



Witness Blanket



Teacher Guide

Connecting with
Indigenous communities

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Despite the residential schools, Indigenous peoples and their cultures are still alive and strong. After viewing the stories of the *Witness Blanket*, classes should personally connect with Indigenous people in their community to deepen their empathy and understanding of Indigenous communities and ways of knowing.

Connecting with Indigenous communities

Building a relationship with local Indigenous communities is a valuable part of students' education, and an act of reconciliation.

When building these relationships, take time to understand local Indigenous communities and the protocols for working with those communities. Remember that, due to government policies which forcibly separated people from their families, communities and identities, Indigenous people may not be a part of a broader Indigenous community. It is also important to understand that traditional Indigenous experiences and knowledge are not universal and that not all Indigenous people want to share in a classroom setting.

Objective

- Develop a class-driven plan to engage with and participate in local Indigenous cultures or ceremonies.
 - This could include speaking with an Elder, attending a pow-wow or art workshop, or participating in a ceremony.
 - This involves a class brainstorm and research about local Indigenous events or notable Indigenous speakers in the area. Ensure students consider local protocols and how they will respect communities and community members.

Where to start

The first step is understanding which Indigenous communities and cultures are present in your area. Indigenous peoples have various understandings of their collective identity and rights, and much of it centers on place. It is important to know whose traditional territory you live and learn on.

The following links are a good starting point in identifying who the Indigenous peoples are in your area.

- The Government of Canada has an interactive map called a [GeoViewer](#) that shows Indigenous communities across Canada with links to information about each community.
- Native Land Digital provides a map of [traditional Indigenous territories in Canada and around the world](#).

Many school districts, teacher unions and provincial education departments have Indigenous liaisons who support teachers with Indigenous education initiatives. These are good first contacts for you and your students when planning to connect with local Indigenous communities.

Place, protocol and the gift of time in your area

When inviting Indigenous guests, there are often protocols. Those protocols vary, but often begin with a conversation and request, sometimes over tea or coffee, accompanied by a small gift. Many schools offer an honorarium to guests, which is always appreciated. Indigenous speakers and Survivors bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to your school or classroom. It is important to acknowledge that their time and effort includes preparing to retell their story, relive the hurt and recover after the presentation. Respecting their gift to the classroom requires a high level of care and kindness, as well as a gift or honorarium in a spirit of reciprocity. Many teachers thank their guests with art from their students, which follows many Indigenous protocols for gifting.

The act of learning about protocol and place are themselves acts of reconciliation for educators and students.

Prepare with your guest before the visit

1. Make a connection and schedule a time to meet to discuss the visit.
 - a. If possible, meet in person to have tea or coffee with the guest.
2. Discuss appropriate gifting protocols.
3. Ensure guests understand the students' goals for the meeting:
 - i. Listen and talk with an Indigenous person.
 - ii. Build a personal connection.
 - iii. Continue to build empathy with Indigenous people.
4. Discuss where the meeting will take place: in the classroom, a school common area or outside the school? Will your class travel to the guest? Will you meet at a location outdoors?

5. Discuss with your guest what a conversation with your students will look like. A typical conversation may discuss:
 - i. Where the guest is from.
 - ii. What makes the guest proud to be Indigenous.
 - iii. What the class has learned so far.
 - iv. The guest's experience or knowledge of residential schools.
 - v. The guest's understanding of what their culture means to them.

Prepare with your students before the visit

1. Share with your students who they will be meeting, where they are from and a little bit about their story.
 - a. Ensure you know how your guest wants to be described, the place they consider to be their homeland, and how they prefer to be introduced to the class.
2. Establish a process that will allow students to meaningfully participate in welcoming the guest in line with local protocols, as well as in the conversation.

During the visit

1. Have the gift or honorarium ready for the day of the visit.
2. Greet your guest as they arrive and ensure that there will be someone with them the entire time they are visiting, including during breaks such as lunch or recess.
3. Ensure you have enough time in your schedule for a meaningful conversation, with allowances for extra time if needed.

Reflect

After their conversation with the guest, have students write, draw or represent their thoughts on a reflective wall shape and add it to the reflection wall.

Possible reflective questions:

1. What part of our guest's story did you connect with?
2. How can our experiences with our guest contribute to our acts of reconciliation?
3. What new understandings of Indigenous people in our area will you carry forward after this meeting?
4. How do the stories from our guest and stories from the *Witness Blanket* inform your understanding of the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada?