Lesson Plan 3: Aboriginal Families and Culture

Topic C: Special Communities

Generalization
People preserve their customs and traditions in similar ways.

Rationale
Most students at this age are familiar with their own cultures. However, many have not been exposed to the traditions and customs of other groups, especially those of Aboriginal People. Students may also be unaware that there are differences amongst Aboriginal communities themselves. This lesson plan will focus on a number of different Aboriginal communities and their special traditions and customs.

Objectives

Knowledge
- Develop an understanding as to the importance of the extended family in Aboriginal communities
- Define key terms regarding reserve areas
- Learn the locations of Alberta reserves

Skills
- Increase creative expression, artistic expression
- Develop confidence in sharing information about families and cultures
- Categorize facts about Aboriginal leaders and heroes
- Ability to express in writing their understanding of reserves and the many similarities and differences between them
- Foster their understanding of map reading, scale and dimension
- Describe how basic needs are met through a variety of family structures

Attitude
- Develop confidence in expressing own ideas and opinions
- Appreciate the contributions that many Aboriginal People made to their communities and Canadian society as a whole

Materials
- Craft supplies (glue, scissors, tape, markers, pencil crayons etc.)
- Old magazines
- Map of reserves in Alberta
- Internet access
- Students will need to bring pictures and memorabilia from their own homes
Teacher Information
While there are many similarities between Aboriginal communities, there are also a number of differences. Aboriginal communities may differ in language group, spiritual practices, size, location, and many have their own customs and traditions. However, all Aboriginal communities value the extended family unit in their own way. Historically, Aboriginal People needed to work together in order to survive. Every member of the family had important roles to fulfill and family needs often had priority over individual desires.

As young parents were often busy hunting, gathering and preparing food, childcare was a shared responsibility within the extended family. Children learned a great deal from Elders who taught them traditions, language and social behaviors often using stories and legends. Children also benefited from the knowledge of other members of the community who had special talents or skills such as plant knowledge and artistic or musical abilities.

This lesson will address the customs and traditions of Aboriginal families and communities, and will allow students to gain understanding of the characteristics that make Aboriginal families and communities unique.

Introductory Activity
Students will create a ‘culture collage’ that represents aspects of their own family and community. They may include photos of family members, pictures of family activities, special phrases or nicknames used within the family, pictures or drawings of a traditional outfit worn for special occasions, and anything else the student feels represents their family and community. The collages should be displayed for all classmates to see.

Main Lesson
Family history is an important of Aboriginal culture and is important for explaining how customs and traditions arose and why they are still practiced today. In this lesson, students will use the Internet to retrieve information on traditional customs or practices of the Cree, Blackfoot, Dene or Beaver. Using the information, students will pretend that they are an Aboriginal person and will create a family history. The family history should include the language spoken (with an example phrase i.e. Tansi means Hello, how are you? in Cree), special ceremonies, roles of family members, education, activities and games and favorite foods. Focus should be on the way Aboriginal families interacted during the early days of European contact and the fur trade. Students may add any additional information that they think is interesting and important. The family history can be arranged in the form of a collage or written story depending on teacher or student preferences. Students should share their family histories with the class.

Supplementary Lesson
Discuss with students how many Aboriginal communities are reserve communities. Today, many Aboriginal People still live on reserves or regard their reserve as their home, even if they live in an urban setting. Teachers may choose to conduct this activity without the support of the main lesson.

Some basic facts about reserves
- 2,500 reserves in Canada
- 41 Bands in Alberta
- 58% of the Aboriginal population live on reserves
• Reserves make up less than 1% of the land base in Canada
• Many reserves were created through treaties. In Alberta, Treaties 6, 7 and 8 were signed
• Most reserves are rural and have been home to many families for a number of generations
• Reserves are regarded as home by many Aboriginal People even if they live in the city
• Approximately 386,000 people live on reserves across Canada with 237,000 living off of their reserve
• Reserves vary in size and location. Many reserves have thousands of members, while some have only a few families

Place a map of Alberta (on next page) that depicts some of the reserves across the province on the overhead projector. Ask students if they have ever been to a reserve or if they are from a reserve. Students will assume the role of a ‘reserve reporter’ and gather facts about three different reserves, for comparison. Have students compile their information into a paragraph describing the different reserves.

Some questions students may want to answer

1. Where is the reserve located?
2. What is the language group?
3. How many people live on the reserve?
4. How many people live off of their reserve but still consider it home?
5. What is an interesting fact you found discovered about this reserve?

Students should use the Internet and the Origin and Settlement Student Zone TidBits section to access the bulk of the information.
Treaty 6, 7 and 8 Reserve Map

- Green squares: Treaty 6 Reserves
- Yellow diamonds: Treaty 7 Reserves
- Red circles: Treaty 8 Reserves