****SELECTED SECTIONS****

The entire document is strongly suggested to be read and can be found at this link: https://www.rupertsland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Metis-Culture-and-Traditions-Foundational-Knowledge-Themes-01.25.22.pdf

What is the Métis Homeland?

The Métis Nation has a generational Homeland that includes much of present-day Western Canada and northern sections of the United States. The specific areas include what is today: parts of southern Northwest Territories; parts of Ontario; Manitoba; Saskatchewan; Alberta; parts of British Columbia; parts of northern Montana; parts of North Dakota; and parts of Minnesota, USA. Métis ancestry, history, culture, and languages are rooted in these lands.

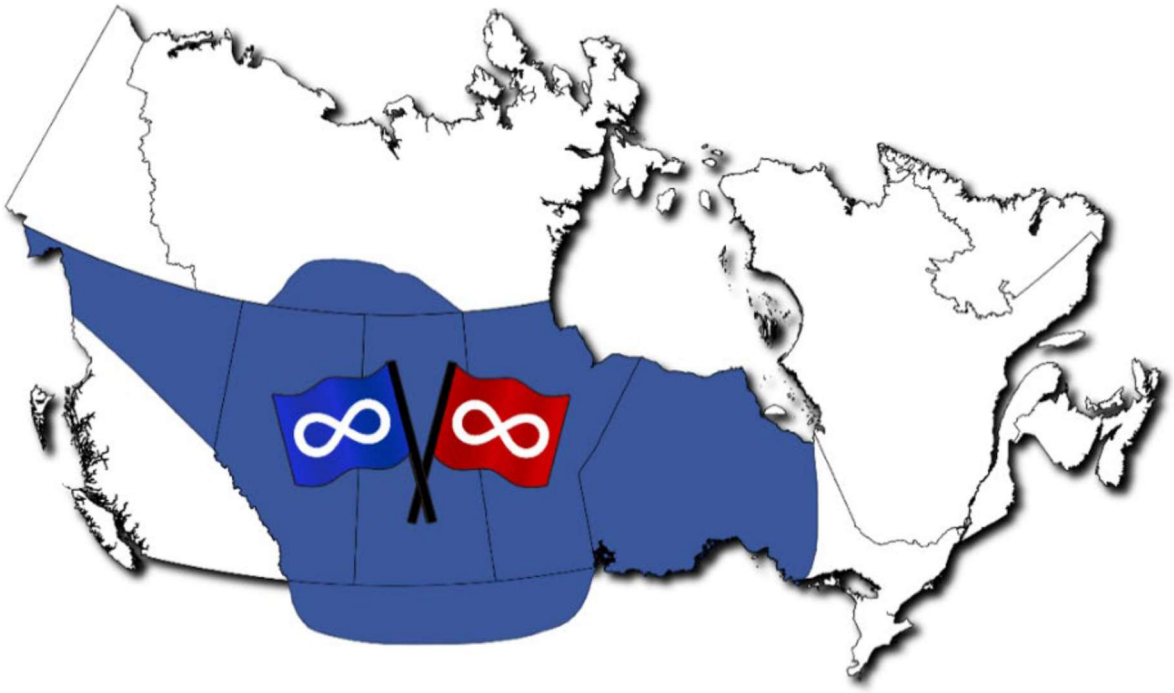

Figure 1 Métis Nation Homeland in Canada. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta, 2021.

Introduction

The Métis Nation has dynamic, beautiful traditions, values, experiences, and relationships. This book is a guide for educators that highlights the key features of Métis culture and traditions. These features provide insight into the colour and vibrancy of Métis society. This book provides a glimpse into Métis culture and traditions.

For the purposes of this book, the terms “Métis culture” and “Métis traditions” refer to the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of Métis communities. Métis culture and traditions are woven into the fabric of the everyday lives of the people.

This theme begins with a discussion titled “Understanding Perspective.” Educators are encouraged to read this resource with an open, reflective attitude, while being cognizant of their own values and identity. The goal of this section is to challenge common ways of thinking about Métis culture and traditions to form a solid foundation. Experiencing the layers of cultural meaning is a delicate process, and it must be done in a thoughtful, respectful manner. As Elmer Ghostkeeper explains:

> *Peeling the layers of cultural meaning is a delicate process and a thing of beauty in the hands of a caring person. Exposing an oral culture to the scrutiny of the written page, baring meaning for all to see, must be done in a thoughtful and respectful manner.*
>
> –Dr. Wanda Wuttunee, quoted in Elmer Ghostkeeper, *Spirit Gifting: The Concept of Spiritual Exchange* (Duncan: Writing on Stone Press, 2007), Forward.

Understanding Perspective

Métis culture and traditions are interesting and distinct from other Indigenous cultures. This prelude to exploring culture and traditions begins by defining perspective; it then explains of what perspective is comprised and then shows how one’s personal perspective influences one’s understanding of individuals and groups. Digging deeper into the concept of perspective equips teachers with reflective cognitive tools that can help them share Métis culture and traditions in their classrooms.

> *A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.*
> –*Oxford English Dictionary*, “Perspective,” https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/perspective

Perspective is a person’s unique way of understanding and responding to the world based on his or her experience, community, beliefs, values, stories, languages, laws, ethics, and behaviours.

