Métis Voices: Michif, the fiddle and stories of the road allowance

NBE3U, Unit 4: Living Words, Lesson 7. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Métis oral traditions grew from many roots: First Nations, French-Canadian and Scottish. They live in Michif, a language that mixes Cree and French, in fiddle tunes and the Red River Jig, and in stories told by Métis Elders and Senators. When Maria Campbell wrote down stories from Michif, she kept the storytellers' own English.

What students do: Students learn about Métis oral traditions (Michif, fiddle music and the Red River Jig, storytelling, the role of Métis Senators), analyse how a teacher-chosen recorded Métis oral text communicates meaning, and discuss the choices Maria Campbell made in Stories of the Road Allowance People (1995) when moving stories from voice to page.

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
B2.5	develop and explain interpretations of oral texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, using evidence from the text, including oral and visual cues, to support their interpretations effectively
B2.7	analyse oral texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, focusing on the ways in which they communicate information, themes, ideas, and issues and influence the listener’s/viewer’s response

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 Métis oral traditions and how they carry meaning. • We are learning to interpret and analyse an oral text using evidence.	• I can describe Michif, Métis fiddle music and the role of Métis Senators. • I can interpret a recorded oral text using what I hear and see. • I can analyse how an oral text influences listeners. • I can explain why a writer might keep a storyteller's own English.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Métis Voices deck.
- **Handouts:** Métis Oral Traditions (page 1), Listening Analysis (page 2).
- **Media:** A teacher-chosen recording from a Métis-led source, for example the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Métis Nation of Ontario or the Louis Riel Institute: a fiddler, a Michif speaker or a Métis Senator speaking publicly. Preview fully.
- **Optional:** Maria Campbell, Stories of the Road Allowance People (Theytus Books, 1995; revised edition Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2010), teacher-chosen; not reproduced here.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	Many roots.	Discuss.	
8–25	**Traditions**	Michif, fiddle, Senators.	Note.	Traditions described.
25–50	**Listen**	Recording.	Listen and analyse.	Interpretation supported.
50–65	**Voice to page**	Campbell's choice.	Discuss.	
65–75	**Journal**	Reflect.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Analysis frame with three questions.
- **ELL:** Glossary: Michif, jig, Senator, road allowance, vernacular.
- **Challenge:** Compare two recordings: a fiddle tune and a spoken story.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Listening Analysis	Oral text forms (B1.1), interpretation (B2.5) and analysis (B2.7)

Métis voices: key points

- **Michif:** A Métis language mixing French (mostly nouns) and Cree (much of the grammar, including verbs); endangered, with fewer than 1,000 fluent speakers.
- **Fiddle and jig:** Blend First Nations, Scottish and French-Canadian roots; the Red River Jig is recorded from 1860; music was central to social life.
- **Senators:** Métis Elders who carry knowledge and culture and take part in Métis governance.
- **Analysing an oral text:** Use oral and visual cues: tone, pace, repetition, humour, gesture, setting, the speaker's introduction.

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- **Campbell's choice:** Keeping village English keeps the storytellers' voices, humour and rhythm; standard English would have smoothed them away.

Teacher notes

- Michif (The Canadian Encyclopedia): a mixed language spoken mainly by Métis in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and parts of North Dakota and Montana; French supplies most nouns, Cree much of the grammar, including verbs. 1,845 people reported speaking it in the 2021 census; experts estimate fewer than 1,000 are fluent. Other Métis languages include French Cree and Bungi.
- Métis fiddle music (Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada): it blended First Nations, Scottish and French-Canadian traditions. The Red River Jig combines First Nations footwork with Scottish and French-Canadian step-dancing; its earliest recorded mention is 1860. Many fiddlers learned without formal training, and many families made their own fiddles.
- Métis Senators (Métis Nation of Ontario): respected Elders valued for their knowledge and life experience; one Senator sits on each MNO community council, and Senators help preserve Métis culture.
- Maria Campbell, Stories of the Road Allowance People (1995): eight stories told by Métis Elders, which Campbell translated from Michif into the village English of the storytellers rather than standard English. Teacher-chosen only; do not reproduce.
- Students listen and analyse. They do not perform jigs or fiddle tunes as a class activity in imitation of Métis culture; a Métis guest may of course choose to teach. 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.
- Recordings: Recorded oral texts are teacher-chosen from trusted sources (for example, a Nation's or organization's own channel, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, APTN, the NFB or CBC Unreserved). Preview fully, confirm the speaker made the recording public, and don't reproduce transcripts.
- 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, Inuit Voices.

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