



Métis Agriculture in Saskatchewan

In this lesson students will explore the history of the Métis people and their contributions to the Canadian culture. Students will look at the historical background of Métis farming in Saskatchewan.

Outcomes:

DR 4.1 Correlate the impact of the land on the lifestyles and settlement patterns of the people of Saskatchewan.

DR 4.2 Explain the relationship of First Nation and Métis peoples with the land.

Indicators:

DR4.1 c. Make inferences about why people in Saskatchewan settled particular locations, including settlement patterns before and after coming together of First Nations and European peoples using a variety of maps (e.g., near waterways, sources of water, rail lines, natural resources, low population density in rural areas).

DR4.1 d. Identify the characteristics of the unique geographic regions in Saskatchewan.

DR4.1 f. Analyze the influence of geography on the lifestyle of people living in Saskatchewan (e.g., flora and fauna, pastimes, transportation, cost of food, type of food, occupations, availability of services such as education and health care).

DR4.1 g. Conduct an inquiry investigating how residents of Saskatchewan came to occupy the land that is now our province (e.g., First Nations, early Europeans, and Métis).

DR4.2 d. Research the history of the Métis people and their relationship with the land.

DR4.2 e. Compare the traditional views of land and culture of the Aboriginal peoples of Saskatchewan with those of the railway developers.

DR4.2 f. Assess the impact of historic loss of land on First Nations and Métis people.

DR4.2 h. Research the Métis struggle for land, and the displacement of Métis people in the late 19th century.

Questions to Guide Inquiry:

1. How was land viewed and used by Métis people?
2. Why was farming important to the Métis?



Two
45 minute
classes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- * Poster paper
- * handouts 5.1, 5.2,
5.3



Teacher Background

The lesson begins with an examination of one of the flags of the Métis Nation in Saskatchewan. A useful site to research other Métis flags is www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/ca_metis.html. According to information on this site, the infinity symbol (the horizontal figure eight) represents the coming together of two distinct and vibrant cultures, those of Europe and indigenous North America, to produce a distinctly new culture, the Métis. The flag symbolizes the creation of a new society with roots in both Aboriginal and European cultures and traditions. The infinity symbol would suggest Métis people will exist forever. The bison were of central significance to the existence of the Métis who made their life from the land and its resources. The rare white buffalo holds a spiritual value and reflects the connection between the Métis and the natural resources of the land.






In 1774 Cumberland House was founded as a fur trade depot. It is the oldest settled community in Saskatchewan.

Although historically the Métis are probably better known for their skill as buffalo hunters, farming was an essential part of their daily activity. Farming was important to the Métis because it increased the income they received from their primary occupations as hunters, labourers, and ranchers. It is not well known that Métis families farming in river lots near present day Prince Albert were actually the first to cultivate wheat in Saskatchewan.

The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture (www.metismuseum.com) provides considerable information about the Métis people, their culture, and images associated with their history, art, and heritage.

Before Activity

Display (on an overhead or digital projector) and/or distribute the Métis flag and the poem, "We Are Called Métis" (Handout 5.1). Have students suggest what the symbols on the flag might represent. Have them suggest why they believe these symbols are appropriate on the Métis flag. Have students follow along as the poem is read. Discuss it with the class. Examples of questions to pose:

-  What does unity mean?
-  What does Métis mean?
-  What might the words suffering, condemnation, and indignity mean?
-  Who was Louis Riel?
-  What do you think invisible minority means?



During Activity

Day One

Use the jigsaw method of group work (Teacher Information 5.1). Split the students into home groups of four. Each person in the home group will be given a different topic to research. Stress to students that each person has different information and the group will be depending on individual students to learn and then share their information with the others. Topics are: Who are the Métis? (Handout 5.2) 1885 Resistance (Handout 5.3) Métis Food and Diet (Handout 5.4) Métis Farming (Handout 5.5).

Form temporary expert groups. As an example, all students who have read the handout, “Métis Food and Diet”, will meet briefly to discuss what is important to share back in their home group. Once students finish in their ‘alike’ group, they are ‘experts’ in their area of study and can share the information they have learned with the other members of their home group.