Perspective is the way people determine how to evaluate their life and experiences, including how they discern between what is right and wrong. Perspective is instrumental in how one defines success and purpose in life.

Perspective aids in the interpretation of relationships with people and things around us. Perspective guides a person’s actions in those relationships.

Perspective refers to the way one interprets the world that they have encountered. It can also be called "worldview," "ways of knowing" or "frame of mind."

> *Problems arise when we take for granted that our interpretation of reality is the only one, or the best one. It is very easy to judge other people based on our personal, limited perspective.*
> –Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, Our Way is a Valid Way (Winnipeg: Manitoba Education, 2013), 31.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “perspective” using the word “attitude.” A person’s perspective is developed, in part, in the “cognitive unconscious.” “Perspective” refers not only to someone’s intentional

thoughts and ideas but also to the parts of their thinking that are not actively noticed, engaged with, or identified by the thinker. The cognitive unconscious is found in language, ways of living, and through the way we make decisions. Each person's perspective originates from the world they live in, the people whose lives they are a part of, the values and ideas that are taught and practised in their communities, and their lived experience.

Understanding perspective is important because it is easy to inadvertently slip into studying and presenting non-Western cultures as something separate from, and less important than, Western culture, which is dominant in Canadian society. The impact of one's personal perspective can easily go unnoticed in a person's day-to-day life. It is important to challenge this "normal" perspective because it can result in the harmful treatment and misunderstanding of the Métis and Métis culture.

"The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you; they are unique manifestations of the human spirit."
–Wade Davis, quoted in Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, *Our Way is a Valid Way*, 31.

Learning about Métis culture and traditions provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on ideas they may have about Métis people, their own culture and traditions, and the cultures and traditions of the diverse peoples around them. Several initial guiding reflective questions are presented below.

Who are you?
What beliefs, values, and ideas help you make decisions about your life and your family?
Do these align with the values, ideas, and beliefs that govern the decisions that leaders make in Canadian society?
What are some of the celebrations that are important to your family, and where do these originate? Why do you celebrate them?

Everyone benefits when educators celebrate the perspectives and cultures of their students. Historically and today, Métis culture and traditions are often absent and misunderstood in Canadian classrooms. It is essential, for all students, that educators adopt a positive, healthy perspective and an appreciation of Métis culture and traditions.

"Students who are ashamed of their culture and try to hide their cultural identity tend to have low engagement in school and lower rates of success. Students who are proud of their heritage, have a strong cultural identity, and feel safe in expressing their identity experience higher academic achievement."
–Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, *Our Way is a Valid Way,* 92.

Without [their] culture, without that strong line from [their] forefathers, no [person] knows who [they] really [are]. If one does not know who [they are], [they] cannot possess pride or dignity for [themselves] or [their] people.
– Dr. Anne Anderson*, The First Métis: A New Nation* (Edmonton: UVISCO Press, 1985), 14.

Figure 2. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Métis grandmother teaches Métis children some traditions," July 25, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Section One
Heart of the Métis

Community, Networking, & Kinship
Traditional Storytelling
Mobility & Adaptability
Resilience

These core Métis values are important for understanding Métis life and identity. They manifest in both subtle and obvious ways, historically and today.
This section provides only a brief introduction to core Métis values and cannot replace direct experience with Métis community and relatives.
The Métis hold many events and community gatherings that people of all backgrounds are welcome to join. Contact Métis offices near you, including the Métis Nation of Alberta and Rupertsland Institute, to find out who your Métis neighbours are and which gatherings you would like to join.

Community, Networking, & Kinship

Métis traditions and cultural practices celebrate, serve, and strengthen the family; the strength of a community is reflective of its families. Family gatherings connect people to one another, and these connections make life rich. Valuing relationships creates strong, united kinships among Métis families and communities.
Honouring relationships is tied to Métis entrepreneurship. Networking is foundational to the prosperity and independence of the Métis. Networking was advantageous to the Métis during the years of the fur trade. Métis roles as freemen positioned them as central to the economic relationships between First Nations and colonial groups.

In her research, Diane Payment reflected that the network of Métis relationships gave their space of residence "the character of a 'big family.' The community was homogenous, united (in spite of typical internal divisions)."
–Diane Payment, *The Free People – Li Gens Libres: A History of the Métis Community in Batoche, Saskatchewan* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), 42-44.

The diligent, hardworking nature of the Métis is complemented by an exuberant, lively community life. A variety of Métis cultural expressions emphasize celebration and socialization. It is common for Métis people to get together and play a quick tune on the fiddle, get out the spoons, and do some jigging. Informal gatherings, like inviting people over for tea, provide a venue for storytelling and teaching skills such as beading. Gathering around the table or the fire in the evening after a long day of trapping or working is also a prime time for sharing stories of all kinds.

