KAA-WIICHIHITOYAAHK

— We take care of each other —

MÉTIS PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL WELLNESS

KAA-WIICHIHITOYAAHK

— We take care of each other —

Métis Perspectives on Cultural Wellness

The michif word *Kaa-wiichihitoyaahk* (ka-wee-chi-hi-toy-yahk) means "we take care of each other." This word was chosen as the title for the guide because caring for our family and community is an important value of Métis people. We express *kaa-wiichihitoyaakh* and cultural wellness towards one another by practising our culture and treating one another with respect and kindness.

MÉTIS NATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Disclaimer: This guide has been produced by Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) in consultation with many Métis people, including Elders and Knowledge Keepers. However, we recognize that due to the diversity of Métis people, there may be different perspectives and viewpoints that are not represented in this guide. In addition, as this guide is intended to be an overview, we have balanced a need for detail with an attempt to simplify complex issues. If you would like to suggest any changes to the guide for consideration in future editions, please contact health@mnbc.ca.

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— We take care of each other —

Métis Perspectives on Cultural Wellness

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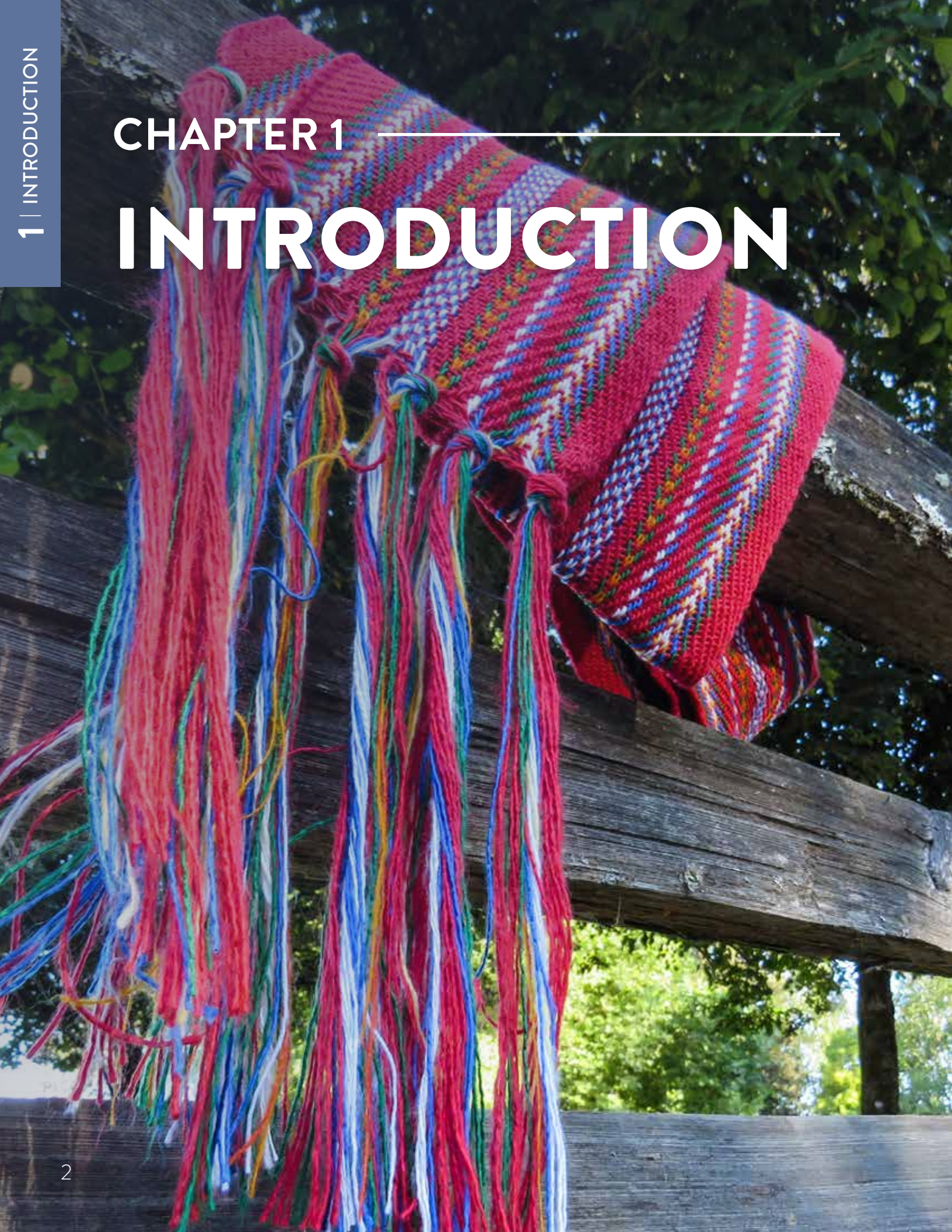


CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the learning resource. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand the purpose of this learning resource and how it was developed
- Understand the structure of the learning resource and have a plan for how to use it
- Reflect on your own learning goals related to the learning resource

1.1 Acknowledgements

Putting together this learning resource was a team effort and many individuals contributed to this work. We thank everyone who participated in the process for sharing their heartfelt contributions and expert knowledge, including the following groups and individuals:

- The Métis Elders and Youth who laid the foundation for the learning resource by participating in interviews, group discussions and focus groups at the Sharing Métis Wisdom gatherings in 2019.
- The Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) staff working group who guided the development of the resource, including Tanya Davoren, Brodie Douglas, Colleen Hodgson, Laurel Katernick, Colette Trudeau and Ashley Turner.
- The reviewers, including Laura Forsythe, Elder Phillip Gladue, Elder Stella Johnson, Victoria Pruden, Lisa Shepherd, Dr. Fred Shore, Celia Jennifer Smith and Kirsten Thingvold.
- The MNBC staff and board members who participated in the review of the learning resource.
- Writers and project managers Mallory Blondeau, Keisha Charnley and Rachel Mason of Arrive Consulting.
- Graphic designers Caroline Mitic and Jessica Thomson of DesignCoast Creative.
- Graphic illustrator Mallory Blondeau (for floral graphic illustrations).
- Métis linguist Dale McCreery (for Michif translations).
- The Government of British Columbia (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions) and Provincial Health Services Authority for providing the funding to make this learning resource possible.
- Photography/photograph submissions from Eden Jager, Leona Shaw, Métis Nation of Greater Victoria, Chilliwack Métis Association and many others.

1.2 How This Learning Resource Was Developed

There is a growing public awareness of the importance of understanding First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture and identity. With the concept of reconciliation becoming increasingly integrated into public consciousness, more workplaces and government agencies are requiring employee training in “Indigenous cultural safety” and the impacts of colonization. However, the majority of available offerings do not explore cultural safety within a Métis context. This learning resource addresses the need for increased awareness of Métis culture, identity and resilience amongst the general public in order to promote cultural wellness for Métis people.

This learning resource has been developed by the Métis Nation British Columbia's (MNBC)'s Ministry of Health, with funding from the Province of British Columbia (B.C.). In March and April of 2019, over 100 Métis Elders and Youth gathered at two events, in Prince George and Kelowna, B.C., to provide their expertise as a foundation for this learning resource. They shared their stories and perspectives through group discussions, small focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Their input was the foundation of this resource.

A working group of staff from MNBC oversaw the development of this learning resource. The working group provided input into the learning outcomes, structure and content, and reviewed drafts for accuracy and educational impact. Arrive Consulting, a company based in B.C. that specializes in Indigenous curriculum development, supported the creation of the learning resource.

The draft learning resource was reviewed by subject matter experts, including Métis academics, educators and Elders. The curriculum was then reviewed by MNBC staff and board members, and their feedback was incorporated into this final document. Many Métis and non-Métis people informed the development of this learning resource, making it a rich tapestry of the voices and insights shared in the development process.

1.3 Learning Resource Overview

Why Use This Resource?

If you are Métis, this resource may help you learn more about and celebrate your Métis roots. The learning in these pages highlights the resilience of the Métis people and the strength of your ancestors. This resource is intended to be an introductory overview and will hopefully provide a foundation for future learning and reclamation of your cultural heritage. It may bring up new questions you might have about being Métis. It may also help you answer these questions, as well as the questions that others may ask you about what it means to be Métis.

If you are not Métis, this resource will help you to learn about the Métis. Unfortunately, many people in Canada have not been educated about the Métis and have significant gaps in their knowledge of Métis culture and identity. These gaps have contributed to a collective experience amongst Métis people of feeling misunderstood, stereotyped, invisible or having to defend the validity of their identity. In this resource, Métis people are generously sharing about who they are as a way of dismantling these misunderstandings and promoting awareness of their culture and identity.

Understanding who the Métis are helps us create a safer and more welcoming community for all people. When the general public understands who the Métis are, the Métis are more likely to be included, acknowledged and valued. They are also more likely to experience programs and services that address their unique needs as Métis people, and this will contribute to feelings of cultural wellness. By undertaking this learning, you will gain knowledge and skills to help you interact with Métis people in a culturally responsive way.

Learning Resource Goals

The overall goals of this learning resource are as follows:

- To be able to explain what it means to be Métis
- To gain awareness of Métis history, including the impacts of colonialism and the resilience of Métis people
- To understand how Métis people are reclaiming their identity and moving towards healing and self-determination
- To understand the role of MNBC and Métis Chartered Communities
- To be able to support cultural wellness for Métis people within your community and place of work
- To be able to build relationships with Métis people in your community

How This Resource Is Organized

This resource is divided into eight chapters, including this introduction. Each chapter after the introduction includes the following sections:

- **Overview:** A summary of the chapter's learning outcomes (found on the chapter cover page)
- **Introduction:** An introduction to the chapter's content
- **Build on what you know:** Links between the subject matter of the chapter and your own knowledge, experience and learning goals (marked with a ∞ symbol)
- **Chapter content:** The chapter's subject matter, divided into topic areas that address the chapter's purpose
- **Stories from Métis people:** Throughout the chapter, there are quotes and stories from Métis individuals in red text or in text boxes
- **Questions for reflection:** Questions that provide the opportunity for you to connect personally with the subject matter (marked with a ∞ symbol)
- **Test your knowledge:** Ideas for activities to extend, practise and apply your learning (marked with a ∞ symbol)
- **Key learnings:** A summary of the key concepts in the chapter

How to Use This Resource

You can use this learning resource in several ways:

- **From the kitchen table:** We envision this resource on the kitchen tables of Métis families, being a spark for conversation and a source of meaningful learning for years to come. You can engage with the resource by skimming through it or flipping to a random page and seeing what you can learn. The resource does not need to be read front to back. For example, you can read the stories aloud to your friends and family sitting at the table over a pot of tea.

  Estimated time: 1 min+

- **In a self-led learning circle:** You can work together with a self-organized group to host learning circles, in which you meet regularly to discuss each chapter and practise applying your learning. The resource is developed in such a way that the Questions for Reflection, Building on Prior Knowledge, and Test Your Knowledge activities can be used as group discussion prompts. You do not require an instructor for this approach, but someone would need to facilitate the conversation using the questions. A facilitation guide for this approach is provided in Appendix C.

  Estimated time: 12–18 hours

- **On your own, self-paced:** You can read the full resource on your own and undertake as many of the Questions for Reflection and Test Your Knowledge activities as you like, at your own pace.

  Estimated time: 3–6 hours

- **In a facilitated group:** The information and activities in this resource could be used by an instructor to develop facilitated workshops and presentations that provide an overview of the Métis. All material in this resource can be shared publicly, but we request that instructors credit the resource so participants can do their own learning as well.

  Estimated time: 16 hours

- **To develop professional learning opportunities:** This resource can be used in any of the above ways to promote professional development and cultural competency within organizations and systems. The resource could be adapted to develop workshops, lunch and learns, or self-directed learning.

  Estimated time: Varies

1.4 Key Language

There are some key words and concepts that are foundational to understanding the content of this resource. These include the following:

Aboriginal and Indigenous: *Aboriginal,* in the Canadian context, encompasses First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. The term *Aboriginal* refers to peoples who inhabited a territory prior to non-Indigenous colonization and settlement of Canada.

In Canada, use of the term *Aboriginal* has declined in recent years, and there has been increased use of the term *Indigenous*. The term *Indigenous* refers to the original inhabitants of a territory.

In everyday language, the terms *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* are often used interchangeably—for example, in B.C., what was once the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is now known as the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Aboriginal people have the right to define the terms that are used to describe their identity. In this resource we use the word *Aboriginal* or the phrase *First Nations*, *Métis and Inuit* based on the preferences of the contributors. This is because of the legal importance of the term *Aboriginal* in section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982, which recognizes Métis people as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. However, the term *Indigenous* has legal importance internationally, such as in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Métis: As defined by the Métis National Council, **"Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation."** The definition of Métis is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

Michif language: Michif is upheld as the national Métis language. It is a unique language that developed in the Red River valley (located in present-day Manitoba) in the early 1800s. Michif is a mixed language that contains Plains Cree verbs and French nouns and noun structure.

There are three types of Michif:

- Métis French (also called Michif-French)
- Métis Cree (also called Northern Michif or Île-à-la-Crosse Michif)
- Southern Michif (also called Turtle Mountain Michif, Chippewa-Cree or Heritage Michif)

Within this learning resource, we have chosen to use primarily the Michif language known as Southern or Heritage Michif, and when a language is referenced as "Michif," we are speaking of that language.

Cultural wellness: The Métis Elders and Youth who contributed to this resource provided input into the following statement about what it means to be culturally well:

> Cultural wellness is a sense of belonging and pride we feel when we are connected to our Métis families, Communities, traditions and the land. It feels like home.
>
> We express cultural wellness by honouring the strength, determination and traditions of our ancestors. We do this by telling our stories, using the Michif language, being on the land and practising and passing on traditions such as our music, jigging and art.
>
> Métis culture is a beautiful continuation of the strength and resiliency of our ancestors, the joy of family connection and the passing on of the teachings and traditions of our Elders to future generations.
>
> Cultural wellness fosters balance in physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health for our Métis individuals, families and Communities.
>
> Embracing Métis heritage and culture honours each Métis person's unique story and our distinct identity as Métis people in B.C. today.

More information on Métis cultural wellness can be found in Chapter 7.

Colonialism: Colonialism is a system through which settlers take control over land and people, imposing a dominant worldview and system of governance while exercising political power over the territory's Aboriginal people.

Oppression: Oppression is the exploitation, based on the perceived inferiority, of a group of people who share a collective identity (such as race, class, cultural background, religion, gender, sexuality, age, language or ability). Characteristics of oppression include the following:

- **Power imbalance** – Oppression involves an abuse of power by one group at the expense of others, which hinders the oppressed groups from accessing resources and fully expressing their freedom. These impacts can manifest at a personal or group level.
- **Systemic** – Oppression extends beyond individuals with prejudiced beliefs and actions; it is embedded within the structure of society, its institutions and day-to-day life.
- **Denial** – The powerful group often denies or is unaware that oppression exists and accepts it as being normal/right, while they benefit from that power imbalance through unearned privileges.
- **Conscious or subconscious** – Both conscious and subconscious oppression can affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. For example, even if people are not aware of their oppressive beliefs, they may subconsciously discriminate against certain types of people.

- **Personal oppression** includes thoughts, behaviours and actions that result in a negative judgement or treatment of an oppressed group. For example, a taxi driver refuses to pick up visibly Aboriginal people because of the belief that they are likely to be violent.
- **Cultural oppression** includes shared societal values and norms that allow people to see oppression as acceptable or right. Cultural oppression is grounded in the belief that the more powerful group is normal and the oppressed group is different, or "other." An example of cultural oppression is judging Aboriginal people negatively when their values and ways of being differ from non-Aboriginal society–for example, considering Aboriginal art to be "crafts" and not "real art."
- **Institutional (or structural) oppression** manifests in the ways that societal institutions (such as governments, religions, education systems, health care systems, legal systems and the media) disadvantage oppressed groups. For example, there is a significantly higher percentage of Métis children in foster care, which continues to negatively impact Métis cultural wellness.

Resilience: Resilience is the ability of a person or group of people to endure challenging circumstances, recover from them and survive into a future where they can thrive. Cultural identity and teachings promote resilience by acting as protective factors in the face of socioeconomic inequalities and oppression.

A note on intentional capitalizations: Certain terms within this document have been intentionally capitalized, as per MNBC conventions, to show respect. These include Elder, Knowledge Keeper, Métis Chartered Community, Métis Citizen, Nation (in reference to the Métis Nation), Veteran, Youth and MNBC political titles.

1.5 Getting Started

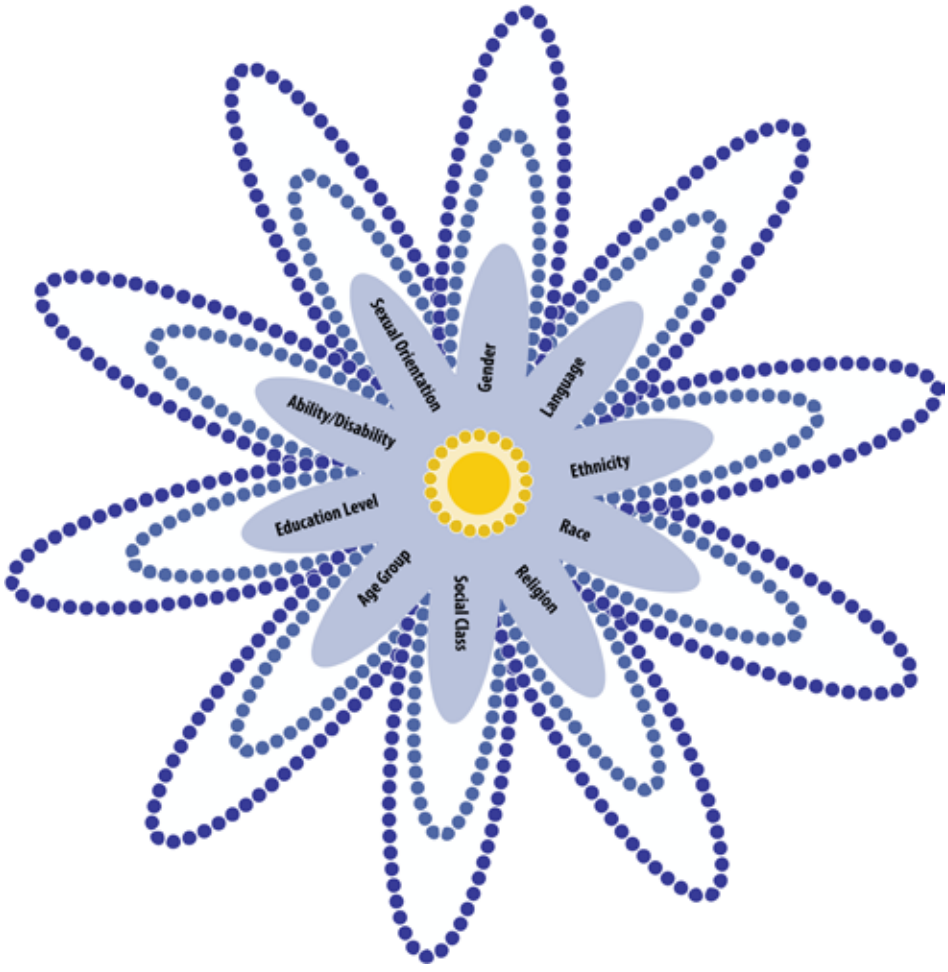
We suggest two introductory activities to prepare you for getting the most out of your learning experience:

1. Reflecting on your own identity
2. Setting your personal learning goals and plan

Reflecting on Your Own Identity

Before you dive into learning about Métis identity and culture, we invite you to take a moment to think about your own identity. Every person has unique cultural roots and experiences that impact their worldviews and ways of being in the world. Many people have experienced both privilege and oppression in relation to various aspects of their identity.

The "Power Flower" is a useful tool for exploring your own identity and your experiences of privilege and oppression. To complete this activity, draw or copy the power flower on a separate sheet of paper. First fill out the outer petals of the flower with the group that is typically the most powerful or dominant group in that category. For example, in Canada for "race," you would put "White," and for religion you would put "Christian." Then fill out the inner petals with the way *you* identify for each category.



Once you have filled in the petals, reflect on the areas where your identity aligns with the dominant group. In these areas, you have experienced privilege. Reflect on the following:

- What has that experience of privilege been like for you?
- What benefits might you have experienced as a result of that privilege?
- What do you think it might be like for someone who has not been privileged in that way?

Next, reflect on the areas where your identity does not align with the dominant group. In these areas, you may have experienced oppression. Reflect on the following:

- What has that been like for you?
- Have you ever felt ashamed or been discriminated against, misunderstood or underestimated as a result of your identity in that category?

While using this learning resource, you will be asked to reflect on your own identity and culture as a way of gaining self-awareness and building personal connections with the experiences of the Métis people.

Setting Your Personal Learning Goals and Plan

Take a moment to think about your goals and jot down notes on the following questions:

- Why are you undertaking this learning?
- How do you think this learning might apply to your life?
- What are some of your questions about Métis people and their culture?

Next, take a moment to plan how you will complete the learning resource and record your learning goals. For example:

- Will you set aside a few hours to review it? Or will you read a chapter each day/week?
- Will you be undertaking the learning alone, with a partner or in a group?
- When do you hope to complete the learning resource?

Finally, take a moment to think about how you will take care of yourself if you encounter upsetting material in this learning resource. There are lots of emotions tied to this learning for Métis people, other Aboriginal people and Canadian settlers. It is normal to have an emotional reaction to injustice, especially if you are dealing with personal or intergenerational trauma. This kind of learning is a step to healing the injustices within Canada's history.

As you learn about who the Métis are and their history, you may ask yourself, "Why didn't I learn about this in school?" The history of the Métis people and the injustices they have faced were intentionally excluded from most school curricula because they were considered less important than the history told from the perspective of European settlers. You may feel angry, saddened or ashamed that you didn't know about Métis culture and history. Please remember that it is not your fault if this information is new to you. You have an opportunity to learn now.

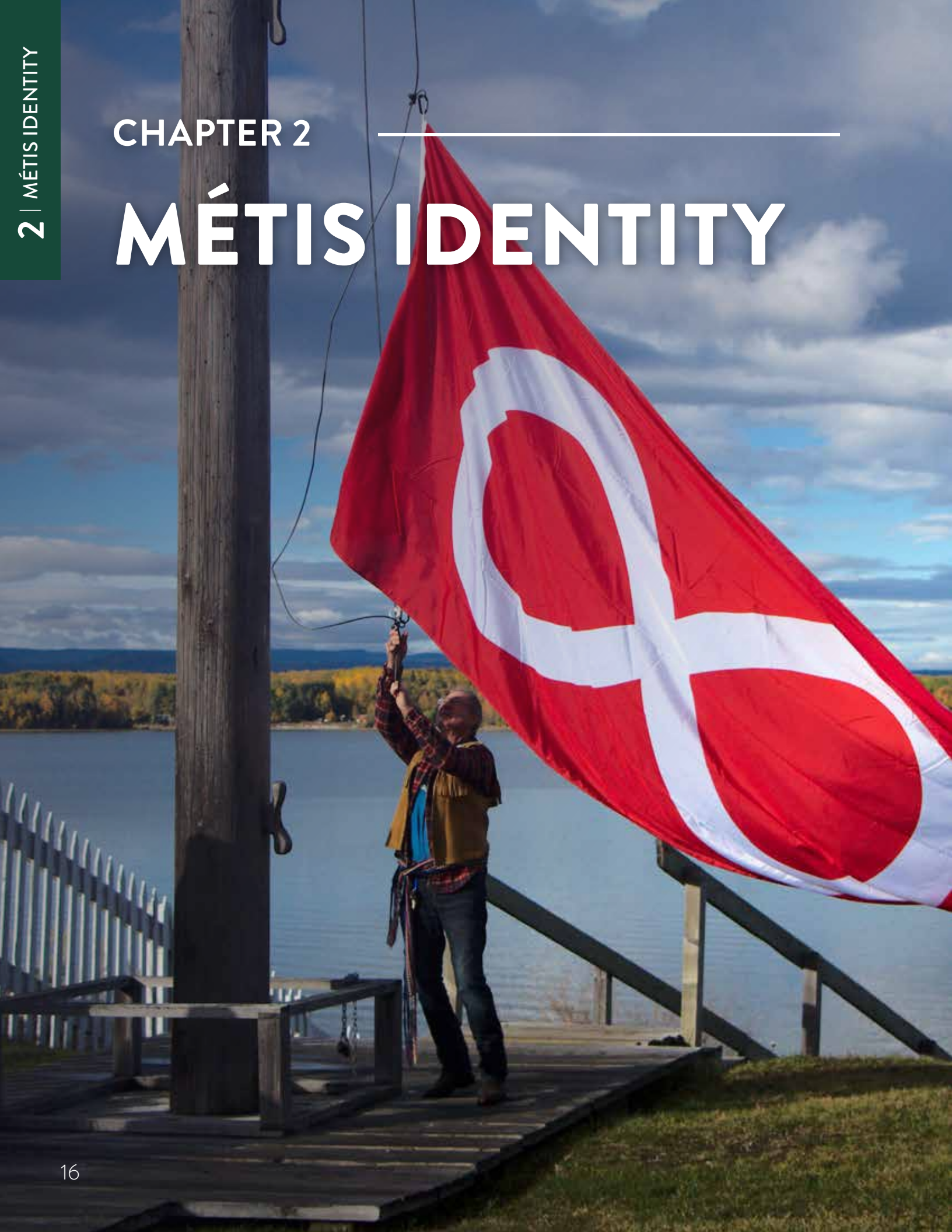
Before reading the guide, think about ways that you can take care of yourself throughout this learning journey. Make a list of actions you could take. Some examples could include the following:

- Talking to a family member, friend or counsellor
- Taking a walk outside
- Taking some time to reflect upon and have a break from the learning resource
- Practising your hobbies
- Doing whatever you like to do to rejuvenate and replenish yourself

Now that you have completed these introductory activities, you are ready to embark on a learning journey about the Métis people.

CHAPTER 2

MÉTIS IDENTITY



CHAPTER 2 OVERVIEW

This chapter is intended to help you understand what it means to be Métis. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Clearly define the term *Métis*

Introduction

The Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes three distinct groups of Aboriginal peoples: Indian (First Nations), Métis and Inuit. However, many Canadians are unaware of who the Métis are and what it means to be Métis. It is a common experience amongst Métis people to have to explain their culture and identity, and this can be emotionally exhausting. Understanding who Métis people are is the critical first step in supporting cultural wellness for Métis people.

> I feel well as a Métis person when I'm being seen as a Métis person...it's important for the general public to really see us for who we are. It's not hard to educate yourself; we're there in the history books. I'm always happy to share about our culture, but people need to take responsibility to learn, too.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. If someone asked you right now who the Métis are, what would you say?
2. What questions do you have about what it means to be Métis?

2.1 The Origin of Métis People

Let us begin at the beginning. Métis culture and nationhood is rooted in intermarriages and other social connections between European and First Nations people during the early North American fur trade period. During the 1600s to 1700s, fur traders from France, Scotland, England and other parts of Europe married First Nations women in what historians have referred to as *country marriages*, or marriages entered into according to Aboriginal law.

The children of these couples were mixed Aboriginal people, but they were not yet Métis. Over time, these individuals chose to marry other mixed Aboriginal individuals, with such families creating distinct Métis kinship networks, communities and cultural norms. Gradually, a distinct culture and Nation solidified over generations. Historic Métis communities emerged in the lands now known as B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and the Northwest Territories, as well as in Montana, North Dakota and Idaho.

Voyageurs at Dawn, by Frances Anne Hopkins, circa 1871.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

Nationhood vs. Racialized Definitions of Métis

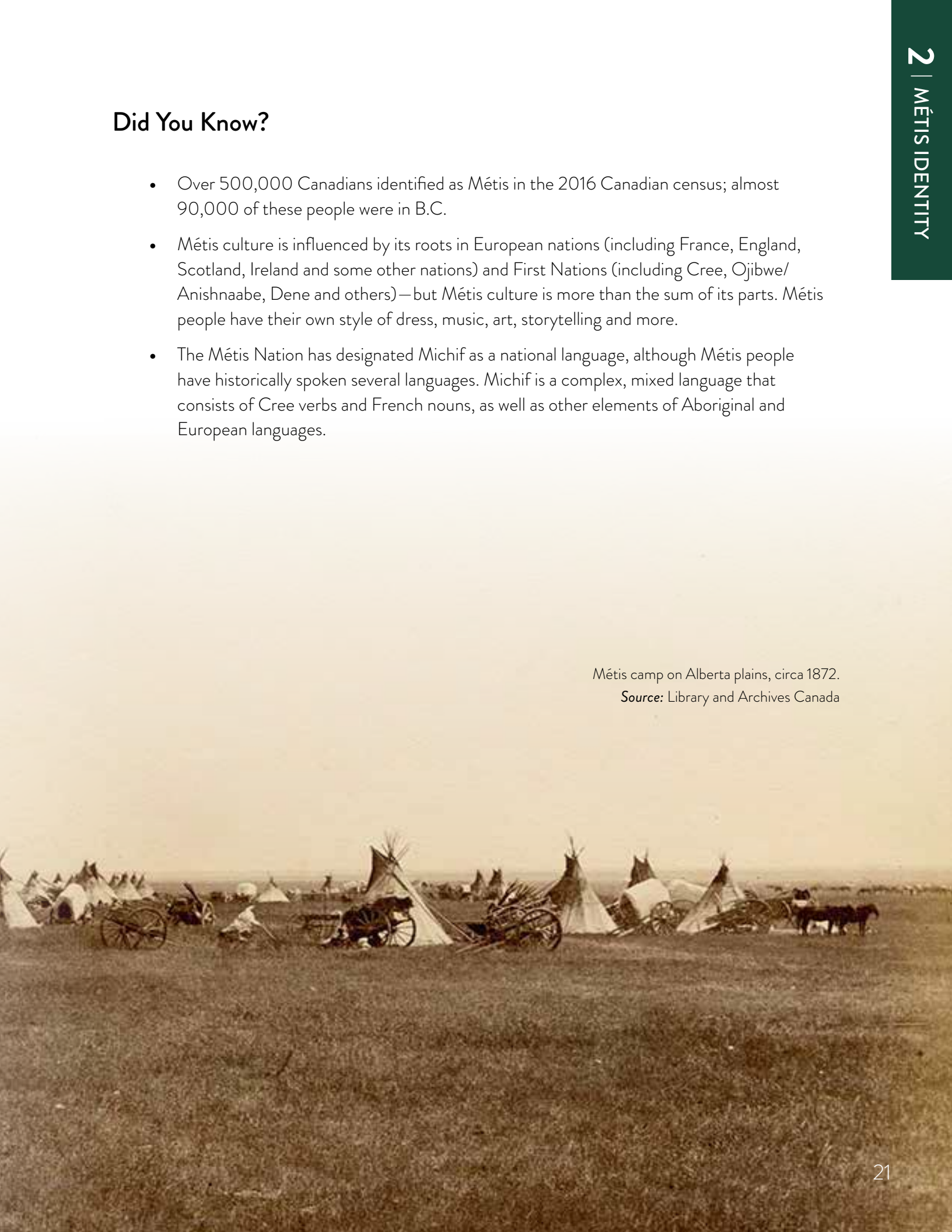
Many misunderstandings have arisen when Métis people are defined by race, as people with mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry. Instead, it is important to understand the Métis people as a Nation, connected by a shared lineage, culture and governance system.

The term *Métis* **does not** encompass all individuals with mixed Aboriginal and European heritage. Rather, it refers to a distinctive people who developed their own worldview, customs, way of life and recognizable group identity that is separate from their First Nations or European forebears. It is therefore not accurate to refer to people as Métis solely because they have mixed Aboriginal and European heritage.

