



## Foundational Knowledge Overview - Métis Culture & Traditions

As an Educator I should know...

The Métis are a strong, Indigenous people who celebrate distinct traditions, languages, culture, politics, governance, and history. Métis are a collective of communities with a common sense of origin and destiny<sup>[i]</sup> with kinship networks which span across a historic homeland. They share a common nationalism that is distinct from other local identities. The traditional homeland of the Métis Nation is expansive, including all of what is now called Alberta.<sup>[ii]</sup>

Métis traditions and cultural practices celebrate, serve, and strengthen the family; the strength of a community is reflective of its families. Family gatherings connect people to one another, and these connections make life rich. Valuing relationships creates strong, united kinships among Métis families and communities.

Honouring relationships is tied to Métis entrepreneurship. Networking is foundational to the prosperity and independence of the Métis. Networking was advantageous to the Métis in the years of the fur trade. Métis roles as freemen positioned them as central to the economic relationships between First Nation and colonial groups.<sup>[i]</sup>

The diligent, hardworking nature of the Métis is complemented by an exuberant, lively community life. A variety of Métis cultural expressions emphasize celebration and socialization. It is common for Métis people to get together and play a quick tune on the fiddle, get out the spoons, and do some jigging. Informal gatherings, like inviting people over for tea, provide a venue for storytelling and teaching skills, such as beading. Gathering around the table or the fire in the evening after a long day of trapping or working is also the prime time for sharing stories of all kinds.

### Métis Family Traditions

It is apt to begin with the family when exploring Métis traditions and culture, because it is within Métis families that cultural traditions have been fostered. As many educators may know, what constitutes “family” is culturally defined. The idea of a nuclear family—consisting of a father, a mother, and their biological children—is dominant in Western society. In the Western model aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are considered to be one’s extended family.

Métis children know their guardians to be not just their mothers and fathers, but also their aunties, uncles, and grandparents. Beyond Western tradition, aunties and uncles in Métis society are not just the



biological siblings of their mother and father; aunts and uncles play a role as nurturing, caring adults in a child's life, as do other family friends, cousins, and more. It is common practice in many Métis families for everyone to contribute in raising children.

For many Métis, the family calls one another by their kinship ties, rather than by formal, given names. One Métis man shared that he calls his brother, "Brother" instead of by his given name, "Macey."<sup>[i]</sup> Family kinship terms such as this demonstrate the value of kinship in Métis families that is distinct from Western families.

Something else that is quite common in Métis families are nicknames. Almost everyone has a nickname and they usually get that nickname because of something that happened.

The kinship web defined in Cree and Michif languages extends beyond the Western family mode. For example, there are distinct notions of a relationship between the mother's side and father's side of the family. While exploring the intricacies of Métis kinship terms and traditions is beyond the scope of this document, it is essential that educators know that many Métis families are organized differently than the standard generally promoted by Western institutions. It is important that these differences are acknowledged and celebrated.

## Traditional Métis Homes

Throughout Métis history, Métis families have taken up farming and homesteading, in addition to mobile lifestyles. The homes and lives of Métis farming and homestead families reflected Métis family values and kinship traditions.<sup>[i]</sup>

One of the main features of a Métis home was its open floor plan. It had no interior walls or separated rooms. The homes were usually one and a half or two stories high and had a cellar and/or exterior shack. The most common style of a Métis folk home featured the door centred on the face of the house, with two windows arranged symmetrically on either side of it. Rounded or squared white poplar or spruce logs created the main structure. The exterior walls were sealed with mud plaster, then often painted white.

The open floor plans lacked bounded, walled-off spaces for each person living in the home, and this reflects the Métis traditions of community and togetherness.<sup>[ii]</sup> The environment of the Métis home allowed family members to take care of each other.

## River Lots

The Métis values of community, networking, and kinship are reflected spatially in the traditional ways they organized their communities. Many Métis across the Métis homeland took up agricultural lifestyles and adopted a unique way of organizing their land. Whereas English systems sought to impose a square grid



pattern upon the land, Métis adapted the French river-lot system to organize their agricultural communities. Métis communities across the Homeland and into Alberta organized land lots in this way to allow for kinship and for communities to gather,[i]

## Métis Dance

Métis stories, historically and today, feature lively gatherings where the Métis dance with passion, whether in large gatherings in the community, or smaller gatherings in family homes. Mervin Desjarlais, a member of the Métis community in Caslan, Alberta, shared about the dances in his community. In his story, he describes how everyone at any time was welcome to join in the house dances. This welcoming, open culture is an expression of Métis ways of kinship.

## Conclusion

Community, networking, kinship, traditional storytelling, mobility, adaptability, and resilience are all foundational values of Métis culture that provide structure to Métis communities. These components are essential to understanding the Métis worldview, and guide Métis ways of living. These values have guided the Métis in periods full of exciting opportunities, and also during times when the Métis have faced devastating, challenging circumstances.