At any time, the Métis were capable of having a good time given an opportunity. Visiting is an important pastime and the Métis place a great emphasis on relationships and friendships. Over time, the Métis have established common gathering places for visiting. For instance. . . it was the social activities in the home, which drew the most people into close association for mutual support, comfort and celebration. House parties could occur whenever people felt like visiting. Women brought sandwiches, cake, pie, coffee, tea while the men played music. Sometimes the host or hostess did not know a party was on its way to their house until it arrived, unannounced! In some Métis communities after church, people gathered for ball games, card games or to have dinner together. Socialization led to the development of a rich and varied entertainment life among the Métis.
–Todd Paquin, Darren R. Préfontaine, and Patrick Young, *Traditional Métis Socialization and Entertainment* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002), 1, http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/00724

Gatherings are essential to the Métis way of life. Celebrations gather people in, and bring people back to, their home communities. Gatherings are a way of affirming Métis identity.

Métis Continue to Gather Today
Since 2016, the Métis Nation of Alberta has held the Youth & Seniors Gathering. This annual gathering is an opportunity for Métis citizens to gather, share knowledge and stories, participate in cultural activities, and develop a sense of belonging to the Métis community. The agenda typically includes keynote speakers, culture workshops, and a banquet with musical performers.

Figure 3. Métis Nation of Alberta, Youth & Seniors Gathering, January 2019, http://albertametis.com/3rd-annual-youth-and-seniors-gathering/.

Traditional Stories

Passing down traditional skills and knowledge from one generation to the next is viewed as a privilege and a key part of the legacy of Métis cultural heritage. The memories and stories of learning these skills are cherished among families.
–Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, *Mark of the Métis* (Fort McMurray: Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, 2012), 88.

Traditional stories are essential to Métis community. Métis children, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, and uncles—from the young to the elderly—everyone shares stories and teachings which guide their ways of

thinking and doing and of interpreting the world. Métis identity, history, and traditions and their meanings are expressed in the stories that are shared among Métis families.

"Learning history through textbooks is not enough. . . . It is important for students to learn by hearing stories of the past. . . . Stories help to create empathy and engage students, giving them an opportunity to see things from another perspective."
–Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, July 24, 2019.

Mobility & Adaptability

The Métis are an adaptive, strong, creative people. Métis values unify communities regardless of location. As a collective, the Métis have adapted in periods of dispersion and forced migration. The Métis have faced discrimination, and their ability to adapt and even move in the face of challenging circumstances has been crucial to their survival/prosperity as individuals and as a nation.
Métis mobility and adaptability have also resulted in diverse Métis ways of living. Some Métis communities settled in places that are now urban centres, so some Métis live urban lifestyles. Other Métis remain anchored to rural communities in the Homeland.

There is even diversity in ways of living among rural Métis communities. For example, some Métis live on Metis Settlements, the Métis-secured land base in Alberta. Other Métis live on farms in rural areas outside of the Metis Settlements. Some Métis choose to live in rural areas simply because they appreciate the solitude of a rural lifestyle. Wherever they live, the Métis are unified by the value they place in resilience, teachings and stories, community, and kinship—all of which remain strong in the Métis collective.

Mobility—defined as the willingness, knowledge, and family structure to be on the move across the landscape for traditional purposes and for wage work—is at the heart of the Métis experience.
–Maria Campbell, *Riel's People: How the Métis Lived* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978 [reprinted 1992]), 46.

Resilience

Resilience is a defining feature of Métis nationhood. Métis resilience is evident in the daily lives of the Métis. Despite Canada's history, which calls Métis a "defeated" people, resilience is evident in Métis literature, academic writing, art, governance, politics, and in many other areas of contemporary life.

Today, as in the old days, they play their fiddles, sing, dance, and tell their children stories. They work hard, as they have always done. . . They know who they are:
"Ka tip aim soot chic"—the people who own themselves.
–Maria Campbell, *Riel's People: How the Métis Lived* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978 [reprinted 1992

Maria Campbell, a Métis author and leader, uses the Michif-Cree expression *ka tip aim soot chic*—which means "the people who own themselves"—to identify Métis resilience. A more commonly known term that means the same thing is *otipemisiwak* (say: oh-tih-pem-ih-see-wak.) Both terms express the reality that the Métis know, govern, own, and care for themselves. These terms refer to parallel notions of individual independence and communal independence, which are intertwined in the Métis story.
As early as the 1830s, Métis nationhood and communities were organized by traditional values and were expressed through cultural expressions and practices throughout the Métis Homeland. At that time, the daily cultural practices and traditions in the Métis way of life were thriving. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Canada progressively advanced into Métis territory and assumed ownership over the Métis Homeland. Settlers displaced not only Métis families but also the cultural practices that connected them to Métis traditions. Many

Métis have denied or hidden their cultural and national identity in order to protect their families from mistreatment.
Despite this mistreatment, dispossession, and displacement, Métis continue to move towards a skilled, knowledgeable, and self-reliant Métis Nation.

Métis have had to endure many hardships throughout their collective displacement, yet Métis traditions have been retained and maintained. Over the past decades, Métis culture has begun to resurface in Canadian society. As the injustices the Métis faced have been unveiled to the Canadian public, human rights movements have begun to make space for Métis expressions of identity. Gradually, it has become more acceptable to talk about and celebrate being Métis.
In this period of revival, many Métis have drawn from the wisdom of their ancestors, as the older generations of Métis still remember the old ways, including traditions that have sustained the people since the birth of Métis. In spite of the traumatic events that Métis have had to endure, the older Métis keep the seeds of Métis traditions and identity safe in their stories and memories. In returning to the older Métis generations and listening to their stories, Métis have been strengthening the Nation and revitalizing Métis culture and traditions.