> We have our own distinct culture. We're not a portion of any other culture. Being Métis is being Métis. To call us First Nations would be like calling an Italian person Portuguese. They might not appreciate that.
>
> – *Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

Did You Know?

- Over 500,000 Canadians identified as Métis in the 2016 Canadian census; almost 90,000 of these people were in B.C.
- Métis culture is influenced by its roots in European nations (including France, England, Scotland, Ireland and some other nations) and First Nations (including Cree, Ojibwe/Anishnaabe, Dene and others)—but Métis culture is more than the sum of its parts. Métis people have their own style of dress, music, art, storytelling and more.
- The Métis Nation has designated Michif as a national language, although Métis people have historically spoken several languages. Michif is a complex, mixed language that consists of Cree verbs and French nouns, as well as other elements of Aboriginal and European languages.



Métis camp on Alberta plains, circa 1872.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

2.2 Definition of Métis

Métis people were not always known by the term *Métis*. For many years, Métis people had a number of terms they used to define themselves. One common term in English was *half-breed*—a term that can carry a negative connotation today as a racial slur but was commonly used by Métis people in the past. Today, some Métis people are reclaiming this term, while others still find it offensive. Some other terms that have been used to describe Métis people include *Half-and-half*, *Half-caste*, *Bois-Brulée* and *Michif*.

In Cree, Métis people are referred to as *Lii Michif Otipemîsiwak*, which translates to "the people who govern themselves" or "people who are their own bosses." In Michif the Métis people call themselves and their language *Michif*.

In 1982, Métis people were formally recognized in the Canadian Constitution as having Aboriginal rights. The Constitution solidified the use of the term *Métis*, which was mentioned explicitly in section 35. However, at that point, there was still a lack of clarity in Canadian law about who was Métis, as Métis communities had their own ways of identifying Métis people. In 2002, the Métis National Council defined a Métis person as "a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation." The Supreme Court of Canada further affirmed this definition in 2003 (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the Powley decision).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. Has your understanding of who the Métis are changed? If so, what do you know now that you did not know before? How do you feel about this learning?
2. Why do you think many Canadians do not know who the Métis are?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

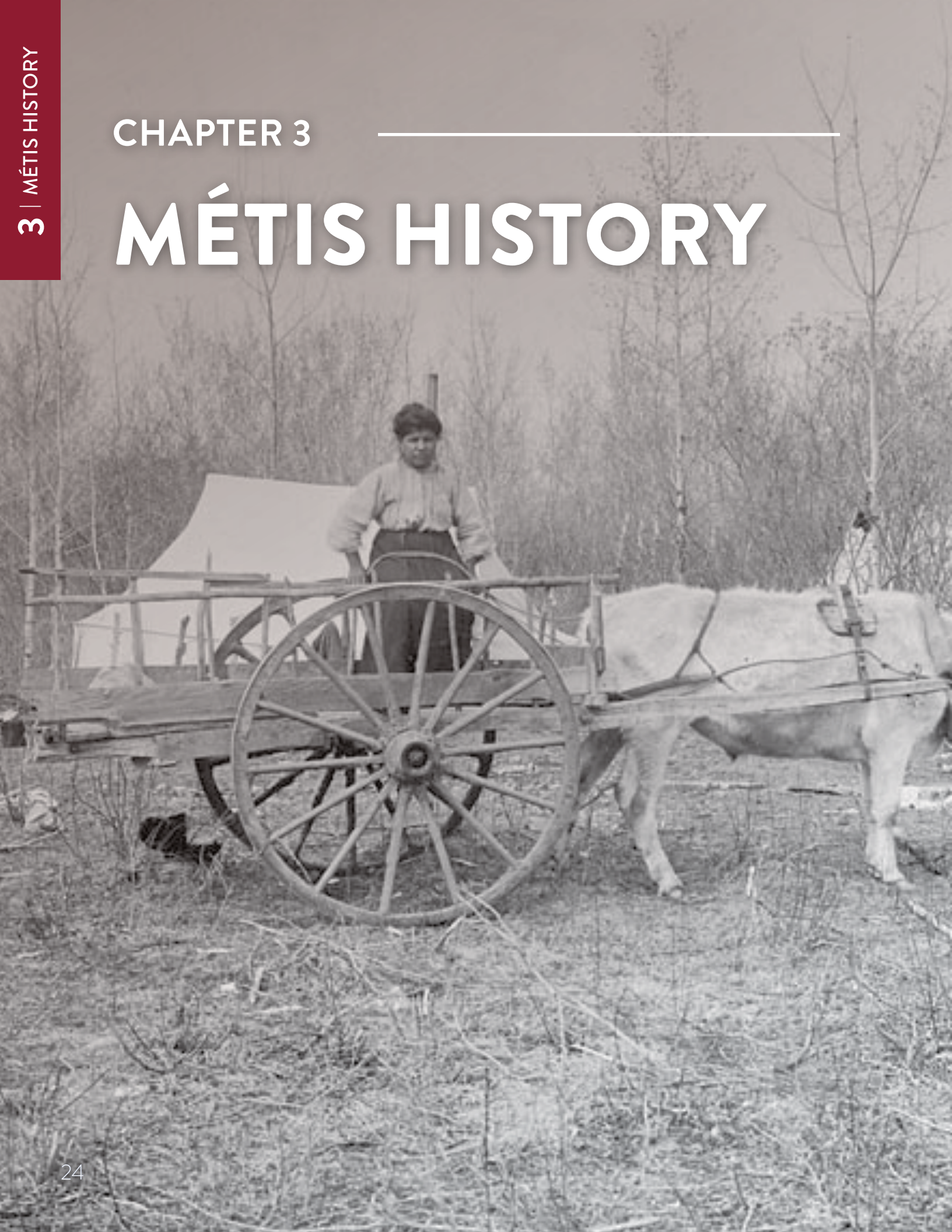
After reading this chapter, explain to a friend, colleague or family member the definition of *Métis*. Share why having an understanding Métis identity is relevant for Canadians. Ask them if they have any questions. If you know the answers, you can tell them. If you do not, write down the questions so you can return to them when you have finished reading this learning resource.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Métis are recognized in Canada's Constitution Act of 1982 as a distinct Aboriginal people of Canada.
- The term *Métis* does not encompass all individuals with mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage. Rather, it refers to a distinctive people who have their own customs, ways of life and recognizable group identity separate from those of their First Nations and European forebears.
- The Métis National Council's definition of *Métis* is "a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation."
- Métis people share collective cultural practices, kinship ties and history as a Nation. Although the Métis people are one Nation, they have diverse expressions of Métis culture.

CHAPTER 3

MÉTIS HISTORY



Métis family at their camp with a Red River cart. Photograph by Rice Studios, circa 1890–1910.

Source: Library and Archives Canada

CHAPTER 3 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of Métis history from the Nation's origins to about 1900. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the origins and development of Métis nationhood
- Articulate how the Métis contributed to the early development of Canada and B.C.
- Explain how the Métis were dispossessed of their lands in Manitoba and Saskatchewan

Introduction

If you grew up in Canada, you might have learned a bit about Métis history in school, but this history was likely presented through a colonial perspective focused on the development of Canadian nationhood. As the saying goes, "history is in the eye of the beholder," and there is often more than one perspective on any historical event. In this chapter you will learn the history of the origins and development of the Métis Nation from a Métis perspective. You will learn how the history of the Métis people is interwoven with the history of Canada, and how the Métis people were central to the founding and growth of Canada. You will also learn about how the Métis were dispossessed of the land they lived on by Canadian policies and practices.

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

- What did you learn about the Métis in school? What words or stories come to mind?
- What questions do you have about the development of the Métis Nation?

3.1 Métis Origins and the Fur Trade

Europeans first came to North America in the 1500s, and by the 1600s, the fur trade had become one of the most significant economic ventures on the continent. The area now known as Canada was prized for its animal furs, which were used for clothing and hats in Europe and other parts of the world. Two major fur-trading companies arose—the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in 1670, which was based in England, and the North West Company (NWC) in 1779, which was based in Montreal. Fur traders travelled into the interior of North America in search of furs.

For the first 200 years, European women rarely came to the interior of North America. European men working in the fur trade often married First Nations women. While distant colonial governments may have contested the legitimacy of these alliances, labelling them *à la façon de pays* (or country marriages), they were the real marriages of the land. For a fur trader of European descent, marrying

a First Nations woman provided many advantages in addition to companionship: alliances and trading relationships with First Nations communities, as well as knowledge of the land, languages, trading routes and survival skills. First Nations women had a great deal of agency in these relationships and served as invaluable contributors to the success of the fur trade.

The children of these marriages grew up with influences from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, but they often ended up being identified more with one side of their heritage. In some cases, these children were raised in First Nations communities by their mothers as First Nations people. In other cases, they were raised by their fathers and even sent to schools in Europe. In both situations they often ended up with social relations and linguistic skills that allowed them to play the role of connectors between different groups.

As the fur trade moved farther west, trading posts were established away from non-Aboriginal settlements like those in Quebec and Ontario. At these posts, goods would be stored year-round, as it was too far to bring furs back east from the posts before the winter set in. Families of European and First Nations heritage lived together in these posts, and a culture developed that was neither European nor First Nations, but rather a fusion of various cultures. In a process known as *métissage*, people of mixed European and First Nations heritage intermarried over generations and developed a unique culture. As a result, Métis identity and the Michif language began to arise.

3.2 Becoming a Nation

Métis nationhood emerged in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in the late 1700s and early 1800s as the fur trade moved west. During this time, Métis people were integral to the fur trade: Métis men provided the hard labour required to transport furs, Métis women provided food and supplies to the fur traders, and both men and women provided social and political relationships that allowed trading to continue smoothly. Many Métis men also become fur trade employees in clerical and leadership positions.

Métis from different communities began to work together as a Nation to hunt buffalo. The buffalo hunt was of critical importance to the fur trade and the Métis people in the Red River area. The rules of the buffalo hunt also formed the basis of the Métis traditional governance system and served to bring together families and communities under a common purpose.

There are a whole lot of misconceptions out there with regards to who the Métis people are, what our history is all about, and our connection to Canada's development. We as Métis people have a great responsibility to make sure that some of these misconceptions are corrected.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

Métis traders on the Plains, circa 1872.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

Buffalo were used for many purposes, including making pemmican. Pemmican was a fur trade staple that is made by drying buffalo meat, pounding it into a powder, mixing it with buffalo fat or marrow to create a paste, and then drying the mixture. The resulting pemmican was highly nutritious, could be stored for a long period and could be eaten cooked or without further preparation.

Fur traders did not have much time to stop and hunt for food, as any time spent hunting would decrease their profits, and setting aside cargo space for food would mean they could carry fewer furs. Pemmican was therefore considered essential to the profitability of the fur trade. By 1870, the Métis, who had taken advantage of this business opportunity by specializing in pemmican production, were making over one million pounds a year selling pemmican for cash in an economy that was primarily trade based. This made the Métis economy very strong because the fur trade relied on Métis-produced pemmican.

The Métis dominated the pemmican trade for decades. In fact, pemmican was critical to the Métis' emergence as a Nation. In the early 1800s, the Métis' right to participate in the economy was challenged during the Pemmican Wars. The Pemmican Wars were a series of trade conflicts between the HBC and the NWC, who were locked in an intense competition. Since pemmican was such an important staple, the companies realized that whichever company controlled the trade of pemmican would dominate the fur trade.

Pemmican drying rack. ***Source:*** www.dibaajimowin.com

In an attempt to gain the upper hand in this trade war, the Scottish governor of the Red River Settlement created a law that anyone who wanted to hunt buffalo or sell or trade pemmican had to have a licence from the HBC. In 1816, a group of HBC representatives tried to stop a group of Métis, led by Cuthbert Grant Jr., from transporting pemmican. A battle ensued, and the Métis

quickly defeated the HBC representatives. Métis historian Fred Shore has referred to this event, known as the Battle of Seven Oaks, or *La Grenouilliere*, as a "crucible of Métis nationalism" because it brought the Métis together under a common cause. It was the first time that the Métis flew their national flag, making it the oldest flag original to Canada. The battle also impacted the trade war as it spurred the British government to demand a resolution to avoid further conflicts, leading to the eventual amalgamation of the NWC with the HBC, along with the establishment of a colonial government administered by the HBC.

Between the 1820s and 1870s, the Métis enjoyed what some Métis historians refer to as "the Golden Years." During these years, the Métis acted forcefully as a Nation. With the amalgamation of the fur trading companies, many Métis employees were laid off. As a result, they focused on strengthening and diversifying their economy, working not only as fur traders and suppliers of pemmican but also as farmers, labourers, small business owners and other professions. As the years passed, the Métis became social and cultural leaders in the Red River area. They developed effective forms of military defence and governance, as well as a distinct lifestyle and culture that was recognizable as Métis. Métis communities also began to arise across the prairies and into present-day B.C. as the Métis and their relatives expanded their sphere of influence.

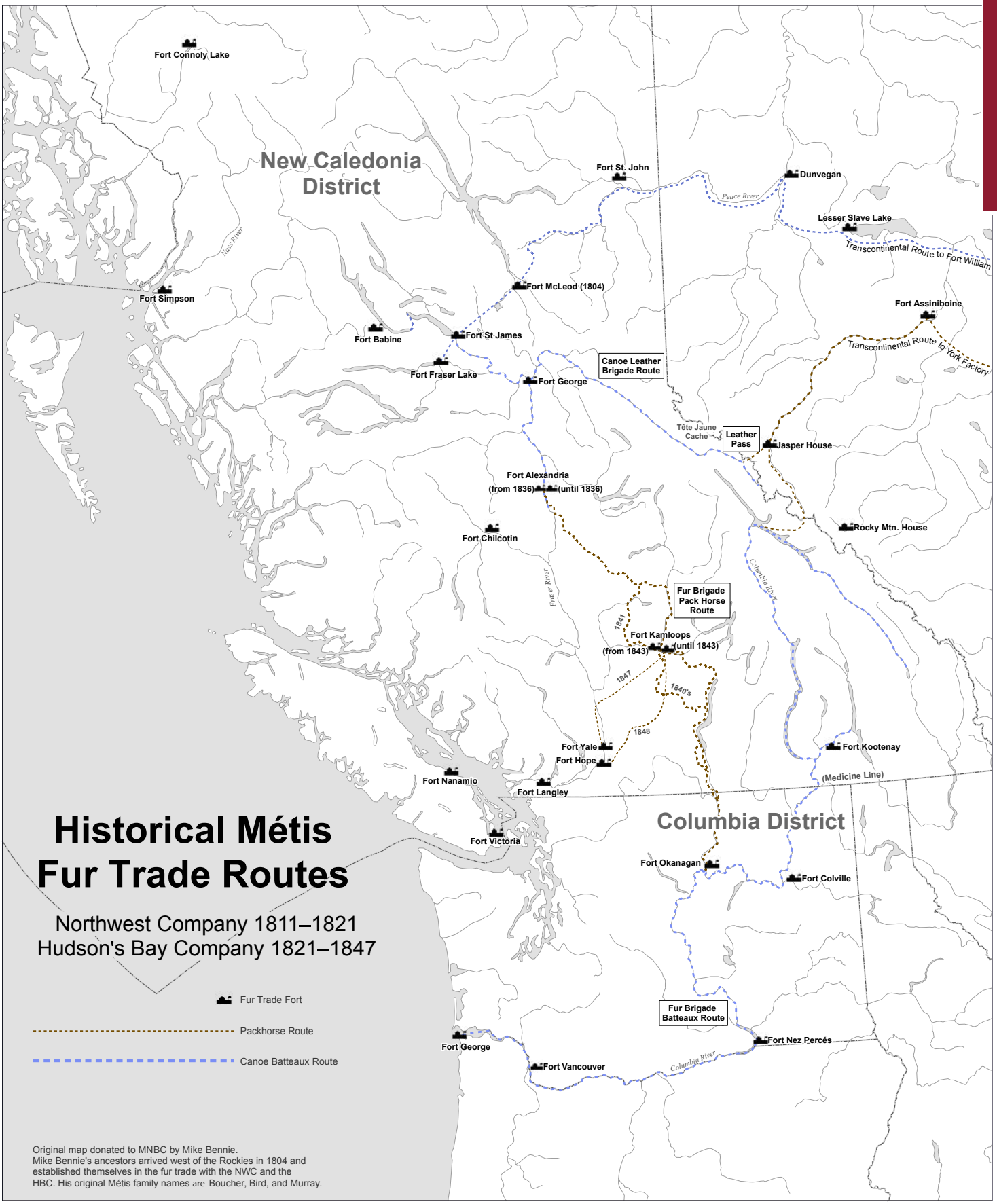
3.3 Métis Presence in British Columbia

Métis people have lived in what is now referred to as B.C. for generations. Today there are many Métis people in B.C. who trace their roots back to ancestors who lived across the Métis homeland.

Métis people were recorded west of the Rockies in the late 1700s as part of expeditions to explore the area. The first Métis person known to have made a permanent home in B.C. was Jean Baptiste ("Waccan") Boucher, who came to B.C. in 1806 as part of an expedition with the NWC to establish fur trade posts across the central interior of the province. Boucher has been described by historians Jean Barman and Mike Evans as an "invaluable linchpin of the fur trade centered at Fort St. James." Boucher had 17 children, and many of his descendants live in the Cariboo region today.

By at least the mid-1800s, and in some cases as early as the 1810s, communities of Métis people were living in Prince George, Quesnel, Fort St. John, Kamloops and Fort Langley. Métis populations also existed in this period in the southern interior, the north coast, the Kootenays and on Vancouver Island. The following map shows historic Métis fur trade routes and communities in B.C. Métis have continued to live in all these areas until the present day.

Map: The Historical Métis Fur Trade Routes map identifies the trade forts and routes that existed within B.C. prior to its entry into Confederation. Many Métis fur traders and their families settled in the region during and after the fur trade. Some trading forts, such as Fort Langley and Fort St. James, are National Historic Sites that can be visited and explored by the public.



Historical Métis Fur Trade Routes

Northwest Company 1811–1821
Hudson's Bay Company 1821–1847

Fur Trade Fort

Packhorse Route

Canoe Batteaux Route

Original map donated to MNBC by Mike Bennie.
Mike Bennie's ancestors arrived west of the Rockies in 1804 and established themselves in the fur trade with the NWC and the HBC. His original Métis family names are Boucher, Bird, and Murray.

Many people are unaware of the Métis history in B.C., which has been under-recognized for a number of reasons. While the Métis historical presence in B.C. is evident in both written and oral records, there has unfortunately not been much study of these resources.

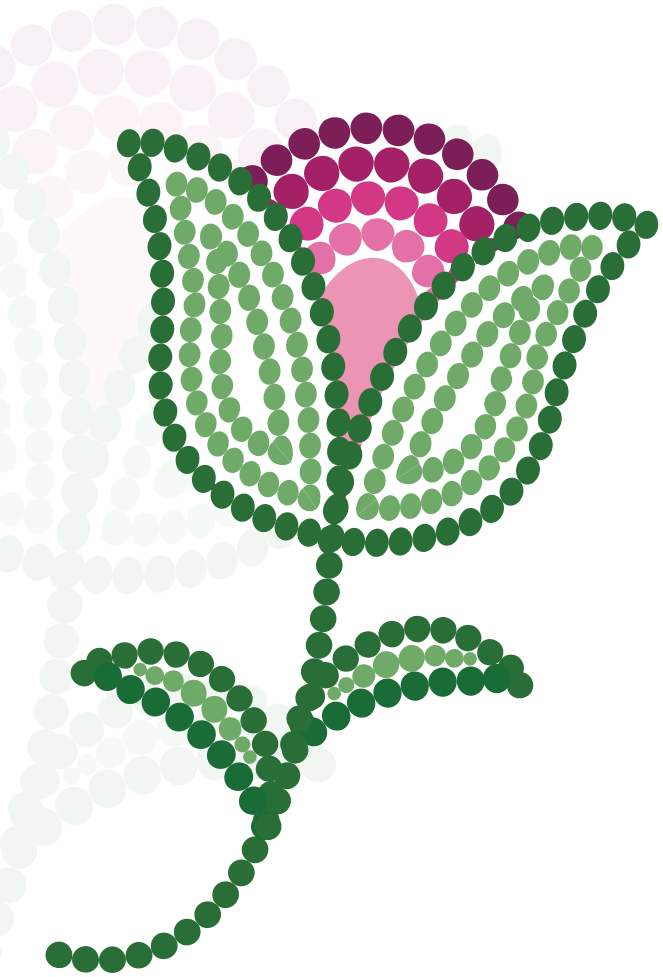
Another factor in the lack of awareness about Métis presence in B.C. is that, as historian Jean Barman has argued, because early British Columbian society generally discriminated against mixed-race people and saw them as inferior, some Métis were reluctant to reveal their identities. Instead, they chose to "meld into the shadows" rather than identify as being Métis. This does not mean that Métis people in B.C. did not practise or celebrate their culture—only that they may have been less publicly visible as Métis. While Métis people knew who they were, because colonial law in B.C. did not recognize "Métis" as a legal category, they were often forced to choose between being "Indian" or "White" in government records.

However, in the early days of the B.C. fur trade and colonial settlement, social and family relationships between Euro-Canadians and Aboriginal people were common. Given that there were so few women of European descent in the area, it was considered acceptable for European men to marry Aboriginal women and for these women to participate in Euro-Canadian society. In fact, many of the Euro-Canadian leaders of B.C. married Métis women, and some of these families became integral and influential parts of early B.C. settler communities. Later, with increased non-Aboriginal settlement, it became less common for Euro-Canadian men to marry Aboriginal women, and often such mixed family histories were suppressed.

Historians have also noted that Métis people contributed significantly to the development of B.C.'s economy and society in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As Métis historian Brodie Douglas has explained, "Perhaps one of the most striking features of Métis history in B.C. is the fact that Métis existed in positions of political and economic power during the early years of the colonial and provincial governments." For example, Joseph William McKay was a Métis man who founded the city of Nanaimo. Lady Amelia Douglas, the wife of Sir James Douglas (the first governor of the colony of B.C.) was a Métis woman. The Douglases had five daughters, including Martha, who was the first Aboriginal woman from B.C. to be a published author, and a son, James, who became a B.C. Member of the Legislative Assembly. Isabella Ross, the first female landowner in B.C. according to colonial law, was Métis.

Significantly, the first military unit and police force in B.C., the Victoria Voltigeurs, was composed of Métis and French-Canadian men whose uniforms consisted of sky-blue capotes and red woolen sashes, typical Métis dress at the time. Métis in B.C. were business owners, community and political leaders, and matriarchs and patriarchs of the cities, communities and institutions that make up modern-day B.C.

Today, Métis people continue to reside in and come to B.C. for the same reasons they did in the past—educational or economic opportunities, family ties and new beginnings. They can connect with a rich history of Métis presence in B.C. and be proud of their ancestors' contributions to making B.C. what it is today.



There were several reasons Métis people came to live in B.C., including the following:

- **Exploring:** From the late 1700s onward, the Métis began to spread west across Canada, acting as guides and leaders on expeditions to explore and settle land west of the Rockies. As such, Métis played a pivotal role in the establishment of present-day B.C.
- **Economic opportunities:** The fur trade, the gold rush, mining and other natural resource industries drew Métis people to B.C. in search of entrepreneurial opportunities and economic advancement.
- **New start:** After the Métis in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were dispossessed of their lands, as described in the following section, many came west to find a new start in B.C. As the population of Métis people grew in B.C., more Métis were drawn to follow their families and form communities based on kinship networks.

We were trading people, explorers, adventurers and farmers, and we were the work force of the HBC; we ran most of the HBC for 200 years. We were the people who laid out the foundation for what would eventually become Canada. I would like that to be recognized in mainstream society.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

3.4 Dispossession of the Métis Nation

In the mid-1800s, the Métis Nation was a flourishing political and economic force in the Red River region of present-day Manitoba. At the same time, more Euro-Canadian settlers from Ontario began arriving in the Red River area. The settlers looked down upon the Métis and saw their power as a threat to Euro-Canadian settlement. They challenged Métis sovereignty by establishing rules to exclude them and sending out surveyors to plot the land they lived on for future Canadian settlement. They established societies, such as Orange Lodges, that were anti-Catholic and anti-French. Their disdain for both French-Canadian and Aboriginal cultures caused them to see the Métis as inferior.

In 1867, Canada became a confederation through the joining together of the eastern provinces. Shortly thereafter, Canada acquired Rupert's Land from the HBC, a territory composed of present-day Manitoba, Saskatchewan, southern Alberta, southern Nunavut and northern parts of Ontario and Quebec. This acquisition included most of the Métis homeland. At this time, the Métis constituted an estimated 85 percent of the total population of the Red River Settlement in Rupert's Land. However, more settlers were streaming into Rupert's Land, and it was clear to the Métis that their rights were under threat.

In 1869, the Métis in the Red River area formed a Métis provisional government led by Louis Riel. They established the National Committee of the Métis Nation to act as a voice for negotiations with Canada about joining the confederation. They invited Métis leaders and Euro-Canadians living in Red River to what was called the Convention of Forty, where they outlined the conditions that the Métis felt were essential in order for Manitoba to join Canada. The list included things like Manitoba having federal members of Parliament, that the Canadian government would respect existing property rights, and that only the new Manitoba Legislative Assembly would have the authority to decide about local customs.

In 1870, the agreement outlined by the Métis became the basis of the Manitoba Act, an amendment to the Canadian Constitution, and Manitoba became a province of Canada. The Manitoba Act stipulated that the Métis would be able to maintain ownership of the land they lived on, and that each Métis person would receive an additional share of land in 160-acre lots. This arrangement should have guaranteed the Métis Nation a place to call home for generations.

Meanwhile, as the Métis publicly asserted their rights, Euro-Canadian settlers organized against them. One group of Anglophone settlers who believed strongly in the superiority of White, Anglo, Protestant culture instigated a fight against the Métis. At first, the Métis government defended itself peacefully. However, when the Métis learned that this same group was planning a second attack on the Métis government, they arrested some of the attackers. One particularly vocal and racist man, Thomas Scott, was put to trial and executed by the Métis government in 1870 for continuing to make repeated threats against the life of Louis Riel. Scott's execution caused a backlash from Anglo-Canadians who did not recognize the sovereignty of the Métis Nation's government.

In part as a result of this conflict, Canada sent a military force to Manitoba, the Red River Expeditionary Force (RREF). In principle, the RREF was supposed to maintain law and order, but in reality, it sought revenge for the execution of Thomas Scott and acted with open aggression towards the Métis. The Euro-Canadian settlers were out to assert control of the territory, and arson, theft and physical and sexual assault against the Métis became commonplace. This period has been referred to by Fred Shore and others as a "Reign of Terror" and contributed to an exodus of Métis to the western provinces and the northern United States.

The Métis were required to apply for the land promised to them under the Manitoba Act at the provincial land office, which was located in the same building as the RREF headquarters. This meant the Métis had to pass by the violent and hostile RREF to claim the land. With the influx of Euro-Canadian settlers, Métis businesses were scorned and Métis people were not offered employment, effectively excluding the Métis from the developing economy in the region and creating economic hardship in Métis communities. This environment of violence, racism and economic exclusion set the stage for the dispossession of the Métis.

The process of the Métis securing their rights to land was very bureaucratic, complex and corrupt. Métis rights lawyer Jason Madden has called it the "largest land swindle in North America," and the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged in 2013 that the Canadian government failed to uphold its promise to the Métis that they would retain their lands in Manitoba (in the case *MMF v Canada*).

The Canadian government gave the Métis people "Métis scrip," a certificate they could redeem for land or for cash. However, the land that was set aside for them was scattered in various locations (rather than being together in one community) and was often hundreds of miles from where they lived. At the time, this land had little market value.

In order to redeem the scrip, the Métis had to go to a provincial land office and then travel to the lands that they were allocated. This meant they had to leave behind their communities and begin new lives in a different area from their homes. It was not an attractive proposition to the Métis, who were well-settled in the Red River area.

Many Métis could not read the Métis scrip papers, which were written in English or French, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Sometimes, Métis would arrive at the provincial land office to claim their land and find that speculators had impersonated them and forged documents in order to apply for their land. Other times, speculators would be standing outside the tents, offering to buy the scrip for cash. When the land offered to them was far from their community and not profitable agriculturally, taking cash instead of land may have been a prudent economic decision.

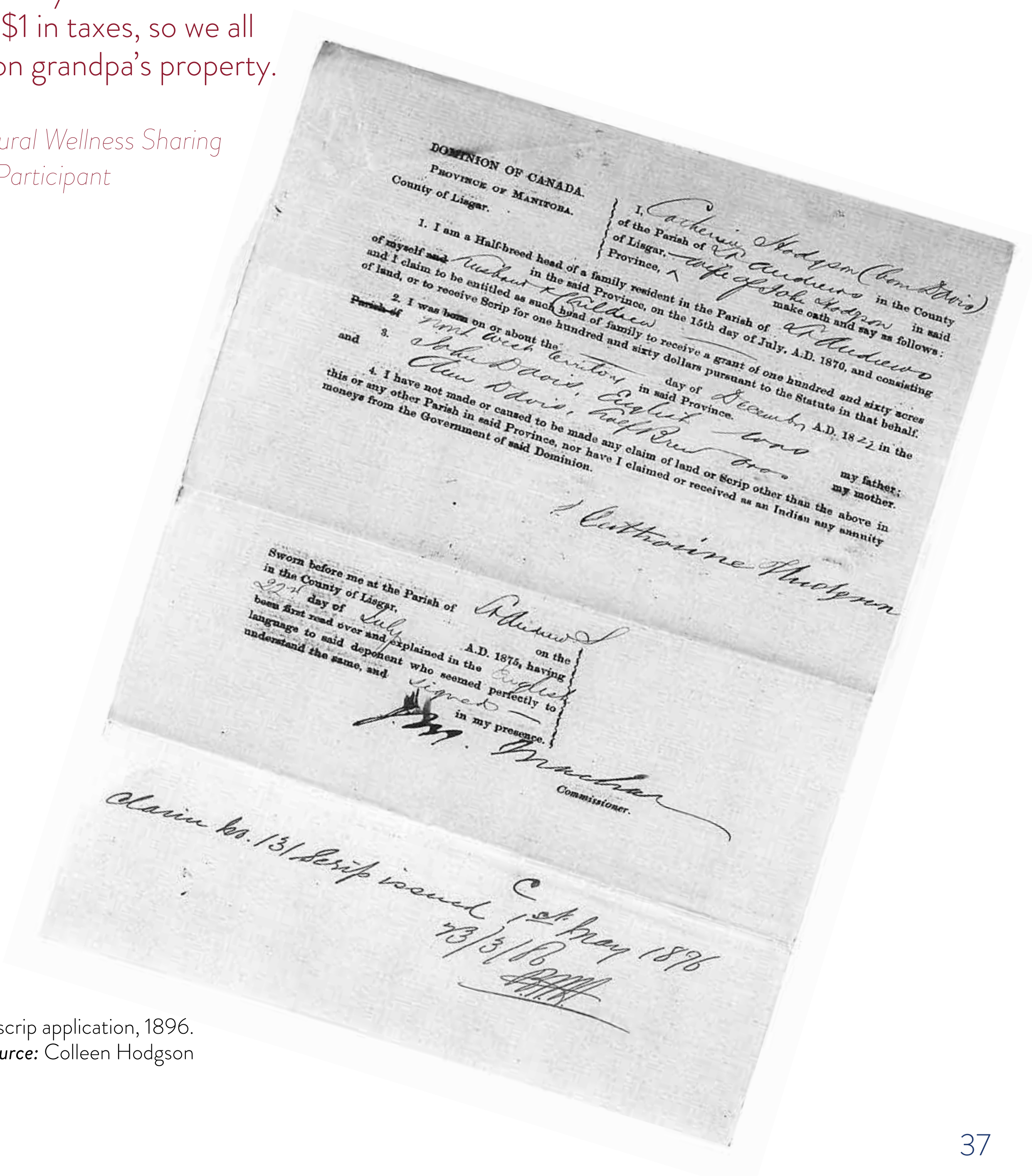
At the same time, the Métis were supposed to be guaranteed the rights to the land they *currently lived on,* but they were also cheated out of this land through a variety of methods. In some cases, surveyors would come to measure their lots while no one was home, and the land was declared empty and open to settlement. The government also changed the rules throughout the process so that lots that were set aside for their children, or for growing hay, were not counted as belonging to the Métis because they were not ploughed and "developed." When a conflict between a Euro-Canadian settler and a Métis person arose over land, the courts were told by an Order-in-Council to rule in favour of the "actual settler"—meaning the Euro-Canadian settler.