Historically, the extended family was the basic unit of survival in Indigenous societies. It would have been impossible to subsist on the land without everybody working together. Young mothers and fathers were often busy securing and preparing food. Parenting was traditionally undertaken by members of the extended family. Children also learned from other members of the community with special skills, such as traditional knowledge, lessons in economics, politics, language development, and artistic abilities. The education of children was both a family and a community responsibility.

Historically, and today, in traditional Métis families, every member of the family has an important role to fulfill and everyone is expected to contribute to the general welfare of the family. Often, family needs are ahead of individual desires. This order of priorities results in both collective needs and individual desires being achieved, as the collective always considers the individuals that make up its parts.

A variety of historical policies contributed to the challenges Indigenous families face today. For example, in the 1960s, many First Nations and Métis children were removed from their homes by the child welfare system. The Indian Residential School (IRS) system is another example of systemic challenges incurred by Indigenous Peoples, imposed by the British Crown. The IRS imposed system was detrimental to the education systems of Indigenous Peoples.

Thankfully, many Métis families, despite having minimal support to maintain traditional education systems



were/are able to maintain transfer of knowledge and skills to the next generations. As a result, the knowledge and skills of Métis are still strong in many Métis families and communities today.

A main component of this education transfer is through active engagement with informed community members, who we connect to via family members. It is through interactions with informed community/family members where the knowledge is transferred through/to the interdependent integral individuals that make up our communities.

This lesson emphasizes the important role that family plays in the education of the child.

(adapted from: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1316530294102/1535458624988#un5>)

*Excerpt from Rupert's Island Institute's Foundational Knowledge Resource, Métis Culture and Traditions*

**Title/Unit:** Métis  
Community & Kinship

**Time Frame:** 45-50 minutes

**Grade/Subject:** 4 -9  
Social Studies/ELA

**Topic(s):** Community/Kinship/Family/Diversity/Identity

## Métis Education Themes

- ☐ Languages of 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



## Ticket Out

At the end of the lesson, students should be able to confidently respond to/understand the following questions:

**What are traditional family values? How are these values demonstrated in Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing? Identify values demonstrated in your family.**

### Assessment FOR Learning

Students are:

- engaged
- identifying personal family values
- listening
- respectful
- participating
- collaborative

### Assessment OF Learning

Students:

- generate Family Fact lists and draft Value Statements in ways that directly connect to their Family Fact list
- re-evaluate and reconstruct their Family Value statements based on their family member feedback, and are able to speak to the process
- are able to identify traditional Métis family values and make connections
- are able to better understand the impact of societal changes on cultural practices, and understand how this impacts the values of communities. Specifically, societal changes in Alberta/Canada and how the changes have impacted the culture of Métis, and by consequence the maintenance of community and kinship values
- list Family Facts that are observable and measurable and are distinct from opinions
- increase their understanding of Métis identity by identifying the correct/incorrect graphic organizer, and are able to rationalize their response in relation to Métis identity

## Differentiation/Adaptations

Be mindful that families are not all the same. Explore and honour this diversity.

Provide family value lists

Have values typed and cut out - students can manipulate them on the Venn diagram

Tie in Métis author and artist, Leah Dorion's Retelling of The Giving Tree

[https://www.leahdorion.ca/gallery\\_the\\_giving\\_tree.html](https://www.leahdorion.ca/gallery_the_giving_tree.html)





Time/Activity	Instructions
Preparation	<p>Writing Journals for students</p> <p>Review PowerPoint Presentation to accompany Métis Community and Kinship</p> <p>Copies of Métis Family and Kinship Excerpt</p> <p>Family Facts Venn Diagram (Appendix A)</p>
5 minutes Introduction	<p>Students document their reflection of their Family Facts</p> <p>Students partner up and share their lists with each other</p> <p><b>PowerPoint Presentation</b></p> <p><b>Slide 1 - Introduction</b></p> <p><b>Slide 2</b> - Displays Louis List of Family Facts; read these with students.</p> <p><b>Slide 3</b> - Displays Louis Venn Diagram. Ask for a student volunteer who also gets to: "... go hunting with [their] uncle every year" (Note: If no students volunteer, then go through Louis Family Facts until someone in the class also experiences that "Fact" in their family (i.e. "have many cousins").</p> <p>Based on students' responses, move the Facts to the correct area of the Venn Diagram so that students are familiar with the graphic organizer.</p> <p>Ask the student if there are any other facts listed that are <b>similar</b> between their family and Louis' family. Move the facts that are similar between Louis and the student volunteer to the middle, and ask them to contribute 1 Family Fact of their own that is different from what is listed on the displayed Venn Diagram; place this "Fact" in the right segment of the Venn Diagram.</p> <p><u>Handout to each student 1 Venn Diagram template</u></p> <p><b>Slide 4</b> - Displays directions for student pairs to populate a Venn Diagram based on theirs and their partner's Family Facts.</p> <p>Have students return to their desks. In their writing journal or on their Venn</p>