Resilience of the Flower Beadwork People

"Historically, after Louis Riel was hanged, many communities (especially in urban areas) were in fear of retaliation and felt it was safer for their families to hide their Métis heritage. Their descendants often grew up never knowing they were Métis. The resurgence of our culture and interest in genealogies brought many new members into our fold. Sometimes through lateral violence these members are frowned upon and scorned for not knowing their history and culture. They should be welcomed with open arms in the true Métis spirit of community and friendship."
–Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, July 24, 2019.

Figure 4. Christi Belcourt, *Resilience of the Flower Beadwork People*, 1999, Acrylic on Canvas, 36" x 48", Collection of Shane Belcourt & Amanda Greener, http://christibelcourt.com/early-work/resilience/.

Section Two
Celebrating Métis Traditions & Culture

Figure 5. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Beaded Moccasins," November 22, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Métis Family Traditions

It is appropriate to begin with the family when exploring Métis traditions and culture because it is within Métis families that cultural traditions have been fostered. As many educators may know, what constitutes "family" is culturally defined. The idea of a nuclear family—consisting of a father, a mother, and their biological children—is dominant in Western society. In the Western model, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are considered to be one's extended family.

The family was the core of Métis society historically and remains the core today.
–Diane Payment*, The Free People – Li Gens Libres: A History of the Métis Community of Batoche,* Saskatchewan (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2006), 42.

Métis children know that their guardians are not just their mothers and fathers but also their aunties, uncles, and grandparents. Beyond Western tradition, aunties and uncles in Métis society are not just the biological siblings of their mother and father; aunties and uncles play a role as nurturing, caring adults in a child's life, as do other family friends, cousins, and other people. It is common practice in many Métis families for everyone to contribute to the raising of children.
In many Métis families, members call one another by their kinship ties, rather than by formal given names. One Métis man shared that he calls his brother "Brother" instead of by his given name, "Macey." Family kinship terms such as this demonstrate the value of kinship in Métis families, which is distinct from that in many Euro-Canadian families.
Nicknames are also quite common in Métis families. Almost everyone has a nickname, which they usually get because of something that happened to them.

"I learned about an uncle that had passed away before I had a chance to meet him. Everybody called him Uncle Jeep. I asked my sister why everybody called him that. She told me he was a firefighter and was the straw boss and had his own crew. One day they encountered a big hill and he packed everything up on his back and one of his crewmembers said, 'There's a real jeep.' Ever since that day everybody called him Jeep."
–Lisa Cruickshank, sharing a story about her uncle Gabriel Justin Bourque, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, December 2019.

The kinship web defined in Cree and Michif languages extends beyond the Western family mode. For example, there are distinct notions of relationship between the mother's side and father's side of the family. While exploring the intricacies of Métis kinship terms and traditions is beyond the scope of this document, it is essential that educators know that many Métis families are organized differently from the standard generally promoted by Western institutions. It is important that these differences be acknowledged and celebrated.

Acknowledging Métis Women

With Métis families at the core of Métis communities, the roles of each family member define the community. Historically, women's contributions to Métis nation-building have been neglected, and patriarchal approaches to studying history and society have predominated. In general, the **hunting**, trapping, and trading practices of Métis men dominate what Canadians know about Métis history. The contributions of Métis women—including in art, craftsmanship, medicine, and economics—have often

gone unrecognized. This resource puts particular emphasis on the contributions of Métis women to provide educators with a more comprehensive review of the development of Métis culture and traditions.

Métis women were integral to all endeavors. [They] played important roles in commercial and domestic production and in the political life. . . . Métis women were clothing designers, doctors, pharmacists, midwives, peacekeepers, teachers, artists, and agriculturalists. Métis women were the children's teachers and keepers of the Métis languages.
–Lawrence Barkwell, *Women of the Métis Nation,* 2nd ed. (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute Press, 2012), 8.

Métis women have created many beautiful contemporary and traditional crafted creations. Many Métis women are expert needle workers, and they create clothing and items in a distinctive Métis style. Each Métis woman had a unique style, a reflection of her creative abilities and individual preferences. Women produced custom designs to fit the preferences of the person who would wear the item, or as a way to express their ancestry.
Many Métis women are and were passionate entrepreneurs, running businesses to produce these creations. Historical records note their distinct entrepreneurship methods for manufacturing and marketing their creations, which distinguish Métis women from other Indigenous entrepreneurs. Métis women crafted both to clothe their families and to generate income for their families, thus ensuring the self-sufficiency of the Nation. Some women produced large quantities of artisan goods, which were highly prized and traded across Rupert's Land. Métis women also designed custom pieces to meet the style and fit of their customers.