Day Two

Each group creates a representation of Métis agriculture in Saskatchewan. Using poster paper, students sketch or otherwise represent the most important information from their research. Supply and discuss a copy of the rubric (Handout 5.6) so students are aware of the project’s expectations.

Completed posters are displayed in the classroom.

After Activity

In their journals, students explain the information on their group’s poster and respond to some of the others on display. They are to include in their entries their personal reflection on the aspects of their poster they were pleased with as well as an indication of what improvements could be made.

Assessment

Rubric for the poster (Handout 5.6).

Journal Rubric

Teacher Checklist

- ✓ Did student participate effectively in expert group discussion?
- ✓ Did student appear to successfully share information with the home group?
- ✓ Did student contribute effectively in the poster creation?



Lesson Resources

www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/ca_metis.html#flag has historical flags of the Métis nation in Canada.






<http://www.members.shaw.ca/mno-ssm/metis-info/mary-coates.htm> is a source of the poem by Linda Mary Coates, "We Are Called Métis".

The website, Back to Batoche at <http://backtobatoche.org> has a great deal of information on Métis history and identity including interviews, games, and videos.

Further Investigation

You may want to organize a class trip to the Western Development Museum or to Batoche.

You may consider investigating any of the web sites below with your students:

-  www.saskstories.ca/ supplies narratives which complement Grade 4 Saskatchewan social studies.
-  www.virtualsk.com/current_issue/batoche.html Virtual Saskatchewan is an on-line magazine. This link connects to the story of Batoche.
-  www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/creelang/index.html This is a Mischif and Métis cultural site which includes Mischif words and phrases, art projects, stories and legends, as well as explorations of Métis history.
-  www.metismuseum.ca/main.php is a link to the Gabriel Dumont's Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture.
-  www.scaa.sk.ca/gallery/saskremembers/en_audio-m.php has selections of Métis music, reels, and jigs.



The Jigsaw Method

The Jigsaw method is a cooperative learning technique in which students work in small groups. Jigsaw learning allows students to be both introduced to material and maintain a high level of personal responsibility. In this method, each group member is assigned to become an “expert” on some aspect of a unit of study. After reading about their area of expertise, the experts from different groups meet to discuss their topic, and then return to their home groups and take turns teaching their topics to their group mates.



The Process

1. Divide students into 3 or 4 person jigsaw groups.
2. One student from each group may be appointed as the leader. Initially, this person should be the most mature student in the group.
3. Divide the day’s lesson into 3-4 segments. For example, Grade 4 students are to learn about the history of Métis agriculture in Saskatchewan. There are four segments to the material: (1) Who are the Métis? (2) The 1885 Resistance, (3) Métis food and diet, (4) Métis farming.
4. Assign each student to learn one segment, making sure students have direct access only to his/her own segment.
5. Give students time to read over their assigned segment at least twice and become familiar with it.
6. Form temporary “expert groups” by having one





student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.

7. Bring the students back into their jigsaw or home groups.
8. Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.
9. Circulate from group to group, observing the process and making any appropriate interventions.



We are called Métis

by Linda Mary Coates

My children ask me where I'm from,
and now it's time to say,
We are the people, true Canadians,
We are called Métis.

From the union of Europe's settlers,
and the grand First Nations are we,

The symbol of unity
that binds the people of our land.
We are the people, true Canadians,
We are called Métis.

Risen above the suffering, the condemnation
and indignity,

Tales of Riel and history
remind us to be proud and true.
We are the people, true Canadians,
We are called Métis.

Dark hair, fair hair, brown eyes, blue,
We have become as one,
The invisible minority, we blend,
We live among,
Are we Scottish, English, Native, French?
No, we are one,
We are called Métis.





Who are the Métis?

The word “Métis” is usually traced to a French word which means “mixed”. The Métis consist of individuals descended from First Nations women (Cree, Ojibwa, and Salteaux) and European men, usually French, English, or Scottish people working in the North American fur trade. The Métis people became a mixture of First Nations and European culture. The Métis developed their own unique language, known as “Michif”. However, Michif is spoken today by only a small percentage of the Métis community although there are efforts being made to protect it.