Diagram ask students to complete the following sentence:

**My family is unique to my partners family because my family...**

**Slide 5 - Explain** that families make up communities, and our families are influenced by the communities from which we come from. Explain that communities come from places in the world, and the ways that communities do things are influenced by the places they are from. For example, British and French Settlers arrived to this land and because the languages from their homeland (Britain and France) were English and French, it is important to them that these languages are maintained. That is why there are Canadian policies that express that French and English are the official languages of Canada. It is important to be able to continue traditions in our families from our communities, based on the places which we are from.

Métis communities are Indigenous to Canada. This means that Métis People are from this place and this land. Let students know that we will read some information about Métis community and kinship that gives us information about the uniqueness of Métis families.

**Read the Métis Community and Kinship excerpt outloud or provide copies to students.**

**Optional: Show Video - Stories of Growing Up Métis**

Discuss how cultural practices like trapping may not be as active today, due to changes in society, but that the traditions are still maintained. Gathering together in the evening to share stories (tradition) still happens today even for traditional Métis families who don't necessarily have long days trapping (cultural practice).

Ask students what societal changes may have impacted the Métis culture of trapping: Métis historically were very successful people in trapping; what in society may have helped this success? (anticipated/possible response what may impact the tradition of community and kinship connection? [C1]) (anticipated/possible responses: trapping environments are being overtaken by industry and urban developments; families live separate from their home community and aren't able to physically connect everyday; synthetic materials are replacing furs, etc.; imposed rules/regulations make it difficult for families/disable them altogether, to practice trapping – economic and political



responses are the aim)[CJ1]

Additional vocabulary that will be helpful to review with students, *as they read*, may include:

entrepreneurship	languishing
networking	intentional
prosperity	revive
liaise	mutual
diligent	socialization
exuberant	kohkum
Old People	moshum

[CJ1]Could add being far from traplines due to living near major cities for employment. In my case, my trapline is 2 hrs away from where I live.

**Slide 6:** - Ask students to consider what Métis community and kinship facts they learned about in the reading exercise. Ask students to complete the following sentence strand in their journal:

**Métis families and communities** \_\_\_\_\_

Ask students to volunteer answers until 5 Facts have been listed by the class.

Be sure to correct any misconceptions revealed in their responses to ensure accuracy in their interpretation. (i.e. "Métis don't visit the Old Ones anymore")





	<p>respond with: although this practice is <i>languishing</i> it is not gone! Métis People still value this source of knowledge and the Old Ones are still visited for their knowledge and support. Languishing means that this practice needs attention or we risk losing this resource as a knowledge base”.</p> <p><b>Slide 7:</b> Review A little bit more about Métis slide</p> <p>After asking the question displayed on the slide “What could the titles of a Venn Diagram in relation to European and First Nations look like?” switch to slide 8.</p> <p><b>Slide 8:</b> Have a volunteer guess which Venn Diagram is incorrect, and invite the class to determine why (anticipated response: The Centre diagram is incorrect because Métis are a distinct People, they are not a mix of French and Cree).</p> <p><b>Slide 9:</b> provides the answer and the rationale for Slide 7.</p> <p><b>Slide 10:</b> Value Statements</p> <p>Facts about families give insight into what a family values.</p> <p>Review Louis Family Facts that were explored at the beginning of the activity and ask students to verbally offer potential value statements. If students struggle, or after two statements are offered, reveal the Value Statements that are under the red blocked Facts blurb on the slide by moving it to the left.</p> <p><b>Slide 11:</b> Review the slide and ask students to complete at least one Value Statement in reference to their Family Facts.</p>
<p><b>Closure</b></p>	<p><b>Ask</b> students to remember how we reviewed how Métis communities respect the voice of the collective. In adhering to this value, we are going to be sure that our personally written Value Statements represent the people that they are written about – our families.</p> <p>It is important, if we are following the value of Métis collectivity, that our families support the Value Statements, and that they agree to them. The homework, then, is to return to our families and check that the statements are accurate. Once our families have expressed their support on the Value Statement it will be valid to share with each other what our Family Value</p>



Statements are.

Have students record this task in their agenda for homework.

## Extension Activities

Share Value Statements that are affirmed by students' families in a sharing circle.

Dig deeper. Explore the following questions:

How does *where* your family comes from influence the value your family has? What societal changes impact cultural practices and traditional values of families and communities?

## Resources/Links/Videos

Stories of Growing Up Métis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wVoC16yTW4>

## Credits

**Rupert's Land Institute** *Métis Centre of Excellence*-Education Team (2020)

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1316530294102/1535458624988>