By developing their own style and by making large quantities of objects that were then sold or exchanged, women played an important economic role within the Métis nation. At the same time, they have also helped spread the cultural identity of the Métis, a proud nation.
–Nathalie Kermoal, "Floral Beadwork: A Métis Cultural Heritage to Rediscover," in *Encyclopedia of French Cultural Heritage in North America*, http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-476/Floral_Beadwork:_A_M%C3%A9tis_Cultural_Heritage_to_Rediscover_.html

Figure 6. This unnamed Métis family was photographed in Pincher Creek, Alberta around 1910. Photo: Sherry Farrell Racette, "Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women's Artistic Production," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, eds. Myra Rutherdale and Katie Pickles (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 41.

Therese and Ernie Ray Michael, a Métis couple who live in Fort McMurray, shared a story that demonstrates the time and energy they invested in creating these beautiful items.

"Us women, not only me, but there's quite a few of them that could sew. That's how they help out to provide for their man, for the children, by sewing. . . . I don't know, where was my time? You ask me when I had time to do that when I had nine kids to look after and still sewing, besides cooking and cleaning. I never used to sleep very much. I used to stay up 'til two in the morning."
Her husband continued, saying, "Longer than that sometimes, I think. We used to go to bed. She'd clean the table. Put her tea kettle on the stove and clean the table, bring out her moose hide, her wool and stuff. And I'd get up in the morning, six o'clock, there'd be a pair of high-top mukluks hanging on the chair for sale, fifteen dollars. Fifteen dollars."
–Therese and Ernie Ray Michael, in Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, *Mark of the Métis* (Fort McMurray: Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, 2012), 86.

Delphine Berard (née Cardinal), is a Métis woman who was born in Fishing Lake, Alberta, in 1938. She also shared a story of the work her mother did in caring for their family.

"My Mom used to tan the hides of deer and moose for footwear, mittens, and nice jackets. She used the hair that she scraped off hides to stuff pillows and mattresses. She would stretch rabbit hides and sell them for five cents each, and made socks and mittens out of old sweaters that were given to us."
–Delphine Berard, quoted in Eleanor Verbicky, ed., *Life and Times of the Métis: A History of Caslan Métis Settlement* (Alberta: Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations, 1984).

Despite Métis women's immense contributions to Métis art and Métis nationhood, Métis women's work has often been insufficiently recognized. Colonial museums often failed to give due credit to Métis women's art, as their artistic endeavours faced the dual discrimination associated with being made by a Métis person and a woman. Thankfully, the prejudices inherent in colonial museums are now being unpacked, and Métis women are increasingly recognized for their work. Their stories are being told.

Métis Medicinal Practices

Métis people have used different plants in a variety of ways to make medicine. Using plants to care for the body was at one time the only way Métis treated medical conditions.79 The knowledge of the purpose and method of using traditional medicines is shared within and between families. Sometimes, there were certain people in the community who held special knowledge of plants to whom others would go for advice. This person is trusted with the knowledge and skills needed to prepare and create medicines. For some Métis, medicinal traditions continue today as a way of being, whereas others today rely primarily on Western health practices.

Métis traditional knowledge, traditional health knowledge and healing practices are based upon a foundation of Métis culture and viewed by Métis to be fundamental to Métis health and contribute to individual well-being and community wellness.
–Lois Edge and Tom McCallum, "Métis Identity: Sharing Traditional Knowledge and Healing Practices at Métis Elders' Gatherings," in *A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* (2006), 85.

"Picking plants for food and medicine was and still is part of our lifestyle. We have . . . studied plants and their medicinal uses for generations. We have . . . preserved the knowledge of traditional plants as an intellectual right given to us by our ancestors. As technology advances, and industry moves further north, we are beginning to lose control of the very land on which our medicines grow."
–Rose Richardson, Métis community member from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan quoted in Nathalie Kermoal, "Métis Women's Environmental Knowledge and the Recognition of Métis Rights," in *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place*, eds. N. Kermoal and Isabel Altamirano-Jimenez (Edmonton: Athabasca Press, 2016).

Figure 67. NetPSPhotoFinder, "Bitterroot," n.d., featured in *Bitterroot*, Mill Creek Nursery Ltd., August 12, 2019, http://search.millcreeknursery.ca/11050005/Plant/2683/Bitterroot/

Figure 68. Fireweed, a part of her larger painting, *Medicines to Help Us*. Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us*, 2003, acrylic on canvas, 51" x 91", Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, http://www.christibelcourt.com/Gallery/gallery2000page4eDT.html

Métis Celebrations

[NOTE: Dates may differ, or these events may not be celebrated in all Métis communities]

Annual gatherings and celebrations during the year are a special time of homecoming, and the presence of the whole family is always greatly anticipated. Celebrations are not only a time for families and communities to gather; they also serve to affirm the community identity through traditions. Some holidays are rooted in spiritual and religious traditions, and some are rooted in the celebration of the nation and of community.

Figure 69. Métis Nation of Alberta, "MNA Christmas Party," December 2018. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Chivaree

A *chivaree* (say: shiv-ah-ree) is a Michif word for a party. It is a lively celebration or gathering with music, feasting, and dancing. New Year's celebrations, for example, can be called a *chivaree*. *Chivarees* are also held following weddings. Wedding celebrations can go on for days after the official ceremony. Because of all the celebrations, many weddings would take place during the Christmas season. One Métis wedding tradition is that the guests all eat breakfast together before heading home. Another wedding custom is that guests have to sing a song to the bride to receive a piece of the wedding cake.