While the Métis were being dispossessed of their homelands, the economic situation in the region was changing. The fur trade was coming to an end, and agriculture was becoming a mainstay of economic growth. The Métis sometimes found that the land offered through Métis scrip was not profitable from an agricultural standpoint, either because it was not tillable, it was too far from a water source, or it was disconnected from markets where they could sell their products. In some cases, they needed to take out mortgages or sell the land, thus ending up landless in a land-based economy.

Through theft, fraud, exploitation, broken rules and economic disempowerment, the Métis were dispossessed of the majority of their lands and livelihoods, amounting to a systematic attempt to expel the Métis people from an area that Euro-Canadians wanted to settle as their own. The Métis resisted these measures in multiple attempts, but eventually they were overpowered by the more numerous Euro-Canadian settlers, who used direct violence and systemic oppression to force many of the Métis to move.

From the 1870s to 1884, the Métis, under the leadership of Gabriel Dumont, petitioned the federal government for recognition of their rights and fought against colonial efforts to dispossess them of their lands. However, the federal government did little to address Métis grievances. Therefore, the Métis asked Louis Riel to assist them once again in their efforts to assert their rights. Together, Riel and Dumont organized a second Métis Nation Provisional Government in Batoche, Saskatchewan, and prepared to defend the Métis homeland.

> The quarter-section that was given to my dad was taken away because he owed $1 in taxes, so we all lived on grandpa's property.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*


DOMINION OF CANADA.
PROVINCE OF MANITOBA.
County of Lisgar.

I, Catherine Hodgson (born Davis) of the Parish of St Andrews in the County of Lisgar, wife of John Hodgson in said Province, make oath and say as follows:

1. I am a Half-breed head of a family resident in the Parish of St Andrews in the said Province, on the 15th day of July, A.D. 1870, and consisting of myself and husband & children and I claim to be entitled as such head of family to receive a grant of one hundred and sixty acres of land, or to receive Scrip for one hundred and sixty dollars pursuant to the Statute in that behalf.

2. I was born on or about the day of December A.D. 182[illegible] in the North West territory in said Province.

3. John Davis, English [illegible] my father; and Ann Davis, [illegible] my mother.

4. I have not made or caused to be made any claim of land or Scrip other than the above in this or any other Parish in said Province, nor have I claimed or received as an Indian any annuity moneys from the Government of said Dominion.

Catherine Hodgson

Sworn before me at the Parish of St Andrews in the County of Lisgar, on the 22nd day of July A.D. 1875, having been first read over and explained in the English language to said deponent who seemed perfectly to understand the same, and signed in my presence.

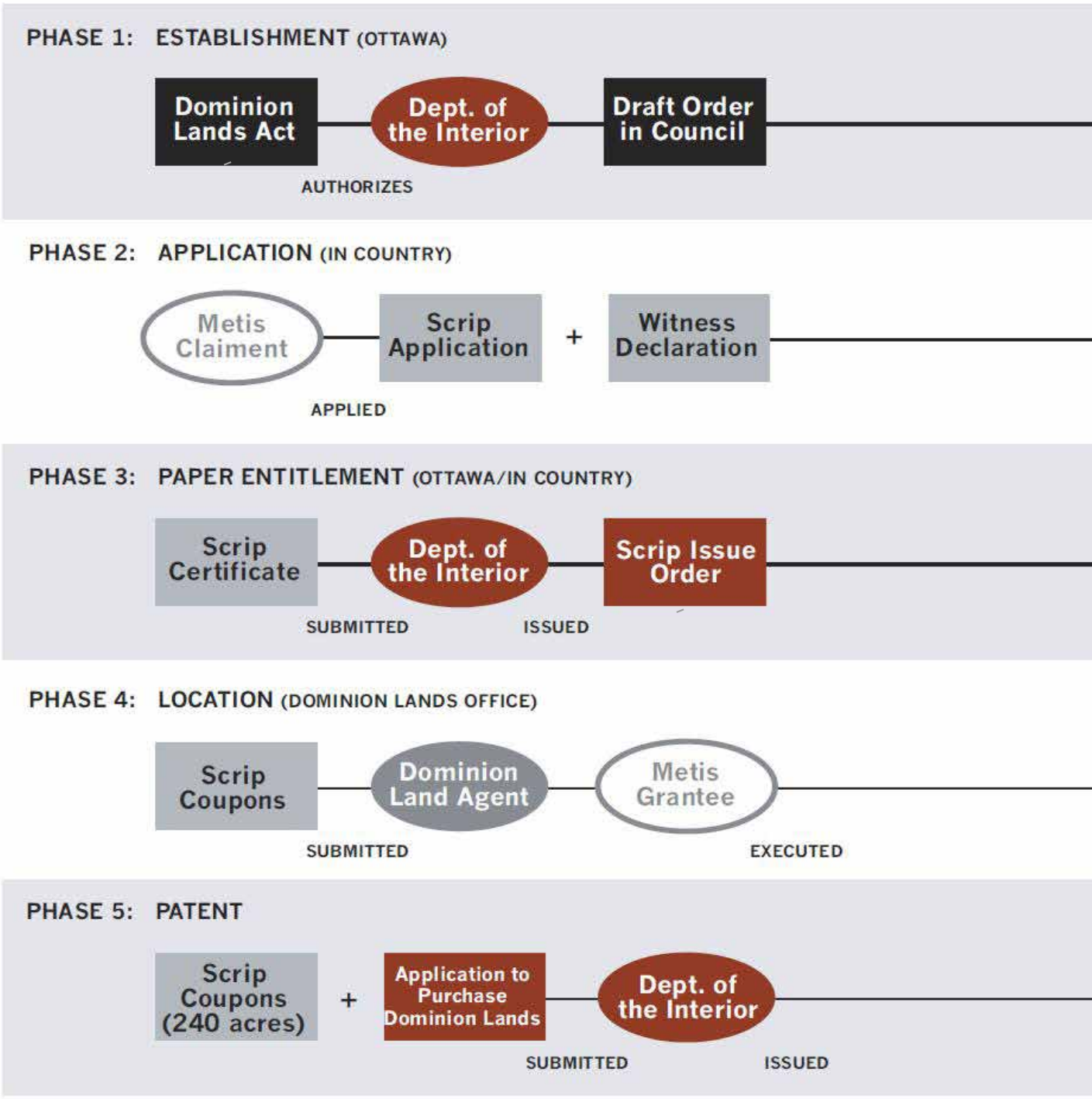
[illegible]
Commissioner.

Claim No. 131 Scrip issued 1st May 1876

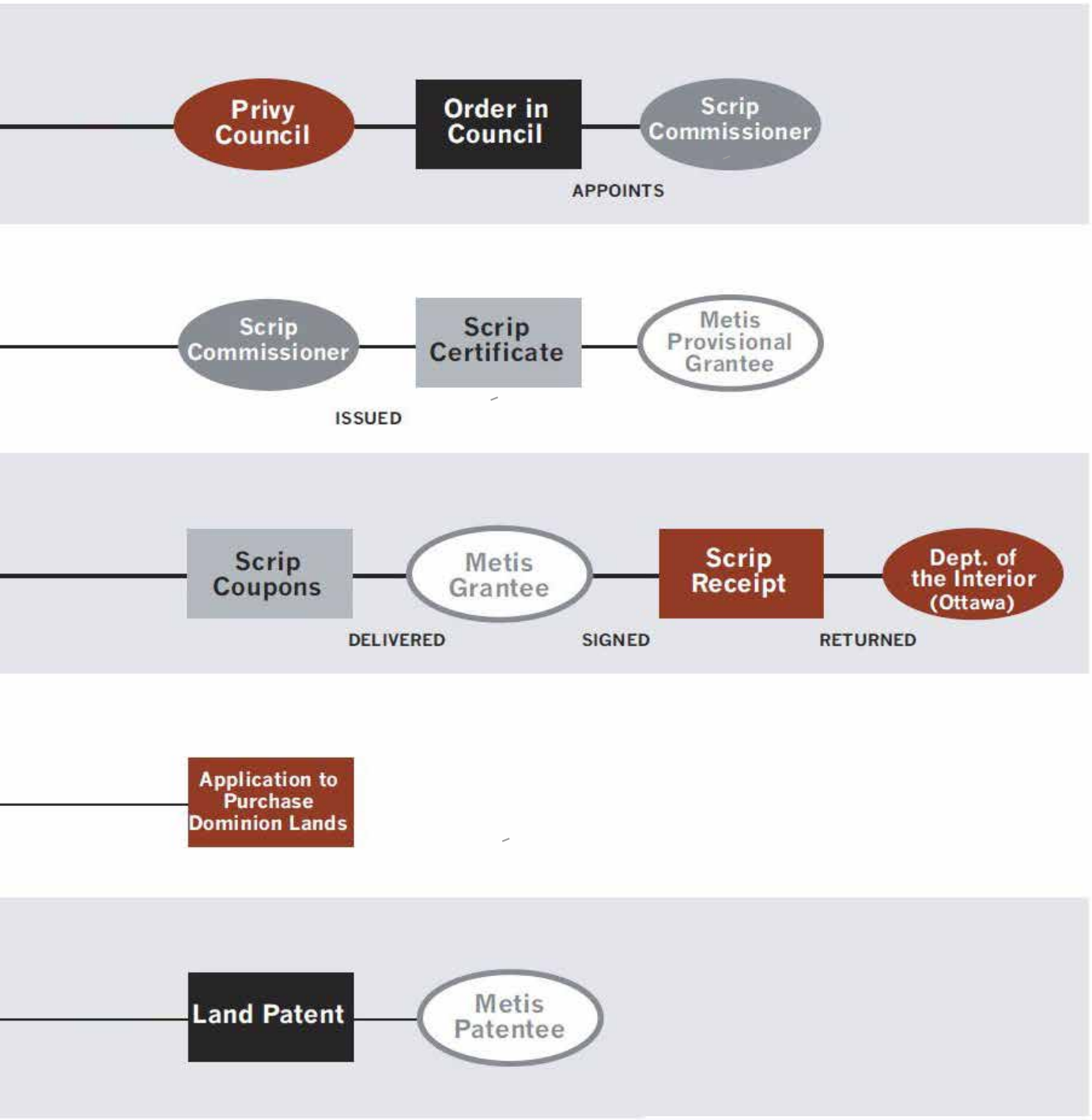
Métis scrip application, 1896.
Source: Colleen Hodgson

Scrip Land Claim Process

This diagram reconstructs the bureaucratic process that Métis people would have gone through to obtain land through scrip. It is based on the way government officials implemented the process and shows the multiple stages of paperwork and approvals required to convert scrip into land.



This complex process created multiple opportunities for impersonation, forgery and fraud. Historians Frank J. Tough and Erin MacGregor developed this diagram based on reviewing hundreds of records relating to land scrip and paper trails from Métis claimants.



Louis Riel was born in 1844 at the Red River Settlement. He was elected president of the provisional government formed in 1869 and helped negotiate Manitoba's entry into Canada. Louis Riel was elected to Canada's Parliament three times, but never took his seat due to threats of violence and imprisonment. He led the Métis in the Battle of Batoche, and as a result was hung for treason by Canada in 1885.

During his life, Riel was recognized as the Father of Manitoba and is currently acknowledged to be a founding father of Confederation in Canada. In addition to advocating for Métis rights, Riel also fought for greater religious freedom, French language rights, First Nations rights and greater gender equality throughout the Northwest. Riel's legacy continues to remind us of the ideals and values that he died defending, including democracy and freedom of expression for all Canadians. November 16th, the anniversary of his death, is Louis Riel Day, a celebration of Riel and of the impact that Métis have had on Canadian society.

– Brodie Douglas, Métis historian

Louis Riel and his Council, 1869.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

Battle of Batoche, 1885.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

During this time, Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada, saw Métis people as a an obstacle to Euro-Canadian settlement. Macdonald wanted to unify and win approval of Euro-Canadians and thought a railroad would promote national cohesion, but he was having trouble raising funds to build the railroad. He strategized that if he argued the railroad was needed to send troops to the west to "keep the peace" with Aboriginal people, then Parliament would agree to fund it. Thus Macdonald welcomed, and possibly provoked, the conflict between the Métis and Euro-Canadians, as he could use it to his advantage to justify the creation of the railroad, as well as address settler complaints by having troops move First Nations people onto reserves and force the Métis out of the area.

When the Métis provisional government issued a series of demands to Ottawa regarding their land rights in 1885, Prime Minister Macdonald responded by sending a military force to dispel the Métis. Although the Canadian forces were heavily armed and outnumbered the Métis, the Métis managed to hold them off in several confrontations in present-day Saskatchewan, including the battles of Duck Lake and Fish Creek. However, the Métis were eventually defeated at Batoche, and Riel was executed. Following this battle, Canadian soldiers ransacked Batoche, and many of the Métis were driven out, effectively ending the Métis resistance.

> The battles led by Riel were called rebellions, but they were not rebellions. They were a resistance against the dominant government that was trying to take land away from Métis people that were just farming and trying to make a good living, and the government decided that they were squatters and should not be on the land. Those were our forefathers, and those warriors are who we are today.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What surprised you in reading this chapter? How did you feel about this learning?
2. What were the key factors that contributed to the growth of the Métis Nation?
3. How is the history of the Métis interwoven with the history of Canada? How is the history of the Métis interwoven with the history of B.C.?
4. How does this history contribute to your understanding of how power, privilege and oppression impact Métis people today?

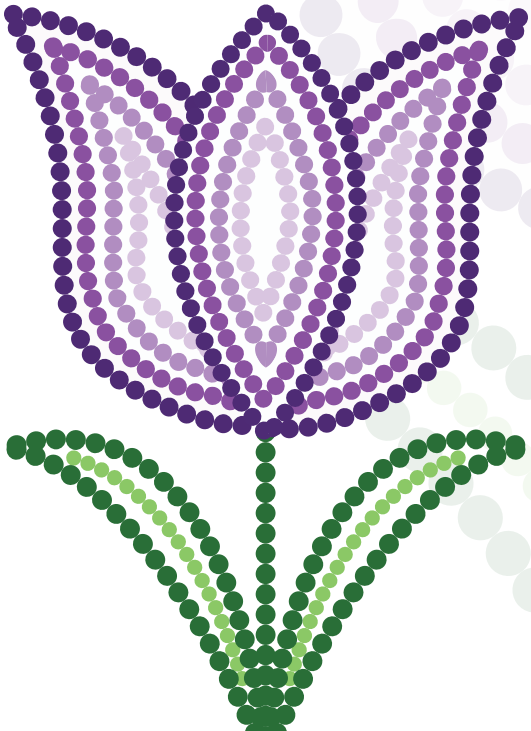
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Consider trying the following activities to expand and test your knowledge:

- Choose one of the events that interested you and conduct further research about it.
- Explain to a friend how the Métis contributed to the development of Canada and/or B.C.
- Explain to a friend or family member how the Métis were dispossessed of their lands.
- Research and write a short biography about a key figure in Métis history, such as Gabriel Dumont, Cuthbert Grant Jr., Joseph William McKay, Louis Riel or Isabella Ross.

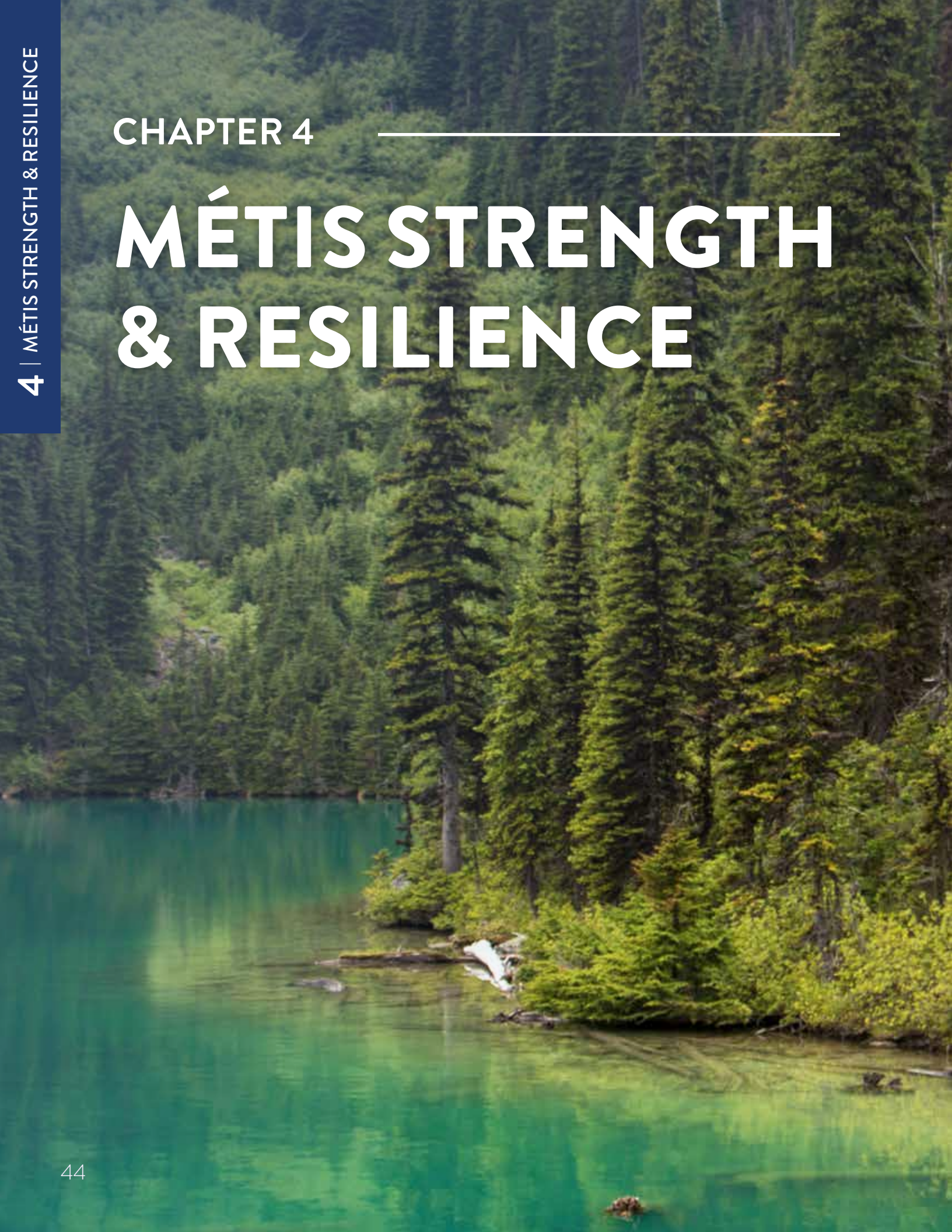
KEY LEARNINGS

- The Métis were vital players in the fur trade, forming Métis communities as the fur trade spread west.
- Métis communities have existed in B.C. for over 200 years.
- The Métis Nation flourished in the 1800s in the Red River region of Manitoba and around Batoche, Saskatchewan.
- Métis nationhood and governance were closely linked to the buffalo hunt.
- Métis experienced discrimination and violence at the hands of Euro-Canadian settlers.
- The Métis organized as a government, advocated and fought for their rights, but were eventually overpowered by Canada and dispossessed of their homeland by the more numerous Euro-Canadian settlers.



CHAPTER 4

MÉTIS STRENGTH & RESILIENCE



CHAPTER 4 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a summary of the Métis experience post-1885, including the struggle to protect Métis culture and to continue asserting Métis rights. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Provide examples of how Métis people have protected, safeguarded and celebrated their culture in the face of systemic oppression
- Connect the policies and practices of colonialism to intergenerational impacts today
- Explain why the term *Forgotten People* has been used to refer to Métis people
- Articulate ways in which Métis people are reclaiming their identity and revitalizing their culture

Introduction

After the Battle of Batoche in 1885, the Métis were essentially sidelined by the Canadian government and society. Their rights were denied and their cultural identity was not recognized. During this time, Métis people survived and kept their culture alive through the strength of their families and communities, enduring challenging socio-economic conditions, colonial violence and attempted cultural genocide through the removal of children from Métis communities. Métis people are resilient, and families put protective strategies in place by holding their culture and identity close.

In recent years, the Métis have re-formed and strengthened their government and fought for recognition of their rights. When the Canadian Constitution formally recognized the Métis as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada in 1982, this opened opportunities for the Métis to establish their rights through Canadian legal and political systems. Today the Métis are entering an exciting period of self-government, self-determination and cultural resurgence.

BUILD ON WHAT YOU KNOW

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What do you already know about how colonial policies impacted Aboriginal people in Canada? How much do you know about how colonial policies impacted the Métis?
2. Have you or anyone you are close to ever faced discrimination, oppression or systemic exclusion? What impact did this have?
3. Have you witnessed Métis culture in your community? What have you experienced?
4. Can you think of some examples (from your own experience or those of other people) of how cultural and family connections support strength and resilience in challenging situations?

> I remember as a little girl going up for visits, and my grandma would be making moccasins under a coal oil lamp, and it was just so warming. In the morning she'd have breakfast ready for us. We'd wake up to bacon and bannock and coffee and a nice fire. Just having that family connection and closeness meant a lot.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

4.1 The Forgotten People

The decades that followed the 1885 Resistance were a challenging time for the Métis. During this time, they became known as the "Forgotten People"[1] because of the racism and exclusion they experienced. On the one hand, they were often sidelined from non-Aboriginal Canadian society through racism and exclusionary laws and policies. On the other hand, because the colonial government placed the Métis in a separate legal category from First Nations, they were considered ineligible for services that First Nations received and were often restricted from accessing First Nations reserves, which had the result of separating Métis people from their First Nations relatives. This was a time when the Métis used their deep strength and resilience to protect who they were, their Nation, their communities and their culture.

Since the Métis were denied access to their homelands and were prevented from full participation in the mainstream economy through racist policies and practices, they often did not have the funds to buy land. As a result, many Métis lived on road allowances, which are small strips of publicly owned land alongside rural roads. Métis scholar Jesse Thistle has called the road allowances "sites of resilience and cultural resistance" because in these spaces the Métis kept their close-knit families and communities together and protected their culture.

Living on the road allowances deepened the poverty the Métis were experiencing. They were technically homeless, and as a result they could not send their children to school, apply for bank loans, get electricity and telephone lines or have access to municipal services.

> My father-in-law grew up on road allowances, and because he didn't pay property taxes he couldn't go to school. His jobs were everywhere: he hunted, trapped, picked rocks out of fields and chopped wood for people.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

1. The first use of this term is attributed to scholar Richard Slobodin in 1964. This term is now widely used by other scholars and Métis people.

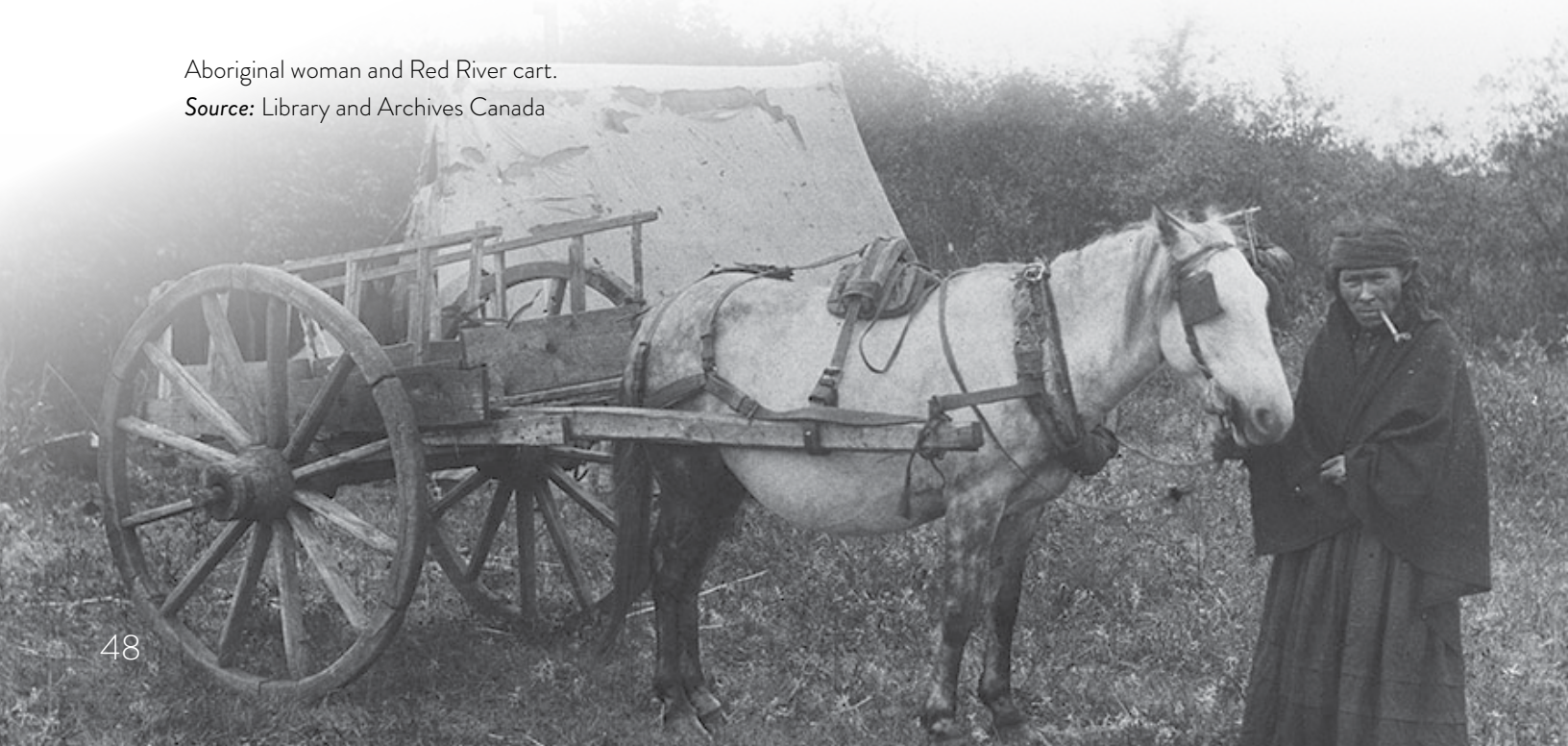
When the Métis did establish a more permanent community, it could be demolished if Canadians wanted access to the land. For example, in one notorious case, all 35 homes in the Métis village of Ste. Madeline, Manitoba, were burned down in 1938 as part of a federal government program designed to clear land and create pasture for settler farmers during the Great Depression. Dogs were shot and the village church was converted to a piggery in this act of colonial violence.

During this challenging time, the Métis kept their culture and lifestyle alive, continuing to gather for dances and community celebrations, to hunt and fish and gather traditional foods, and to create traditional clothing and art. Elders played the role of teachers and guardians of Métis culture. Communities made their own laws and governed themselves, taking care of the children and Elders and those in need.

During this period, many individuals experienced racism and shame in relation to being Métis, leading to disconnections with their Métis identity. Because Métis have both European and First Nations genetics, they sometimes are not visibly identifiable as Aboriginal—they may have blond hair, blue eyes and light skin. Métis families often found that those who "looked White" experienced less racism and violence than those who "looked Aboriginal."

Some Métis people who could blend in as non-Aboriginal kept their identities hidden in order to avoid systemic violence, racism and other forms of oppression. In some cases, Métis people did not tell their children that they were Métis in order to protect them from the impacts of racism. In other cases, Métis children were removed from their families and placed in the child welfare system and were never told of their Métis roots. There are therefore many Métis people today who have only recently reconnected with their Métis ancestry and are in the process of reclaiming their cultural heritage.

In other cases, Métis people have always known they were Métis and grew up surrounded by Métis culture (and in some cases language) their entire lives. The following stories from Métis Elders demonstrate the wide variety of ways in which racism and colonialism impacted Métis identity.



Aboriginal woman and Red River cart.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

Stories from Métis Elders

There wasn't always pride in being Métis—there was some shame attached to being Métis when I was a little girl, especially because I'm so dark, and in the summertime I'd get really black elbows and knees from being in the sunshine. I liked to play outside when I was a little girl. My mum used to say (and my mum was Métis), "Go have a bath." She'd give me a big brush to scrub off the brown part. My mum wasn't an evil woman or anything; she was just a product of that time.

∞

When I was a young married woman, I went into a store to buy food and they wouldn't accept my cheque because I'm Métis.

∞

When I was training to be a nurse's assistant, I was the only Aboriginal person there, and the nurses said they didn't want my "drunken Indian friends" coming over. I had to have my own room in the basement.

∞

I was very fortunate to have been brought up knowing who I was, what my ancestry was. I grew up in a Métis community, and every Saturday night they'd clear the house out and have a dance. My uncles played the fiddle—there was singing, jigging and square dancing. That's our culture—that's how we grew up.

∞

My great-great grandfather was Louis Riel's first cousin, and he had been radically assaulted after the rebellion in Red River. They basically moved away and assimilated. That's why I didn't know I was Métis, and my dad didn't know either.

When we were raised, we didn't talk about being Métis or having ancestral ties. I grew up always with an empty spot. There was always a knowing that I didn't totally feel embraced in my identity. I would have these pangs of loneliness and longing, but I didn't know why. It just tugged at me all the time, but I could never put into perspective why I felt that way. When I found out I was Métis, it gave me the reason why I felt like that.

∞

My mother has much darker skin than I do. I navigate the world a lot differently than my mom did because she had dark skin and faced a lot of racism her whole life. I went to the ER with her once and they let all the White people in before her, even though she was having a medical emergency.

∞

Because the community that I lived in when I was growing up was a half-breed community, I've never ever had that sense of not belonging. My grandmother was a very strong lady. She instilled in all of us that sense of being proud of who you are, and as a result I've never felt there was a road I couldn't go down or a hill I couldn't climb or anything of that sort.

We have a lot of Métis people who have been searching very hard to regain their culture, and they're at a different place in their journey. It's important for them to feel validated, for them to understand that they're just as Métis as anybody else.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

All of us grew up in different ways—some of us had grandparents and a community with traditional teachings.Others weren't as fortunate and are learning more about their culture today.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

4.2 Racism and Assimilation

Throughout their history, the Métis people have had to navigate the impacts of systemic racism and attempts to assimilate them. The Canadian government created an apartheid-like system in which First Nations and non-Aboriginal people had different lands, schools and hospitals. The system was designed to erase and assimilate Aboriginal people. The government had inconsistent policies and practices for people who did not fit neatly into the categories of First Nations or non-Aboriginal. Sometimes, Métis people found that the colonial government thought of them as non-Aboriginal people, and First Nations thought of them as Aboriginal kin. Other times, they were seen as Aboriginal by government and as non-Aboriginal by First Nations communities.

One way in which the colonial government dealt with Métis identity was through attempting to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture by removing Métis children from their communities through residential schools, hospitals and the foster care system.

