



Foundational Knowledge Overview - Languages of Métis

As an educator I should know...

Languages traditionally spoken by Métis are unique embodiments of Métis worldviews, history, and culture. The unique experience of the Métis Nation is woven into the language. Across the Métis Nation, language reflects evolving diversity and kinships.

“Michif language is the essence of the [Métis] culture. If you learn the language, you will learn who we are as a people.”

There are four languages traditionally spoken by Métis in Alberta: Michif, nehiyawewin (Cree, neh-hee-yaw-way-win)[1], English, and Français (French).[i] Examining languages through a Métis lens shares how language is intimately connected with identity and community. The benefits of teaching and learning languages in Albertan classrooms are manifold. Students who develop an appreciation for languages spoken by Métis are better able to understand Métis culture. Teachers who appreciate the importance of languages, and in particular, the relationship between language and identity, help to cultivate an education system that aligns with what Métis families hope their children will learn about their peoplehood.

The Importance of Language

Educators have the privilege of facilitating meaningful student engagement with Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing. This can be done by facilitating activities that explore Michif and other Indigenous languages used by the Métis. Through the mindful, informed selection of content and teaching methods, teachers can enhance their students' understanding of the Métis worldview. Stories that are shared by teachers in their classrooms are an expression of the provincial curriculum they are empowered to deliver. The narrative behind how these stories are expressed—their choice of words, metaphors, reinforcing ideas, and the language they use to express these stories—determines the message about the Métis that learners internalize.

A Language of Contact and Coming Together

Michif is a contact language that was developed exclusively by the Métis. “Contact language” describes languages that were birthed out of the joining of settlers and Indigenous people. As Cree and Ojibway women married settler men, new communities were formed, and these communities developed a unique language. Communities of First Nations and European families integrated their languages and together



formed a language that was neither First Nations nor European, but uniquely Métis. Michif was not originally a written language. It first developed orally, and was later made into a written language. The first written forms of Michif date back to the early 1900s. The language was developed organically, without the institutional influences of education systems and government which typically impose standardization in Latin languages. As a result of the oral, community-based development of this language, Michif is diverse and complex in its dialects and structure.

[1] This pronunciation of nehiyawewin may vary by region.

[i] Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 52-53.

**excerpt from Foundational Knowledge Resource - Languages of Métis*

Title/Unit: Exploring the Languages of Métis	Time Frame 35 min
Grade/Subject Grade 1 - Math, ELA, and Social	Topic(s) Explore the various language Métis people speak. Learn Classroom words in the languages

Métis Education Themes

- ❑ Languages of Métis
- ❑ Métis Culture and Traditions
- ❑ Homeland History
- ❑ Métis in Alberta
- ❑ Métis Nation Governance

Teacher Quality Standard (TQS) connections

How does this lesson contribute to my knowledge in the following areas?

1. Fostering Effective Relationships
2. Engaging in Career-Long Learning
3. Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge
4. Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments
5. Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit
6. Adhering to Legal Frameworks and Policies



Competencies

Critical Thinking • Problem Solving • **Managing Information** • Creativity and Innovation • **Communication** • **Collaboration** • **Cultural and Global Citizenship** • Personal Growth and Well-being

Vocabulary/Terms

Métis

“Métis means a person who self-identifies as Metis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation”

[National Definition of Metis](#)

Assessment FOR Learning

Students are engaged when listening to the Michif speakers speak in Michif. They are trying to guess what is being said. They are showing a level of respect for the language.

Students are **attempting** to read the Michif words they are labeling the calendar with.

Assessment OF Learning

Students are able to fill in the blanks of what day it is in the 4 languages.
Students are able to discuss what it would be like to speak 4 languages.

