Keeping Words Alive: Revitalization, repatriation and the right to one's knowledge

NBE3U, Unit 4: Living Words, Lesson 11. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Across Canada, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities are bringing languages and oral traditions back: through immersion programs, online archives they control, laws and international declarations, and the return of objects held in museums. These efforts change how Canadians value Indigenous knowledge.

What students do: Students research a contemporary effort to affirm the value of First Nations, Métis or Inuit oral and cultural text forms (for example FirstVoices, the Indigenous Languages Act, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, UNDRIP Article 31, repatriation), identify its key information, analyse its influence on society, and choose a topic and terminology for the unit presentation.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
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
B1.3	explain, with increasing insight, the influence of a range of social, economic, and/or political forces on the disruption or continuation of oral traditions in contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities
B2.4	identify, in a variety of ways, important information and ideas in oral texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, including increasingly complex or difficult texts
B3.4	use appropriate words, phrases, and terminology, and a variety of stylistic devices, to communicate information and ideas related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and/or perspectives effectively and to engage their intended audience

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.

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Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning about efforts to revitalize and protect Indigenous languages and oral traditions. • We are learning to choose precise terminology for our presentations.	• I can describe a contemporary revitalization or protection effort. • I can identify the most important information about it. • I can analyse its influence on society. • I can choose accurate, respectful terminology for my presentation.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Keeping Words Alive deck.
- **Handouts:** Effort Research (page 1), Topic and Terms (page 2).
- **Devices:** For research.
- **Summative:** Summative Tasks and Rubrics (hand out today).

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–10	**Hook**	A word a day.	Discuss.	
10–25	**Efforts**	Overview.	Note.	
25–50	**Research**	One effort.	Research.	Key information.
50–60	**Influence**	On society.	Analyse.	Influence explained.
60–75	**Summative**	Topics and terms.	Plan.	Topic chosen.

Differentiation

- **Support:** A short list of starter links.
- **ELL:** Terminology bank with definitions.
- **Challenge:** Compare Canadian and international measures (UNDRIP and the Indigenous Languages Act).

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Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Effort Research and Topic and Terms	Efforts to affirm value (A3.5), social forces (B1.3), key information (B2.4) and terminology (B3.4)

Keeping words alive: key points

- **FirstVoices (2003):** Community-controlled online language archives, apps and keyboards; communities decide what is public.
- **Indigenous Languages Act (2019):** Recognizes language rights, supports revitalization and created a Commissioner of Indigenous Languages.
- **UNDRIP Article 31:** Indigenous peoples' right to control their cultural heritage, knowledge and oral traditions, and the intellectual property over them.
- **Repatriation:** Returning objects and recordings to communities restores the contexts in which knowledge lives.
- **Influence:** These efforts shift Canadians from seeing Indigenous knowledge as “legends” or “artefacts” to seeing it as living knowledge with rights attached.
- **Terminology:** Name the Nation; use “Elder,” “Knowledge Keeper,” “Métis Senator” as communities do; avoid “myth” and “artefact” for living traditions.

Teacher notes

- FirstVoices (launched 2003): run by the First Peoples' Cultural Council and the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation; language teams share alphabets, audio, words, songs and stories, and community administrators control all content, some of it password-protected at the community's direction (Wikipedia, “FirstVoices”).
- The Indigenous Languages Act received royal assent on June 21, 2019: it recognizes Indigenous language rights, supports reclaiming and revitalizing languages, and created an Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages (Canadian Heritage). Canada launched a national action plan for the UN International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) in 2024.
- UNDRIP Article 31 affirms Indigenous peoples' right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, including oral traditions, and the intellectual property over them; states are to take effective measures with Indigenous peoples to recognize and protect these rights.
- Repatriation: the U'mista Cultural Centre (1980) in Alert Bay houses returned potlatch objects (Lesson 6). Copyright law fits Indigenous knowledge poorly: it assumes an individual author and a time limit, and can give a recording's copyright to the person who recorded it rather than the storyteller (University of Manitoba Copyright Office).
- Check any figures students find about numbers of speakers for a date; they change with each census.
- 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.

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Coming up

Lesson 12, Presentation Workshop.

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