The Métis experience with residential schools varies. Some Métis children were enrolled in residential and day schools, where many endured physical, emotional and sexual abuse and were made to feel ashamed of their language and culture. Other Indian residential and day schools refused to take Métis children, as they did not have Indian status, while many public schools also refused to take them because they were Aboriginal. Awareness about Canadian Indian residential schools has been increasing since Canada's federal apology to Aboriginal people in 2008 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report released in 2015.[2] However, Métis people who attended Indian residential or day schools were the only Aboriginal group excluded from the residential schools' compensation program, despite the significant intergenerational impacts of these schools on Métis culture and well-being.

2. For more information on the Métis experience with residential schools, see "Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada," published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Another resource is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report entitled "The Métis Experience." Both resources are publicly available online.

Two Métis children with an Inuit child at All Saints Residential School, circa 1930.

Source: Library and Archives Canada

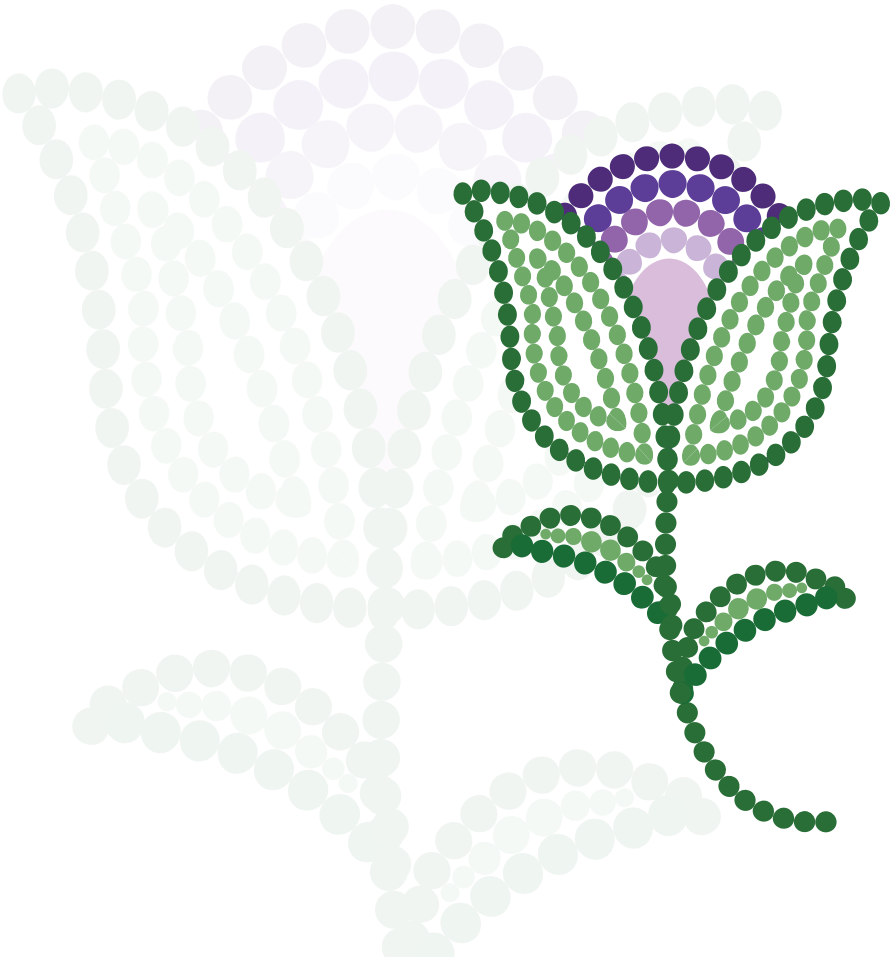
The story of Métis attendance at residential schools is unique. It is clear that the government did not continually support their attendance. The government did not want to take responsibility for the Métis, yet at the same time, they did not want their efforts towards full assimilation of Aboriginal people into the dominant society to lapse. In many cases, during the early twentieth century, as common as it was for a Métis person to be taken to residential school, it was also just as common to be not taken to school at all.

– Aboriginal Healing Foundation,"Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada," 2006, p. 2.

The Sixties Scoop was another approach used to remove Métis children from their families. This policy, implemented through the child welfare system, took children from First Nations and Métis communities and adopted them out into non-Aboriginal homes, which were often hundreds or thousands of miles away from their home communities. Children often faced abuse in these homes. Métis children were frequently adopted out for dubious reasons (such as having a single mother) and against the family's will. Métis communities already had their own adoption process, known as *kaa-ohpikihikitamaashohk (kaa-OH-pi-KEE-i-GIT-a-MAA-SHOHK)*, that placed a child in need with another Métis family in their community, but the provincial child welfare system did not recognize this system.

Indian hospitals were yet another way of separating Métis children from their families. Métis children with conditions such as tuberculosis were often taken to segregated hospitals great distances from their families and were kept there for many years. As with residential schools, these children often faced displacement, abuse and discrimination.

Métis adults also faced violence and discrimination as a result of their Métis identity. One example of systemic racism is the treatment of Métis Veterans. While many Métis Veterans served proudly in the Canadian forces in World War I and II, they were not afforded the same benefits as Euro-Canadian Veterans (such as housing, education, financial assistance) upon return to civilian life. Although in 2002 the Canadian government apologized and offered compensation to First Nations Veterans who had been denied benefits, the same gesture was not extended to Métis Veterans until 2019, after which the majority had already passed on.



Racism and oppression have negatively impacted Métis individuals and communities. Some of the impacts include intergenerational trauma, poverty and socio-economic challenges, struggles with mental health and addictions, loss of language and cultural practices, and feeling shame about Métis identity. In addition, one of the impacts of the dispersal of Métis people following the Resistances of 1869 and 1885 has been an associated lack of connection with the larger Métis Nation and challenges in maintaining political and cultural identity as a Nation when geographically dispersed.

Today, systemic and institutional racism has been normalized and continues to cause harm to Métis families. For example, the goal of assimilating Métis people, as with other Aboriginal groups, lingers in institutions like hospitals, schools and the child welfare system, whose policies and practices do not fully address the impacts of colonialism and the unique cultural identity of the Métis people.

Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School with tents, Red River carts and teepees outside, circa 1885.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

4.3 Political Resurgence

Beginning in the 1920s, the Métis began to rebuild their government at the community, provincial and national levels. The Métis established government bodies in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C.—across the Métis homeland. They also established the Métis National Council (MNC) to provide a national voice for the provincial councils. The Métis collaborated with First Nations people to support the resurgence of Indigenous rights and culture—for example helping to found Friendship Centres to serve Aboriginal people in urban areas and supporting political movements like the American Indian Movement.

Métis people advocated to have their culture and identity acknowledged and accepted by federal and provincial governments. As a result of this advocacy, Canada formally recognized the Métis as Aboriginal people in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982. Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution states the following:

> *35(1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal people in Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.*
>
> *(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada.*
>
> *(3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1), "treaty rights" includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.*
>
> *(4) Notwithstanding any other provision of this act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.*

Although Métis people were included as an Aboriginal people in the Constitution Act, the courts had still not defined who the Métis were and had not specified the Métis rights that were recognized by the federal and provincial governments. The Métis used the legal and political systems to assert their rights. It has been an uphill battle, as federal and provincial governments have been slow to acknowledge the distinct cultural identity and rights of Métis people.

For over a century, it had been presumed by the government of Canada that Métis people had lost any Aboriginal rights when they accepted Métis scrip for their land. However, this was never part of the understanding of the Métis, who did not see taking Métis scrip as a relinquishment of their rights, and who knew that the scrip system was unfair and exploitative.

In addition, throughout their history Métis people have always shared land with First Nations people,[3] and thus for the Métis, their rights are not linked to "ownership" of land, but rather to occupancy of, meaningful connection to and shared use of the land prior to the introduction of colonial government systems.

Métis people succeeded in getting their rights recognized in Canadian law in a number of significant cases, including the following:

R. v Powley (2003): This case was about establishing Métis hunting rights, and was also the first time that Canadian courts used the MNC definition of Métis citizenship as a standard to identify Métis who have section 35 rights.

In 1993, Steve and Roddy Powley, a Métis father and son, shot and killed a moose in Ontario and were charged with hunting without a licence. They pled not guilty, maintaining they had a right, as Aboriginal people, to hunt for food. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Powleys had a right to hunt that was protected by section 35 of the Constitution, an important step in the legal recognition of Métis Aboriginal rights.

However, the application of Powley has been limited because the court determined that in order to assert rights, Métis claimants must be able to meet a narrow set of criteria known as the "Powley test." This limited interpretation of Métis hunting rights has been challenged in court several times, and Métis people are still working to assert broader rights to hunt as Aboriginal people.

Manitoba Métis Federation v Canada (2013): This case acknowledged that the Canadian government did not fulfill its obligations regarding Métis land rights. The Manitoba Métis Federation successfully argued that Canada did not uphold its promises to the Métis to implement sections of the Manitoba Act that guaranteed Métis land rights after joining Confederation in 1870. In its ruling, the court acknowledged that Canada failed to uphold the "honour of the Crown" in protecting Métis land rights.

Daniels v Canada (2016): This case determined that federal government has an obligation under the Constitution Act to negotiate in good faith with the Métis on issues such as land rights, improved programs and services (such as education, housing and health care), and further clarification of Métis rights. The Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged that the Métis had been caught in a "jurisdictional wasteland" and ""tug-of-war" between federal and provincial governments.

The Daniels case has already opened the doors for increased Métis self-governance. Recent developments include the signing of the Canada–Métis Nation Accord in 2017, which set out a process for negotiating future agreements that will allow the Métis to manage their own health care, education and child welfare systems to better address their socio-economic needs. For more on self-governance, see Chapter 6.

3. One example is the Iron Alliance (*Nehiyaw Pwat*), an agreement amongst the Métis, the Plains Cree, Chippewa and Assiniboine Nations in the 1700s and 1800s to share the use of the land peacefully.

We were once the Forgotten People. But now with the Constitution, winning our land claims, having the Daniels decisions and the Powley case, all of these things have boosted the morale of the Métis. We're not forgotten anymore. And now we're trying to take our place within history where it should have been a long time ago.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

4.4 Cultural Resurgence

Today many Métis people are reclaiming their culture and healing from the impacts of racism and colonial oppression. Below are some compelling stories of Métis people who are in the process of embracing their identity and culture:

I was brought up in a family where my father was Métis and my mother was not. My mother was ashamed that there were "half-breeds" in the house because of the racism at the time. Because of this, there wasn't much culture in the home when my siblings and I were growing up. In the last 10 years, it's now safe for my family to reclaim our culture and get involved in the community. We all crave learning more about our culture like jigging and the language. To be well, I need to engage more in the culture and share that with my children and grandchildren.

∞

Since age eight, I would ask my dad, "Who am I? Who are we?" and he would just say we were English. But it didn't fit right because my dad spoke French better than English and our family had dark skin. So I grew up believing we were English but deep down wondered if there was more to the story. Today, now that I know who I am, I can share the culture with my children, and I feel like I've been Métis my whole life. To know my culture means so much to me. Being Métis means that I know where I belong.

∞

My grandmother was encouraged not to show her culture to us because my grandfather was afraid that people would see her as an Indian. I didn't learn about my culture early on, but then I received a book about my genealogy, and I learned about and embraced my background as being a sixth generation Métis. We used to have our kitchen parties with the blinds closed so no one could see our culture. Now it's time to open those doors and roll up those blinds so everybody can see how we celebrate our culture.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. How did you feel reading the section "The Forgotten People"? What surprised you?
2. Now that you have completed this chapter, what is your understanding of Métis rights? What questions do you still have?
3. What was one of the personal stories of cultural resurgence that moved you? How did it make you feel?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Consider trying the following activities to extend your learning:

- Make a list of the factors that oppressed Métis people and the strengths and actions that helped them keep their culture alive.
- Ask yourself whether there are aspects of your identity and personality you do not feel comfortable sharing publicly. Reflect on how that may be linked to discrimination or prejudice. If you feel comfortable, share more about your culture or identity with someone in your life who does not know about it.
- Reflect on justice and equity. What is one action you can take in your life to promote justice for someone who experiences oppression?
- What is one aspect of your culture that you are proud of? Reflect on how cultural pride has contributed to your life.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Métis people have been impacted by colonial oppression, including losing their land and destruction of their communities; exclusion from full participation in the Canadian society and economy; having their children sent to residential schools, day schools, Indian hospitals and being taken away through the Sixties Scoop; and discrimination based on skin colour or appearance.
- This had led to intergenerational trauma, which is exemplified by the loss of culture and language, mental health and addictions challenges, and socio-economic struggles.
- Métis people have formed governments to support their people and advocate for Métis rights.
- The Canadian Constitution (1982) acknowledges Métis people as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.
- Court cases such as the Powley and Daniels decisions have helped Métis people to reestablish their rights in the eyes of the legal system, including their rights to practise their culture and to govern their own people.
- Many Métis people are rediscovering and reclaiming their cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 5

MÉTIS CULTURE

CHAPTER 5 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of Métis culture. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain the importance of the family structure in Métis culture
- Describe key Métis art forms and technologies
- Describe Métis values and approaches to spirituality
- Explain the origin and significance of Michif to the Métis people

Introduction

Métis people have a distinct culture that arose during the fur trade in the 1700s and 1800s and continues to the present day. This culture is a product of the unique origins and history of the Métis people. From the late 1800s until the mid-1900s, Métis culture went "underground"—Métis people still practised their culture and lived according to their values and traditions, but the culture was often kept hidden and protected against the forces of racism and colonialism. When Métis people were dispossessed of their lands and pushed to the margins of society, they continued to practise their culture in family networks and communities. Métis culture is currently undergoing revitalization, and Métis people are reintroducing, adapting and celebrating long-held traditions.

Métis culture is expressed in many ways today. There are several reasons for this:

- Different Métis people may be influenced more strongly by French, English, Cree or other European and First Nations cultures. As a result, Métis people have passed down traditions, language dialects and styles that demonstrate differing aspects of the various cultures that have contributed to Métis identity.
- Métis people have been dispersed across the Métis homeland over the past 150 years. As Métis people spread across Canada, different expressions of Métis identity developed.
- Traditional and contemporary ways are woven together. This interweaving is an example of resilience and demonstrates how Métis culture is alive and adaptive.

> Our Métis culture really grounds me—it's about my relationship with myself, being grateful for what I have, our relationships with each other and respect for the world around us. I can turn to my identity when I need guidance for what I'm dealing with in my life. Our culture is fun and we laugh a lot—and laughter is the best medicine. The more I learn about my own culture, the more I've been able to connect with my own family and my grandma and learn about the parts of our culture that have been important to her since she was a little girl.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What are some of your family's or community's time-honoured traditions? Think about foods, music, stories and ceremonies that are important in your family or community. What feelings do you get when you come together to share those practices?

2. What do you already know about Métis worldviews and cultural practices? What questions do you have?

5.1 Family Structure

The Métis family structure has always been the backbone of Métis communities and has provided the foundational relationship for economic, political, social and cultural activities and alliances. The family provides a sense of belonging and supports the well-being of each individual. The concept of *Wahkohtowin* (wa-ko-to-win), a Cree word that expresses the interconnectivity and relationships we share with all things, is central to the Métis understanding of the social responsibilities and obligations held between members of the family and community.

Many components of Métis culture—such as beading, dances, music and weaving—are linked to family traditions. When Métis people were dispersed from their homeland and lived outside of Métis communities, the family continued to be the primary vehicle for passing on cultural knowledge and ways of being.

The Métis have an extended multi-generational family structure known as kinship networks. Kinship networks are one of the most significant factors in structuring Métis communities. Extended family members often have roles in raising children, who grow up surrounded by networks of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Métis people often take pride in tracing their roots back multiple generations to the Red River era or before, and in doing so finding connections within the larger Métis Nation.

Métis culture demonstrates high respect for women and Elders. Women have always had influential and distinct roles in Métis society and are seen as keepers of the land, law, kinship knowledge and culture. They also traditionally held a respected role in raising children alongside other family members, notably grandparents. Elders are honoured as advisors and Knowledge Keepers, and in Métis communities they are often responsible for making leadership decisions or resolving conflicts. They also play an essential role in passing down language and culture to the younger generations.

Historian Fred J. Shore explains their role clearly:

> Métis women were an intrinsic part of the Métis world, and were not relegated to a subservient role, something they never would have tolerated. As the Nation developed, women's roles developed equally with the men's. More importantly, the extended family became the basic building block of the Nation, and in this way women played a major role in the development of the Nation, since they were essentially the managers of the extended families. Through the women, the extended families became the source of wealth, honour, status and resources.
>
> (Threads in the Sash: The Story of the Métis People, *2017, p. 44.)*

Children are also highly valued, and traditionally many Métis had large families. Prior to the introduction of the Canadian child welfare system, Métis people had a system of adoption that kept children as close as possible to their families, communities and culture. Fred J. Shore explains this system:

> Whenever one parent died or was unable for whatever reason to care for the children, the other parent assumed full responsibility. If both parents died, or were unable to care for their children, the grandparents would assume responsibility for them. If one set of grandparents could take care of all the children, they did so. If not, they would divide the children among other close family members, taking care to keep the children in touch with each other. If no relative was available, then someone in the community took on the responsibility. Anyone who was caring for children in this way could count on help with food, clothing, care and other necessities from everyone in the community.
>
> (Threads in the Sash: The Story of the Métis People, *2017, p. 113.)*

Community gatherings have always been valued by Métis people. Traditionally gatherings were held often and included socials, picnics, berry picking, sports and horse racing. "Kitchen parties" and community dances were frequent occurrences in Métis communities. People would gather in a church, school or someone's kitchen and push aside the furniture to make room for music, dancing and food. These parties were multi-generational events that brought the whole community together. Everyone danced, and many people joined in the music with fiddles, guitars, mouth harps and spoons. They were held all year, rain or shine, and were often impromptu. Many Métis communities today continue to hold dances and community gatherings to celebrate and take pride in Métis culture.

5.2 Art and Clothing

> "My people will sleep for 100 years, and when they awaken it will be the artists who bring back their spirits."
>
> *– Métis President Louis Riel*

Métis art often takes the form of distinctive clothing to display Métis identity and culture, and traditionally certain patterns and colours represented specific families. The time and care taken to create intricately designed clothing demonstrates the pride Métis people have in sharing their family connections and culture with others.

Beadwork

Métis are sometimes referred to as the Flower Beadwork People because of their distinctive beadwork, which combines techniques of First Nations quillwork with European embroidery and floral patterns. By the 1830s, beadwork could be found on almost every item of traditional clothing. Today beadwork is used to decorate items such as moccasins and clothing, to continue family representation through specific patterns, to create jewelry and more.

Frock Coat created by Lisa Shepherd, Métis Artist, for the permanent collection of the Royal Alberta Museum. Background "Pansy & Wild Rose" mossbag, created by Lisa Shepherd, Métis Artist, for a private collection.

Artist Profile: Lisa Shepherd is a B.C.-based Métis Artist who uses traditional Métis practices and materials to create contemporary artwork and garments featuring her flower beadwork. Her one-of-a-kind pieces can be found in museums and educational institutions across the country.

"Yarrow & Huckleberry" pointed toe moccasins, created by Lisa Shepherd, Métis Artist, for BC Cancer Agency.

When I learned how to bead, I had this moment of being connected to my grandmother. It was such a spiritual moment. I'd never felt like that in my life before. I felt right and it was the most amazing feeling. And it happens every time: she comes when I'm beading.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

Traditional Dress

Distinctive Métis clothing arose in the Red River area in the 1800s and combined the dress of fur traders with First Nations styles. The most characteristic feature of the clothing was the abundance of decoration—including beadwork, quillwork, buttons, shells, ribbons, feathers, embroidery and painting—even for utilitarian clothing.

The typical style for men was a long jacket tied with a sash around the waist. There were several types of jackets worn at different times of the year. The capote, a long jacket with a hood, was worn from fall to spring. Different colours were worn for different regions—the Métis tended to wear blue capotes, which was the North West Company colour. The Red River coat and buckskin jacket were also typical.

Women tended to wear practical clothing, including dresses and shawls. Traditionally men and women wore moccasins made of animal hide. The moccasins kept feet warm and dry in all kinds of weather conditions and were acknowledged by fur traders to be the best footwear for travelling through the backcountry.

Although contemporary materials are often used today, moccasins, velvet or hide vests, buckskin jackets, shawls, and ribbon shirts and skirts (all of which are frequently decorated with beadwork and ribbons sewn into them) are common at Métis cultural gatherings.

Métis Sash

The Métis sash is probably the most distinctive article of clothing and is considered by many Métis to be a visible symbol of their identity. It was originally known as *une ceinture fléchée* (or *en saeñcheur fleshii* in Michif), meaning "arrow belt" because of the zig-zag pattern. They were created from European wool, using a First Nations finger weaving technique that is still often used today. Each handwoven sash takes hundreds of hours to create.

The sash is typically worn wrapped around the waist for men or over the shoulder for women. Today the sash is often worn as ceremonial dress to honour people for achievements and recognize membership in a Métis community. Wearing the sash connects Métis people with their ancestors and their Métis identity.

> I wear the sash because of my ancestors. It was a tool for the Métis—we used it for many things, whether you were out hunting, if you needed a sling, rope, thread, a belt—so it's just one of our items. We're the only people who wear it. There are many different colours that all represent something different—the colours are very meaningful for us. It's tightly woven, and that represents who we are as a community—we are cohesive and unity makes us stronger.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

Colours of the Sash

Some Métis people today ascribe meaning to each colour of the sash. While there may be more than one interpretation of the colours, here is an example of some commonly used meanings for each colour:

- ***Red:*** The blood that has been shed fighting for Métis rights
- ***Blue:*** The depth of the Métis spirit
- ***Green:*** The fertility of a great Nation from the womb and the land
- ***White:*** The importance of the Métis connection to the earth and Creator—the land, sky and water
- ***Yellow:*** The prosperity of the Métis Nation
- ***Black:*** The dark period of the suppression and dispossession of Métis land and the loss of lives and culture
- ***Purple:*** Connection to all living things, especially Métis ancestors and the wisdom of Métis grandmothers

> When I wear my sash, a lot of people on the street just come up and say, "Oh I'm Métis too, no way!" So, you never know when you're gonna meet a cousin.
>
> – *Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

Uses of the Sash

The sash was not just a decorative item. It was used for many practical purposes, such as the following:

- Holding the coat closed or the pants up
- Muffler or scarf
- Sling, bandage or tourniquet
- Washcloth
- Bridle/saddle blanket
- Trail marker or sewing kit (by removing the threads at the end of the sash)
- Pocket
- Back support when holding heavy objects
- A rope (useful to portage canoes)
- Identifying one's kill in a buffalo hunt
- As a calendar system (threads were used to mark days on the trapline)

5.3 Dance and Music

Dance and music are integral parts of Métis culture. Traditionally, music permeated daily life in Métis communities, and today there is unlikely to be a Métis cultural gathering without music. Métis music is influenced by folk fiddling from Ireland, Great Britain and France, and by the structures of First Nations' music. Music can also be unique to families, who may have their own styles, tunes, songs and dances.

Métis are best known for their fiddle music. Fiddles were expensive to purchase during the fur trade era and were therefore handmade from local wood such as maple and birch. Métis music accompanies traditional dances such as Métis jigging, a lively dance with fancy footwork influenced by Scottish highland dancing, as well as by First Nations and Celtic dancing.

Métis dance involves the audience clapping, cheering and playing the spoons to accompany the music. All ages are encouraged to engage in dance, with Elders chair-jigging if preferred, as dance is a way of connecting as a community and celebrating Métis roots. The Red River Jig is the best-known Métis dance.

Contemporary Dancers

Madeleine McCallum is a renowned Métis dancer who has been jigging since she could walk. She performed in the opening ceremonies for the 2010 Winter Olympics and has worked with the Louis Riel Métis Dancers and other dance groups. Over the last several years, she has performed at many Aboriginal events in B.C. representing her Métis culture and heritage.

Madeleine McCallum.
Source: Sweetmoon Photography

5.4 Language

Michif is upheld as the national Métis language. It is a unique language that developed in the Red River valley in the early 1800s. Michif is a mixed language that contains Plains Cree verbs and French nouns and noun structure, as well as some vocabulary and structures from Saulteaux and English. According to linguist Peter Bakker, Michif is the only language that mixes nouns from one language and verbs from another.

There are three types of Michif:

- Métis French (also called Michif-French)
- Métis Cree (also called Northern Michif or Île-à-la-Crosse Michif)
- Southern Michif (also called Turtle Mountain Michif, Chippewa-Cree, or Heritage Michif)

Within this learning resource, we have chosen to use primarily Southern or Heritage Michif, and when a language is referenced as "Michif," we are speaking of that language.

These three Michif languages are quite different from each other, but they all contain elements of the languages that influenced the Métis, including European and First Nations languages. Michif is unusual amongst mixed languages due to its complex structure. While French and Cree speakers can recognize words from Michif, they cannot fully understand the language, and Michif speakers often do not know how to speak Cree and/or French. Also, as Michif was historically an oral language, there was no need for a standardized spelling system until more recently, so spelling varies across communities and between speakers.

Michif Words and Phrases

Hello: ***Taanishi***

Good morning: ***Booñ mataeñ***

See you soon: ***Miina kawaapamitin***

Take care: ***Kanawaapamisho!***

Please: ***Madooñ***

Thank you: ***Marsii***

Because Michif is based on a mix of languages, there can be a lot of variation in how a speaker chooses to say something. For example one can say "It's a good day today" in two different ways:

"*En bon zhornii anohch*" – using a French noun for day

"*Miyokiishikaaw anohch*" – using a Cree verb that means "it is day"

> Michif is at the basis of who we are. It's part of what makes us a distinct people. It's not a European language and it's not a First Nations language—it's our own language. But I have mixed emotions about Michif because it's also a language that hasn't been carried through in some families, and there's a sadness about that, because when we lose that language, we lose a perspective of the way that a life is lived, and a worldview. Because of our history, there's been some breakdown of the language. A lot of our people are really working to get that language back.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

In addition to Michif, Métis people have a long tradition of multilingualism, which stems from their connections to multiple cultures and their resourcefulness and adaptability. Diverse expressions of Métis culture and different kinship networks have resulted in communities and individuals speaking a variety of other languages, such as Cree, Saulteaux, French and English in a "Métis way." For example, some Métis people grew up speaking Cree, and the Cree spoken by Métis people differs from the Cree spoken by First Nations Cree people. Bungi is another Métis language; it consists of Scottish-English influenced by Gaelic, Cree and Saulteaux.

When Métis people were dispossessed of their homeland and dispersed from their communities, the Michif language became endangered. In schools, Métis were encouraged to speak either English or French. Currently there are only a few hundred Michif speakers left, often living far from other Michif speakers. Many Métis today feel strongly about the need to revitalize the Michif language before all fluent speakers are lost.

The following story was shared by Elder Norman Fleury, told to him by his grandmother:

Speaking in Michif, she told him that when the Métis first arrived, li booñ Jeu, the Creator, looked at all the other Nations and saw that they each had their own language. The Sioux spoke Sioux, the Cree spoke Cree, the Saulteaux spoke in Saulteaux, and the French spoke in French. He then looked at the Métis, and saw that they didn't have their own language, so he gave the Métis the Michif language to be their own.

5.5 Innovations

Métis innovations stem from Métis history and culture. The Métis flag and Red River cart are two of the best-known innovations.

Red River Cart

The Red River cart was a crucial means of transporting goods during the fur trade and buffalo hunts. Carts were made entirely from wood, which meant that they could be repaired whenever needed using locally available trees. They could also be disassembled to make shelters, temporary rafts for crossing water, a sleigh in the wintertime and other tools. Horses or oxen could haul several carts that were tied together. On average, one man could handle about six carts, meaning they could carry a significant amount of supplies for both survival and trade. The efficiency of cart transport allowed the Métis to establish trade routes between eastern and western Canada.

The Métis also used the carts as a defensive mechanism during battle. According to Métis historian Fred J. Shore, a caravan of travelling Métis could very quickly create a strong defence. Carts were placed in a circle with the shafts facing outward. Animals, children, women and Elders gathered in the middle of the circle, and men were on the outside fighting off the attackers. The women and older children supported the men by reloading guns and taking care of causalities. Very few attackers ever made it through the fortifications of the circle of carts. First Nations esteemed the Métis for this highly effective method of defence.

Métis Flag

The Métis flag is the oldest flag indigenous to Canada and predates the maple leaf by over 150 years. The flag depicts a white infinity symbol in the middle of a blue or red flag. The red Métis flag has been documented as appearing as early as 1814 and the blue Métis flag in 1816. The Métis flag is a symbol of Métis identity, and flying the flag demonstrates Métis pride.

There are many explanations as to the meaning and origin of the infinity symbol. Some of these include the following:

- It represents two cultures woven together.
- It represents that the Métis Nation is strong and will carry on forever.
- It is based on the sign for "cart" in Plains Indian sign language.
- It is based on the pattern in which Métis buffalo hunters rode their horses to show the rest of the hunting party they had scouted a buffalo herd.

Other Innovations

Some other items used by Métis people historically, which continue to be symbols of Métis identity today, include the following:

- **York boat:** Métis traders developed this large wooden boat, which was inspired by fishing boats from the Orkney Islands in Scotland and by First Nations canoes. Each could carry 4–5 tons of goods during the fur trade. Métis traders would portage these boats overland between rivers and lakes. The York boat demonstrates the resourcefulness, ingenuity and strength of the Métis people.
- **Birchbark canoe:** Adopted from First Nations cultures, these canoes were vital during the fur trade and served as the primary mode of transportation for Métis people and their belongings. They were light, maneuverable and easily repaired en route.
- **Firebag/Octopus bag:** Octopus bags are shoulder bags that have eight separate storage compartments. They were used to carry ammunition, materials to start a fire, tobacco and pipes, and more.

How the Firebag Came to Be Known as the Octopus Bag

It is believed that the Métis firebag design with eight tabs (four in front and four behind) is inspired by the Salteaux people's "many legs bags." The "many legs bag" was an otter skin, belly side up, with the four legs and the tail decorated with quills or beads, and used to carry flint, steel, tobacco and pipes. Inspired by the functionality of the legs and tail pockets, the Métis came up with their own firebag design that allowed them to compartmentalize the items needed for use with making fire or smoking a pipe. The firebags were elaborately decorated, front and back, with beadwork or embroidery and lined with cotton calico print fabric. They had four hanging tab pockets or "legs" in the front and four in the back. The clever and attractive design was quickly and widely embraced right across the prairies, up into the Yukon and down along the west coast of B.C. It was there that the coastal First Nations people related the shape of it to that of an octopus and began referring to it as an "octopus bag." That name then travelled back across the prairies, and today many Métis people call these firebags octopus bags. I wonder, though, how many have questioned where the Métis would have ever seen an octopus on the prairies! The history of the Métis firebag is an excellent example of how effectively both goods and information travelled along the trade routes, connecting Métis people to each other across the land, but also connecting people between various distinct groups. I acknowledge with gratitude the late Lawrence Barkwell, who shared these teachings with me on a trip I made to Manitoba.

