Grade 4- Teacher Zone
Topic B: Alberta–Its People in History

Lesson Plan 2: Fur Trade–The Legacy of Métis People

Generalization:
Albertans have been affected and challenged by historical events.

Rationale
Students must develop a comprehensive view of the many aspects of Alberta’s history and understand the contributions of a variety of different cultural groups in the province. For instance, students need to be aware of the relationships that developed between French fur traders and Aboriginal women, which ultimately gave birth to a culturally distinct group known as the Métis. The Métis are sometimes called the ‘forgotten people,’ since to date they have not been able to receive benefits from either the provincial or federal governments. It is essential that students have the opportunity to hear the stories of relationships that developed between French fur traders and Aboriginal women, and to recognize the many contributions made by Métis people.

Objectives
Knowledge
• Develop an awareness of the contributions made by Métis people to the Province of Alberta
• Gain insight into the roles Métis people played in the fur trade era
• Understand the differences between Métis and Aboriginal cultures
• Recognize which aspects of European and Aboriginal culture became the foundation for Métis culture

Skills
• Utilize online historical resources to understand and organize facts about Métis people and communities
• Generate original ideas in written format
• Foster written communication skills
• Share information collected about Métis people and communities
• Develop research skills
• Demonstrate the ability to gather information, synthesize and formulate ideas in new and creative ways

Attitude
• Demonstrate creativity by developing an original story
• Learn respect for the unique nature of Métis culture
• Develop confidence in expressing ideas

Materials
• Métis love story (taken from online or other sources)
• White board or flip chart paper
Teacher Information
At the beginning of the contact period, the French were dependent on the Aboriginal People as guides and trading partners. However, the relationship changed as intermarriage between French men and Aboriginal women developed into strong unions. Aboriginal women provided the fur traders with the connections that they needed in order to be successful in the trade industry. The women served as interpreters and as a labour force, by processing foods, sewing clothing and manufacturing various goods used by traders. These marriages and the children that resulted are the earliest beginnings of a northern Métis population, with kinship ties to Aboriginal, First Nations and Métis groups at other posts throughout the northwest. (http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/Peoples_and_Places/Northwind_Dreaming/northwind_europeans_1.html) However, not all of these relationships were based on economic pursuits. Many men were romantically involved with and committed to their wives and children, and took on the legal responsibilities for their well being. The development of Métis culture can be traced back to the 1690s. Métis culture developed in the Great Lakes region as they began to live separately from their parents.

Some historians claim that the first person of Aboriginal and European heritage was born nine months after the first Europeans arrived on the shores of Canada. Those of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry were certainly an important group in the settlement of New France by the 1600s, and the distinct society called Métis (French meaning “mixed blood”) are the children of the fur trade in the Canadian West. The term “Métis” generally applied to those born from the marriage between French traders and predominately Cree and Ojibway women. “Half-breeds” or “breeds” were names applied to those of Scots/English and Aboriginal ancestry. In the Peace Country, the following were common French Canadian names: Courtoreille, Cardinal, Bellerose, Bourassa, Chalifoux, Beaudry and Laboucan. The names Ross, MacDonnell, MacDonald, Gray, Cunningham and Isbister reflected Métis with Scottish, English and Orkadian heritage. Many of these are still common names of Métis families today. (http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/Peoples_and_Places/Profiles_of_the_Treaty_Makers/ Bands_and_Nations/Métis.html)

Many factors contributed to the development of Métis culture and identity, including the fur trade, the Hudson’s Bay Company, the Catholic Church and Aboriginal People. By 1750, the Métis had developed unique economic and social institutions. By 1820, they had taken up permanent residence at Red River as a semi-isolated community.

Métis people did not sign any treaties across Canada, as they were not recognized by the Canadian government as being ‘Indian’. Instead, Métis were given a certificate, called “scrip”, worth either $240 or 160 acres. Most Métis chose the money scrip. However, because the scrip was difficult to redeem, it was often sold for ready cash at a lesser value to scrip buyers who were close in attendance. After this one-time settlement, Métis were legally considered ordinary citizens with no special protections. (http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/Peoples_and_Places/Northwind_Dreaming/northwind_treaty8.html)
While there is no single definition of Métis people that is universally accepted the following are two popular examples of political definitions

The Métis National Council defines the Métis as
- Aboriginal People distinct from First Nations and Inuit
- Descendants of the historic Métis who evolved in what is now Western Canada as a people with a common political will
- Descendants of those Aboriginal People who have been absorbed by the historic Métis

Alberta Métis Nation Association defines Métis as
- Someone who declares him/herself as Métis, has traditionally held him/herself as Métis, and is accepted by the Métis community as Métis

There are eight distinct Métis settlements in Alberta
- Paddle Prairie known as Keg River Settlement Area No. 1 (north of Edmonton)
- Big Prairie
- Gift Lake or Utikuma Lake (north of Lesser Slave Lake)
- East Prairie (west of Grouard)
- Kikinow (Lac La Biche area)
- Wolf Lake
- Elizabeth (south of Cold Lake)
- Fishing Lake

To be legally recognized in the province of Alberta, a Métis person must reside on one of the above mentioned Métis settlements or colonies. There are currently over 60,000 Métis living in Alberta.

Introductory Activity
Have students arrange desks into a circle or have them sit in a circle on the floor. Share with students a love story involving a European fur trader and an Aboriginal woman. The story should discuss each of their lifestyles, so students can get an idea of the differences between the two cultures. The story should also focus on the family that is created from their union—Métis children—and the importance of the new culture. Pictures may be used to supplement the story.
Métis Love Story

“Once along time ago when this was a magical land, called Turtle Island, and we could still drink the water, and eat the fish, without buying them at the store, a boy named Alan met a girl named Monaca. Alan came from a land far, far away to the East of the big waters, where no one had fun anymore. It was a sad place, sad enough to make Alan’s mom and dad runaway to this new place where they didn’t know anyone at all.

It was so sad there in fact that Alan told Monaca that the children never played, and laughed there and always had to be in school where they learned nothing all day long. Monaca was sad to hear this she loved little Alan very much, so she taught Alan about this new place he had come to from across that waters, She told him how all her people laughed and played all the time in this new land he had come to… She told him that here people even played as adults, which Alan had never heard of before…. Need less to say little Alan and Monaca did eventually grow up, and they were so in love that they got married and had little Alan and Monaca children together, who laughed and played with their parents even as they grew old…it was a happy time indeed…And now Alan’s mom and dad had friends and family too and were never alone again

… What happened to Alan and Monaca? Oh yes they started a tribe of their own…and that boys and girls is how the Métis People came to be on this Earth…through a love story….”

Main Lesson

Discuss definitions of Métis and write the correct answer(s) on the board or on flip chart paper. Students may use a dictionary, or definitions provided with the teacher information.

- Discuss the cultural heritage of the Métis people including beliefs, customs, special knowledge, historical experiences, language, medicines, etc.
- Students should have an opportunity to make notes, or receive a handout that includes all of the information discussed
- From this information, students are to write their own story of a Métis family which depicts the lifestyle of a Métis family and an event that affects their lives. Some examples are events surrounding Red River, the Riel Rebellion, the development of a homestead, the selling of scrip etc. Students should use some relevant facts but should also have creative freedom
- Once the stories are finished they can be shared with the class, posted for everyone to read, or put together in a story book that could be placed in the library