Lesson Plan 2: Traditions and Culture of the Blood Nation

**Generalization**
Canada is comprised of families who have common traditions and as well as those special to themselves.

**Rationale**
Students are introduced to the Blackfoot culture as a means of recognizing that many other cultures and families have traditions, ceremonies and customs that vary. Students will be able to recognize similarities and differences between their own family and a representative Blackfoot family.

**Objective**

**Knowledge**
- Learn about similarities and differences between the students’ own families and Blood families
- Understand the importance of Blood legends and stories which reflect special characteristics of their community
- Appreciate the connection between Aboriginal People, nature and animals

**Skills**
- Work effectively within a large group setting
- Be active participants in a group setting
- Learn how to express themselves without using letters or numbers

**Attitude**
- Develop acceptance and respect for those families and cultures that are different from their own
- Maintain a positive attitude during activities and games
- Appreciate craftsmanship in the items developed by Aboriginal People

**Teacher Information**
The people of the Blackfoot Confederacy are Plains Aboriginals whose vast territory extended eastward from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the valley of the Mississippi River. From central Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba the Plains stretch south almost to the Gulf of Mexico. The Blackfoot Nation consists of three groups—the Bloods, Peigan and Blackfoot and are members of the Algonquian language family. The Blackfoot refer to themselves as either ‘Nitsi-tapi’ meaning ‘Real People’ or ‘Soyi-tapi’ meaning ‘Prairie People’ in their own language. There are many stories as to the origin of the Blackfoot people. One story tells of how the Blackfoot split into three groups to protect their territory from enemies. One group went north to
protect their land from the Cree, another went to the southwest to fight and the last group when
to the southeast to fight the Crow, Assiniboine and Sioux.

The Blood nation received their name from the Cree, Mih-kwee-ye-ne-week, which means ‘Blood People’ or ‘Red People’. They received this name from the Cree because they used red paint as decoration when they were preparing for special occasions. The Blood people refer to themselves as Kai-nau, which means ‘Many Chiefs’.

The Blood people were nomadic hunters who relied on the buffalo to provide a large part of their diet, utensils, tools and building materials. As well as hunting buffalo, the Blood people hunted antelope and deer. They ate many wild berries such as saskatoons, chokecherries and wild strawberries. Blood women made pemmican and dried meat for the whole family to eat over the winter time, when it was difficult to hunt and find fresh meat.

The Blood people used the Buffalo Jump method of stampeding or chasing the buffalo over a steep cliff in order to kill large numbers of the herd. The men and older boys would hide and wait for the buffalo behind large piles of rocks, known as cairns, constructed in a “V” shape. One brave man would cover himself in a buffalo hide and pretend to be a buffalo in order to lure the animals into the “V” configuration.

When the animals were close enough, they would jump out and scare the buffalo causing them to stampede over the cliff.

Like many Plains Aboriginal groups, the Blood people lived in tipis made from buffalo hides that were sewn together and stretched around tall poles. An opening at the top allowed for smoke from the indoor fire to escape. Blood people often decorate their tipis with unique designs belonging only to the owner.

The extended family is an important aspect of Aboriginal culture. For the Blood people, it was crucial that children were given guidance and knowledge from many other people in addition to their parents. Therefore, children often learned the names of relatives very early in life. Children would receive a name when they were born, but were often given two or three names as they grew up. These names would depend on what they did or their appearance.

*Introductory Activity*
Using a baby name book, research the names of your students. Define the names and explain their origin. You may choose to read them aloud to or pass out each student’s name and have other classmates read them aloud. Have students decide on a name for themselves based on something special they have accomplished or a unique feature they can use to identify themselves. This method of naming is a tradition followed by many Aboriginal groups.

*Main Lesson*
Have students sit in a circle and introduce them to the Blood people, members of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Read the following legends and then discuss facts about the Blood people. What do the legends say about Blackfoot culture?
There is a story that a Blackfoot Indian came to the Blood Indian camp. He asked, “Who is Chief here?”
“I am,” said the first man he met.
“I am the Chief,” said the second man he met.
“I am the Chief,” said the third man he met.
Soon the Blackfoot was confused. He said, “I will call you Kai-nau.” This means ‘Many Chiefs’ in Blackfoot.
This is how the Blood people came to be known as Kai-nau, or Many Chiefs.

The Legend of the Big Dipper
Once upon a time some people were camped by a river. One man had a family of seven sons and one daughter. Each day the daughter gathered wood for the fire. One day when she returned with the wood, O’kina, the youngest son, asked her, “Why are you always dirty when you come back?”

“It is muddy where I gather wood,” she replied.
O’kina did not believe his sister. The next day, he followed her. There was a bear cave. O’kina watched his sister play with the bear.

O’kina ran home and told his father. His father was very angry. He ran out of his tipi. He called out to his people, “Help! Help! A bear wants to marry my daughter! Come and help me kill the bear!”

All the people came running. They went to find the bear and kill him. Soon they came to the cave. But they were too late. The bear and the daughter were already married. The daughter walked out of the cave. The bear was right behind her. The people started shooting at the bear. But they could not kill him.

The father said, “O’kina, run to your sister. Ask her what the bear’s weakness is.”
O’kina told his father that the bear would die if he was shot in the foot. The people shot at the bear again and again. They hit his foot. Then the bear fell to the ground, dead.
In those times bears had powerful medicine. The people took the parts of the bear they wanted for the medicine. The daughter said, “O’kina, cut a piece of hide from my dead bear husband.”

So O’kina cut off a piece of hide for his sister. Then she asked, “O’kina, tap me on the back four times with this piece of bear hide.”