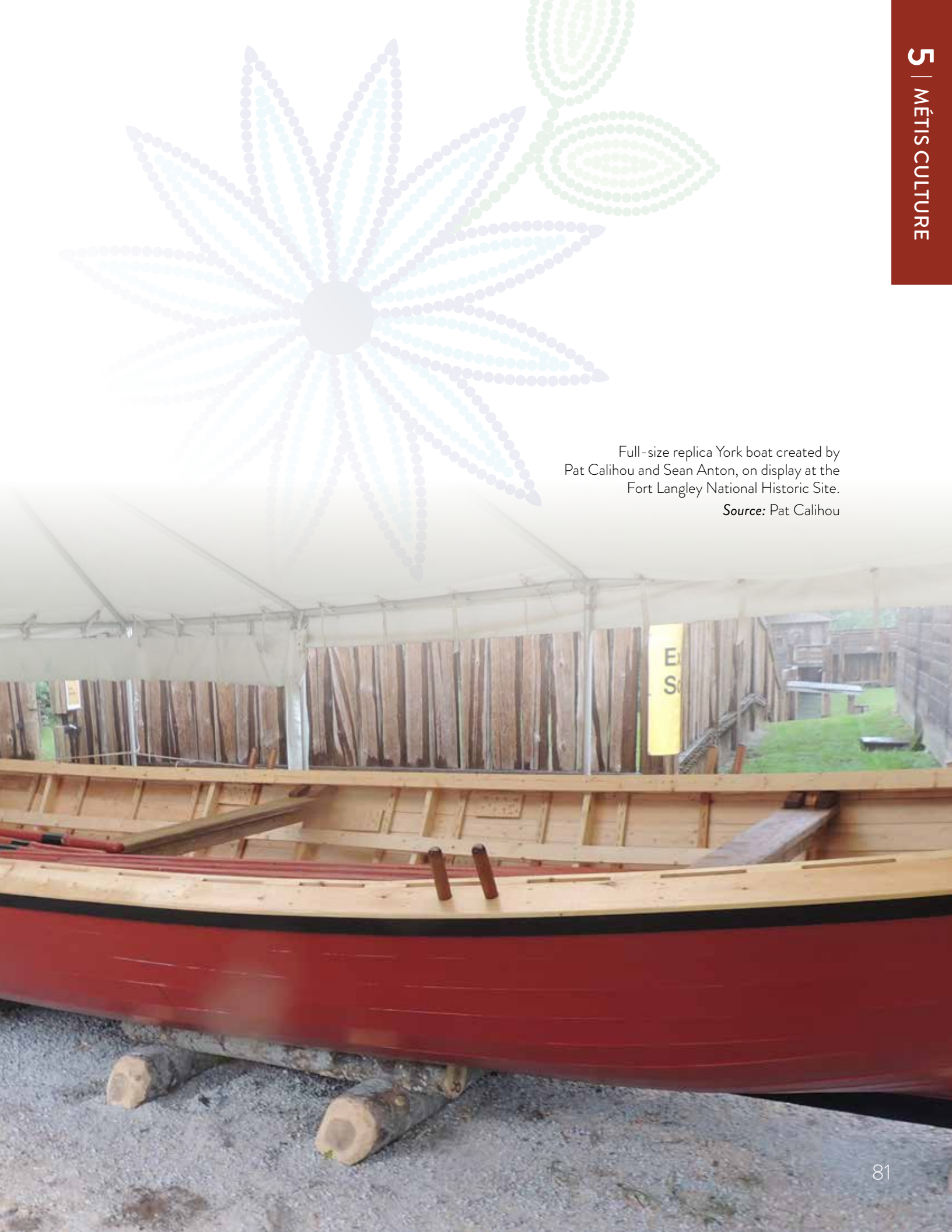
— Lisa Shepherd, Métis artist

"Kinnikinnik" Fire Bag, created by Lisa Shepherd, Métis artist, showing plant medicines including sage, red willow, bear berry, yerba santa and osha.

Artist Profile

Pat Calihou is a B.C.-based Métis artist and wood worker. Pat creates hand carved paddles and custom cedar row boats and canoes. Pat has also created full-sized replica Red River carts and a York boat, which are displayed at the Fort Langley National Historic Site's Métis exhibit.

Pat Calihou
Source: Parks Canada/N.Hildebrand



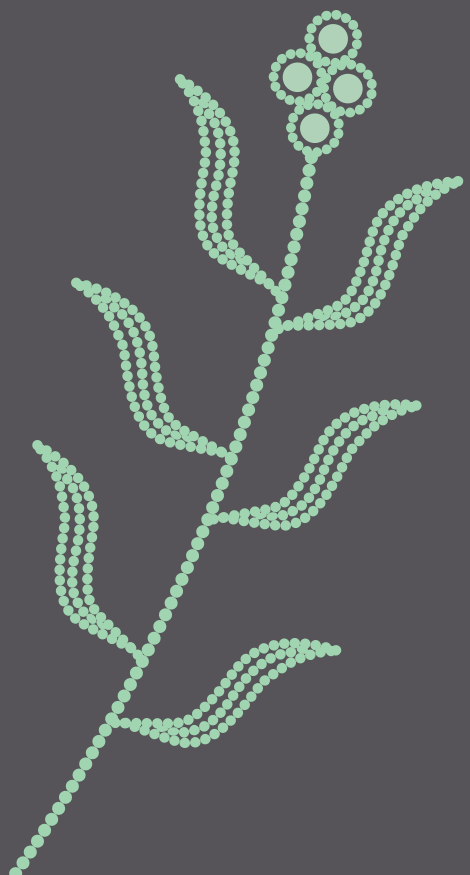
Full-size replica York boat created by Pat Calihou and Sean Anton, on display at the Fort Langley National Historic Site.

Source: Pat Calihou

Métis Hunting, Fishing and Harvesting Rights

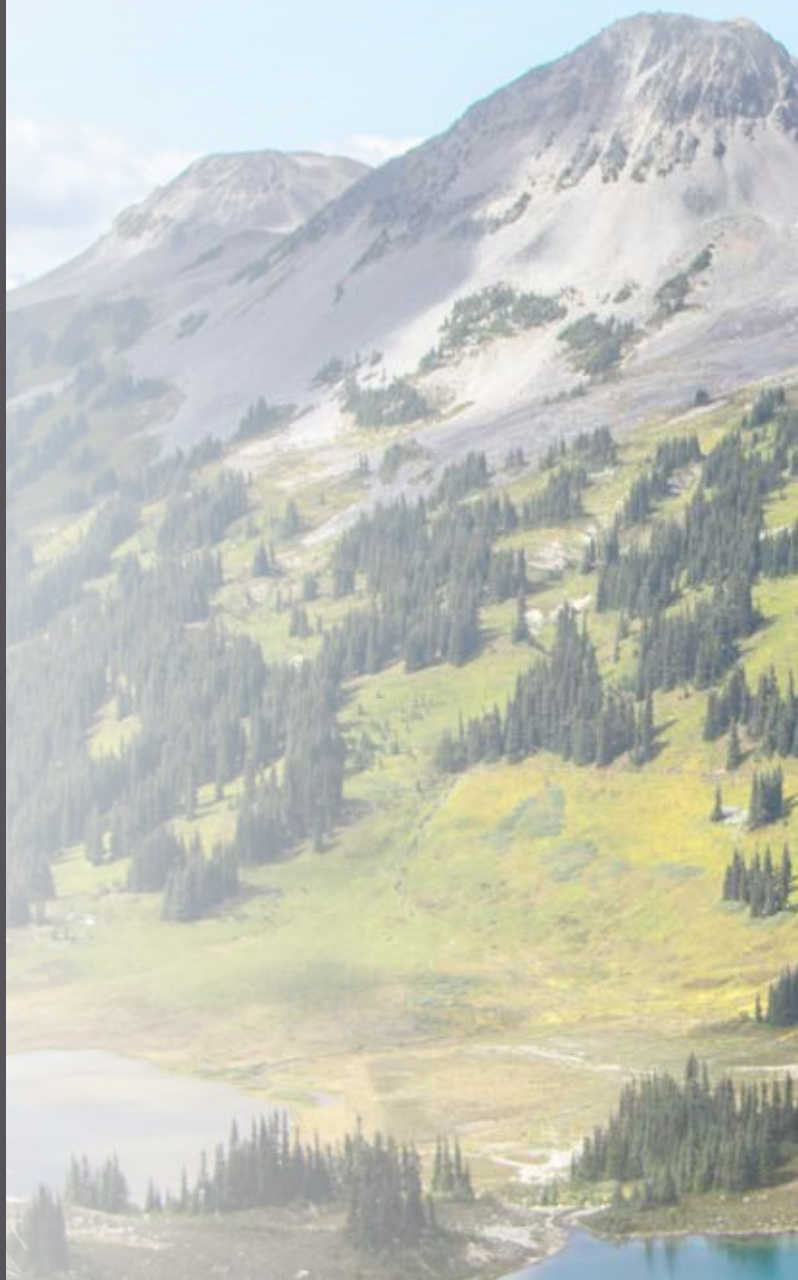
MNBC issues harvesting cards to qualifying applicants in affirmation of Métis harvesting and stewardship rights and responsibilities. Hunting, fishing, trapping, and harvesting rights are very important to Métis people and have been the basis of several prior and ongoing legal and policy challenges with the Canadian and provincial governments.

Currently, the harvesting cards issued by MNBC are used to collect information on land use and occupancy, as part of an effort to establish recognized Métis harvesting rights in B.C.



5.6 Land-Based Practices

Métis culture has always been a land-based culture. Métis people were often guides for settler explorers because they knew the land so well. As trappers and traders, they made their living off the land and survived in the wilderness for days on end. Today, hunting and harvesting practices connect Métis people to their traditions and their ancestors and exemplify the values of personal discipline and respect for all parts of the land and ecosystem.



I still trap and hunt. I venture into the woods all the time. I love the woods. To me it's where I come from and I like to keep it with me wherever I go.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

When I was a child, my uncles taught me to set snares, and my grandmother taught me to pick medicine. They taught that the animals in the bush are there to protect you.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

Métis people were capable hunters and used meat for feeding their families and trading. Trapping was also a common means of harvesting animals for survival and trade. Métis families used animal hides to create clothing, art, carriers (such as bags and baby carriers) and, of course, to trade furs. Métis people also fished many different species, which they often dried or smoked. Métis people continue to fish, trap, hunt and prepare foods with wild game today.

Métis people also gathered plants for food and medicinal purposes. Berries, fruits, seeds, nuts and roots were components of traditional Métis diets. Families also maintained extensive gardens and canned fruits and vegetables to last through the winter. They kept cows to produce dairy products and made teas from harvested plants.

Métis Traditional Medicines[4]

- Muskeg tea to relieve fever
- Pine and spruce needles to reduce chest and sinus congestion
- Chokecherry bark for sore throats, stomach pain and diarrhea
- Mustard plaster for colds
- Salt to relieve cramps
- Tobacco for offering gratitude and prayer
- Seneca roots for headaches and pain
- Mint for fever
- Wild ginger for earaches

Lots of people suffer with cramps today. I still use that medicine of putting salt in a sock or hand and you rub it on the cramp and it works. You would hear in my house, "Get the salt!" and everyone knew someone had a terrible cramp. That was the medicine we used.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

4. This information was shared through conversations with Métis Elders. Before gathering and using plant medicines, please consult with an Elder or Knowledge Keeper in your area to learn about appropriate harvesting practices and safe uses of the plants.

The traditional Métis diet was high in protein, fat and carbohydrates, which was well-suited to an active lifestyle. The introduction of flour brought about bannock (known as *la galet* in Michif), a baked bread that is still very popular in Métis communities today.

Food plays a significant role in bringing people together and is representative of the importance of family and community to the Métis. A Métis traditional value is that visitors are always welcome guests at the table, a value still practised today in the welcoming nature of Métis culture. These values are part of the traditional Métis laws that reinforce meaningful social relations.

Common Contemporary Métis Dishes

- Bannock
- *Les boulettes*
- *Li rababou* and other stews
- Tourtière
- Traditional meats (wild game and fowl) and fish

5.7 Values and Spirituality

Both First Nations and Christian spiritual practices influence Métis people. The French-Canadian roots of the Métis people brought the influence of Catholicism, which has been deeply integrated into the Métis culture and which many Métis practised during the Red River era. Métis of English and Scottish descent were more influenced by Protestantism. At the same time, Métis communities have always had connections with the teachings of the land and ceremonies carried forward by First Nations ancestors.

Colonialism has impacted Métis spirituality. The Indian Act banned Aboriginal spiritual practices from the 1880s to the 1950s, and these practices went underground and were carried on in secret. Residential schools taught that Aboriginal spiritual practices were inferior to Christianity, and caused many Aboriginal people to either abandon or hide their Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices.

> Spirituality is a personal thing and I'm always looking for my connection. For Métis people, there are relationships with both the church and Native spirituality. Some Métis people find meaningful ways to engage with both the church and our culture. One Elder I know would go to church in the morning and run the sweat lodge in the afternoon. The priest from the church would come to the sweat lodge, too.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

Today, many Métis still practise Catholicism and other forms of Christianity and experience these practices as strongly linked to their Métis identity. On the other hand, for some Métis people, Christianity is tied to the trauma and negative experiences of residential schools or experiences of being shamed for being Métis. Some Métis are re-embracing Aboriginal spiritual practices and re-discovering practices that, for many years, were dormant within their families and communities.

As a result, there is a great variety of spiritual beliefs amongst Métis people. Chantal Fiola, author of the book *Rekindling the Sacred Fire: Métis Ancestry and Anishinaabe Spirituality* (2015), quotes one of her research subjects as explaining, "In a Métis community, if we were all sitting right here: this guy's super Catholic, this guy's super Cree-spirituality, this guy's a mix, this guy does a little bit of things, this guy's a shaman, this guy's a priest, and it's all accepted as Métis. That's one of the cool things about being Métis, right, is you're part of this and part of that, so you get to have whichever parts you want" (p. 200).

Some examples of spiritual practices that Métis people may participate in include the following:

- Smudging
- Sweat lodges
- Land-based practices such as hunting and food harvesting in a way that acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans and nature
- Use of traditional medicines such as plant-based medicines for offerings, cleansing and prayer
- Midewiwin Lodges (sometimes referred to as *Le Grande Médicine*)

If you are curious to learn more about these practices, it is best to connect with a Métis Elder or Knowledge Keeper in your community.

5.8 Oral Traditions and Literature

Métis people over the generations have maintained a strong oral tradition in which storytelling communicates teachings, shares humour, entertains and more. This high regard for storytelling is also expressed in day-to-day communication, where stories are valued for building relationships and for respectfully dealing with conflicts. These storytelling traditions are evident in Métis literature today. Contemporary Métis novelists and poets are becoming known by the mainstream and are weaving the experiences of the Métis people into their writing. Some examples of literature by Métis authors are included in the reading list of this learning resource.

> We as Elders need to get the stories going again, because there has been such a silencing. A lot of stories have been lost, and that's really hard to take. But they're not all lost, and families still have their stories. So I think it's up to us to take the lead in making sure that storytelling—the oral tradition—is not lost.
>
> – *Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

We close this chapter with a poem by contemporary Métis poet Marylin Dumont:

THESE ARE WINTERING WORDS

Michif problem family among the nuclear language types one parent French the other Cree/Salteaux wintering words sliced thin, smoke-dried, pounded fine, folded in fat and berries pemmican not pidgin or creole combining two grammatical maps paddle trade routes along waterways traverse rapids: white and dangerous with Ojibway women à la façon du pays Métis traders, speak la lawng of double genetic origin pleasure doubled twice the language twice the culture mixta, not mixed-up, nor muddled but completely FrenchCreeOjibway different tongues buffalo, a delicacy source language right from the cow's mouth mother of all in-group conversation wintering camps dispersal neither Cree, Salteaux nor French exactly, but something else not less not half not lacking

– *Marilyn Dumont*, The Pemmican Eaters, *2015*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What left an impression on you in learning about Métis culture?
2. What are you curious to learn more about in regard to Métis culture?
3. What did you learn that you feel is most important for others to know?

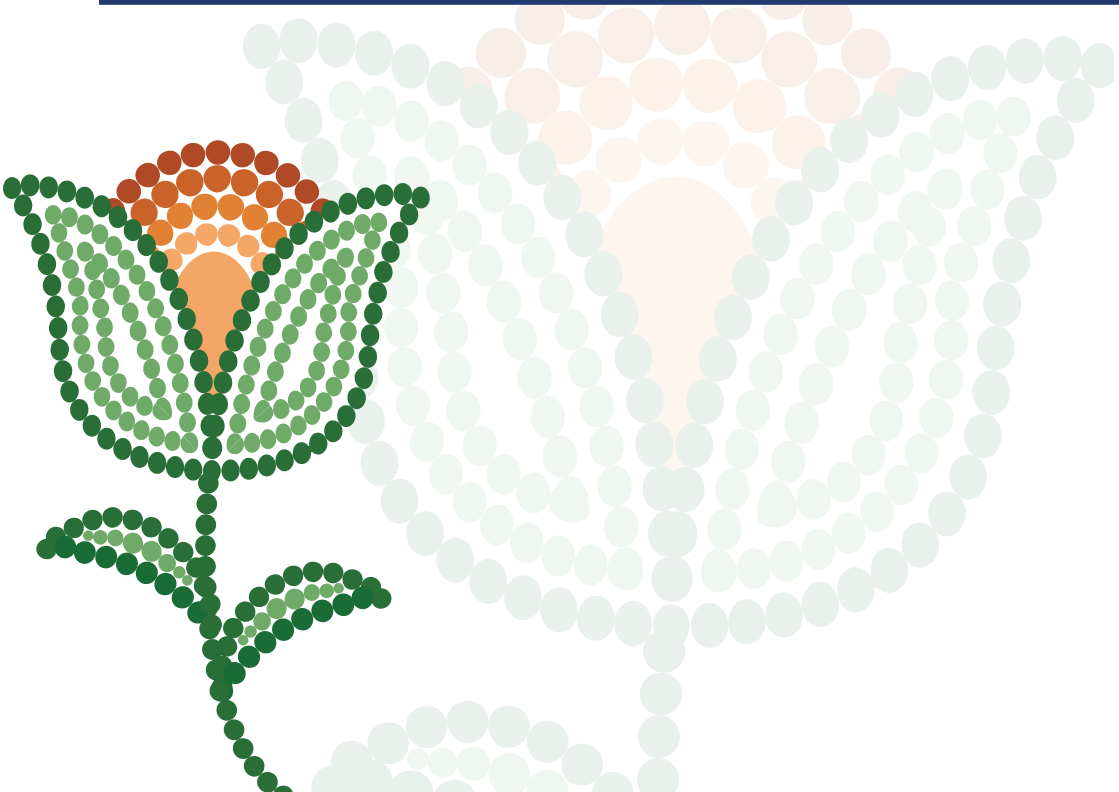
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Consider the following activities to expand and test your knowledge:

- Explain to a friend, colleague or family member three things you've learned about Métis culture. Ask them if they have any questions. If you know the answers, you can tell them. If you do not, write down the questions so you can return to them when you've finished reading this learning resource.
- Choose one of the topics in this chapter that caught your interest and do a deeper dive into learning about it. Check out the resources list at the end of this learning resource for some suggested websites.
- Learn a few Michif words by visiting learnmichif.com or downloading the "Michif to Go" language app.
- Reflect on the commonalities between Métis culture and your own upbringing, values and way of life.

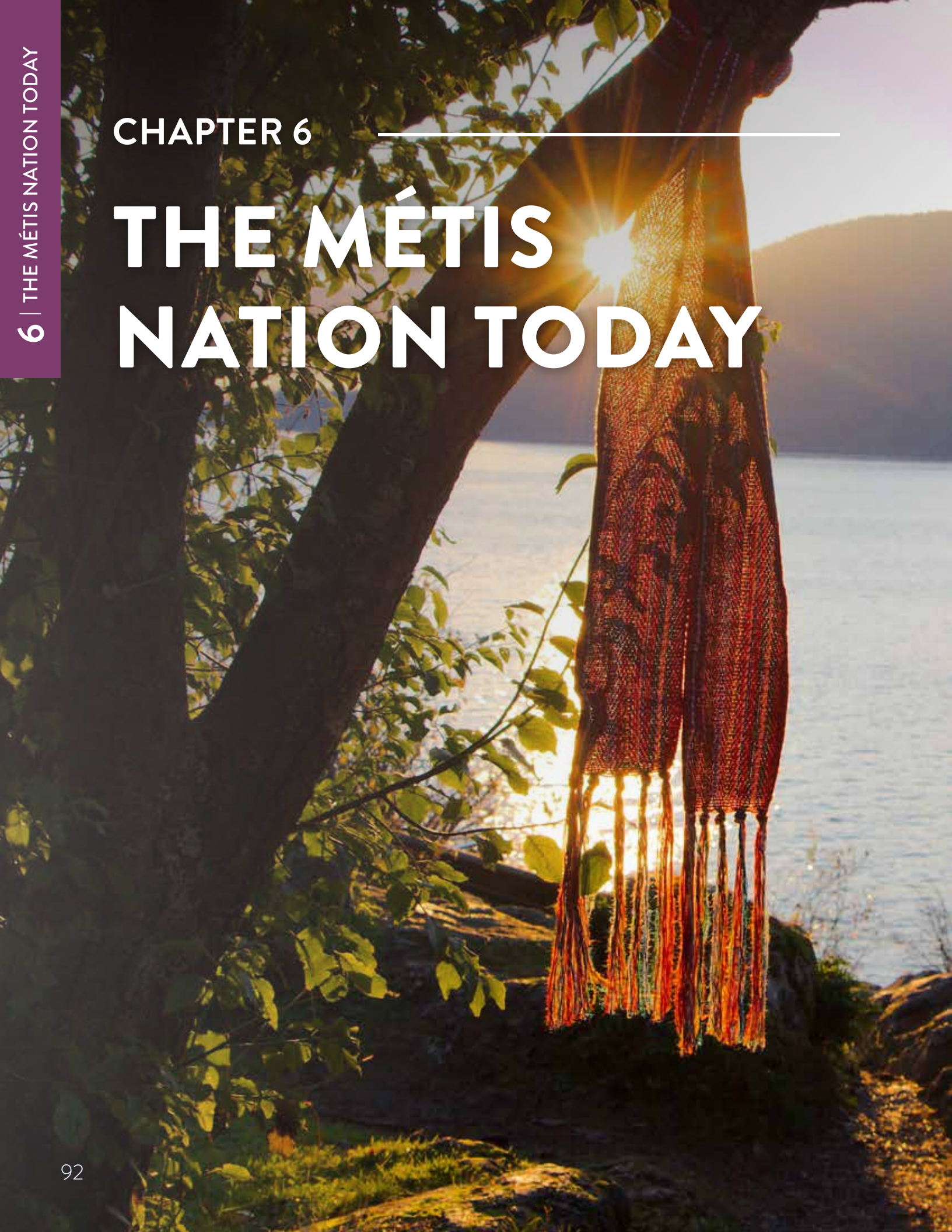
KEY LEARNINGS

- The extended family is the heart of Métis culture and community structure. Men, women, children and Elders all carry significant roles.
- Métis values and worldviews are closely connected to nature and being on the land.
- Métis clothing is highly decorative and is representative of families and communities. Métis people today wear traditional clothing items such as the capote, sash and beadwork to represent their Métis identity.
- Music and dance are key aspects of Métis culture and bring communities together.
- Michif is a distinct Métis language and has a unique mixed-language structure. This language is endangered, and Métis today are working to revitalize and protect it.
- Symbols of Métis identity such as the Métis flag and Red River cart are linked to Métis history and traditions.
- Métis people continue to fish, trap, hunt, gather and cook traditional foods. Food is a valued component of Métis gatherings.
- Both Christianity and First Nations spirituality influence Métis values and spirituality.



CHAPTER 6

THE MÉTIS NATION TODAY



CHAPTER 6 OVERVIEW

This chapter is intended to help you understand the governance structure of the Métis Nation. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain what Métis Chartered Communities are and how they support Métis Citizens
- Explain how the governance structure of the Métis Nation in B.C. links to local and national structures
- List the requirements for Métis citizenship
- Explain the importance of self-governance and education to Métis people

Introduction

Many people think of the Métis primarily as a cultural group. While the Métis share a cultural identity, they are also a self-governing Aboriginal Nation. The governance structure of the Métis Nation has ties to traditional Métis governance systems and is the guiding force for Métis citizenship and self-governance today.

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What are some of the roles of a government?
2. What does self-governance mean to you?
3. How do you enact autonomy by making decisions about your day-to-day life?

6.1 Métis Nation Governance Structure

MNBC has three levels of governance:

- Local: Métis Chartered Communities
- Provincial: Métis Nation British Columbia
- National: Métis National Council

Métis Chartered Communities

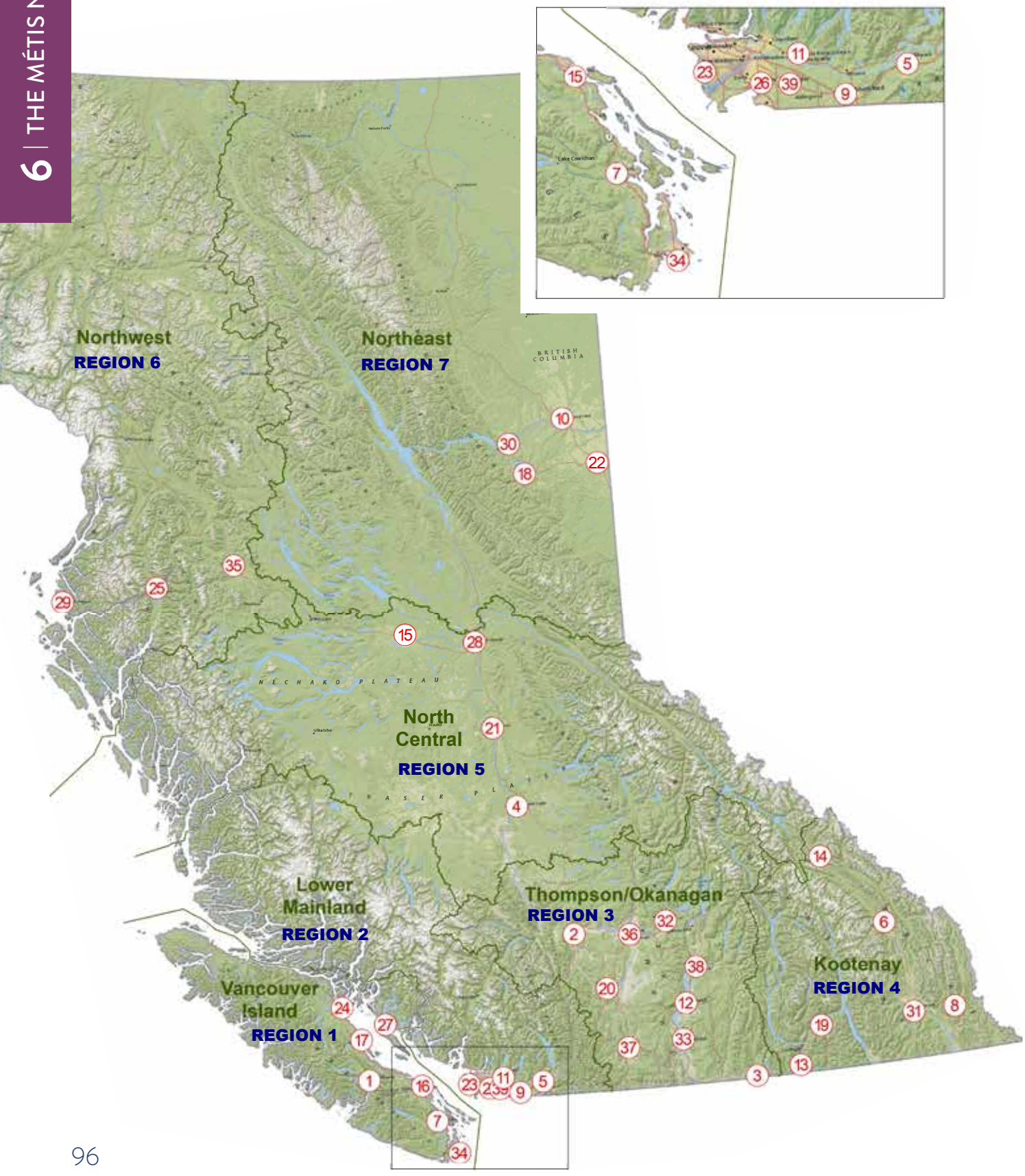
MNBC is composed of 38 Métis Chartered Communities grouped into seven regions. Métis Chartered Communities are volunteer-run associations that connect Métis people with local cultural events and supports. These communities are the heart of the Nation and provide opportunities for Métis culture to flourish and be passed on.

Métis Chartered Communities have the following roles:

- Promoting and celebrating Métis culture through cultural and social events for Métis people and the community at large
- Supporting family and community ties through gatherings and events
- Promoting public awareness of Métis people and advocating for their needs
- Supporting Métis people to access resources such as education funding, harvesting licenses, business networks, Métis citizenship applications and more
- Connecting Métis people with Elders and Knowledge Keepers

Chilliwack Métis Chartered Community

Métis Nation British Columbia Chartered Communities



1. Alberni Clayoquot Métis Association
2. Ashcroft District Métis Association
3. Boundary Métis Community Association
4. Cariboo Chilcotin Métis Association
5. Chilliwack Métis Association
6. Columbia Valley Métis Association
7. Cowichan Valley Métis Association
8. Elk Valley Métis Association
9. Fraser Valley Métis Association
10. Ft. St. John Métis Society
11. Golden Ears Métis Society
12. Kelowna Métis Association
13. Kootenay South Métis Society
14. Métis Nation Columbia River Society
15. Metis Nation New Caledonia Society (Vanderhoof)
16. Mid-Island Métis Nation Association
17. MIKI'SIW Métis Association
18. Moccasin Flats Métis Society
19. Nelson & Area Métis Society
20. Nicola Valley & District Métis Society
21. North Cariboo Métis Association
22. North East Métis Association
23. North Fraser Métis Association
24. North Island Métis Association
25. Northwest BC Métis Association
26. Nova Métis Heritage Association
27. Powell River Métis Society
28. Prince George Métis Community Association
29. Prince Rupert & District Métis Society
30. River of the Peace Métis Society*
31. Rocky Mountain Métis Association
32. Salmon Arm Métis Association
33. South Okanagan Similkameen Métis Association
34. The Métis Nation of Greater Victoria Association
35. Tri-River Métis Association
36. Two Rivers Métis Society
37. Vermillion Forks Métis Association
38. Vernon & District Métis Association
39. Waceya Métis Society

*Interim Charter Community

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 Albers
Provincial Map Scale: 1:2,750,000; Inset Map Scale: 1:1,000,000
Created: April 2018 by Inlailawatash (www.inlailawatash.ca)
Data Sources: Province of British Columbia, Government of Canada, National Geographic, ESRI, DeLorme, HERE, UNEP-WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, GEBCO, NOAA, increment P Corp.

Moccasin Flats Métis Chartered Community

The Moccasin Flats Métis Chartered Community in Chetwynd has been offering programs to the community since 2001. They are named after a local area where many Métis lived in the 1960s. They offer a range of programs to support people of all ages, including the following:

- An annual three-day culture camp for families
- Holiday activities, such as Halloween, Christmas and Easter events
- A women's group where they do arts activities and socialize
- An annual Louis Riel Day celebration
- Family days with activities like skating or swimming
- Self-care for Elders
- Supporting people to register for Métis citizenship or learn about Métis identity

Although the programs are targeted to Métis people, they don't turn anyone away. They support people in need by providing food through a school lunch program, gym passes, travel expenses for medical travel and more. Their programs are entirely volunteer-run and are supported with program funding from MNBC. In a small community, it can be challenging to get a good turnout for programs and to recruit volunteers, but this small team is motivated to keep going because they are the only Métis-specific service provider in their area. They provide an essential link for connecting local people with Métis culture and community.