The Métis are one of the three separate Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, as recognized by the Canadian constitution*. The Métis people were important to the Europeans as they worked as guides and interpreters. They brought provisions such as food and other supplies to the new forts and trading companies the Europeans had built across Canada from the Great Lakes (in what is now the province of Ontario) to the interior of British Columbia. Today, the Métis homeland includes Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.



Métis fur trader, 1870



Red River carts were traditional transportation



There are many items we associate with Métis culture. No Métis cultural gathering is complete unless there are fiddlers playing lively dance music such as reels and jigs. Traditional Métis clothes included woven sashes, beaded vests, and deer hide caps. Métis women are well known for their skill in the traditional Aboriginal arts of beading, embroidery, and finger weaving. Métis people developed and used Red River carts to travel across the Great Plains. These strong, two-wheeled wooden carts have become a lasting symbol of the Métis people.

*This is the highest law in Canada



Marriages between First Nations women and fur traders resulted in an entirely new group of people, the Métis, known as "children of the fur trade," "Michif," or "gens du libre." On the prairies, Métis were known as Flower Beadwork People - a tribute to their penchant for brightly adorned flower beadwork clothing.

Historic photos accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission.



The 1885 Resistance

In 1869 the Hudson's Bay Company sold most of what was then called Rupert's Land to the newly formed Canadian Government. Rupert's Land was made up of present day Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Southern Alberta, southern Nunavut, and northern parts of Ontario and Quebec. However, the Métis people who lived, farmed, and worked on the land were not included in the talks about what would happen to the land and the people living and farming on it.

The Métis were frightened of what might happen to them as a result of this land sale to the Canadian government. A Métis leader by the name of Louis Riel worked to preserve Métis rights and culture so they would not be lost. He argued for a place for the Métis Nation in this new arrangement. However, a number of promises were not kept by the government including Métis land claims. Many families were given what was called a land scrip, or gift certificate to buy land somewhere else. As a culture and people the Métis wanted to live together with their friends and family. As more and more settlers began to arrive in their territory, more and more Métis ended up selling their land scrip. The Métis began to move to other areas such as Batoche, on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River northwest of Saskatoon, so they could begin a new life together. Traditional Métis farms were placed along river



*Gabriel Dumont (1837-1906),
Military Commander of the
Métis during the North
West Rebellion of 1885.*



Louis Riel



banks in long, narrow lots. Each farm had a small river front. The river would provide the farmers with a means of transportation, drinking water, and food. However, the Canadian government surveyors* began dividing the Prairies into square sections, ignoring the Métis people's way of farming. If river lots disappeared, the Métis feared that they would lose their farms and their close community.

Worried, the Métis people, led by Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, resisted. They would defend their land and their way of life. In 1885, the government sent troops to stop the Métis resistance. Riel and some of his followers were arrested. Louis Riel was executed in Regina on November 16, 1885.

*Surveyors are people whose job it is to set up land boundaries by measuring angles and distances.



Drawing of Riel's capture accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission. Photo of Louis Riel courtesy Public Archives of Canada. Remaining historic photos accessed from <http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/DE/Sask-100gallery/index.htm> and to be reproduced for educational purposes only.



Métis Food and Diet

The Métis added to the Canadian diet by adapting many nourishing and flavourful foods traditionally eaten by their First Nations and European ancestors. Examples of these foods are Aboriginal foods such as pemmican or wild rice and French-Canadian foods such as Tourtière (a pork-based meat pie) and les Boulettes (meatballs).

A high fat and carbohydrate (sugar and starch) diet was necessary for traditional Métis peoples because they lived a very active and often physically demanding lifestyle. Because they farmed, hunted, and fished they had variety in their diet. However, there was always the chance that, in a bad year, a family might run out of fresh food. Winter, too, was a long season and no matter the skill of a hunter or trapper there was the threat that there would not be enough food to last until spring.

