Figures of the Oral Tradition: Who they are, and what they teach about world view

NBE3U, Unit 4: Living Words, Lesson 5. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Nanabozho, Glooscap, Raven, Wesakechak, Kiviuq and the woman of the sea Inuit know as Sedna or Nuliajuk appear in stories that teach how the world came to be and how to live in it. Each belongs to particular peoples. Labels like “myth,” “legend” and “trickster” can flatten them.

What students do: Students research one figure from Indigenous-led or scholarly sources (origins, roles, characteristics, behaviour), explain how the figure reflects a world view, compare figures across Nations without merging them, and examine how labels such as “myth” and “legend” affect how Indigenous knowledge is valued. No stories are retold.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
B1.2	describe a variety of significant figures from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit oral stories, including their origins, roles, characteristics, and behaviour, and explain, with increasing insight, how they reflect a particular culture’s world view
A3.5	describe various contemporary efforts to affirm the value and counteract the undervaluation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultural text forms, and analyse the influence of these efforts on society
B2.6	extend their understanding of oral texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, by making effective connections between the ideas in them and in other texts and to their own knowledge, experience, and insights

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 about significant figures from oral traditions and the world views they reflect. • We are learning how labels shape the way Indigenous knowledge is valued.	• I can describe a figure's origins, roles and characteristics, and name the people it belongs to. • I can explain how the figure reflects a world view. • I can compare figures without treating them as the same. • I can explain why labels like “myth” can be a problem.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Figures of the Oral Tradition deck.
- **Handouts:** Figure Profile (page 1), Labels Matter (page 2).
- **Devices:** For research (start with The Canadian Encyclopedia's articles “Trickster,” “Nanabozo” and “Glooscap,” then Indigenous-led sources).

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	What's a hero?	Discuss.	
8–18	**Many figures**	Overview.	Note.	
18–45	**Profiles**	Research.	Research.	Figure described.
45–60	**Labels**	Myth, legend, trickster.	Discuss.	Issue explained.
60–75	**Share**	Gallery.	Compare.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** A starter fact sheet for each figure.
- **ELL:** Profile frame with sentence starters.
- **Challenge:** Explain why one figure has many names in different regions.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Figure Profile and Labels Matter	Figures and world view (B1.2), efforts to affirm value (A3.5) and connections (B2.6)

Figures: key points

- **Nanabozho:** Anishinaabe and Cree; culture hero, creator and trickster; changes form; helps create Turtle Island in some stories.
- **Glooscap (Kluskap):** Mi'kmaq and other Wabanaki Nations; a giant culture hero and transformer who shapes the land.
- **Raven:** Northwest Coast Nations such as the Haida, Tlingit and Tsimshian; appears in origin stories.
- **Sea woman:** Inuit; Sanna/Sedna, Nuliajuk or Takannaaluk by region; governs sea animals; respect affects the hunt.
- **World view:** Figures model relationships with land, animals and community; humour and rule-breaking teach right from wrong.
- **Labels:** “Myth” and “legend” imply untrue or quaint; “trickster” lumps distinct figures together. The curriculum asks us to see these texts as world views and historical records.

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Teacher notes

- Figures (The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Trickster,” “Nanabozo,” “Glooscap”): Nanabozho (Nanabush, Wenabozho), Anishinaabe and Cree: culture hero, creator and trickster who changes form. Glooscap (Kluskap), Mi'kmaq and other Wabanaki/Algonquian-speaking Nations: a huge culture hero and transformer credited with shaping the land. Raven, Northwest Coast (for example Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian): appears in origin stories. Wesakechak (Wisakedjak), Cree: a humorous, rebellious teacher. Kiviuq, Inuit: a wanderer and cultural hero.
- Sea woman (Wikipedia summary of ethnographic sources): known as Sanna (Sedna, an older spelling popularized by Franz Boas) in southern Baffin Island, Nuliajuk among the Netsilik and Aivilik, and Takannaaluk in Igloolik, among other names. Many are avoidance names, used because her proper name was not spoken. She governs sea animals; hunters' respect affects whether animals are released.
- The curriculum's own list for B1.2 includes Chikapash, Nuliajuk or Sedna, Kiviuq, Waynaboozhoo or Nanabush, the Creator, Mother Earth, clan animals and Windigo. Windigo stories involve fear and harm; leave them for a Knowledge Keeper or a board-approved resource.
- “Trickster” is a scholars' catch-all word. Indigenous writers have argued that each Nation's figure should be understood on its own terms, not as one generic “pan-Indian” type (The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Trickster”).
- Some figures' stories are told only in winter; describing a figure's role is not the same as telling the story. 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.
- 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, Silenced and Spoken.

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