Differentiation/Adaptations

Partner

Provide answers/phonetic spelling/visuals

Approx. time	Activity	Materials/Text References <i>Needed: Whiteboard and markers</i>
Intro - 5min	Place the following 4 words on the board 1. Dog 2. Chien 3. Atim 4. Sh'yaen Ask students to guess what language each word is; either nehiyawewin (Cree), Michif, French or English	ANSWER KEY: Mitchif/sh'yaen nehiyawewin (Cree)/Atim French/chien English/Dog



	Explain: These are some of the languages spoken traditionally by Métis People, that will be explored in this lesson.	
New information and discussion: 15min	1. Explain, Métis people spoke a variety of languages. Michif, French, English, and nehiyawewin (Cree). 2. Explain what each language is: a. Who can tell me what Michif is? (This is review from lesson #1) As new Métis communities formed, they would speak through a blend of both French and Cree, which changed into a language of its own; Michif. Michif cannot be broken up into two languages (Cree and French) but instead is a balanced blend of each culture and language. b. Français (French) is a birth language of the Métis. Métis children that participated in school or church would have also learned how to speak the French language. Many Métis people still speak French today. c. Cree: nehiyawewin (Cree) is an Indigenous language spoken across Canada.. A majority of Métis people who speak an Indigenous language speak Cree. Many Métis people continue to speak Cree today. d. English: although not as common, some Métis were able to speak the English language across the homeland. It was beneficial to be able to speak the English language when trading and/or negotiating with English settlers. Some Métis learned	A computer with a sound system for voice clip of Michif speaker.



	English as they may have had Scottish, English, or Irish ancestors that would have passed down the language. 3. Ask students to think about the following question, and then discuss it as a class: Why would Métis people have different languages? (what would be the purpose?) ANSWER: Being able to speak so many different languages was very important to Métis communities. Knowing many languages allowed Métis people to help in the Fur Trade. DISCUSS: What would it be like to know more than one language? How would that affect you? How would it change your life?	
Closure 15min	ACTIVITY: 1) List the days of the week in English 2) Listen to the Michif speaker list the days of the week and place them on the board next to the English ones: Metis Museum Resource (as you listen, try and guess which day is which. Pause and repeat the words you hear) 3) Add the Cree and French words to your list. <i>(See the English, French, Michif and Cree words for the days of the week below)</i> <u>Activity #2:</u> Label your classroom calendar together using French, English, Michif and Cree. 1) After listening to the video place the labels on your class calendar together as a class (see labels at the end of the lesson) 2) Go through each word and try and say them	Find the labels for the calendar at the bottom of the lesson



	As a class, create a sentence using the day of the week, in each language. (Have students fill in the blank page below while you create the sentences on the board) EXAMPLE: Today is Monday, tomorrow will be Tuesday, and yesterday was Sunday. (English) Today is lundi, tomorrow will be mardi, and yesterday was dimanche. (French) Today is Laenjii, tomorrow will be Morjii, and yesterday was Jimaansh. (Michif) Today is peyak kîsikâw, tomorrow will be niso kîsikâw, and yesterday was ayamihêwi-kîsikâw. (Cree)	
Extension Activities - Every morning say the day of the week in Michif, and Cree - Label the classroom in English, French, Michif and Cree using these websites: Online Cree Dictionary Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture		
Resources/Links/Videos Metis Museum Resource		
Credits Foundational Knowledge Resource: Languages of Métis Rupert's Island Institute *Please note that while Rupert's Island Centre for Teaching and Learning (RCTL) has consulted with a variety of Language & Culture carriers, it is recognized that there are a variety of dialects spoken or written amongst communities. Rupert's Island Institute - Métis Centre of Excellence, Education Team (2020)		

ANSWER KEY FOR ACTIVITY #1



ENGLISH	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
FRENCH	lundi	mardi	mercredi	jeudi	vendredi	samedi	dimanche
CREE	peyak kîsikâw	niso kisikâw	nistokesikaw	newokisikâw	nîyânano kîsikâw	nikotwâsik kîsikâw	ayamihêwi- kîsikâw
MICHIF	Laenjii	Morjii	Mikaarjii	Jhwijii	Vaandarjii	Samjii	Jimaansh

Fill in the blanks for Activity #2 (print one for each student)

Name: _____

ENGLISH:

Today is _____.



FRENCH:

Today is _____.

MICHIF:

Today is _____.

CREE:

Today is _____.