Who Tells, When and to Whom: Protocols, ownership and Legends of Vancouver

NBE3U, Unit 4: Living Words, Lesson 4. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

In many Indigenous communities, a story is not free for anyone to tell. It may belong to a family or a Nation, be told only in winter, or be shared only with those ready to hear it. When a story moves into a book, who controls it then?

What students do: Students learn customs that govern oral texts (seasons, the listener's age, designated keepers, family or clan ownership), use E. Pauline Johnson's foreword to Legends of Vancouver (1911) as a case study in credit, permission and editing, and identify factors that limit or protect public access to oral and cultural text forms.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
B1.1	identify various text forms associated with the oral traditions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures; explain their purpose and symbolic meaning; and describe various customs governing their use
A2.4	describe a range of contemporary and historical factors affecting public access to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit text forms, including cultural text forms
A2.5	describe a range of issues related to attempts to apply Western cultural criteria to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit text forms, including cultural text forms

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 the customs that govern how oral texts are shared. • We are learning to analyse what happens when an oral story enters print.	• I can describe customs that govern who tells a story, when and to whom. • I can explain why some knowledge is protected rather than public. • I can analyse how Johnson frames Chief Capilano's stories. • I can identify questions of credit, permission and editing.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Who Tells, When and to Whom deck.
- **Handouts:** Protocols (page 1), From Voice to Book (page 2).

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–10	**Hook**	Whose story?	Discuss.	
10–28	**Protocols**	Seasons, ages, keepers.	Note.	Customs described.
28–50	**Legends of Vancouver**	Johnson's foreword.	Read and analyse.	Credit and permission.
50–65	**Access**	Protected or public?	Sort.	
65–75	**Journal**	Reflect.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Foreword with key phrases highlighted.
- **ELL:** Glossary: protocol, permission, credit, edit, sacred.
- **Challenge:** Research the Squamish Nation's own place names and how they are shared today.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	From Voice to Book	Customs (B1.1), access (A2.4) and Western criteria (A2.5)

Protocols: key points

- **When:** Some stories belong to a season (for example, certain Anishinaabe sacred stories are told in winter).
- **To whom:** Some teachings depend on the listener's age or readiness.
- **By whom:** Elders, Métis Senators and Knowledge Keepers carry teachings; some stories belong to a family, clan or Nation.
- **Johnson's foreword:** She credits Chief Joe Capilano by name, presents the stories as a gift of friendship, and claims no other English speaker had heard them.
- **Questions:** Did he agree to publication? She edited freely, and he died before the book appeared. Whose book is it?
- **Access:** Protected knowledge is not “lost”: it is held by the people responsible for it.

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Teacher notes

- Seasonal protocols: in many Anishinaabe communities, certain sacred stories are told only in winter (biboon), when the land is resting (University of Waterloo Library, “Anishinaabe storytelling in the wintertime”). Practices differ among Nations; do not generalize to all Indigenous peoples.
- Chief Joe Capilano (Sahp-luk, also spelled S7ápelek), Squamish, born about 1854, died March 10, 1910. He led a delegation of British Columbia chiefs to London in 1906, where Johnson met him; they reconnected in Vancouver in 1909. Legends of Vancouver (1911) includes about a dozen stories he told her; she edited them freely, and he died before the book appeared (The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Chief Joe Capilano”).
- The peaks Johnson calls “The Lions” are Ch'ich'iyúy Elxwíkn, “Twin Sisters,” in the Squamish language (Squamish Chief). Students analyse Johnson's framing; they do not retell the story.
- The curriculum's examples for A2.4 include the role of Elders, Métis Senators and Knowledge Keepers in protecting sacred knowledge, the number of speakers of Indigenous languages, and past laws regulating Indigenous self-expression.
- 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.
- Historical texts use the words of their time, including terms now considered offensive (for example, “Red-skin,” “savage,” “squaw,” “half-breed,” “Eskimo”). We quote accurately when analysing, explain why these terms are harmful, and use today's terms (First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous, or the specific Nation) in our own words. Readers may say “[skip]” instead of reading a slur aloud.
- 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 5, Figures of the Oral Tradition.

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