Lesson Plan 2: Spirituality and Art

Generalization
People keep their customs and traditions in similar ways

Rationale
One way that people convey their spiritual beliefs and values is through artistic interpretation. Historically Aboriginal Peoples had many ways in which they conveyed their spiritually. Students will have an opportunity to explore the connections between art and spirituality within an Aboriginal community as well as share their own interpretations.

Objectives

Knowledge
- Recognize the spiritual and cultural importance of symbols and colours
- Understand how spirituality can be expressed through different artistic mediums
- Develop awareness as to the spiritual components required for artistic design

Skills
- Interpret information and develop own understanding
- Identify aspects of tipi and clothing design
- Create own artistic design

Attitude
- Develop respect and understanding for the culture and traditions of others
- Respect the special ceremonies and artistic interpretations/expressions of other cultures

Teacher Information
Tipis were the primary means of shelter for Plains Aboriginals prior to contact with Europeans. They ranged in size and after the introduction of the horse, which was able to carry larger loads, they increased in size. The assembly of the tipi had significance was not undertaken randomly. In Blackfoot culture, the tipi doorway always faced east and each of the tipi poles had a name. Tipis were typically made from young buffalo hides and were tanned and sewn with sinew in the spring or early summer.

The painting of tipis was a sacred event that required a special ceremony. Tipi designs were personal and remained the property of the designer. Designs were developed with a specific purpose in mind, and were created to protect the family and ensure happy lives. It was possible
to give a tipi design away through a special transfer ceremony that usually which included some sort of payment. Often, people received ideas for their tipi designs through dreams and visions.

Buffalo, deer and elk were the most sacred and powerful animals to be painted on a tipi. Other animals that often appear in tipi designs are the otter, weasel, mink, beaver, raven, snake or thunderbird. Each animal symbol had its own ritual and special song. Ultimately, tipi designs reflected the natural environment as Aboriginal People have a special spiritual connection to the land. Borders along the bottom of a tipi could contain mountains, hills or stars.

*Introductory Activity*

Break students into small groups of three or four. Download enough pictures from the Student Zone Picture Gallery of various tipi designs, so that each group will have two to three pictures to examine. Have them examine the tipi pictures and make notes about what they observe. What symbols or images do they see? What do they think they represent? Is the same symbol being used on different tipis? Are any tipis alike? Does it appear that the tipi design is telling a special story? What do they think that story might be?

Reassemble the students into one large group and discuss some of their findings about tipis. Make notes on the board, referring to the Teacher Information, on the importance of the tipi designs.

Students may copy these notes into their own books if necessary.

*Main Lesson*

Download the Tipi Template from the Teacher Worksheets section and distribute tipi designs to students. Following the information shared about tipi designs and the spiritual significance of symbols, have students create their own tipi design. Their design should reflect a personal story or event of significance to them or their family.

Students will be required to do a mini presentation to share the meaning behind their tipi design.