In the summer and fall, Métis women usually dried meats and berries for later use. Dried berries and fruits could later be boiled to make tarts and pies or eaten with cream. Drying and smoking meat and fish was done outdoors in the sun and wind using racks over low fires. Dried meat and fish could be eaten plain or could be boiled in stews. Pemmican was an essential diet of many Métis people and a product that could last for years. It was necessary



Drying fish by the creek



Berry picking expedition



for survival. Pemmican is a food made from pounded buffalo meat. It is then blended with berries and hot buffalo fat. Meats, fish, berries, and fruits were also canned. Autumn was the season for canning and some families canned up to a thousand litres of vegetables, fruits, wild berries, fish, and wild meat.

First Nations corn and barley were dried and ground for easy storage and used in soups, stews, bannock*, and other breads. Fruits and vegetables were stored in small cellars so families would have vitamins and minerals in the winter. Meat could be kept cool in a well or buried in sawdust, wheat, or under the ground.

*Bannock is flat bread made of flour, salt, and water. It is a traditional Métis food used by people who had to eat a quick, nourishing, and tasty meal, particularly when doing an activity. Like pemmican, bannock was a high-energy food eaten by travelers or other people engaged in a great deal of physical activity.



Corn was an important part of the Métis diet



Indian woman making bannock at Loon Lake

Historic photos accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission. Image of woman making bannock courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library, Local History Room



Métis Farming

Did you know that Métis families farming in river lots near present day Prince Albert were the first to cultivate* wheat in Saskatchewan? Although the Métis are probably better known for their skill as buffalo hunters, farming was an essential part of their daily activity. Farming was important to the Métis because it increased the income they got from their main occupations as hunters, labourers, and ranchers. Most farms remained small, because of the lack of metal equipment with which to break and work the land. This meant that only a few acres could be planted in a season. Most Métis farmers could not afford tractors, and the amount of land they could cultivate remained small. Most grains from the Batoche region (northwest of Saskatoon) were still being shipped north in exchange for furs.

Traditional Métis farms in the Prairies were located along riverbanks in long narrow lots. Since the river lots and farm yards were narrow, Métis families lived close to each other and had close ties with other Métis families. There was a strong sense of community. Well used trails and paths connected Métis river lots. Wood for fuel and building materials was provided by the river valley. Métis farms were all on the river so families had water close by for transportation, fishing, irrigation, and drinking. River lot farming worked well in the Red River and South Saskatchewan River areas.





For many Métis people though, farming the land was impossible, simply because they had no land to farm. Thousands of Métis people had lost their land. When the West was open for settlement, the government decided to deal with Métis and Aboriginal land claims through the distribution of certificates (called scrips). These could be traded for either cash or land. Unfortunately, this idea did not work well. The process was very long and confusing. It required a lot of travel. This travel was often during the busy summer months. An entire family would need to leave their home and work for several days.

As a result, many Métis ended up without land. Today there are very few Métis farmers.

*To raise crops by ploughing the land, planting seeds, and taking care of the growing plants.



Historic photos accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission.



Poster Rubric

Name: _____
Project: _____
Date: _____

	Exceeding Expectations 4	Meeting Expectations 3	Beginning to Meet Expectations 2	Not Yet Meeting Expectations 1
Clarity of graphics & labels	All content is clear and identifiable. All items of importance on the poster are clearly labeled.	Most of the content is clear and can be identified Almost all items of importance on the poster are clearly labeled.	Some of the content is clear and identifiable. Several items of importance on the poster are clearly labeled.	Many graphics are not clear or are too small None or very few important items were labeled.
Content Accuracy	At least 7 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.	5-6 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.	3-4 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.	Fewer than 3 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.
Conventions (spelling, punctuation, care, and attention to detail)	There are no significant mistakes of convention on the poster.	There are very few mistakes of convention on the poster.	There are a several mistakes of convention on the poster.	There are numerous mistakes of convention on the poster.
Overall Impression	Wow! Very impressive work demonstrated.	Good work. The student would appear to "get it" but there are improvements that could be made to make it better yet.	Student has not quite "got it" yet; however, there are numerous ways that it could be brought to a more acceptable level.	The student does not "have it". The work does not demonstrate understanding.
Additional Comments:				Total: _____ /16