Members of the Moccasin Flats Métis Chartered Community

Members of the Chilliwack Métis Association

Chilliwack Métis Association

The Chilliwack Métis Association is a dynamic community that provides a safe and inclusive environment and has been connecting Métis people in Chilliwack for over 10 years. They started with the guidance of Elders who had cultural teachings and connections to the Métis homeland. Resurgence of identity is valued by the Chilliwack Métis Association, and they offer many ways of connecting with Métis identity, including the following:

- Cultural nights
- Moccasin workshops: making moccasins and telling stories about them and doing beadwork
- Jigging workshops
- Movie nights with historic and culturally relevant movies
- Round circles: gathering with a talking stick so that everyone can share their story

They keep close ties with neighbouring Métis Chartered Communities and gather together as family. Respectful relationships with local First Nations are also strong. There are many ways that they create relationships in the community, such as the following:

- Community potlucks
- Representation at the local powwow
- Pancake breakfasts in partnership with local First Nations
- Connections with the local university

The Chilliwack Métis Association focuses on being visible and accessible to their community. They open their doors and people flood in, ready to connect with who they are.

One of the most critical roles of the Métis Chartered Communities is to foster community connections and a feeling of belonging among Métis people. Below are some stories from Métis people about what being part of a Métis Community means to them:

> At a community potluck I got to stand up and they acknowledged my name and that I'm a Métis person and I'm part of this community. I felt like, "I've come home, this is me, this is who I am." I was just so proud and I still am.

> We need community to feel whole. We need ourselves, our family and our community—we're all one. I know my grandchildren can seek out people in their community to help them along, and they can learn about their culture and feel comfortable and welcomed.

> I know that if I'm really stressed at work, I need a community event to help ground me, and I'm mentally so much better after going to a Métis gathering. My mental wellness is centered in getting together with Métis people, getting into our culture, drumming, sharing stories and hearing my language.

Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC)

MNBC is the provincial governing body for the Métis Nation in B.C. MNBC was established in 1996 and represents the 38 Métis Chartered Communities in B.C.

MNBC plays several key roles, including the following:

- Promoting the political, social, cultural and economic interests of the Métis Nation
- Establishing relations with federal, provincial, municipal, First Nations and Inuit governments to ensure the appropriate place of Métis people as partners in the Canadian federation
- Ensuring that there are Métis-designed programs and services for the benefit of the Métis in B.C.
- Seeking equality and justice for the legal, constitutional and international rights of the Métis Nation
- Raising the level of awareness of governments, educational and other institutions, and the general public on Métis history, culture and heritage
- Registering Métis Citizens in B.C.

The MNBC governance system has a democratic structure of elections and decision making. There is an annual general meeting each year, which is open to any Métis Citizen, who can participate, vote on and speak to the resolutions.

The MNBC governance structure has four main components that uphold Métis self-determination and nationhood today:

Board of Directors: An 11-member Board of Directors is democratically elected by Métis Citizens. The President, Vice President, Women's Provincial Chair and the Youth Provincial Chair are chosen through a province-wide election. Seven Regional Directors from across the province are chosen through regional elections. The MNBC Board of Directors serves the Métis people as an elected voice for their respective constituencies and the ministers are responsible for individual or multiple portfolios.

Regional Governance Councils: MNBC divides the province into seven geographical regions. Each of the seven regions of the province has a Regional Governance Council, which consists of the Métis Chartered Community Presidents, Regional Youth and Women's Representatives and is chaired by the Regional Director. These councils are a link between local communities and MNBC. Their mandate is to provide input to the Regional Director, who serves at the provincial board level, and to develop policies that support the Métis Chartered Communities within their respective regions.

MNBC Ministries

MNBC portfolios, known as ministries, include the following:

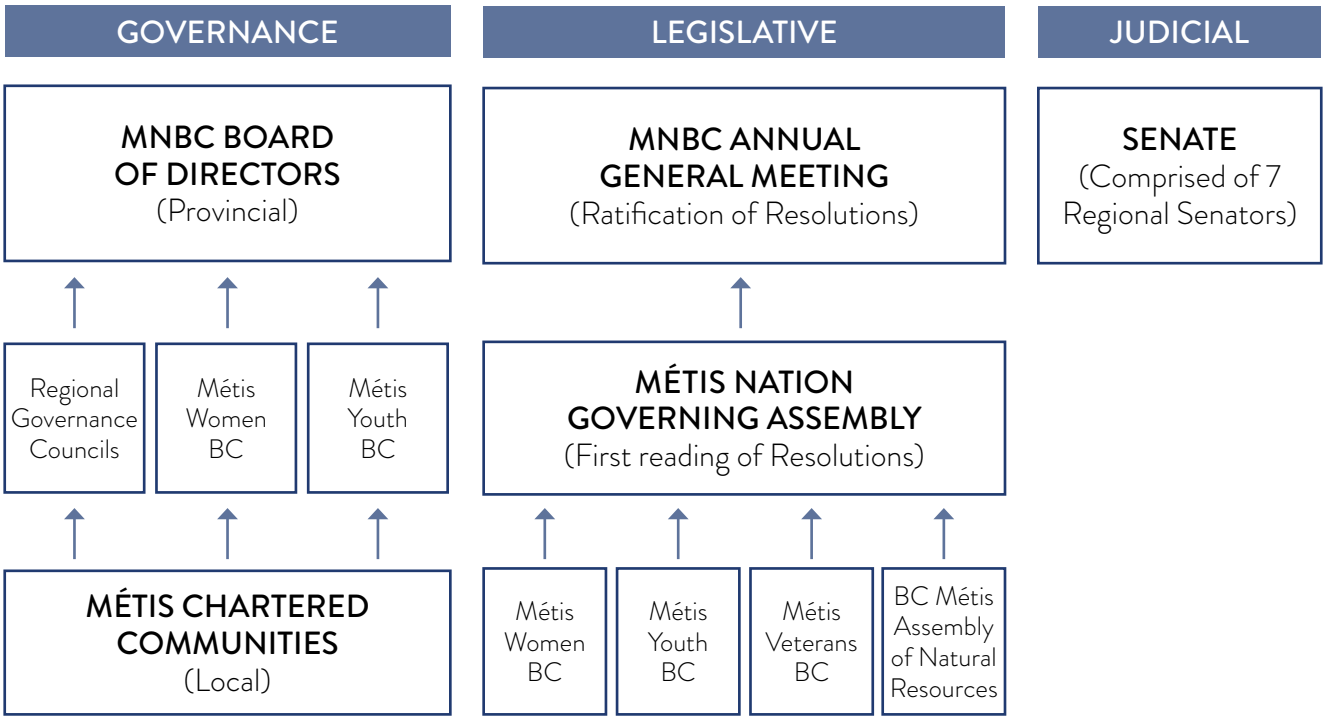
- Children and Families
- Citizenship Registry
- Community Services
- Culture, Heritage and Language
- Digital Government
- Early Learning and K-12 Education
- Economic Development and Natural Resources
- Elders
- Employment and Skills Training
- Environmental Protection
- Health | Mental Health and Addictions
- Housing and Homelessness
- Justice
- Métis Rights
- Post-Secondary Education
- Sport
- Veterans Affairs
- Women and Gender Equity
- Youth

Senate: The MNBC Senate is the judicial arm of the Métis Nation. It includes seven Senators, one appointed from each region. Senators officiate at functions such as the swearing-in of MNBC Board Members. They are also responsible for the citizenship appeal process.

Métis Nation Governing Assembly (MNGA): The MNGA is the legislative arm of the Métis Nation. It includes the MNBC Board of Directors and the 38 elected Presidents of the Métis Chartered Communities. It meets annually and debates the resolutions that will be brought forward to the annual general meeting.

Additional Governance Arms: MNBC also includes two governance arms: Métis Women B.C. and Métis Youth B.C., which ensure that Women and Youth are represented and integrated into the decision-making processes of the Nation. There are also two committees: Métis Veterans B.C., which manages Veterans affairs, and the B.C. Métis Assembly of Natural Resources, a non-political committee that manages natural resources on behalf of the Métis Nation.

MNBC GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



MNBC Board of Directors: The MNBC Board of Directors represents the governance arm of the Métis Nation and serves the Métis people as an elected voice for their respective constituencies. The Board of Directors consists of seven Regional Directors, a provincial Women's Representative and a provincial Youth Representative, and the MNBC Vice President and President.

Regional Governance Councils: The Regional Councils are a link between local communities and MNBC. Their mandate is to provide input to the Regional Director, who serves at the provincial board level, and to develop policies that support the Métis Chartered Communities within their respective regions.

Métis Chartered Communities: Métis Chartered Communities are grassroots organizations that are primarily volunteer-run. Métis Chartered Communities provide the primary link to Métis culture and community for many Métis people.

Métis Nation Governing Assembly (MNGA): The MNGA represents the legislative arm of the Métis Nation. It meets annually and debates on the resolutions that will be brought forward to the annual general meeting.

MNBC Annual General Meeting: At the annual general meeting, all Métis Citizens have the opportunity to share their ideas and vote on leadership and legislation.

Senate: The MNBC Senate is the judicial arm of the Métis Nation. Senators officiate at functions such as the swearing-in of MNBC Board Members. They are also responsible for the citizenship appeal process.

Additional Governance Arms: MNBC also includes two governance arms: Métis Women B.C. and Métis Youth B.C., which ensure that Women and Youth are represented and integrated into the decision-making processes of the Nation. There are also two committees: Métis Veterans B.C., which manages Veterans affairs, and the B.C. Métis Assembly of Natural Resources, a non-political committee that manages natural resources on behalf of the Métis Nation.

Métis National Council (MNC)

The MNC is the governance structure of the Métis Nation nationally and internationally. It receives its mandate and direction from the democratically elected leadership of the Métis Nation governing members of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. The MNC states that their "central goal is to secure a healthy space for the Métis Nation's ongoing existence within the Canadian federation."

The President of MNBC sits on the MNC Board of Governors, which is made up of the presidents of each of the provincial governing members.

6.2 Métis Citizenship

As of November 2020, there were approximately 20,000 registered Métis Citizens in B.C. To be granted Métis citizenship, a person must demonstrate that they meet the national definition of Métis citizenship by providing evidence that they:

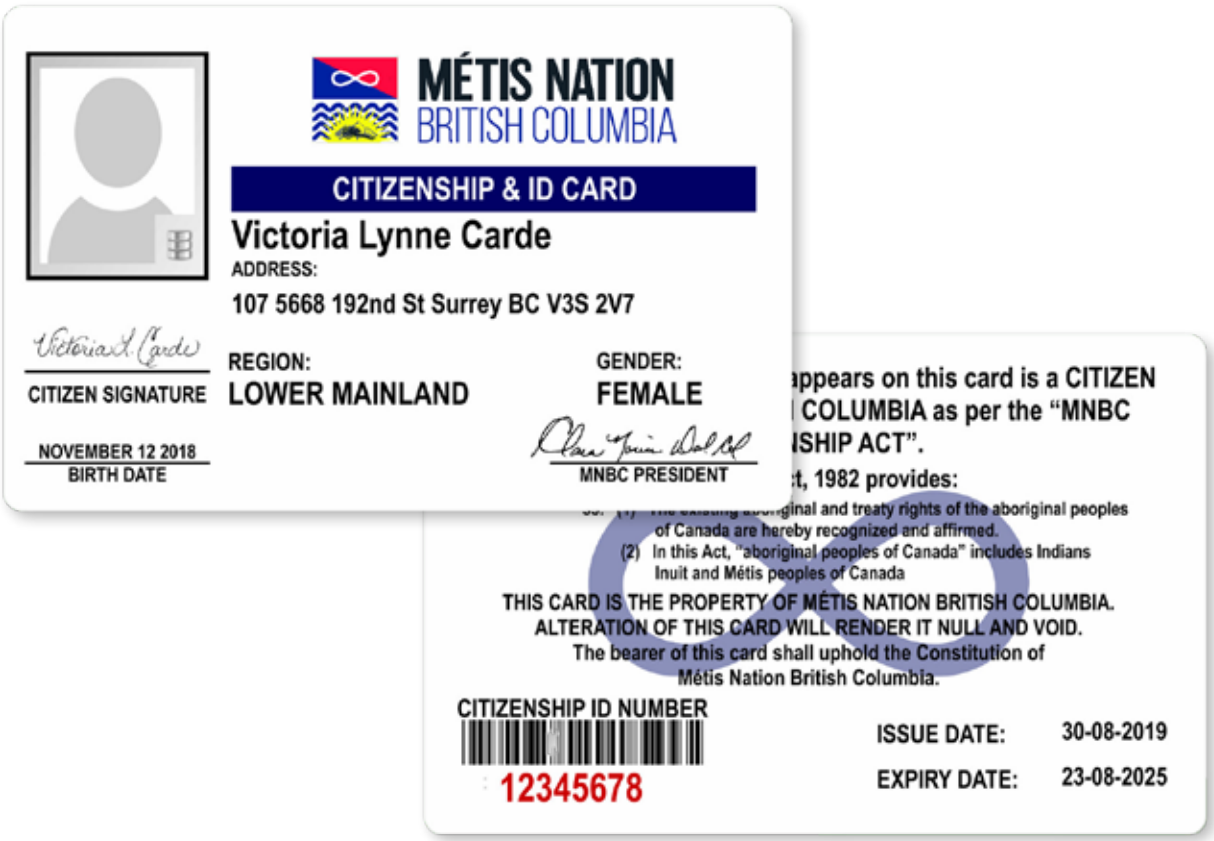
- Self-identify as Métis
- Are distinct from other Aboriginal peoples
- Are of historic Métis ancestry (demonstrated through genealogical records)
- Are accepted by the Métis Nation (demonstrated through connection to a contemporary Métis community)

There are many more people in B.C. who self-identify as Métis by checking Métis on the Canadian census (approximately 90,000). Some of these people may be eligible for Métis citizenship, and others may be of mixed First Nations and non-Aboriginal ancestry but are not Métis.

All people who self-identify as Métis are eligible to access programs and services offered by MNBC, but are encouraged to register for citizenship. Métis Chartered Communities support new Citizens to participate in cultural events and meet Elders and Knowledge Keepers in their local area. To learn more about applying for Métis citizenship, visit the MNBC website.

We have to stand up and be counted. Lots of people still say, "Well, I don't need a card to know I'm Métis," but that's not the point. It's not for us—it's for the future generation, and if we don't stand up and say we are, nobody will know how many of us there are and what we want. So we'll never get what we want. If we don't stand up and be counted, we don't have a say in the government, and if we don't stand up now, our grandchildren will have to deal with it.

– *Jean Peerless, Métis Elder*



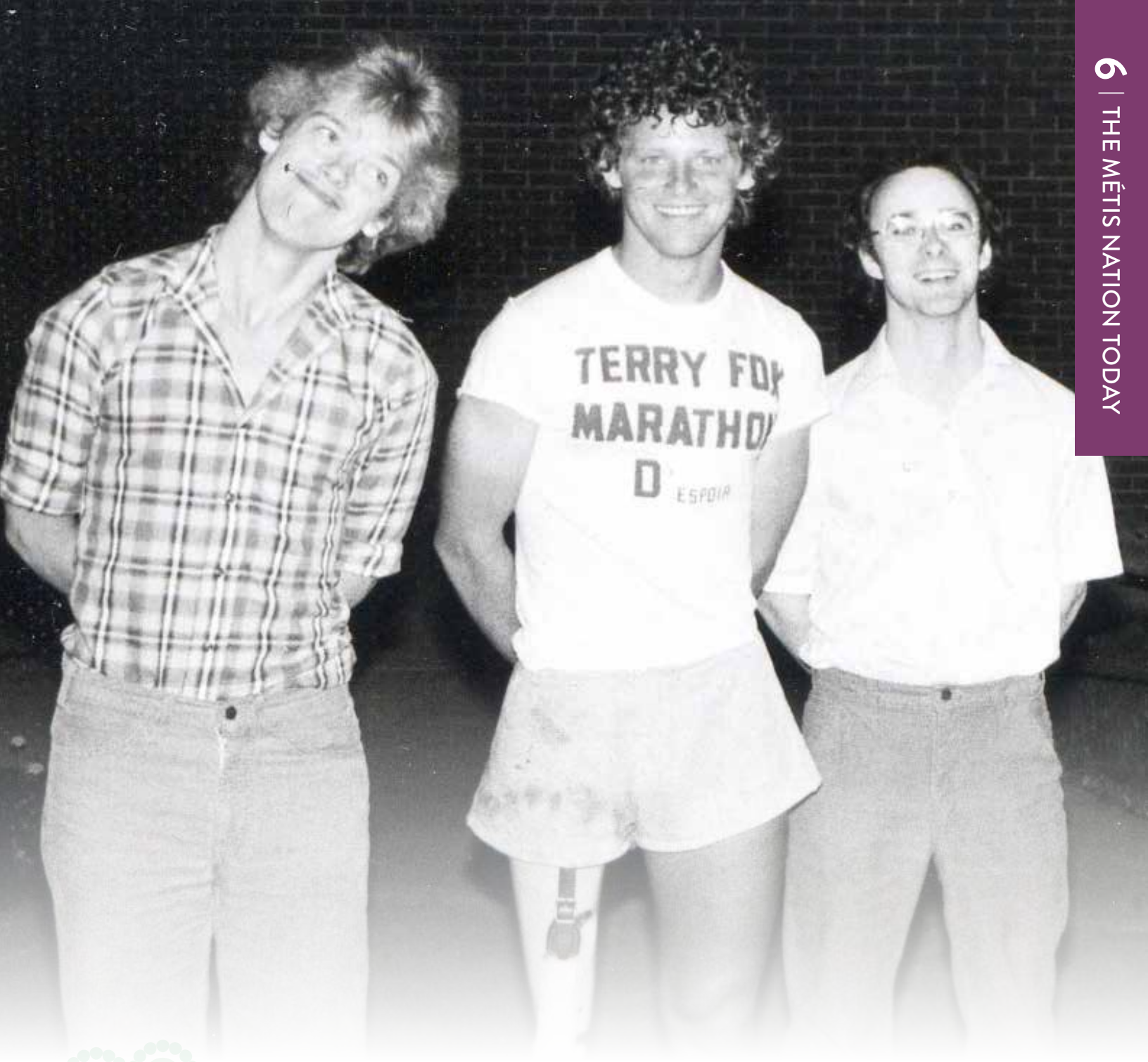
Terry Fox's Métis Family History

Many people may think that they do not know anyone who is Métis, but there are many prominent Canadians, now and in the past, with Métis citizenship. One example is Terry Fox.

Terry Fox was admired by many Canadians for his Marathon of Hope in 1980, in which he attempted to run across Canada to raise money for cancer research. At the time, Terry was a young cancer survivor and amputee who had already lost a leg to the disease, and he inspired millions through his courage and dedication. Over halfway through his run, the cancer returned, and Terry eventually passed away at age 22. However, his legacy lives on in the annual Terry Fox runs that take place across the country and in the over $750 million raised for cancer research in his name.

In his lifetime, Terry did not know that he was Métis. Like many Métis of her generation, Terry's grandmother, Marion Gladue, kept her Métis identity hidden to protect herself and her family from racism and discrimination. Marion's Métis family history is connected to the buffalo hunters of the plains and to the Red River community of Manitoba. In 2014, through genealogical research, Terry Fox's family discovered their Métis identity. In 2015, MNBC posthumously awarded Terry Fox their highest honour, the Order of the Sash, in recognition of his contributions to the Métis Nation and all Canadians.

Although Terry was not aware of his Métis identity, his brother, Darrell Fox, has reflected that the Métis values Marion exemplified had a significant impact on Terry. Terry was very close to his grandmother, and the family always spent summers at her home in rural Manitoba. While they suspected based on her visual appearance that she had Aboriginal ancestry, this was something that Marion never spoke of. However, she did pass on the values of hard work, a family-centered lifestyle, generosity, courage, honesty and caring. Darrell explains, "When people think about Terry Fox, the values he lived by were very much a part of my grandma. She was exceptionally stubborn and that's why she lived so long—and we're all that way in my family. My grandma was everything to us, and she passed on her giving and caring nature to my mother. A big piece of Terry was that quality of giving to others, and when he saw the suffering of others this really came to the surface."



Darrell Fox (Terry's brother), Terry Fox, Doug Alward (Terry's friend and driver on the Marathon of Hope), June 1980.

The Fox family is embracing their Métis identity. As Darrell shares, "We didn't grow up understanding our culture. I'm still connecting and I'm fascinated to learn more. Finding out I am Métis is something that has enriched my life and I'm so proud. The Terry Fox story is an amazing story of determination and perseverance, and so is the Métis story."

The Métis Nation Relationship Accord II was signed between the Province of B.C. and MNBC in 2016. It outlines the commitment of both parties to work together to improve socio-economic conditions for Métis people in B.C. This document affirms the Métis rights included in the Canadian Constitution and states the parties' intentions to work together in a relationship based on mutual respect, responsibility and sharing.

The Canada–Métis Nation Accord was signed in 2017 between the prime minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, the Métis National Council and provincial Métis governing bodies. This agreement recognizes that the Métis-Crown relationship is a "Nation-to-Nation, government-to-government" relationship. The objectives of the accord are to advance reconciliation, end the legacy of colonialism, improve the socio-economic conditions of Métis people, address unresolved claims and grievances and advance recognition of the Métis Nation amongst the general public. Since the signing of this accord, the Canadian government has committed funding to the Métis National Council and five Métis governing bodies to support the well-being of Métis people in areas such as post-secondary and early childhood education, employment training and housing.

6.3 Métis Self-Governance

The Métis Nation has always been a self-governing Nation. However, Canadian and provincial governments have not always recognized the Métis Nation as a legitimate government.

In recent years, Canadian and provincial governments have shifted to working with the Métis Nation in more of a Nation-to-Nation relationship. Agreements with the Province of B.C. and the Government of Canada have opened doors to a shared commitment to improve the well-being of Métis people.

Examples of Métis Self-Governance Today

- Métis have governance systems at the local, provincial and national levels.
- Métis government bodies define their citizenship criteria and manage their own citizenship through citizenship and identification registries.
- MNBC has a data sharing agreement with the Province of B.C. that allows Métis sovereignty over their health data.
- The Métis Nation Early Learning and Childcare Accord supports Métis jurisdiction over early years education and childcare for Métis children in B.C.

Canada–Métis Nation Accord signing, 2017

The signing of the Canada–Métis Nation Accord just happened in 2017. That's just a few years ago. It took a long time and I think on that day our ancestors that fought so hard in those early days for our recognition and our rights felt we finally got there. Things have been changing for the better more and more.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

6.4 Reconciliation and Aboriginal Rights

The general public is becoming increasingly aware of and committed to reconciliation and Aboriginal rights as a result of the following recent developments:

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada, which documented the history and impacts of the Canadian residential school system on survivors and their families. In 2015, the TRC released 94 Calls to Action, which outlined steps for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), which is an international set of standards to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples. It outlines Indigenous rights in all areas of life, such as language and culture, education and health. The TRC called for UNDRIP to be used as a framework for moving toward true and lasting reconciliation. In 2019, B.C. passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, legislation to align B.C. laws with UNDRIP. UNDRIP supports self-governance, stating that "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development."

Reconciliation with Métis people is an ongoing, action-oriented process that is about understanding and addressing past wrongs done to Métis people, making amends and improving relationships. Respecting Aboriginal rights involves honouring the rights of Métis people to practise their culture and express their identity, revitalize their language and govern their citizens.

It is encouraging to see greater awareness and acceptance of the need for truth and reconciliation and the importance of Aboriginal rights, and it is important that Métis people are consistently included and involved in discussions and actions related to Aboriginal rights and reconciliation.

6.5 Education

Education is a priority for the Métis Nation in two regards:

Education *for* Métis people: The Canadian education system has historically excluded Métis people in several ways, including the following:

- Métis people living on road allowances were often considered ineligible to send their children to government-run schools because they did not pay property taxes.

- For many years schools were divided: schools for people of non-Aboriginal descent and schools for First Nations people. In some cases, Métis people were excluded from both these systems.
- The legacy of colonial policies has left socio-economic impacts on Métis people today that create challenges to attaining post-secondary education.
- In contemporary society, Métis people are often not included in efforts to improve the experiences of Aboriginal students, and Métis students do not receive the same funding or supports as First Nations students.

For these reasons, MNBC provides education funding to Métis people in B.C. through the federally funded Métis Employment and Training Program, and it advocates for and delivers improved educational policies and opportunities for Métis people from early childhood through post-secondary.

Education *about* Métis people: The education system in Canada has historically excluded and/or misrepresented Métis history and culture and, as a result, many people living in Canada do not know very much about the Métis or have incorrect knowledge. While today's K–12 curriculum is more inclusive of Aboriginal people in general, there are still many gaps in teaching about Métis identity and culture, and both educational policy and curriculum do not accurately acknowledge the distinctiveness of the Métis.

Across B.C., Métis people volunteer hours of time to present to schools, organizations and community groups about the Métis in order to further understanding of Métis identity. Funding to support raising awareness about the Métis is limited, and there are few curriculum resources specific to the Métis. Thus the majority of work Métis people are doing to educate the public is grassroots and volunteer-led.

> To be able to pass on my culture means so much to me—not only to my own children but to the other students when we go into the schools. I think it's important that the public learns that the Métis are a distinct Nation and that children grow up knowing who they are. It would have meant so much to me to have grown up with that, but it's never too late, and it all starts with education. Getting into the schools and involving everyone is important so that Métis children can identify who they are, and the other children can know who we are as Métis.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

For Métis people to attain equity and inclusion in the education system, they need to have a voice. Métis communities must be involved in all aspects of policy and decision making related to Métis students. Provincially and locally, a government-to-government relationship is needed. At the provincial level the B.C. Ministry of Education works with the MNBC Ministry of Education, and at the local level school districts work with Métis Chartered Communities. These relationships help to ensure that the education system contains accurate Métis content and better serves Métis students.

> There's still a lot of ignorance about us out there. There's not enough Métis content in our current curriculum in Canada. In our school district, they're craving Métis culture. The teachers want us to come to their classes. We were hidden for so long, and all of the sudden people are becoming more aware of us. It's about acceptance of who we are.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. How do Métis Chartered Communities and MNBC support Métis people in B.C.?
2. Why do you think self-governance is important to Métis people today?
3. How was Métis history and identity included in your education? What could have been better?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Consider trying the following activities to expand and test your knowledge:

- Think of several actions you could take in your life that would support reconciliation and/or increase inclusion of the Métis. Choose at least one action to move forward on in the next one to two months.
- Reflect on the following excerpt and the similarities between the governance of the Métis Nation today and traditional Métis governance structures.

The buffalo hunt rules and management system were the essence of Métis governance. The community gathered, set the rules, elected leaders from among the best people for the job, and then carried out what they had agreed to. It could be a buffalo hunt, a war...or a defense of their homeland from an outside threat. Once the reason for the rules being set in place was over, everyone went back to their everyday lives. Le Président was only le Président as long as the community needed him in that role. Métis people took their individual rights seriously and only agreed to be controlled by someone else if they had elected them to be in charge, and only for as long as the particular issue required someone to be in charge.

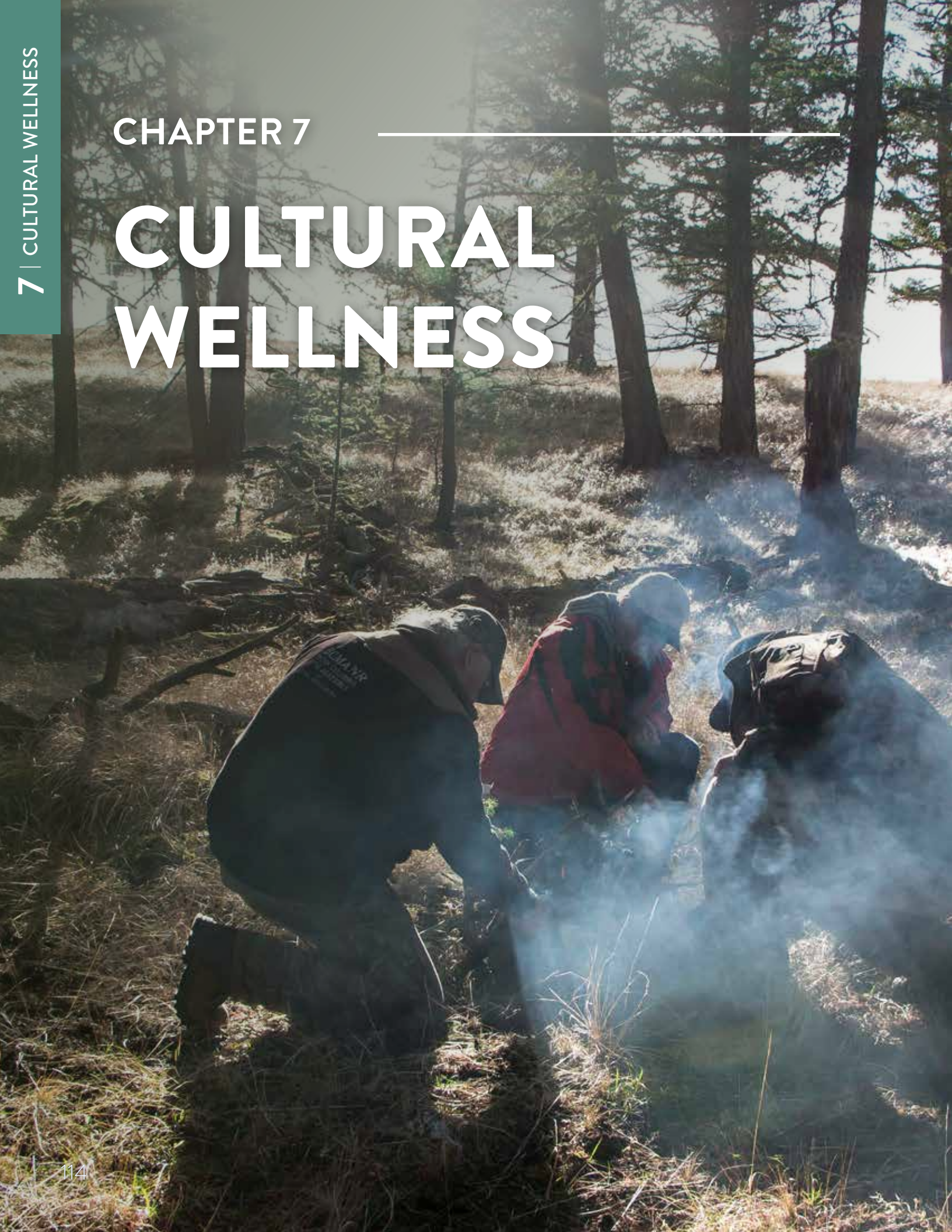
– *Fred J. Shore*, Threads in the Sash: The Story of the Métis People, *2017, p. 43.*

KEY LEARNINGS

- The Métis people today have a clearly defined, democratically elected system of governance that has links to traditional Métis governance systems.
- Métis Chartered Communities provide community connections and support at the local level.
- The Métis Nation is an Aboriginal government and is working towards stronger recognition and support of their inherent right to self-govern their people.
- Greater recognition of Aboriginal rights and reconciliation has led to stronger partnerships between the Métis Nation and all levels of government in Canada.
- Education for Métis people and about Métis people is a high priority for the Métis Nation.

CHAPTER 7

CULTURAL WELLNESS



CHAPTER 7 OVERVIEW

This chapter is intended to help you understand how you can support cultural wellness for Métis people. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe some aspects of what cultural wellness means to Métis people
- Explain why it is important to recognize and acknowledge Métis identity
- Identify ways you can work to create safe and welcoming spaces for Métis people

Introduction

Cultural wellness is a key factor in promoting health and well-being. For many years, the Métis had to hide aspects of their culture and identity in order to stay physically safe, progress economically and be respected in mainstream society. Even today, many Métis people experience that sharing their Métis identity can cause them to be subject to racism and misunderstanding. Cultural wellness is about promoting a world in which Métis people can express and celebrate their identity with pride.

The stories below speak to the importance of cultural wellness and the impact it can have on well-being.

I'm Métis all the time and my identity is woven into everything I do on a daily basis through my perspective and approach. Being well means having access to practices like smudging and communicating with my ancestors; it's being with our people.

