

What is the Métis sash? Can I use one in my class?

What has become known as the “Métis sash” is really a repurposed article of clothing that filled a number of important practical uses for French Canadian explorers, the Eastern Woodland people that also used it and ultimately the Métis people themselves:

“The sash is a finger woven belt made of brightly coloured wool ... approximately three metres long. Wrapped about the midsection, the sash was used to carry belongings during fur trade duties, but had many uses as belt, tumpline (a rope worn over the head to pull or carry heavy objects) and rope. It was tied at the waist to hold a coat closed. ... Into this are thrust the buffalo knife behind, and the fire bag at the right side. The sash served as a tourniquet for injuries or to wrap a broken bone, as a wash cloth, as a towel, as a saddle blanket, a bridle and a marker left on a killed buffalo to identify it as the property of the shooter. It could lash your canoe, like a rope, for a portage. The sash used in the past could be upwards of 12 feet long and was utilized as a rope or pulley to assist the free traders to haul the trade goods up, down or along. It acted like a scarf, and the colours helped identify your allegiance.” (Louis Riel Institute - date accessed April 2017 - <http://www.louisrielinstitute.com/the-sash.php>)

While it is important culturally, it doesn't have a spiritual or ceremonial significance that would require a particular protocol in place before showing it to students. It is important to recognize that these days, the sash has become a symbol of pride and identification for Métis people. (Manitoba and Saskatchewan have both created "The Order of the Sash" given to members of the Métis community who have made important cultural, political or social contributions. - *Louis Riel Institute - 2017*) Strictly speaking it is the “Assomption” pattern that provides the traditional colours of the sash, but there are new variations (adding black or dark blue) that are making an appearance at various functions.

When they teach about Métis culture, some teachers have expressed concern about using sashes that they have acquired in gift shops or on the internet. Can they use it as an artifact for their classrooms? I'd say if the supplier has a connection with authentic Métis culture (ie. The Gabriel Dumont Institute or other source) then you could say it is “really” a Métis sash. Otherwise you can certainly use it as an example of a “ceinture fléchée” that is similar to what is/was worn by Métis people.

Here are some additional links for more info.

http://www.mmf.mb.ca/the_sash.php

<http://www.kikino.org/metis-culture/the-sash.php>

<http://www.louisrielinstitute.com/the-sash.php>

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/205/301/ic/cdc/albertametis/history/sash.htm>