Feu de Joie

Feu de Joie is a term for a celebratory tradition of firing guns in salute at a ceremony.

Winter Celebrations

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Le Réveillon | December 24–25

Much driving about and visiting take place, and balls, family parties and celebrations of a kindred nature are set on foot. . . Processions of perhaps twenty-cutters and carrioles set out for a long drive over the snow, and the occupants generally arrange to call at some friends' house in a body and have a dance. This is called a surprise party and the dissipation has its charms. . . One of the principal events in the holidays is the celebration of a midnight mass in the cathedral of St. Boniface, on Christmas Eve.

For some Métis, it is a tradition to gather as a family to attend a Catholic midnight Mass ceremony, which is a celebration of the birth of Jesus. For these families, it would be customary to fast during the day and evening of Christmas Eve. At the Mass, Catholic Métis would receive Communion. At the end of Mass, bells would ring to announce *Le Réveillon* (meaning "the awakening"). After the Mass, families would go home to enjoy an elaborate, multi-course feast. Following the meal, at around 2:00 a.m., families open their gifts. Often, the parish priest would travel to homes in the Métis community to visit with parishioners following the Mass.

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–Joseph James Hargrave, *Red River* (Montreal: Printed for the author by John Lovell, 1871), 171.

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, Kissing Day, Ochetookeskaw; Shaking Hands Day | December 31–January 6

The calendar year begins anew a week after Le Réveillon. Again, there is reason to celebrate. The celebration of the new year begins on New Year's Eve, December 31, and the festivities last until January 6. When the clock strikes midnight at a New Year's Eve party, guests shake hands and kiss one another. It would not be uncommon to hear the *feu de joie*, the sound of guns being shot in the air as the clocks strike midnight. This tradition continues today in some rural areas here in Alberta.

Every household hosting a party serves food and baked goods to their guests. It is customary for someone, usually the men, to shoot once out a door facing west to see the old year out, and then shoot once out a door facing east to welcome the new year in. During this week, there are many parties and a lot of dancing. Here is one fond memory of a Métis New Year's celebration.

"If you stood outside, you could hear the sleigh bells ringing through the cold night air as families gathered at the homes of their elders (parents or grandparents). Traditionally, they would go from house to house to toast the New Year, and enjoy the feast. Upon arrival to someone's home you can hear the expression "La Bonne Année," and receive a kiss and a handshake from everyone in the house young and old. The custom of kissing and shaking hands is an expression of good wishes for the coming year... The feast included foods such as les boulettes (ground beef made into meatballs and rolled in flour and boiled), bangs (fried bread dough), flat galette (a flattened bread), potatoes, pork, confitre–berries in sauce, beef, turkey, homemade pies, tourtière (a pie with ground meat and spices for filling), and pouchin (boiled cake)."

–M. Bercier, P. Laverdure, and R. Davis, "Memories of Christmas and New Year's on the Turtle Mountain Reservation," the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (North Dakota: North Dakota State Department of Public Instruction, 1997), interview with Irene Fox-Davis, 1994.

Commemorative and Cultural Celebrations

[NOTE: Dates may differ or these events may not be celebrated in all Métis communities]

Métis Week and Louis Riel Day | November 11–16

People throughout Alberta gather throughout **Métis Week** to celebrate the Métis in Alberta. Events such as formal ceremonies, special exhibitions, and exciting celebrations take place all week across the province.

Figure 70. These men were honoured as proud Métis veterans during the Flag Raising Ceremony at Edmonton's City Hall. Métis Nation of Alberta, "City Hall – Métis Week," personal communication, November 2019.

Métis Week centres on Louis Riel Day, a nationally recognized day of commemoration to honour and reflect on Louis Riel's memory and influence in the Métis Nation. Riel is remembered through ceremonies, commemorative walks, gatherings, dances, feasts, and music. Louis Riel Day is held on November 16 because, on that day in 1885, Riel lost his life for leading the Nation in a movement that asserted Métis sovereignty and the Métis right to self-determination in their Homeland.

Figure 71. Courtesy of Kimberley Fraser-Airhart, "Louis Riel's gravestone," November 2017, personal collection.

Figure 72. During Métis Week, the Métis Nation of Alberta hosts a Louis Riel Commemoration Walk that reflects the same commemorative walk done by Métis across the nation. This walk is done in honour of Riel's family and friends who carried his casket 6 miles in the harsh Manitoba winter to St. Boniface so that he may finally be laid to rest. Check in with the Métis Nation of Alberta each year for details on this annual walk.
Photo: Métis Nation of Alberta, "Louis Riel Walk," November 10, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Voyageur Days | Annually in the Summer
Métis Crossing, a Métis cultural centre just south of Smoky Lake, Alberta, hosts an annual event that invites everyone to experience Métis culture and traditions first-hand. Throughout the weekend, participants learn about and participate in Métis traditions such as jigging, fiddling, trapping, hide tanning, dry meat making, beading, and finger weaving. There are also contests, performances, workshops, and other events. Métis culture and traditions of all kinds are celebrated throughout the weekend.

