Grade One
Topic C: Other Canadian Families

Lesson Plan 1: Our Culture, Our Language

Generalization
Families maintain traditions that have been passed down from their parents and grandparents

Rationale
There is an intricate link between culture and language. Many people would argue that a culture is unable to survive without language as the basis of communication. It is important that students understand how language is important to their own culture and to the culture of others.

Objectives
Knowledge
• Understand the importance of language to a culture
• Define culture
• Recognize that there are many different Aboriginal languages
• Understand that many Aboriginal groups have similar traditions but speak different languages

Skills
• Learn a new word in an Aboriginal language
• Identify different Aboriginal groups in Alberta
• Recognize symbols of their own culture and those of others

Attitude
• Show respect and interest in Aboriginal culture
• Participate in classroom activities as an individual and as part of a group

Teacher Information
Language is a critical and essential component in the maintenance and transmission of culture from one generation to the next. Language reflects a unique worldview specific to the culture to which it belongs. It is also an important symbol that helps define group and individual identity. Geography is an important element to consider when understanding the diversity amongst Aboriginal languages. Within the province of Alberta alone, five numbered treaties were signed with various groups such as the Cree, Blackfoot, Beaver and Dene. Each of these Aboriginal groups speak different languages, although Cree and Blackfoot belong to the Algonquian language family. Many languages also contain different dialects, such as the Cree language which contains five separate dialects. These factors make classifying and categorizing Aboriginal languages a difficult task.

It has been agreed that there are 53 individual languages that belong to 11 Aboriginal language families. It is also agreed that prior to European contact there were significantly more Aboriginal languages in use. However their history was neither recorded or understood by early
European explorers, making it impossible to get an accurate estimation. It is important to recognize, however, that many Aboriginal languages today are considered endangered and are suffering the effects of past history, like the denial of speaking one’s mother tongue in residential schools. There are many Aboriginal languages that are predicted to fail transmission into the next generation, due to the small number of individuals speaking the language in the home environment. It is important to the transmission and survival of any language that it be learned in the home environment, making it an individual’s mother tongue.

It is important, therefore, to introduce Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to Aboriginal languages and recognize their importance in culture and identity.

**Introductory Activity**
Create a ‘New Word Wall’ with the students. On different pieces of coloured paper, write down the following words:

- Language
- Culture
- Mother tongue
- Identity
- Cree
- Blackfoot
- Dene
- Beaver

Show each of the words to the students and provide a simple and brief definition of each word. Students should practice writing and saying the words in their social notebook or their ‘New Words’ booklet (decided by teacher preference).

**Main Lesson**
Once students are familiar with the simple definitions of the above words, show them some pictures (that can be downloaded off of the Language and Culture Edukit: Student Zone Picture Gallery Section) of Cree, Blackfoot, Dene and Beaver people. Discuss how they communicate with their family through language, and how it is important to Aboriginal People and their culture that they share information and tell stories using their own language.

**Supplementary Lesson**
Read students a short story in any of the four Aboriginal languages. The purpose is for students to realize how understanding a language makes it important for sharing ideas and information. This relates to a person’s identity. Explain that we identify with others that speak the same language, and that language is vital to the survival of a culture.

**Supplementary Lesson**
Have students draw a picture of their family participating in an activity that is important to their culture, such as Christmas, Hannuka or Ramadan. Students should then draw a picture of an Aboriginal family sharing an important event to their culture, such as story telling by an Elder. Provide students with examples and allow them to examine pictures of the Cree, Dene, Beaver and Blackfoot people.