After the fourth time, the daughter turned into a bear woman. Then all the people and the bear woman went back to the camp.

Later, O’kina went hunting. He saw his six brothers running across a stream. O’kina asked them, “Why are you running?”

“There is a bear in the camp. It scared all of the people away,” they said.
O’kina told them that the bear was really their sister.

“What are we going to do?” they asked. “We have to kill her. The only way is to shoot an arrow into her foot.”

The eldest brother said, “O’kina, you were the one who helped her change into a bear. You are going to have to trick her out here. Then we will shoot her in the foot.”

“But none of us can shoot very well,” O’kina replied.

So the brothers set a bundle of arrows into the ground. The points stuck up.

Sadly, O’kina went back to the tipi. His sister, the bear woman, was waiting for him. She asked, “O’kina, where is the meat you were going to bring home?”

“I was hungry. I ate it on the way back,” he replied.

The bear woman got very angry. She growled, “I am going to kill you for killing my bear husband!”

The bear woman chased O’kina outside the camp. O’kina led her to the arrows. The bear woman stepped on the points. She fell down and died. O’kina and his six brothers ran away. Finally, they stopped to rest.

But the bear woman came back to life. She ran after her brothers. “We will never kill her. We can never stop running,” O’kina cried.

So the seven brothers climbed a tree to escape. “I wish we had thought before doing something foolish like we did,” the eldest brother said.

Just then a chick-a-dee flew by. “I can grant your wish if you close your eyes,” it said.

The brothers closed their eyes. When they opened them, the seven brothers found that were the Big Dipper. You can see it in the sky today. O’kina is the star at the end of the handle.

- Ask students if they have any questions about Blood people. Make note of any questions that you do not know the answers to so that you can later inform the students.
- Discuss with students why they think legends and stories are important to Aboriginal culture. What are some common stories told in their own families?

Supplementary Lesson
Remind students about the concepts related to oral history. Oral history is one way in which knowledge, traditions and customs are passed down from one generation to the next. Discuss with students how many Aboriginal groups did not use writing to preserve their history, but
instead told stories and legends, and invented symbols to represent ideas. These symbols are known as hieroglyphics (this word could be added to the new word wall).

Discuss with students modern forms of hieroglyphics, like street signs (use pictures to illustrate). Discuss some symbols that could be used to represent a girl, boy, grandmother, grandfather, dog, horse, mom, dad, house etc. Either draw these on the board or on the flip chart to provide students with a visual aid. Distribute the worksheet containing samples of actual Blackfoot hieroglyphics. Students will then create their own hieroglyphic story of an important event or ceremony that they celebrate within their own family.

Provide each student with a portion of a brown paper bag that they can rip to look like a buffalo hide. Make sure they write their names on one side. On the other side, have them use pastels to create a ‘symbol story’. Students should try to mimic some of the symbols created in class or those provided on the handout. Once they are finished, they will ‘wash’ their hide by using a paintbrush and brown tempera paint. The paint will not adhere to the pastel. Students will then crumple up their hide and then spread it out to dry. This will give it the effect of being an authentic buffalo hide.

To conclude the activity, encourage each student to explain the meaning of their buffalo hide ‘symbol story’ and then display them around the classroom.

**Supplementary Lesson**

Aboriginal People across Canada played games both for sheer enjoyment as well as educational purposes. Games that focused on hitting a target worked to develop the important coordination skills needed to become a successful hunter. Adults enjoyed games based on gambling or competitive sports. Many people do not know that Aboriginal People invented the sport of Lacrosse or ice hockey. Today, many Aboriginal games have been modified, as different bands adapted them and certain supplies are no longer readily available. The following game is the Blackfoot version of the Stick Dice Game—a popular activity enjoyed by many Plains tribes.

Depending on class size, the Stick Dice game can be played as a whole class or in smaller groups of two or more.

**Stick Dice Game: Teacher Instructions**

**Materials**
- Four large wooden sticks to be used as dice (must be larger than popsicle sticks). They should be painted on one side (any color but green) and will have black markings made by marker on the other (consult the scoring sheet for patterns)
- Tally sticks (popsicle sticks). There should be enough sticks so that every student has 10 brown (plain coloured) sticks that are worth one point each and five green sticks worth five points each
How to Play the Game
The starting player takes all four of the stick dice and tosses them into the center of the circle. The player determines the number of points they receive by comparing the thrown dice to the tally sheet. For example, if a player throws the dice and they land in the pattern which is worth 10 points, then each of the other students/players must give him two green Popsicle sticks or 10 brown sticks. Students collect points from one another following the tally sheet. Each player throws once and then passes the stick dice to the next player in a clockwork motion. The game ends when one player has won all the other players’ tallies or one player throws the dice and all four sticks land marked side up.

- Explain the Stick Dice game to students. Make sure they understand that it is a traditional game played by Blackfoot children. This game is just one variation. Distribute the tally sticks and scoring sheets to all students. Have fun!

Supplementary Lesson
The Blackfoot people initially wore moccasins for the practical purpose of protecting their feet from the elements. However, the creation of moccasins also fell within the creative sphere, as Blackfoot women would often decorate the tops of moccasins with simple geometric patterns. Distribute the moccasin information sheet that describes six different moccasin patterns. Distribute the ‘design units’ worksheet to students so that they may see the six basic quill and beadwork patterns that were commonly used. Make sure they understand that the Blackfoot women only used five colours: red, blue, white, yellow and green. Using a blank moccasin template downloaded from the Teacher’s Zone, allow students to create their own moccasin design by following the basic patterns used by the Blackfoot people. Have students cut out their moccasins once they are done and display them around the classroom.