Figure 73. Métis Nation of Alberta, "2017 Canoe Brigade Metis Crossing," July 4, 2017. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Back to Batoche Days | Annually in Mid-July

Back to Batoche Days is a four-day festival in Batoche, Saskatchewan, that showcases Métis culture and traditions. Métis host their kin from other provinces, along with guests of all ages and backgrounds, who enjoy jigging, storytelling, food, fiddling, competitive games, and singing.

Figure 74. Greg Huszar Photography, "Dancers and Fiddlers at Back to Batoche," https://backtobatochedays.ca/

"Family and friends enjoy the opportunity to reconnect and honour the rich contributions of Métis people and culture to the colorful mosaic of our Canadian society."
–Warren Kaeding, "Greetings from Minister Kaeding," Back to Batoche Days, Métis Nation–Saskatchewan, https://backtobatochedays.ca/.

Alberta Métis Fest | Annually, Date Varies

The Métis Nation of Alberta hosts a party in each of their regions to showcase Métis culture, talent, and history. Each region features a combination of jigging contests, fiddling, food, storytelling, and community gathering.

Figure 75. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Alberta Métis Fest Provincial," March 26, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Métis Youth & Seniors Symposium | Annually, Date Varies

Each winter, the Métis Nation of Alberta hosts a gathering of Métis seniors and youth. At this intergenerational gathering, members of the older and younger generations of Métis come together to share culture, traditions, and learning.

Figure 76. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Youth & Seniors Symposium," 2018. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Métis Nation of Alberta Annual General Assembly | Annually in Mid-August

Since 1928, the Métis Nation of Alberta has gathered annually to build the Nation and commemorate another year of success and growth. Each year, one of the six regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta hosts the Annual General Assembly (AGA). Beginning in 2021, Métis Crossing will host the AGA every second year.

Figure 77. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Eligible members of the MNA vote on resolutions during the 2019 AGA," 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

During this event, leaders of the Métis Nation of Alberta and their affiliates report to the community on the achievements of that year, as well as updates on progress toward the Nation's goals. Previous business minutes and financial statements are reviewed. Citizens and Métis Nation of Alberta leaders propose and vote on resolutions.

During the AGA, the host region puts on a special local event. There is also a youth conference, concurrent with the AGA, where Métis youth gather and participate in business and social affairs. The AGA also includes a tradeshow where Métis artisans and business owners showcase goods and services. At the AGA, there are also lively social gatherings of families and performers, who celebrate cultural traditions together by showcasing and teaching Métis dance, music, and other traditions.

In 2019, a historic goal was celebrated at the 91st MNA AGA:

"Métis self-government was finally recognized by the Government of Canada. On Thursday, June 27, 2019, Canada and the MNA signed a historic agreement. The agreement recognizes the Métis Nation within Alberta as having an inherent, constitutionally protected right to self-government."

–Métis Nation of Alberta*, 91st Annual General Assembly Annual Report 2018-2019* (Edmonton: Métis Nation of Alberta, 2019), 14.

Figure 78. Métis Nation of Alberta, Prince Charles Students performing at the AGA, 2016, http://albertametis.com/photos/2016-2/annual-general-assembly-2016/nggallery/page/4

National Indigenous Peoples Day | June 21

National Indigenous Peoples Day is a national celebration for all Indigenous people in Canada, including all of the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit. June 21 was chosen because it is the summer solstice, making it the longest day of the year. Québec first celebrated this day in 1990. In 1995, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended it be recognized as a national holiday. National Indigenous Peoples Day is an official part of Canada's calendar and is celebrated by the Métis across the country.

"On June 13, 1996, former Governer General Roméo LeBlanc officially declared June 21 National Aboriginal Day." It was renamed National Indigenous Peoples Day in 2017.
–Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *National Aboriginal Day History*, archived from the original PDF on 17 November 2017.

Figures 79 & 80. Courtesy of Billie-Jo Grant, "National Indigenous Peoples Day, Edmonton Expo Centre," June 21, 2019, personal collection.

Métis Harvesting and Culinary Traditions

Harvesting and culinary traditions are essential aspects of Métis culture and are deeply rooted in Métis history and in the Métis ethnogenesis. These thriving traditions are dynamic and continue to evolve.

Harvesting

The term *harvesting* refers to all aspects of collecting resources from the land. Métis harvesting includes trapping, hunting, fishing, medicine picking, berry picking, and gathering. Harvesting has been a part of Métis ways of being for centuries. Though harvesting is not the single source of sustenance for Métis in Alberta today, harvesting traditions remain an essential expression of Métis culture.

Métis harvesting is about food, spirituality, tradition, respect, and culture. It is more than simply hunting or fishing. . . Harvesting is an important part of the Métis way of life and a mechanism for cultural transmission.

–Métis Nation of Alberta, "What We Heard," July 2018, 9.

Figure 81. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Watching Winter Trapping Basics," 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Traplines are a vital part of the Métis way of life. Many Métis trappers have lost traplines, or lost portions to development. Métis trapping traditions have been completely lost in some cases, and the only way to ensure the practice continues is to make trapline ownership available to Métis trappers.

–Métis Nation of Alberta, "What We Heard," July 2018, 12.