∞

As a Métis person, I go to the doctor and the dentist and they'll ask for my status card because of the colour of my skin. When I say I don't have a status card because I'm Métis, they'll give me a blank stare: Métis, what is that?!

We have experienced racism in the health care system for generations. My mother was in the hospital because of kidney troubles, and the doctor told us it was from her drinking, but my mother never drank a drop of alcohol in her life. They just make assumptions because we're Aboriginal and that's very disrespectful.

∞

People look at me (I'm obviously Native) and the first assumption is that we're getting something for nothing. I pay my taxes; I've worked hard all my life. I don't get anything for free, so I want people to be aware of that.

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. Have you ever experienced a situation in which you felt like you had to hide aspects of who you are (for example, your culture, identity or personality) in order to be respected? If so, what did it feel like?

2. How well do you think your place of work includes and acknowledges Métis identity? What could be better?

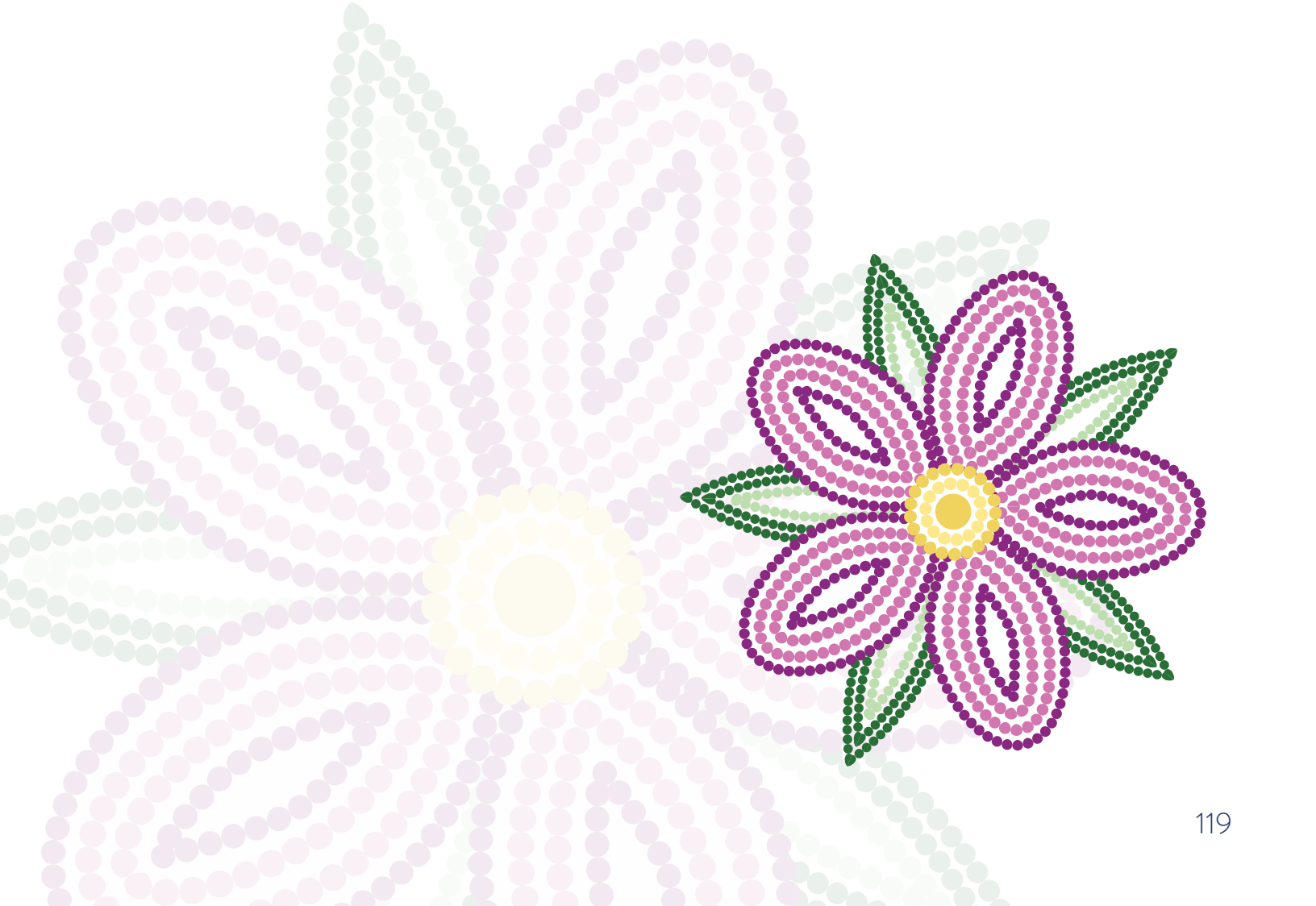
7.1 Cultural Wellness from a Métis Perspective

Understanding what cultural wellness means to Métis people is essential to being responsive to their unique cultural identity. Métis identity must be understood, respected and included in schools, hospitals, the justice system and other institutions and services. A better understanding of Métis identity will contribute to the overall health and well-being of Métis people.

What Is "Cultural Wellness?"

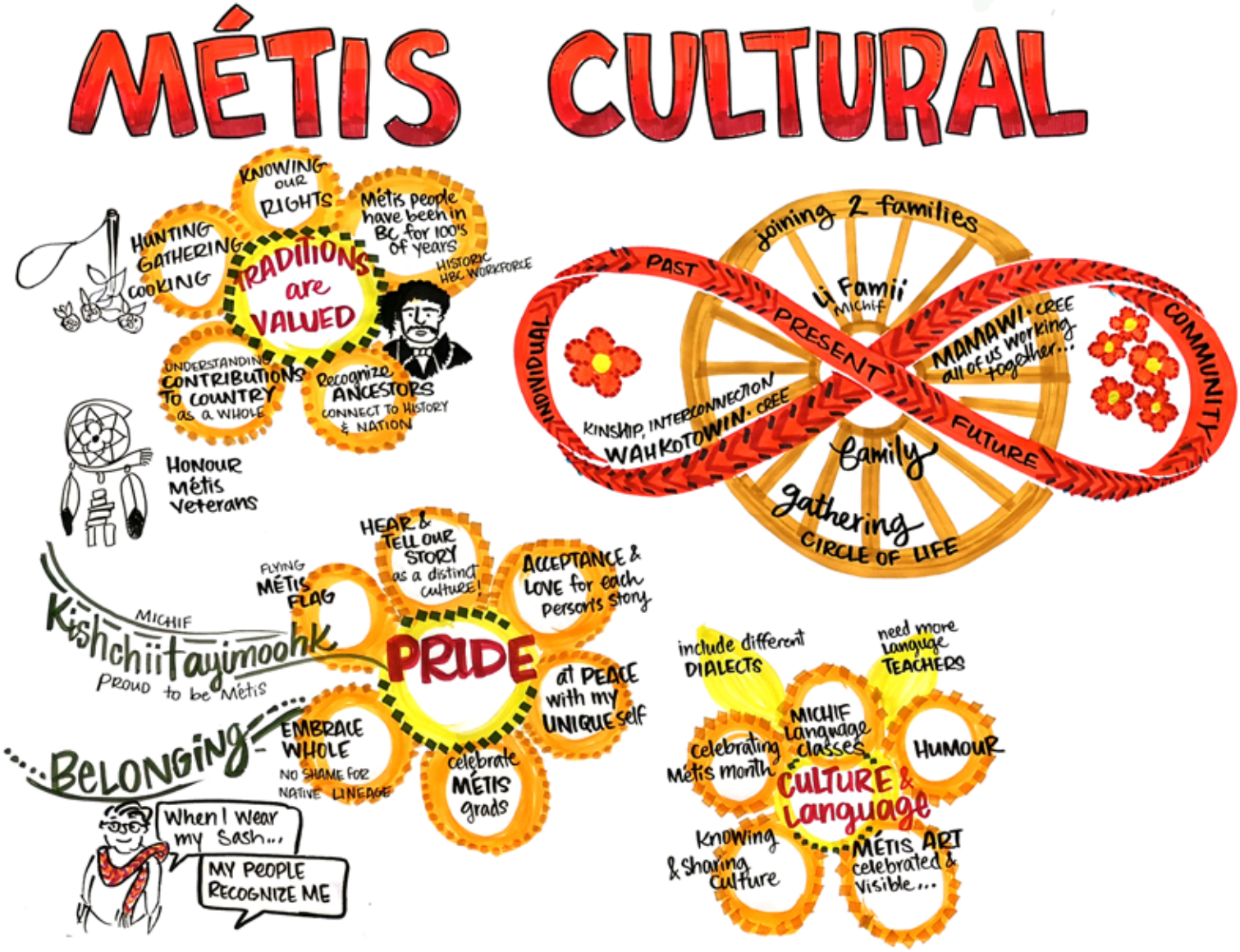
Cultural wellness is about creating a space in which Métis people can be themselves and fully express and embrace their culture. The concept of cultural wellness has parallels to the concept of cultural safety. The San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety program explains cultural safety as being "about fostering a climate where the unique history of Indigenous peoples is recognized and respected in order to provide appropriate care and services in an equitable and safe way, without discrimination." There is growing recognition of the essential role of cultural safety in promoting well-being for Aboriginal people as they access services in education, health care and beyond.

For this resource, we have shifted the focus from the term cultural safety to cultural wellness, in recognition that the term safety can cause triggers for people who have often felt unsafe because of oppression of their identity. The term cultural wellness conveys a feeling of strength and empowerment. It's an invitation to contribute to a community that promotes wellness for all, and it resonates with concepts of healing and self-care.



MNBC has developed the following graphic about cultural wellness. This graphic was informed by input from over 100 Métis Elders and Youth.

The graphic demonstrates that Métis people have a clear idea of what cultural wellness means to them, and how families, communities and society can support cultural wellness.



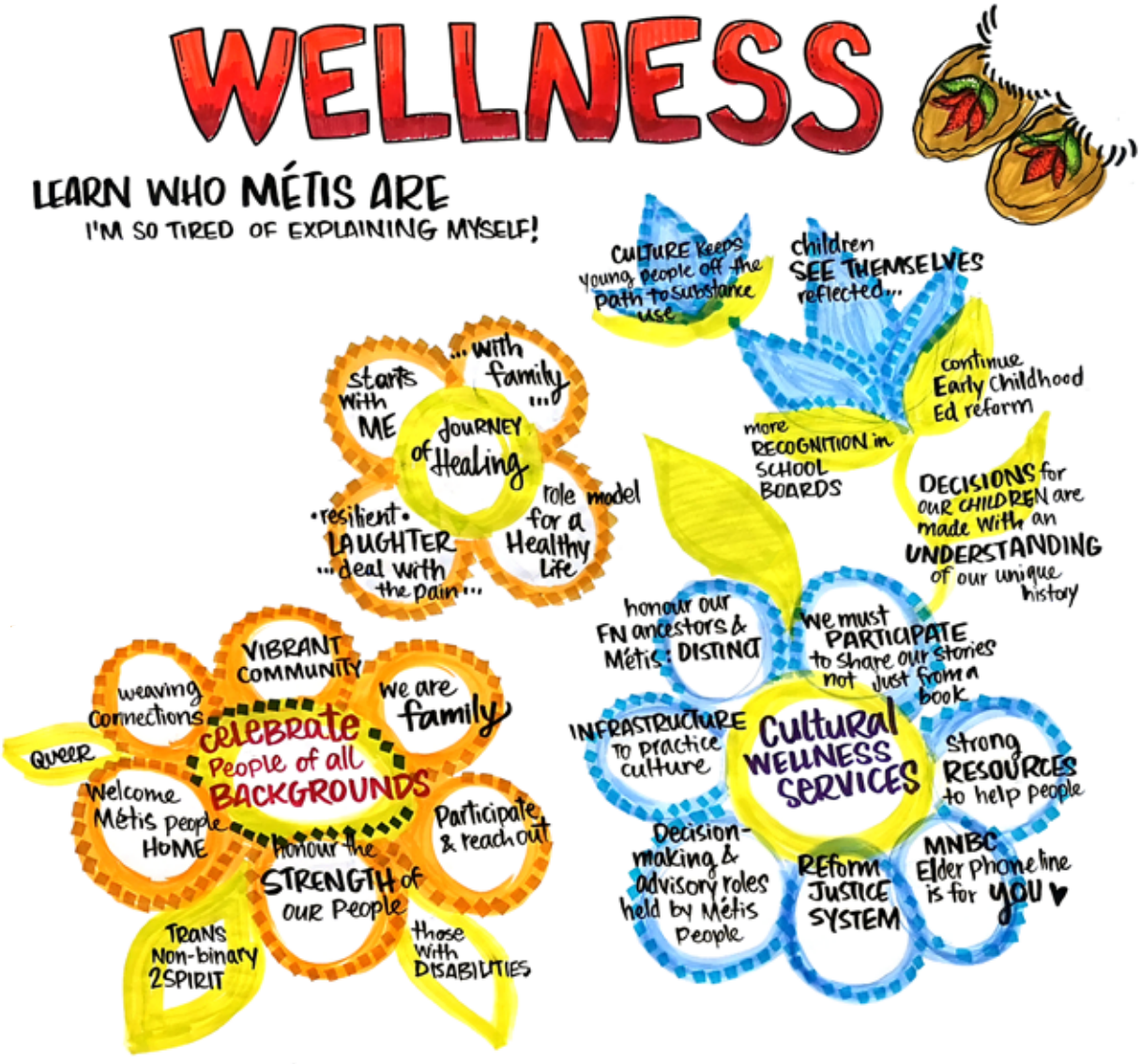


Image created by Drawing Change

Cultural Wellness from a Métis Perspective

MNBC has developed the following description of what cultural wellness means to Métis people and how the general public can support cultural wellness. This statement was based on input from over 100 Métis Elders and Youth.

Cultural wellness is a sense of belonging and pride we feel when we are connected to our Métis families, communities, traditions and the land. It feels like home.

We express cultural wellness by honouring the strength, determination, and traditions of our ancestors. We do this by telling our stories, using the Michif language, being on the land, and practising and passing on traditions such as our music, jigging and art.

Métis culture is a beautiful continuation of the strength and resiliency of our ancestors, the joy of family connection and the passing on of the teachings and traditions of our Elders to future generations.

Cultural wellness fosters balance in physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health for our Métis individuals, families and Communities.

Embracing Métis heritage and culture honours each Métis person's unique story and our distinct identity as Métis people in B.C. today.

How to Promote Cultural Wellness for Métis People

To promote cultural wellness for Métis people, Canadians need to know the history of the Métis experience and recognize our distinct identity. The education system needs to teach everyone about Métis people so that we don't have to explain who we are. We need to see ourselves reflected in the spaces around us, in schools and in hospitals—so that we know we are included and acknowledged as Aboriginal people.

Cultural wellness is promoted when Métis families and communities come together to embrace and practise our culture. Some of us were raised with traditional Métis culture, while others kept their identity hidden in order to stay safe and are now reclaiming their culture later in life. We recognize that each Métis person has their own unique story, but we are all connected through kinship, language, homeland and history.

Working together in reconciliation with non-Aboriginal people and strengthening relationships between First Nations, Métis and Inuit people also contributes to cultural wellness.

Cultural wellness is demonstrated when we are able to walk in the world feeling at ease, being proud of who we are, grounded and confident as Métis people. When we feel safe to share and display our Métis culture and identity, and never feel ashamed or have to justify who we are and where we come from, then we have arrived at cultural wellness.

7.2 Fostering Cultural Wellness

One of the most meaningful things you and your organization can do to support cultural wellness for Métis people is to recognize and acknowledge the distinct identity of Métis people.

When Métis people see their identity being understood, respected and celebrated in society at large, it promotes pride in who they are, self-acceptance and self-love. It demonstrates that regardless of past experience, it is now safe to be themselves as Métis people. This contributes to the well-being of individuals, families and communities.

Impacts of Cultural Wellness

Below are some stories from Metis people about the impacts of having their culture recognized and valued.

I used to work for a company that hired a lot of people who engaged in traditional food harvesting practices in the winter time. That organization was aware of the needs of the community and would give their employees time off to go out on the land to harvest their traditional foods. It showed they really valued the culture, and I thought this was a great example of a workplace supporting cultural wellness.

∞

I don't want to be the angry Native in the class and stand up and say "that's not right!" when a professor or teacher misrepresents Métis identity. So, when it happened, I approached the teacher afterwards and explained how our culture is distinct from First Nations culture. At first she was defensive, but eventually she heard what I was saying and corrected herself during the next class. It was good role modelling for the students; what could have been a conflict turned into a learning experience for the class.

I feel best when I don't have to pretend to be someone I'm not or play some role of who a Métis person is "supposed to be." I'm a Métis person, and it makes me feel well to be true to that, to be confident and accepting of myself.

∞

It's key that our children and community members can walk with their head up and be proud of who they are. This will happen when we're recognized as Indigenous along with the First Nations and Inuit people. Recognizing that our ancestors contributed to this country and we are a distinct people is important to us.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participants

Supporting Cultural Wellness

The table below contains some suggestions for how you can support the recognition and acknowledgement of Métis people.

DO	DON'T
Do your own learning about who the Métis are. This may involve independent research (see recommended reading in Appendix B) and unlearning some of the mistruths you've been told about Métis people.	Rely on stereotypes or make assumptions about Métis people based on their Indigeneity.
If you want to ask a Métis person about their culture, establish consent before asking. For example: "Would it be okay if I ask you some questions about being Métis? I'm interested to learn more if you feel comfortable sharing." Approach relationships with humility and ask thoughtful and empathetic questions.	Assume all Métis people are happy to answer questions about their identity at all times. Sometimes they might be, but sometimes it can be discouraging when people don't understand your identity, and it can be tiring to be asked to explain who you are. If you do have permission to ask questions, ask them gently and with genuine curiosity, rather than drilling people or challenging them on their answers.
Treat Métis people with respect. Act in anti-racist ways by stopping racism and other forms of oppression towards Métis people.	Use dated or offensive terms such as *half-breed*.
Make sure to include Métis people in Aboriginal events and practices (for example, "Aboriginal graduation" or consultation sessions with Aboriginal peoples). In these events, recognize Métis people for who they are: Métis.	Forget to include Métis people or lump them in with First Nations people. Métis people want to be included in Aboriginal events and practices, but they are not First Nations, and they want to be recognized for their distinct Métis identity.
Ensure your place of work has artwork, posters and symbols that represent Métis identity.	Include local First Nations art, but not Métis art.
Recognize that a Métis person is 100% Métis, not part White and part First Nations.	Ask Métis people how Aboriginal they are. This is based on the incorrect and racist assumption that race rather than nationhood defines Métis people.
Connect with your local Métis Chartered Community and see if there are areas where you can collaborate, contribute and build mutually beneficial relationships.	Request input, training or advice from Métis Chartered Communities or Métis colleagues without establishing rapport and consent first.
Share your knowledge of the Métis.	Ignore misunderstandings or lack of knowledge about Métis people.
Acknowledge the presence of Métis people when doing a territorial acknowledgement (see examples on the following page).	Consistently acknowledge the presence and importance of First Nations people but not Métis.

Public Acknowledgement of Métis People

Métis people have shared some specific examples of actions taken by schools, hospitals or governments that have supported cultural wellness. Some of these include the following:

- A city publicly recognizing Métis people at community events
- Métis art being put up in public buildings such as hospitals and schools
- Métis Elders being included with First Nations Elders at events such as graduation ceremonies
- Police or social service organizations connecting Métis Citizens with Métis supports through local Métis Chartered Communities
- Updating curriculum in schools to more accurately reflect Métis people

Example of Including Métis When Acknowledging Traditional Territories

We acknowledge that we live, work and play on traditional territory of the [Local First Nations]. We also acknowledge that [CITY] is home to the [local Métis Chartered Community].

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What resonated with you when reading the Métis statement on cultural wellness or viewing the graphic about cultural wellness? Choose one line or image and reflect on how it impacted you.
2. What surprised you in learning about Métis people's experiences with sharing their identity?
3. How does recognition and acknowledgement of Métis identity contribute to cultural wellness?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Now that you know about who the Métis people are and their unique identity, you can take action to support cultural wellness for Métis people. Try one of the following activities:

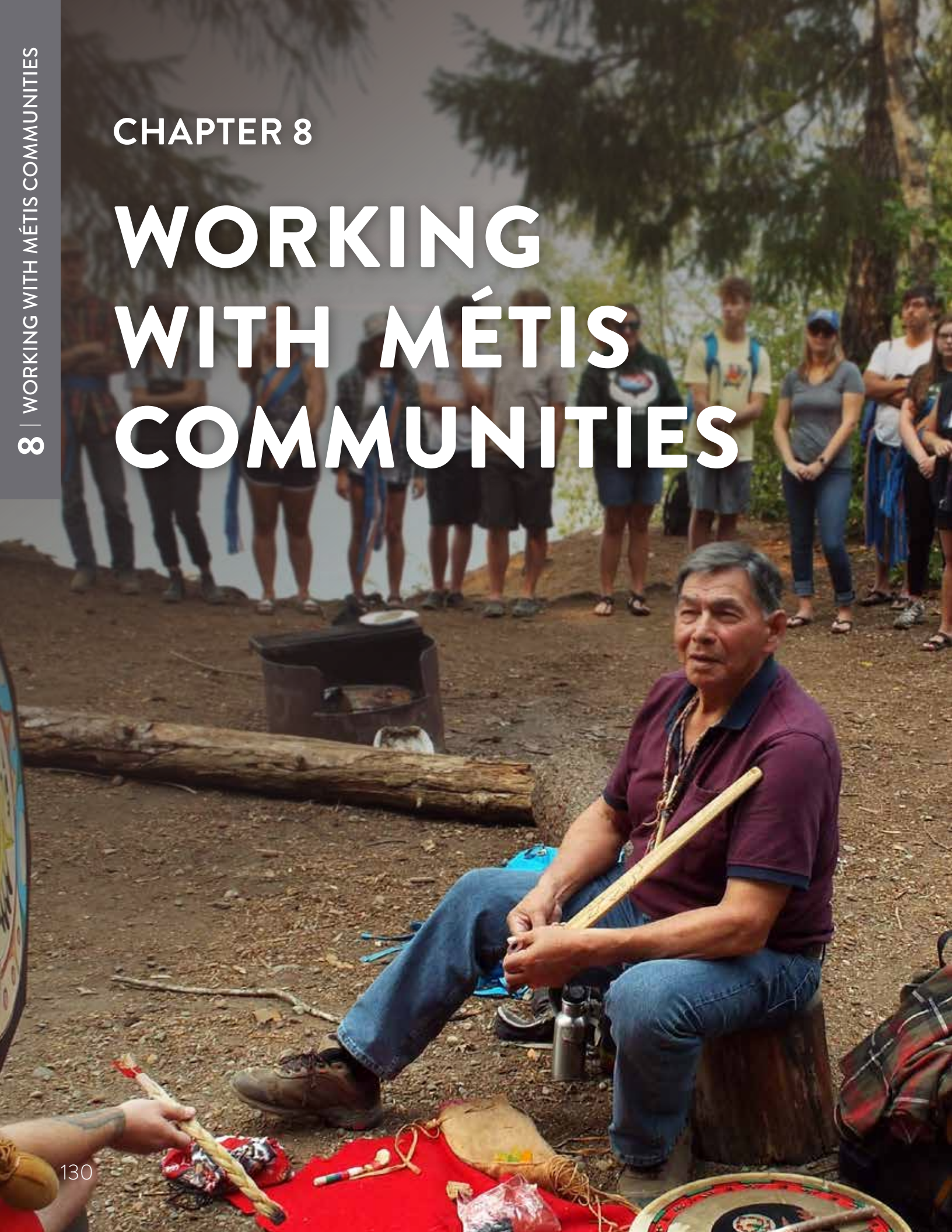
- Brainstorm a list of ways that your workplace could acknowledge and support the understanding of Métis identity.
- Take one concrete action to promote change in your place of work or community.
- Arrange an opportunity for your colleagues or community members to learn more about Métis people.
- Use a land acknowledgment that is inclusive of the Métis.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Cultural wellness is critical to the health and well-being of Métis people.
- Acknowledging and including Métis identity promotes healing, self-acceptance and pride for Métis people.
- Learning about Métis identity is the first step to supporting cultural wellness for Métis people.
- Sharing your knowledge about Métis people can promote healing, reconciliation and healthy communities for all.

CHAPTER 8

WORKING WITH MÉTIS COMMUNITIES



CHAPTER 8 OVERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to empower you to connect and collaborate with Métis communities respectfully. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain why it is important to involve Métis people in making decisions that impact them
- Identify your closest Métis Chartered Community
- Understand how to connect with a Métis Elder and/or community member

Introduction

Most people like to be included in making decisions that impact their lives. Métis people want to have a voice in their health care, education and local governments. However, many organizations do not know how to engage with Métis people or how to connect with Métis Chartered Communities, or perhaps they do not even recognize that Métis people live in their community. In this chapter, you will learn about how to work respectfully and effectively with Métis people in your community.

> The student group at the university used to be called the First Nations Student Association and wasn't inclusive of Métis students. First Nations Elders were invited to events and recognized, but as Métis Elders we weren't. Our niece received an award at the university, and she invited us to be present as her Métis Elders. When the university saw us there, faculty members said, "We're glad you're here!" They recognized that it was important to have Métis representation for the Métis students. Now, Métis Elders are being invited to the awards ceremonies and are acknowledged as Métis Elders.
>
> – *Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. Has your place of work ever held an engagement or public consultation session? If so, were representatives of the Métis Community invited?
2. What do you think would be the most respectful way to invite Métis people to participate in your place of work (for example, as presenters, to provide input from a Métis perspective, or to collaborate on a project)? What past practices have you seen that worked well?

8.1 Connecting with Métis Chartered Communities

Many people feel nervous about approaching Aboriginal communities. The fact is, colonial policies intentionally separated non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities for years by pushing Aboriginal people out of areas where non-Aboriginal people wanted to live.

As a result, there may be mistrust or fear from both sides in a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. There is a long history behind these feelings and experiences. However, as Chief Justice Murray Sinclair wrote in the *TRC Final Report*, "Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem—it involves all of us." Everyone has a role to play in advancing reconciliation by building positive relationships with Métis people.

Reaching out takes courage and initiative, but it is important to do so because Métis people deserve to be fully included in Canadian society. If you are new to connecting with Aboriginal communities, keep in mind that you may make mistakes at first, but if you demonstrate cultural humility and are willing to learn from your mistakes and address the gaps in your learning about Métis people, your actions will likely be well received.

An excellent place to start is by connecting with your local Métis Chartered Community. There are 38 Métis Chartered Communities in B.C., so chances are there is one close to you. To find out about the Métis Chartered Communities in your region, you can visit the MNBC website.

If you want to build a relationship with your local Métis Chartered Community, here are some things to remember:

- Métis Chartered Communities generally hold events such as potlucks and gatherings that are open to the public. A great way to initiate relationships is to visit one of these events.
- An increasing focus on reconciliation has meant that many groups and organizations want to learn about and engage with Aboriginal people, including the Métis. This is a good thing! However, remember that relationships that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal are the most powerful. If you are inviting a Métis person to participate in a process, think about how their involvement may also help them to meet their community's goals.
- Métis Chartered Communities are generally volunteer-run. Do not assume that they have the capacity to engage with you—they likely have limited time and resources and need to be selective about where they engage. Nevertheless, even if they choose not to engage, it is better that you invite them to participate.

Tips for Building Relationships with Métis Communities

- Be humble and open to learning.
- Think long-term, not short-term/ transactional.
- Take time getting to know each other and maintaining a relationship.
- Be trustworthy—follow through on what you commit to.
- Participate in the community—build relationships outside of "work."
- For a first visit, meet in person and bring a small gift and food to share to show your appreciation.
- Provide compensation for participation, such as honoraria.

Working with Elders

Métis culture reveres Elders as leaders and educators. Not everyone who is old is an Elder—an Elder is someone who has earned the respect of the community. Elders frequently play the role of Knowledge Keepers, advisors and teachers.

While the word *Elder* is commonly used, this terminology stems from European languages. Aboriginal languages have their own terminology for *Elder*, which often translates as "Old One" or "Knowledge Keeper." For example, in Michif Elders might be referred to as *lii vyeu pii pii vyeey*– the old men and women.

> An Elder is someone who's earned the respect of a community. Someone that the community looks to for direction and sees as a role model. They are seen in the community and are there to help the community. You never hear people refer to themselves as an Elder—it's always the community that does that.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

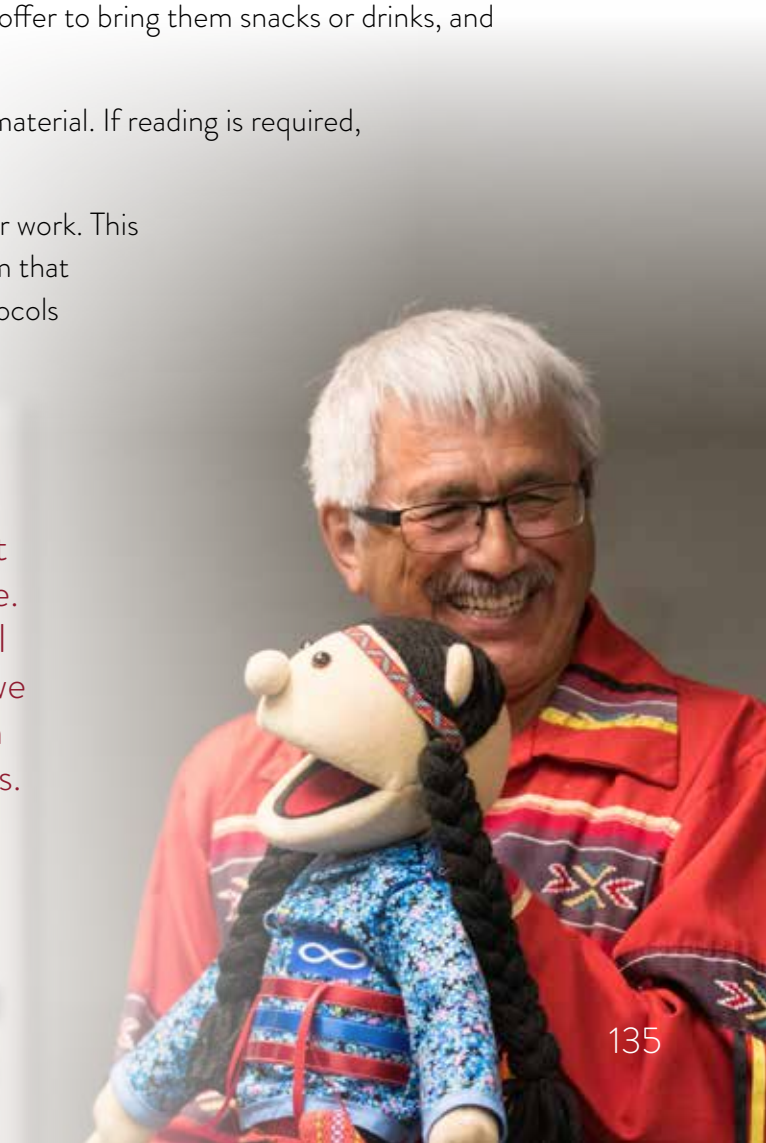
Many Métis Elders in B.C. communities spend time teaching about Métis identity in schools and other organizations. Working with Elders can be highly rewarding. Not only do they bring expertise in Traditional Knowledge, but Elders often bring a certain energy to an interaction that impacts people's mindsets. Elders remind us of the larger picture and the moral and communal reasons for the work that we do together. Elders can also bring a sense of spirituality, laughter and connection.

