Lesson Plan 1: Aboriginal Sovereignty and Self-Determination

Rationale
Theme one examines the principle of sovereignty. There are a number of Aboriginal political organizations whose mandates include allowing Aboriginal People across Canada to exercise sovereignty or self-determination in the areas of education, health and politics. Students are expected to explore these issues from an Aboriginal perspective in order to recognize what challenges and factors surround Aboriginal sovereignty.

Objectives
Knowledge
- Recognize the importance of self-determination to Aboriginal People
- Define self-determination and sovereignty from an Aboriginal perspective
- Determine how decisions made at the local, regional and federal levels impact Aboriginal Peoples’ desires for sovereignty
- Define Aboriginal identity and its relation to the quest for sovereignty

Skills
- Research different Aboriginal political groups
- Locate specific areas in which Aboriginal People have gained some micro forms of sovereignty

Attitude
- Develop an appreciation for the continuing struggle of Aboriginal People across Canada in respect to sovereignty and self-determination
- Develop compassion and understanding of Aboriginal Peoples’ desires for self-determination

Teacher Information
Prior to European contact, Aboriginal groups across Canada retained their own methods of political designation, education, traditional teachings and sharing of knowledge, health and spiritual practices. The fur trade, immigration and settlement—along with the development of a national railway and the decline of the buffalo—were all components that drove the federal government to secure treaties with Aboriginal Peoples. The numbered treaties affect a large number of Aboriginal People in Alberta and the West. The signing of treaties also led to other legislation such as the Indian Act (including multiple amendments), the White Paper, Bill C-31 and the Canadian constitution. During the late 1960s a grassroots political movement emerged that gave Aboriginal leaders a voice to speak out against the affects of the Indian Act, treaty promises and the poor social conditions that were affecting many Aboriginal People. Many of the political organizations developed in this time still exist today. However they have continually restructured themselves politically to reflect the changing needs of Aboriginal People across the country. Sovereignty, or self-determination, remains a goal for many Aboriginal political groups. These groups have never stopped lobbying for the federal government to relinquish control in
areas such as health care, education and other social services. Bill C-31 and the Constitution Act are reflections, on a small scale, of what some political groups would like to achieve. Many Aboriginal political groups would like to see Aboriginal People in Canada have the benefits of full sovereignty or self-determination.

**Introductory Activity**

Have students define the following terms and concepts

- Sovereignty
- Self-determination
- Assimilation
- Legislation
- Paternalistic
- Treaties
- Indian Act
- Amendment
- Bill C-31

After the students have defined the terms and concepts, place them all in an Aboriginal context through class discussion. How are all of the terms and concepts related to one another?

**Main Lesson**

Working in small groups, have students create a portfolio on an Aboriginal political organization. A short class presentation will also be expected and accompanied by a fact sheet distributed to the whole class. When choosing a group to research, students should be encouraged to choose a group that has a long historical standing and is based either in Alberta or Western Canada (although it may not be possible for all groups to research a different group). The group will want to examine how the political group/organization was formed and on what basis (what was the catalyst for the groups formation), the political groups position on self-determination or sovereignty, the strategies it has in place to achieve its goals, basic structure of the organization, funding support, cultural and community contributions. Areas that are of particular importance are education, health and general social welfare. The groups should also answer the following questions:

1. Should decisions facing Aboriginal People be made at the local, provincial or federal level? What are the pros and cons for each? What do Aboriginal People think?
2. Some people argue that the attitude of the federal government in dealing Aboriginal People is paternalistic in nature. Define and discuss whether your political group would agree or disagree.

The teacher can decide on an appropriate length of time for the presentations, as well as how comprehensive the worksheets should be. This lesson plan loosely incorporates the principals of the jigsaw method of instruction.

Some groups that the students may want to research are
• Native Women’s Association of Canada
• Federation of Saskatchewan Indians
• Manitoba Indian Brotherhood
• Assembly of First Nations (formerly the National Indian Brotherhood)
• Métis Association of Alberta
• The Prairie Treaty Nations Alliance
• The United Treaty First Nations Council

Supplementary Lesson
Independently, students could research Bill C-31 focusing on the historical need for Bill C-31, the process of getting the Bill passed in 1985, the contemporary realities now facing Aboriginal communities (i.e. band membership), and the social and political implications. Findings could be presented in a research paper format including the necessary components of a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion.

Supplementary Lesson
Independently, students could write a position paper on the White Paper (1969) and how it was viewed by Aboriginal groups. Students must also discuss the implications of the White Paper on Aboriginal political and lobby groups.