four seasons, the teacher can share the following inferences:

- Different activities happened in each season to respect the natural cycle of animals and plants.
- The Métis have a vast amount of information on locations, plants, and animals for survival, medicinal use and income.
- Ways of life were passed down to future generations by harvesting, planting, hunting, trapping and completing activities together as a family and community.
- Knowledge of place was gained by visiting and revisiting areas.
- Michif are a hardworking, helpful and supportive people.

The teacher will model how students can use Michif words in the stories they will be creating. The teacher will select a word or phrase from each seasonal story in the book and, using either the *Geographical Terms* video or a Michif online dictionary, identify the meaning of the Michif terms they chose. For example:

Spring

Bush – Bwaa

Summer

Land – Tayr

Fall

Town - Vil

Winter

Hill – Beut

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Note: If a word is not included in the *Geographical Terms* video (such as “town”), use an online Michif dictionary or an app to translate. See the Additional Resources section for more information.

The teacher can then demonstrate how these Michif words can be used in the story about each of the seasons by exchanging an English word in the story for a Michif word.

Now that the teacher has modeled how to add Michif into the stories, students will write their four short stories (one for each season) about their own personal experience with the land in each of the seasons. Next, watch the *Knowledge of the Land* section of the *Geographical Terms* video together as a class to allow students to look for their own individual Michif terms (one for each season). If terms are not in the video, the teacher can direct students to an online Michif dictionary, the [Michif to Go](#), or the [Heritage Michif to Go](#) app. Remind students to use the connections they made to Edwin St. Pierre’s stories as starting points for their own stories about the four seasons.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Visiting Activity: (Please do the sharing/visiting activity outside on the land if weather permits.)

Divide students into groups of four. Have students sit in their small groups and share their written stories with each other. The focus is on listening and remembering the stories that are being shared. After everyone in each group has shared, hand out the Making Connections exit slips for students to complete. Ask students to write about a connection that they made to a classmate’s story. Next, have students ask questions and discuss a classmate’s story to identify and define the Michif word that stood out to them.

Call students back together as a group and make a closing statement about stories, the land, and Michif. For example:

“Now that we have read some stories and created our own recollections, we have a deeper understanding of how stories and spending time completing activities on the land helps the Métis gain knowledge about place, culture, and ways of doing. We have shared our own stories, learned a little Michif and have begun to identify lessons learned from the experiences we have had on the land to prepare us for future land-based experiences.”

Collect all the exit slips and stories for assessment purposes.

Extend your geographical thinking

Read from *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminisces of Edwin St. Pierre* by Edwin St. Pierre:

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Recreational Activities (pages 4-5)

Possible inferences:

- Different activities happened in each season.
- From a young age, children developed relationships with the land.
- Knowledge of land, plants, and animals came from spending time with older siblings and cousins on land.
- Knowledge came from exploring and checking in with the land, plants and animals.

The Social Life of the Métis in the 1940s (pages 40-45)

Possible inferences:

- Métis care, share, and support one another and ensure family and community remain important.
- Visiting with one another helped people pass on knowledge and share stories and is important to the Michif way of life.
- The Michif people called their Nation Michif and spoke Michif amongst themselves.
- The term Métis did not come about until the 1960s.

Read *Plants Growing Along the River - Iii plante kaa shaakikihki oborr la rivyayr* produced by Gabriel Dumont Institute about harvesting plants and then go on a plant walk.

Provide opportunities to visit on the land to gain knowledge of the changes throughout the year.

Invite a Métis Elder or author to speak to students about the importance of stories and the land.

Modifications

- Have students share their own stories verbally instead of in writing.
- Use visuals in *Remembering My Métis Past: Reminiscences of Edwin St. Pierre* by Edwin St. Pierre and *Manny's Memories* by Ken Caron and Angela Caron with students to support discussion and to generate ideas for their own stories.
- Differentiate the number and length of written stories and number of Michif words based on needs for modifications or enrichment.

Assessment Opportunities

- Assess seasonal stories written or shared orally by each student.
- Review exit slips for assessment of student's ability to make text-to-self connections.
- Review exit slips for the learning of one new Michif term.

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Sources and Additional Resources

- *Manny's Memories* by Ken Caron with Angela Caron
- *Plants Growing Along the River-llii plante kaa shaakikihki oborr la rivvayr* produced by Gabriel Dumont Institute
- Michif To Go (Google Play) or the Heritage Michif To Go (The App Store) apps
- Gabriel Dumont Institute Michif Dictionary
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada - Métis