In the Textbook: What schools taught, and what they left out

NBE3U, Unit 2: Behind the Image, Lesson 7. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

For generations, Canadian students learned about Indigenous peoples from textbooks that described them in the past tense, grouped them as “the Indians,” and told history from the explorers' canoes. What a school text includes and leaves out teaches as much as what it says.

What students do: Students analyse an original model paragraph written in the style of older textbooks, identify its features and omissions, compare it with how First Nations, Métis and Inuit diversity is represented in current sources, and rewrite the paragraph using specific, accurate information organized for a clear purpose.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
A3.3	analyse and compare the ways in which the diversity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit lives, knowledge, cultures, and world views is represented or under-represented in various contemporary and historical text forms
C2.1	identify a variety of characteristics of literary, informational, and graphic text forms, and explain, with increasing insight, how they help communicate meaning or reflect a world view
A2.2	identify contradictions in how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures have been depicted in various contemporary and historical Indigenous text forms, and non-Indigenous texts, and analyse the reasons for the divergence of views
D1.4	identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies and selecting the organizational pattern best suited to the content and the purpose for writing

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 how informational texts represent, or under-represent, Indigenous diversity. • We are learning to organize accurate information for a clear purpose.	• I can identify features of an informational text and how they shape meaning. • I can find what a text leaves out or under-represents. • I can identify contradictions in a text. • I can organize accurate information into a better paragraph.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** In the Textbook deck.
- **Handouts:** Reading the Old Paragraph (page 1), Rewrite (page 2).
- **Devices:** For checking facts on Indigenous-led and government sites (for example, the Nation's own website, ITK, the Métis National Council, The Canadian Encyclopedia).

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	Your old textbooks.	Discuss.	
8–25	**The old paragraph**	Features and omissions.	Analyse.	Omissions identified.
25–40	**Diversity**	What's missing.	Note.	
40–68	**Rewrite**	Organize and write.	Write.	Organized paragraph.
68–75	**Share**	Compare.	Share.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** An outline frame for the rewrite.
- **ELL:** Word bank of accurate terms.
- **Challenge:** Find a real older textbook in your school or library and analyse one page.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Reading the Old Paragraph and Rewrite	Representation of diversity (A3.3), text features (C2.1), contradictions (A2.2) and organization (D1.4)

Look-fors

Task	Strong response	Next step if not yet
Rewrite	Specific Nations, present tense, all three peoples, a clear topic sentence and logical order, one cited source	Return to the omissions list; add one specific fact per sentence

In the textbook: key points

- **Features:** Past tense, generalizations (“the Indians”), hidden agency (Indians simply “remain”; the government “takes care of them”), a heroic frame for explorers, no named people or Nations.

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- **Omissions:** No specific Nations, no Métis or Inuit, no treaties, no residential schools, no present-day life, no Indigenous sources.
- **Contradictions:** Calls peoples “wandering” while describing their central role in the fur trade; says they had no written forms (ignoring wampum and birch bark scrolls).
- **Consequences:** Students grew up believing Indigenous peoples were few, past and alike, which shaped attitudes and votes.
- **A better paragraph:** Names Nations, uses present tense for living peoples, includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and cites sources.

Teacher notes

- The “old textbook” paragraph is an original model text written for this lesson in the style of older textbooks. It is not quoted from a real book; tell students so. Original model texts in this course were written for the lessons by K9solutions. They are written from a student's or a teacher's point of view and never imitate an Indigenous person's voice, story or teachings.
- The curriculum suggests a causal question: what are some consequences of how First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures have been represented in school texts? Use it as the discussion question.
- Students check facts on reliable sources. Encourage the Nation's own website, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (itk.ca) for Inuit, and the Métis National Council or provincial Métis governments (for example, the Métis Nation of Ontario) for Métis.
- 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 8, In the News.

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