Hunting, which is one harvesting practice, involves the shooting of game, including rabbits, grouse, moose, bison, elk, and deer. Trapping, another type of harvesting, involves setting traps for fur-bearing animals. Trapping is done primarily to harvest animal furs; however, some people also eat the meat of the trapped animals.

Policies developed with Métis consultation empower Métis' ability to practice harvesting and teach their children in traditional ways. Traditional harvesting reflects values associated with need and availability, not demand-based or recreational values. When Métis are taught the traditions of Métis harvesting, they learn to be true stewards of the environment.

Figure 82. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Winter Trapping – Furs and Traps," 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Métis harvesters harvest what is available, and the purpose of the harvest informs what is harvested. For example, harvesting for sustenance, family, community, one meal, ceremony, or for cultural purposes have different needs.

–Métis Nation of Alberta, "What We Heard," July 2018, 7.

Figure 83. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Canoe Brigade Metis Crossing," 2017. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Reflecting on the way Métis are restricted in their access to their rights as Indigenous people is an opportunity for educators to realize how a lack of understanding among government officials can foster policies that do not reflect the realities of the Métis.

Métis harvesting is, by its very nature, conservation focused.
–Métis Nation of Alberta, "What We Heard," July 2018, 11.

Traditional Cuisine

Many Canadians believe that traditional Métis food is limited to bison, pemmican, and bannock. This is not the case. Métis culinary skills are creative, and there is a lot of variety in Métis dishes. Celebrations feature an especially diverse spread of delicious food. Gathering to share food brings the community together. Whether it is fresh preparation, canning, or drying meats and fish, food preparation is a special part of Métis family life and a time of bonding.

Métis believe that sharing what you have is an important value, and this value is expressed in the culinary culture of Métis people. Many meals include fresh-baked bannock, which is often devoured quickly. Many say it tastes best with butter and homemade Saskatoon berry jam. Métis families often prepare wild meat; when a family has extra meat, it is traditional, even today, to share the extra meat with their family and the wider community—especially with those in need.

The main place of family activity was the kitchen. A hot bowl of Metis soup (rubaboo) and a hot piece of bannock (li galette) was always at the ready, along with a good cup of hot tea.

–Audreen Hourie, Anne Carriére-Acco, Lawrence Barkwell, and Leah Dorion, "Metis Foods and Food Preparation," in *Metis Legacy Volume II: Michif Culture, Heritage, and Folkways*, eds. Lawrence Barkwell, Leah M. Dorion, and Audreen Hourie (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute and Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2006), 120.

Some Métis have a tradition of putting out an extra table setting at feasts. After the meal, the set-aside food is put into the fire for “those who went before us.” These practices are part of the Métis value of generosity, and also of honouring their ancestors. These key aspects of Métis tradition are maintained through culinary culture.

In another Métis custom relating to food, when a Métis child shoots or snares their first animal, the child will have a feast prepared for them, in which the family and community gather to celebrate the success of the harvest.

Food is not just for sustenance; Métis communities also view food as medicine. Métis soup recipes are known to have healing properties; they prevent many illnesses by including a variety of nutritious foods in a single pot.

Figure 84. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Youth holding up their catch from nets,” personal communication, 2019.

There are many different Métis recipes, and they vary across communities, families, and regions of residence. One common feature of Métis recipes is that they do not include a set, perfectly measured ingredient list. Like traditional stories, languages, and music, Métis recipes are taught and learned through oral tradition. Learning orally means that the learner witnesses the preparation and develops the skill of approximating the balance of ingredients. The best way to learn about Métis food is to join a Métis gathering, enjoy the food, and listen to Métis people tell stories about the foods their families' treasures!

Conclusion

Community, networking, kinship, traditional storytelling, mobility, adaptability, and resilience are all foundational values of Métis culture that provide structure to Métis communities. These components are essential to understanding the Métis worldview and guide Métis ways of living. These values have guided the Métis in periods full of exciting opportunities and also during times when the Métis have faced devastating, challenging circumstances.

Learning about Métis culture reveals some of the beautiful, vibrant expressions of Métis people. There are many aspects to Métis culture and traditions—including clothing, art, architecture, transportation, music, dance, food, sport, storytelling, faith, and celebrations. This foundational knowledge resource serves as an introduction to the diversity of Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Métis values, traditions, and culture are strengthened by lived experience. Many Métis today stand true to the traditional ways of life explored in this document and practice them daily. Others, who are in the process of reconnecting with their families and communities, may not have had the benefit of a traditional lived experience. There are many reasons for this displacement, such as Residential and Indian Day Schools, the Sixties Scoop, the hiding of one's identity, intergenerational trauma, and forced assimilation.

Educators need to consider the variety of contexts in which Métis people live today as they prepare to introduce students to learn about Métis culture and traditions. Métis students will have varying experiences in their exposure to Métis culture and traditions. Some Métis students know and live their culture and traditions vibrantly, while others may not even know they are Métis. It is in this diversity that Métis resilience is evident and celebrated, and creates a welcoming space for those who are reconnecting.

As educators develop and incorporate their own foundational knowledge of Métis culture and traditions, students of every background will develop a wholesome, positive, informed understanding of Métis identity, culture, traditions, and belonging. This shift in narrative fosters a positive outlook towards reconciliation.