Law 7-Teachers Zone
Topic B: A Bilingual and Multicultural Country

Lesson Plan 2: Aboriginal Assimilation

Generalization
Multiculturalism supports the existence of cultural diversity.

Rationale
Canada is a country that prides itself on being multicultural and for recognizing and supporting the existence of a variety of ethnicities and cultures. The federal government has created numerous legal documents and policies that recognize the rights of Aboriginal People. Unfortunately, these policies do not always guarantee Aboriginal People access and rights to self-determination, a political policy that is the focus of many Aboriginal organizations. At the same time, many argue that Aboriginal People have been subject to assimilation policies historically and that the trend continues today.

Objectives
Knowledge
- Define multiculturalism
- Explore the effects of different government policies upon Canada’s Aboriginal population
- Recognize how Aboriginal People have adapted to mainstream culture while still maintaining an Aboriginal identity

Skills
- Develop the strategy of using webbing/mapping to recognize interrelationships between concepts
- Practice the organization of data in a brief and concise manner

Attitude
- Foster a sense of pride in and understanding of Aboriginal culture
- Continue to work in changing negative attitudes towards Aboriginal People

Introductory Activity
Write the word ‘multiculturalism’ on the board or use an overhead projector. Draw a line from the word and write beside it the word ‘definition’. Underneath write ‘examples’ and beneath it ‘components’. Have students brainstorm in small groups to fill in the three sections. Follow up this exercise with a class discuss, generating a consensus on the definition of multiculturalism.

Using a webbing/mapping model, guide students into developing their own webbing charts in their notebooks. Students should write the word ‘multiculturalism’ in the center of a circle in the middle of the page. Using arrows stemming from the center students should identify factors that are related to multiculturalism.
Main Lesson

While Canada supports a vision of being a multicultural society, Aboriginal People have been forced to adapt to mainstream culture in many ways. Distribute the following worksheet to students.

Aboriginal Adaptation

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1. What aspects of Aboriginal culture appear to have been retained?
2. What are the main areas of change?
3. What are the main influences that have affected change in Aboriginal culture?
4. List some general conclusions concerning how Aboriginal culture has changed.
5. Do you think it is fair to expect cultures to change/conform to mainstream society?
6. Do you think/feel that you have changed to fit into society (school environment, sports team, church group, etc.)?

**Supplementary Lesson**

Many Aboriginal People argue that the Canadian government implemented numerous policies and legislation that aimed at assimilating them into mainstream society. The Treaties, Indian Act and the Residential School System all significantly impacted Aboriginal culture. In this lesson plan, students will examine the effects of Treaty 8 on the Aboriginal People of Northern Alberta. The following information sheet should be distributed and discussed with students.

**Facts about Treaty 8**

Between 1871 and 1877, Treaties 1 to 7 were secured, with First Nations people agreeing to surrender their lands in return for protection and assistance from the federal government. The First Nations people struggled with starvation, trespassers, and sought an ongoing relationship with the government. Land surrenders were accomplished in return for compensation in goods and annuities, and later treaties also included reserves for exclusive use by First Nations people. 

http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/The_Setting/Treaty_and_Scrip_Commissions/treaty_making_3.html

As they had little experience with the European concept of land ownership, it is unlikely that First Nations people could have understood exactly what they were getting and what they were surrendering in the treaties. The language used in the treaties was official in nature and Euro-Canadian in origin, a foreign language for Aboriginal People. Even if the terms of the treaties had been clearly translated (which they often were not), the First Nations people were not economically or culturally prepared to understand the politics behind the treaties. They believed the treaties guaranteed them freedom to continue their traditional lifestyle while protecting their future. The two parties negotiating the early treaties rarely completely understood each other. For example, in some areas, First Nations people were under the impression that the land rights they were giving up meant they would share resources with the Euro-Canadians and allow the land to be farmed. When non-Aboriginals began digging below the surface to the rich mineral beds below, the First Nations people saw it as an unfulfilled promise of the treaties.

http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/The_Setting/Treaty_and_Scrip_Commissions/default.html
Formal agreements were often not written down, and much was read into what the ‘Spirit and Intent of the Treaty’ dictated. Oral traditions and commissioners' reports give some insight into discussion not included in treaty text. Both sides had their own intentions and agendas to bring to the negotiating table and their own way of interpreting what each side desired. What the government offered was usually not enough; the First Nations people often negotiated additional terms and provisions, which were often noted by early historians as "extravagant demands." In reality, the First Nations people were trying to relieve anxiety they felt about their own survival, while the government was merely striving to forestall any potential problems with the province’s Aboriginal People.

http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/The_Setting/Treaty_and_Scrip_Commissions/treaty_making_2.html

On June 21, 1899 at Grouard, Alberta, six First Nations leaders signed Treaty 8. It began a treaty process that by its completion in 1900 would cover the land between Athabasca Landing and the Great Slave Lake, from Lake Athabasca to the Rockies. It would be the largest treaty in Canada.

http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/The_Setting/Treaty_and_Scrip_Commissions/treaty_eight_2.html

The first six signatures were instrumental in gaining acceptance of the treaty from other bands in the region. However, obtaining signatures from everyone in the area was a daunting task, given the wide expanse of territory and the scattered nature of the bands. The Treaty Commission split into two groups to speed up the process. That year, nine other Treaty 8 sessions were held and when the Commissions returned to Edmonton in September 1899, 2,217 people were on record as having agreed to the terms of Treaty 8 while another 1,243 had accepted scrip. Still, due to the hurried nature of the negotiation, many Aboriginal People were overlooked. To ensure that a majority of Aboriginal People were bound to the treaty, a second group departed in 1900 to obtain signatures from those who had been missed. On their return however, it was noted that distance had prevented them from settling with a number of people, leaving a contingent of First Nations people who had not signed a treaty. Among those were the Cree of Lubicon Lake—a band whose claim for settlement would still be on the table some 90 years later.

http://www.albertasource.ca/treaty8/eng/The_Setting/Treaty_and_Scrip_Commissions/signing_4.html

List the following key words on the blackboard and discuss them with the students. Print off copies of Treaty 8 from the *Culture and Its Meaning* website/CD-Rom. Allow students to read and discuss the actual treaty. Follow up by creating a column on the board titled ‘Treaty Promises’ and list the promises that were made in regards to Treaty 8.

Treaty
Treaty Commission
Reserves
Annuities
Land ownership
Oral history
Negotiation
Distribute the following worksheet to the students.

*Treaty 8–Problems and Perspectives*

1. What did each group want from the treaty? (Aboriginal People, the Métis, the government)
2. What was the Aboriginal understanding of the meaning of treaties?
3. Was the language and terminology of Treaty 8 clear and easy to understand?
4. Did the different sides always treat each other with respect and honesty?
5. How do you think the treaty could have been made easier to understand?
6. Do you think that the terms of treaty should be honoured today? Why or why not?