If you would like to connect with a Métis Elder to seek guidance or advice, or to provide a learning opportunity within your community or place of work, here are some tips to remember. These tips are adapted from the BCcampus publication, "Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers" (2018):

- Be clear on the Elder's role and prepare them by providing background information. Communicate how long you will need the Elder's service and the compensation that will you will provide.
- Take every effort to ensure the Elder's physical and emotional comfort.
- Provide nourishing food. Be aware of any dietary needs in advance.
- When sharing food, always make sure to serve Elders first. Unless they prefer to serve themselves, it is customary that someone else bring an Elder their requested food and drink. You should check in with Elders regularly and offer to bring them snacks or drinks, and check on their comfort.
- Do not expect Elders to read a lot of textual material. If reading is required, supply large print versions.
- Elders should always be compensated for their work. This is a way of recognizing the value of the wisdom that Elders share and accords with traditional protocols around honouring the role of Elders in the community. This should be budgeted for.

For me, being a Métis Elder is about being healthy as much as I can be. I want to be a role model to the younger people. Before I was ready to become an Elder, I had to go through a long journey. Now we have to help our young people engage in their own journeys of health and wellness.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant



Tips on Gifting and Honoraria

- Elders are typically provided with an honoraria for cultural work or advice. Check with your local Métis Chartered Community to determine an appropriate amount.
- An honoraria is not considered a "payment for services" but rather is a modern way of showing reciprocity that aligns with traditional values.
- Most Elders receive retirement benefits and are only allowed to earn a small amount of money, after which point their pensions may be reduced or they may have to pay unexpected taxes. Make sure Elders are aware of this and develop a compensation approach that will not cause financial harm. In some cases, gift cards are preferred to cash honoraria. Another option is to increase the honoraria to include taxes. As always, the best thing to do is ask the Elder.
- If there is any instance where Elders are required to give their social insurance number, this should be communicated and agreed upon prior to the event.
- Small physical gifts are often given in addition to honoraria. These could include food, cards, small items such as a mug or piece of artwork, or traditional medicines. If you don't know what to give, you can always ask the Elder in advance what they like.

The knowledge that Elders share with us is not just a gift, it's something you carry for a whole lifetime. It changes your life. You have to be careful when you approach an Elder or Knowledge Keeper for teachings. It's up to you to have integrity and be prepared for a reciprocal relationship. We have to make sure we're not taking advantage of Elders—always recognize where you received the knowledge from. I take care of the Elders for the time that I'm with them—grocery shopping, cooking dinner, etc. And that relationship continues; you don't take their knowledge and then leave when you got what you needed.

– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant

8.2 Supporting Métis People in the Health-Care System

Health authorities across the province are beginning to recognize the importance of providing culturally safe and responsive care and services to Métis people. Letters of Understanding have been signed between MNBC and Interior Health, Island Health, Fraser Health and Northern Health Authority as of November 2020. The following tips have been compiled to assist health-care providers in supporting the cultural wellness of Métis patients:

- **Find out the person's healing and care needs** – Ask the patient about their healing and care preferences. Métis people are united through shared history, culture, lineage and identity. However, the cultural and spiritual values and practices of Métis people are diverse. Allowing each person to decide what is relevant for them is a way of enabling autonomy.
- **Seek culturally based support if desired** – Most health authorities have Aboriginal patient liaisons, nurses, social workers, Elders or Cultural Advisors available to provide culturally based support to Aboriginal patients. There may also be people within the community whom the patient would like to connect with for spiritual or cultural support.
- **Create a welcoming space for cultural ceremony** – Cultural ceremonies or practices may be an important aspect of healing and care for your patient. If requested by the patient, it is important that you allow time and show respect for these cultural practices. If certain traditional or spiritual practices cannot be accommodated, explain the reasons in a sensitive manner and discuss alternative options.
- **Understand the kinship structure of Métis families** – Métis family structure is based on a kinship system (see Chapter 5) and may not fit within Euro-Canadian expectations about family structure. It is important to take into account the patient's family structure and needs, and let them define who their family is. This is particularly important in terms of hospital policies around visitation. Working with the patient and their family to ensure their needs are being heard and respected can take a bit of effort, but ultimately this will create positive impacts for the Métis patient and their family.

You can connect with your MNBC regional health coordinator at health@mnbc.ca to learn more about existing policies and resources available to support Métis patients.

8.3 Supporting Métis Inclusion in the Education System

Until recently, authentic learning about the Métis has generally been absent in the K–12 and post-secondary education systems, or what was present was often inaccurate, stereotypical and racist. This absence and misrepresentation has led to a lack of accurate knowledge about the Métis amongst the general public and a feeling amongst Métis people that school curricula do not represent them.

> It's important that the curriculum and education in the school system are improved, because we know it hasn't been good enough. We need to see Métis people sharing about Métis people, not just the students reading about us in a book.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

In B.C., the revised K–12 curriculum introduced in 2016 encourages teachers to include more content on Métis people. Many post-secondary institutions are working to "Indigenize" their curricula, and this had led to varying levels of increased awareness about Métis people. Change is happening, but it's moving slowly because many educators do not know much about the Métis or where to start.

What Is Cultural Appropriation?

Cultural appropriation can be understood as using intellectual property, Traditional Knowledge, cultural expressions or artifacts from someone's culture without permission.

It is most likely to be harmful when the source culture is a group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways (as with Aboriginal peoples), or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive or sacred.

Using resources that are developed by Métis people and working in partnership with Métis people can help you to avoid cultural appropriation.

One of the key principles for educators to keep in mind is that Métis people should be involved in bringing Métis content and knowledge into the curriculum and in making decisions about Métis education. Aboriginal people often share the advice, "Nothing about us without us." If possible, involve Métis people in the curriculum changes you are planning—both in developing and delivering the learning. Many Métis Chartered Communities have volunteers who are happy to help with the inclusion of Métis content in the curriculum.

> My granddaughter came home from school one day and said, "Not everyone likes Métis." Now she's older and is finding her voice as a Métis person. We can't tolerate any Aboriginal student not feeling safe to be who they are in the classroom. Our efforts to create safety in the classroom benefit all students.
>
> *– Cultural Wellness Sharing Circle Participant*

If you are in a position to promote inclusion of Métis people in the education system, here are some things to consider:

- Do your own learning first, so you do not perpetuate myths and stereotypes.
- Remember that learning about Métis people is for the benefit of all students—not just those who identify as Métis.
- Include Métis content throughout the year—not just in a special one-off lesson.
- Be careful not to lump learning about Métis people in with Aboriginal people in general—it is important to recognize that the Métis are a distinct Nation with a history and culture that is different from First Nations.
- Use learning resources that are developed by Métis people. You can access some free resources on the MNBC website. There are also many great resources available for purchase through the Gabriel Dumont Institute. Your local library or Métis Chartered Community may also have resources that you can borrow. You can also share information from this resource.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

1. What questions do you have about connecting with your local Métis Chartered Community? Where could you go to answer these questions?
2. What do you think would be the benefits for your organization to engage with Métis communities? What would be the benefits for Métis communities to engage with your organization?

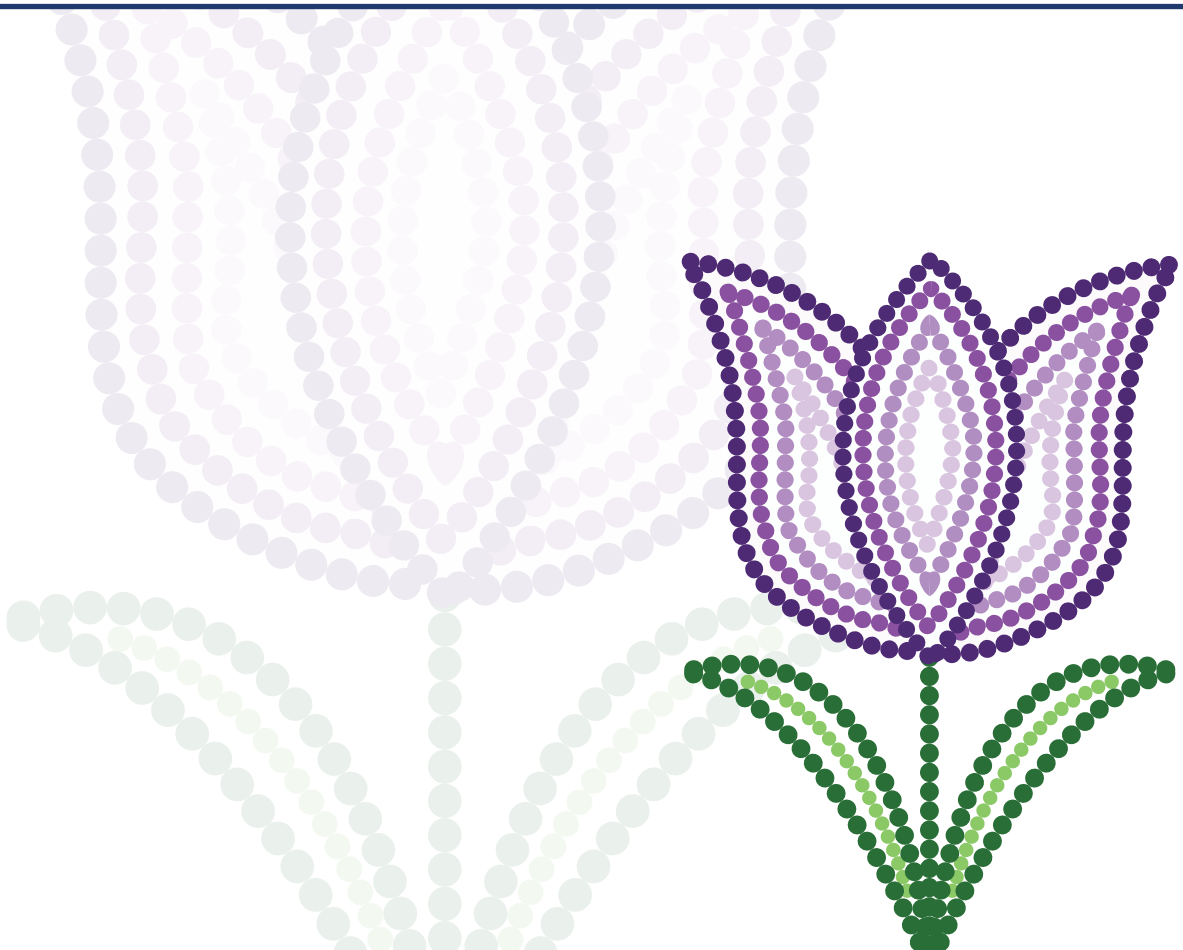
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, you learned about the importance of including Métis people. You can act on your knowledge in the following ways:

- Write a list of the reasons why it is important to include Métis communities in your place of work and share the list with a colleague or supervisor.
- Research the local Métis Chartered Community in your area and attend a community gathering to build relationships.
- Invite a representative from the Métis Chartered Community to participate in a relevant event at your workplace.

KEY LEARNINGS

- It is important to include Métis people in decision-making processes, education and Aboriginal-focused events.
- You can connect with Métis people through the Métis Chartered Community in your area.
- Be respectful and intentional when building a relationship with Métis communities. You may be afraid of making mistakes, but you will be more likely to build positive relationships if you stay humble and open to learning.
- Working with Métis Elders can be an enriching experience. Follow tips for working with Elders and be respectful of the Elders' time and comfort.
- A health-care system that is responsive to the unique needs of Métis people can promote health and healing for Métis patients.
- Including Métis content in the education system in authentic and respectful ways promotes cultural wellness for Métis students and helps to address Canadians' general lack of knowledge about Métis people.



Conclusion

The Métis Nation was born from strong relationships that wove together different ways of life to create a distinct culture and a resilient people.

The Métis have a vibrant and complex history. Many Métis ancestors have played key roles in the development of Canada. Yet, throughout history, Métis people have experienced racism and colonization, and have not always been treated fairly. By learning about Métis history and culture, we can work towards healing from past injustices, and we can see that we each have a relationship to the Métis through the creation of Canada.

Métis culture represents the creativity, resourcefulness and humour of the Métis people. Each bead sewn on Métis beadwork is a testament to the important ways that Métis individuals honour the land, their families and Métis communities. Every thread in the Métis sash shares a value that highlights the ways Métis people have survived despite the challenges they have faced. The Michif language holds the distinct Métis way of seeing the world with kindness and generosity. Métis ancestors teach us about integrity and loyalty to where we come from.

Métis cultural wellness is a sense of belonging and a feeling of home for a Métis person. It is achieved by recognizing Métis identity and culture as well as by honouring each Métis person's individual story and autonomy. When Métis people feel seen and safe in their everyday lives, it contributes greatly to their health and well-being.

This learning resource is just the beginning. As you continue your journey, take the time to share your learnings with others, ask questions and deepen your understanding. Appendix B contains some recommended resources for further learning.

As you complete this learning resource, we invite you to reflect on how you may nourish cultural wellness in your own life by embodying your values and reflecting on where you come from, where you are now and where you are going.

APPENDIX A: Frequently Asked Questions about Métis People

Is anyone of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage Métis?

No. Métis people are part of a specific Nation and culture, so *Métis* is not a general term for any person of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage. To be a Citizen of the Métis Nation, you must demonstrate that you:

- Self-identify as Métis
- Are distinct from other Aboriginal peoples
- Are of historic Métis ancestry
- Are accepted by the Métis Nation

How do you know if someone is Métis?

You cannot tell by how a person looks, dresses or acts if they are Métis. You know a person is Métis if they tell you they are Métis.

How Métis are you?

All Métis people are 100% Métis. The idea that the percentage of First Nations identity defines a Métis person originates from the concept of "blood quantum," which was imposed on First Nations people through the Indian Act and is grounded in a racialized view of identity. Métis people do not use blood quantum definitions of identity for their Citizens.

Are Métis people Aboriginal?

Yes. Métis people are one of the Aboriginal groups recognized in the Canadian Constitution: Indian (now known as First Nations), Métis and Inuit.

Do Métis people pay taxes?

Yes. Métis people do not have any tax exemptions.

Do Métis people have reserves?

Métis people do not have reserves. However, eight Métis Settlements in Alberta were established in 1938 with the passing of the Métis Betterment Act. The intention of this act was to secure a land base for future generations and to support self-governance and economic well-being. These are the only Métis land bases recognized by the Canadian government.

Do Métis people have treaties?

Not in the same way as First Nations. Most Métis people were guaranteed a right to maintain their lands and property in the Manitoba Act of 1870 and through the accompanying "Half-breed Claims Commissions" established throughout the Métis homeland; however, in practice this right was not respected and Métis people were dispossessed of their homelands (see Chapter 3 for more information). However, Métis people do have treaties and alliances with First Nations.

Did Métis people go to residential schools?

Yes, some did. The Métis experience with residential schools varies. Some Métis children attended residential and Indian day schools, where many endured physical, emotional and sexual abuse and were made to feel ashamed of their language and culture. Other residential and day schools refused to take Métis children, as they did not have Indian status, while sometimes public schools refused to take them because they were Aboriginal. Although Métis people were sent to residential schools, the Canadian government did not offer them the compensation provided to First Nations residential school survivors.

Do Métis people have status?

Métis citizenship is not a form of Indian status. The Métis National Council's five provincial governing members maintain and are responsible for their respective Métis citizenship registries. Registered Métis Citizens hold a citizenship card. This card is not a status card, and it does not entitle them to the same rights as status Indians.

What rights do Métis people have as Aboriginal people?

Métis rights include rights to practise Métis culture, such as harvesting, language, religion and law. The Canadian Constitution recognizes the rights of Métis people but does not define what they are. Métis people have used political and judicial means to assert their rights. Métis people have the legal right to define citizenship and to protect the integrity of citizenship. The Métis people assert a right to self-governance, but colonial governments have not always acknowledged this right.

Do Métis people contribute to the economy?

Métis people have contributed to the economy in fundamental ways since their origins. The Métis played a critical role in the fur trade, which was the dominant economy in early Canada. Throughout their history, Métis played prominent roles as farmers, traders, explorers, entrepreneurs, politicians and more. Métis people today may experience disproportionate socio-economic challenges as a result of colonial policies and the loss of their lands. However Métis people participate in the economy through a wide variety of professions and are proud of the entrepreneurial and hardworking spirit of their people.

Do Métis people have a language?

The Métis Nation has recognized Michif as the national Métis language. It is a unique language that developed as the Métis people became a Nation. Michif has Cree verbs and French nouns, but it is distinct from both French and Cree. Some Métis people have unique connections to other Aboriginal languages due to their heritage or community, such as Cree or Bungi.

Do Métis people prefer to be called Aboriginal or Indigenous?

Métis people generally prefer to be called Métis. Using terminology like "First Nations, Métis and Inuit" is preferred because it specifically mentions the Métis. However, as a general term, *Aboriginal* has the advantage of demonstrating a clear linkage to the Canadian Constitution, while the term *Indigenous* is more common in an international context. For more information, please see Section 1.4 of this document (Key Language).

Do Métis people receive any health benefits like non-insurable health benefits?

No, Métis people do not receive any health benefits as a result of being Métis. They are not eligible for the non-insurable health benefits Inuit and status First Nations people receive.

Do Métis people have hunting and harvesting rights?

Yes, but these rights are not fully protected by Canadian law. In R. v. Powley (2003), the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that section 35 of the Canadian Constitution protects Métis hunting rights, but the decision creates a test that may be difficult to meet, even when people have legitimate claims.

What is Métis cultural wellness?

Cultural wellness is about creating a space in which Métis people can be themselves and fully express their culture, without discrimination. MNBC has developed the following statement about what cultural wellness means to Métis people:

> *Cultural wellness is a sense of belonging and pride we feel when we are connected to our Métis families, Communities, traditions and the land. It feels like home.*
>
> *We express cultural wellness by honouring the strength, determination, and traditions of our ancestors*
>
> *We do this by telling our stories, using the Michif language, being on the land, and practising and passing on traditions such as our music, jigging and art.*
>
> *Métis culture is a beautiful continuation of the strength and resiliency of our ancestors, the joy of family connection and the passing on of the teachings and traditions of our Elders to future generations.*
>
> *Cultural wellness fosters balance in physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health for our Métis individuals, families and Communities.*
>
> *Embracing Métis heritage and culture honours each Métis person's unique story and our distinct identity as Métis people in B.C. today.*

How can I support cultural wellness for Métis people?

Understanding who the Métis are and having an awareness of their unique history and culture is one important way to support cultural wellness for Métis people. Other actions you can take include the following:

- Sharing your knowledge about the Métis with friends, family and colleagues
- Making sure Métis people are included in initiatives related to Aboriginal people
- Acknowledging the presence of Métis people in your location
- Including representations of Métis culture in public spaces
- Continuing your learning about the Métis

For more information on promoting cultural wellness in specific sectors, review Chapters 7 and 8.

APPENDIX B: Reading List of Books by Métis Authors

Fiction and Poetry

For Adults

***In Search of April Raintree*, by Beatrice Mosionier (1983)**

- A story that follows two young Métis sisters as they learn and navigate the complexities of their Métis identity

***The Empire Wild*, by Cherie Dimaline (2019)**

- A novel with a tragic love story, inspired by the Métis story of the Rogarou, a creature that haunts the roads and woods of Métis communities

***The Marrow Thieves*, by Cherie Dimaline (2017)**

- A novel depicting a dystopian future in which Indigenous people are targeted for their bone marrow

***A Really Good Brown Girl*, by Marilyn Dumont (1996)**

- A collection of poetry about connecting to one's Métis heritage and the challenges of navigating Métis identity within society

***North End Love Songs*, by Katherena Vermette (2012)**

- A collection of poems illustrating the complex realities of Winnipeg's North End

For Children

***The Road Allowance Kitten*, by Wilfred Burton and Norman Fleury (2015)**

- An illustrated book in Michif and English based on the real history of Métis who lived along the road allowance in western provinces

***Métis Spirits*, by Deborah Delaronde (2006)**

- A book of short stories that highlights components of Métis culture, history and contribution to Canada through a supernatural adventure

***A Name for a Métis*, by Deborah Delaronde (2015)**

- A humorous story of a boy who wants a traditional name

***The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Métis Story*, by Leah Dorian (2009)**

- A story of Métis culture and family that shares Métis values and community perspectives

***Li Saennchur Fleshii di Michif: Thomas and the Métis Sash*, by Bonnie Murray, Sheldon Dawson & Rita Flamand (2015)**

- A story of a boy whose mother shares the history of the Métis sash and its meaning today

***A Girl Called Echo*, by Katherena Vermette (2017)**

- A graphic novel following a 13-year-old Métis girl who travels back in time to the places of her ancestors

Non-Fiction

***"Métis" - Race, Recognition and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, by Chris Andersen (2014)**

- A critical analysis of Métis history and identity in Canada and the ways we interpret the word *Métis*

***Half-Breed*, by Maria Campbell (1973)**

- A personal account of growing up Métis

***Stories of the Road Allowance People*, by Maria Campbell (2010)**

- A collection of traditional Michif stories that gives voice to Métis Elders and informs understandings about Michif worldview

***The Métis in British Columbia: From Fur Trade Outposts to Colony*, by George and Terry Goulet (2008)**

- A history of some of B.C.'s prominent early Métis Citizens

***Métis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People*, by Michel Hogue (2015)**

- An account of Métis history and how Métis people have been affected by divisive colonial politics and the establishment of borders

***Threads in the Sash: The Story of the Métis People*, by Fred J. Shore (2017)**

- A concise and accessible history of the Métis people from their origins to today

***The North-West is Our Mother*, by Jean Teillet (2019)**

- Written by the great-grandniece of Louis Riel, a popular and engaging history of the "Forgotten People" up to the present era

***A People on the Move: The Métis of the Western Plains*, by Irene Ternier Gordon (2009)**

- A history of Métis life in what is now known as Saskatchewan and Alberta, with information drawn from journals and contemporary sources

***From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way*, by Jessie Thistle (2019)**

- A memoir about a Métis man who overcame poverty and drug addiction and found his way back into the circle of his Métis culture and family

Video

MNBC Videos

- On the MNBC website, there are a number of videos under the link Press Video Gallery. These include *The Forgotten Ones—Voices of the Métis in B.C.*, *The Political Evolution of the Métis Nation*, *Terry Fox—Métis Family Video* and a documentary on the Métis Community of Moccasin Flats in northern B.C.

Frontier

- A fictional Canadian historical television series chronicling the North American fur trade in the late 1700s through the lens of a part Cree and part Irish outlaw. Recommended for mature audiences.

Métis: How'd You Do That?

- This short comedic video series by Flatland Comedy, available on YouTube, is a humorous take on Métis identity.

APPENDIX C: Learning Circles Facilitator's Guide

This learning resource can be used independently or with a group. In this section, we provide suggestions for how to facilitate group-led learning circles using this resource.

Group-led learning circles can operate somewhat like a book group or discussion circle. Participants can read sections of the resource independently and then come together to debrief, deepen and apply their learning. The Questions for Reflection, Building on Prior Knowledge, and Test Your Knowledge activities can be used as discussion prompts.

In this approach, responsibility for the learning and leadership of the group is shared between learners. You may choose to form a group with co-workers, community members, family or others. You do not require an instructor for this approach, but someone needs to step into a leadership role to facilitate the conversation using the reflection questions and to coordinate the group's meetings.

These learning circles can be used to do the following:

- Empower learners (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to connect with their ancestors and histories
- Support the unlearning of harmful narratives and stereotypes of Métis people and their history
- Create opportunities to reflect on your values, where you have been and where you would like to go in the future
- Prepare learners to work in a respectful and supportive way with Métis people in their professions

Preparing for Your Circle

Understanding our place in a community makes learning relevant and helps us understand our power to create positive change. Take the following steps before embarking on learning circles:

- Review the introduction chapter.
- Consider your own positionality: Where are you from? What is your identity? How have you experienced privilege or oppression? Who are your ancestors? How does who you are affect how you walk through the world?
- Reflect on how your identity influences the way you navigate society. For example: Do you feel seen when you go to the doctor? Can you access your traditional foods at a restaurant or supermarket?
- In the place where you meet, what do you know about the First Nations and Métis people in the area? For example: Is there a Métis Chartered Community in your area? Who are the local First Nations people?
- Envision how you may be able to share these learnings on Métis culture within your own community and advocate for greater recognition of Métis people.

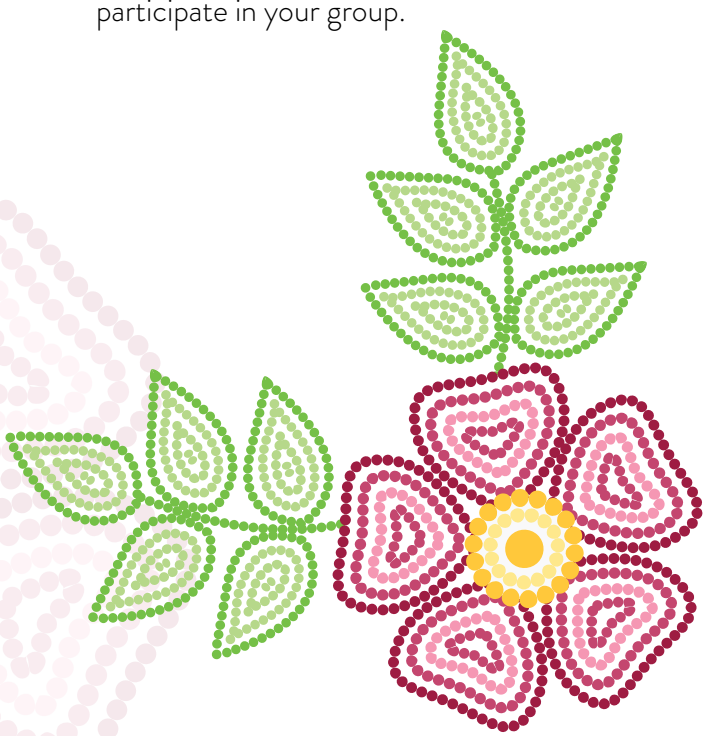
Planning Your Learning Circle

Follow Protocols

- Share a territory acknowledgement at the beginning of every learning circle, including acknowledgement of local First Nations and your local Métis Chartered Community.
- Connect with the local Métis Chartered Community and let them know you are engaging in this learning.
- Seek out the participation and guidance of Métis Elders.
- Engage in learning about local First Nations and Métis protocols.
- Reach out to a Knowledge Keeper who can provide guidance about how to conduct your learning circle in alignment with Métis values.

Logistics

- Locate a meeting place.
    - Circles could rotate each session through a different learner's home.
    - Alternatively, you could book a suitable space like a room at the local library, community centre or co-working space.
- Organize refreshments.
    - Sharing food while learning is a traditional Aboriginal value. As such, the group may decide to coordinate a weekly potluck for the learning circle or designate a different person to bring snacks each week.
- Decide on a schedule.
    - Will your learning circle meet weekly, bi-weekly, monthly?
    - How much of the guide will your group discuss each meeting? One chapter? Two chapters?
- Agree on communication.
    - Ensure that learners are aware of the meeting details in advance.
    - Create an accessible way for the group to communicate (email, message group, etc.).
- Include Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
    - You may want to invite a Métis Elder or Knowledge Keeper to share in one of your sessions. Provide an honorarium and follow the guidelines suggested in Chapter 8 for working with Elders.
    - In the Métis community, family is a central value. Having intergenerational participation upholds this value and provides reciprocal relationships between learners of all ages. If possible, create opportunities for different generations to participate in your group.



Facilitation Tips

You may choose to identify one facilitator for all the learning circles or to alternate facilitators at each meeting. It is necessary to identify the facilitator for each session in advance so that they can prepare to lead the session. The facilitators will support the group by doing the following:

Establishing a Collective Intention and Values

- Check in with each learner on the first day about what their hopes are for this learning circle.
- Open the first day with introductions.
- Ask each learner to identify what values they think are important to this learning.
- Establish boundaries (for example: every learner has a "right to pass" during the discussion).
- Set group agreements (for example: equal air time for each learner, respect for differing perspectives).

Building a Supportive Community

- Acknowledge that there are many emotions tied to this learning for Métis people, other Aboriginal people and Canadian settlers, and that it is normal to have an emotional reaction to injustice. This learning is the first step to healing the injustices in Canada's history, and it sets the stage for positive contributions to Métis cultural wellness.
- Create opportunities for both one-on-one and whole group conversations.
- Create social time such as breaks, time outside and sharing food.
- Create opportunities for personal sharing (for example, through inviting participants to share in the opening and/or closing circles).
- Include icebreaker activities and games at each session.

Creating a Safe Space

- Create opportunities for all participants to share equally and openly (for example, by asking participants to try to listen twice as much as they speak).
- Acknowledge participants and reflect back what is heard.
- Emphasize that this learning is for everyone: Métis, First Nations, Inuit, Canadian settlers and new immigrants. All people in Canada have a responsibility to learn about Métis people, their culture and their history.
- Emphasize that there are no "silly" questions. Because this knowledge has been intentionally hidden from Canadians for many years, we must unlearn some of the things we believed while confronting the true history of this place.

- Approach the learning journey gently by recognizing sensitive topics and unpacking them slowly with lots of time for self-care.
- Model a trauma-informed approach by recognizing the diversity of lived experiences that may be in the circle and not making judgments or assumptions.
- Keep an eye out for tension, negativity or judgment in the group, and gently address it through a shift in the activities or approach.
- "Hold space" by making sure participants are engaged and the energy is positive and constructive.
- Make time to share feelings and reflect on experiences at the end of each session.

Facilitating a Circle

We encourage you to use a variety of facilitation techniques, such as presentations, talking in groups of two or three and open discussion so that there are multiple ways to participate. However, we recommend that you open and close the session in a circle.

The sharing circle is a commonly used practice in Aboriginal communities. When facilitating a circle, the facilitator should make the group aware of the specific guidelines and protocols for the circle and lead the group through the process. Protocols and guidelines include the following:

- In a circle, only one person speaks at a time. Nobody interrupts that person while they are speaking, and they may continue until they are finished.
- The circle goes around in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction, depending on local protocols in the area you are meeting. Ask a local Elder or Knowledge Keeper if you are not aware of which direction to use.
- Each person has a turn, during which they may choose to speak or pass.
- You may consider using a talking piece that a learner can hold when they want to speak. This can be grounding for the speaker and also reminds others not to interrupt.
- The circle continues until everyone has had an opportunity to speak.
- What is shared in the circle stays in the circle, especially when it involves personal experiences.

Celebrating Your Learning

You can be proud that you have chosen to engage with this meaningful learning! There is no better time to empower yourself with this knowledge about Métis people and their identity and history. Consider planning a celebration for the end of your learning circles when you have completed the final chapter. Invite your families and friends to share in Métis foods, connect with the local Métis Chartered Community and celebrate learning with one another.

SUGGESTED AGENDA FOR 1.5-HOUR LEARNING CIRCLE		
Welcome	Include a territory acknowledgement and any logistical announcements.	5 minutes
Opening Circle	Invite learners to go around the circle and share how they are feeling and what they are hoping to get from today's learning circle.	10 minutes
Individual Reflection	Offer learners a chance to privately journal or doodle based on their reflection on the Building on Prior Knowledge questions. If desired, they may choose to share with a partner.	10 minutes
Break (10 minutes)		
Options for Activities (choose one or two)	Invite learners to share their thoughts on the Questions for Reflection.	40 minutes
	Invite learners to share their experiences with doing the Test Your Knowledge components of the chapter.	
	Invite learners to share a personal or family story that is connected to a topic in the chapter.	
	Host a guest speaker or presenter.	
	Ask learners to share their reflections with each other in small groups (2–4 people).	
Preview	Invite one member of the group to provide an overview of the next chapter of the learning resource.	5 minutes
Closing Circle	Go around the circle and provide each person an opportunity to reflect on the learning from that day.	10 minutes

APPENDIX D: Bibliography

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