What Counts as a Text? Cultural text forms: belts, scrolls, blankets and song

NBE3U, Unit 1: Where We Stand, Lesson 5. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

A text is anything that carries meaning that people can read, hear or see. For First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, texts include wampum belts, birch bark scrolls, button blankets, beadwork, regalia and song. Learning to read them means learning about the customs that surround them.

What students do: Students define “cultural text form,” learn about examples from several Nations (birch bark scrolls, wampum, button blankets, painted hides, regalia, katajjaq), visit a gallery of teacher-chosen images, listen to a teacher-chosen recording of Inuit throat singing with a clear listening purpose, and compare Western and Indigenous ideas of what counts as a record.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
A1.1	identify various cultural text forms and associated customs from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and explain how they support the communication of meaning within the society
A1.6	compare multiple perspectives on themes, ideas, and issues related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities, relationships, and self-determination, sovereignty, or self-governance, as reflected in various texts from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources
B2.1	identify the purpose of a range of listening tasks, with a focus on listening to oral texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and set goals for specific tasks

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies (2019), English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices, Grade 11, University Preparation (NBE3U). A = First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives and Text Forms in Canada, B = Oral Communication, C = Reading and Literature Studies, D = Writing, E = Media Studies.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning what cultural text forms are and how they communicate meaning. • We are learning to set a purpose for listening.	• I can explain what a cultural text form is. • I can describe how two cultural text forms communicate meaning. • I can compare two perspectives on what counts as a record. • I can set and meet a listening goal.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** What Counts as a Text? deck.

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- **Handouts:** Gallery Notes (page 1), Listening Goals (page 2).
- **Images:** Six to eight teacher-chosen images from museums, archives or Nations' own sites (for example, wampum belts, birch bark scrolls, a Tsimshian button blanket, Métis beadwork or a finger-woven sash). Avoid sacred objects and images shared without permission.
- **Media:** A teacher-chosen recording of katajjaq (Inuit throat singing) performed by Inuit singers, from an Inuit-led or NFB source. Preview first.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Warm-up**	Texts that aren't books.	List.	
8–20	**Cultural text forms**	Definition; examples.	Note.	
20–40	**Gallery**	Read the objects.	Walk and note.	Meaning explained.
40–55	**Listening**	Katajjaq.	Listen with a goal.	Goal met.
55–75	**Records**	Two perspectives.	Compare.	Perspectives compared.

Differentiation

- **Support:** Gallery cards with captions and one guiding question each.
- **ELL:** Visual vocabulary sheet.
- **Challenge:** Research the customs that govern one form (who may make, wear or read it).

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Gallery Notes and Listening Goals	Cultural text forms (A1.1), comparing perspectives (A1.6) and listening purposes (B2.1)

Cultural text forms: key points

- **Definition:** Forms of communication (material culture, stories, songs, practices) developed over time from a culture's beliefs and values, and passed on to express them.
- **Birch bark scrolls:** Anishinaabe records of events, stories, migrations and teachings.
- **Button blankets:** Tsimshian and other Northwest Coast blankets whose designs show an individual's clan.
- **Katajjaq:** Inuit throat singing, traditionally by women, in pairs: rhythmic voiced and unvoiced sounds.
- **Records:** A Western view privileges paper; many Indigenous records combine an object, the spoken words and the people who remember them.

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Teacher notes

- Students learn about ceremonies, protocols and oral traditions; they do not imitate or perform them, and they do not retell community stories. Leave sacred knowledge to the people who hold it.
- The curriculum's examples include Anishinaabe birch bark scrolls that record events, stories, migration and teachings; buffalo-hide robes painted with life events; Tsimshian button blankets that show an individual's clan; Inuit katajjaq (throat singing), traditionally performed by women; and regalia with Nation-affiliated designs. Explain that many objects are governed by customs: not everyone may make, wear or interpret them.
- Do not have students attempt throat singing or wear or make regalia. They learn about the forms and listen to people who carry them.
- We strongly recommend reviewing this unit with your board's Indigenous education lead and, where possible, inviting a First Nations, Métis or Inuit Elder, Knowledge Keeper or guest speaker following your board's protocols (including offerings and honoraria). Local Nations' own sources come first.

Coming up

Lesson 6, Two Rows.

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