Book Tasting: Choosing a contemporary novel

NBE3U, Unit 5: Stories Now, Lesson 1. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit writers are not one voice: they write speculative fiction, literary novels, graphic novels, memoir, comedy and tragedy, from cities, reserves, the Arctic and the prairies. We start by sampling widely and choosing a novel to read together.

What students do: Students review what they know about the course's historical writers, sample the openings, covers and author statements of three to five teacher-chosen novels at book-tasting stations, rank their choices with reasons, set purposes for reading and form literature circles.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
C1.1	read a variety of student- and teacher-selected contemporary texts from diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources and historical texts, identifying specific purposes for reading
C5.2	analyse the influence of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit literary works on identities and heritage in Canada, commenting with increasing insight on the role of literature as a social and cultural force in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities
C4.1	explain which of a variety of strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading texts from and/or related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, then evaluate their areas of greater and lesser strength as readers and identify the steps they can take to improve their skills

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 to sample and choose contemporary texts by First Nations, Métis and Inuit writers. • We are learning to set purposes for our reading.	• I can describe the openings of several contemporary novels. • I can explain my choice with specific reasons. • I can set two purposes for reading my novel. • I can name a reading strategy that works for me.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Book Tasting deck.
- **Handouts:** Tasting Menu (page 1), Reading Purposes (page 2).

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- **Books:** Copies of three to five teacher-chosen novels (see the Circle Guide), at stations with their back-cover text and a printed author statement or interview link.
- **Guide:** Unit 5 Circle Guide.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–10	**Hook**	Then and now.	Discuss.	
10–45	**Tasting**	Five stations.	Sample and note.	Specific observations.
45–60	**Choose**	Rank and explain.	Rank.	Reasons, not just genre.
60–75	**Purposes**	Set purposes.	Write.	Two purposes.

Differentiation

- **Support:** Audiobook samples at one station; a graphic novel option.
- **ELL:** A station card with key vocabulary for each book.
- **Challenge:** Compare the openings of two books for voice and setting.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Tasting Menu	Purposes for reading (C1.1) and influence of contemporary works (C5.2)
Assessment as learning	Reading Purposes	Reflecting on strategies (C4.1)

Choosing well: key points

- **Variety:** Contemporary FNMI literature spans genres: speculative (Rice, Dimaline), literary (Good, Vermette), graphic (Vermette), Inuit storytelling and fiction (Nappaaluk, Dunning).
- **Openings:** First pages establish voice, setting and a question the book will answer.
- **Purposes:** Read to understand, to enjoy, to learn a history, to examine representation, to study craft.
- **Reasons:** Strong choices name the voice, the question the book raises, or a theme, not only the genre.
- **Strategy:** Know what helps you: audiobook, a character list, short daily chunks, sticky notes.

Teacher notes

- Choose three to five titles your board approves, including at least one by a First Nations, one by a Métis and one by an Inuk writer, and preview each for content. Titles only: these texts are under copyright and are not included. Choose from your board's approved resources, preview for content (several include

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residential schools, violence, sexual content or grief), add local creators where you can, and learn about each creator in their own words.

- Group students by choice, and balance groups of four or five. Have a second choice ready for every student.
- Johnson, Zitkála-Šá and Eastman are historical writers (they died in 1913, 1938 and 1939). We read them as historical context: Indigenous writers who answered settler audiences a century ago. The course's contemporary voices are First Nations, Métis and Inuit creators chosen by the teacher.
- Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities, to share personal or family histories, or to act as experts. Every student's participation in sharing is optional.
- This course discusses colonization, residential schools and their effects. Some students and families carry this history personally. Support: Hope for Wellness Help Line (for Indigenous people across Canada, 24/7, by phone or online chat at hopeforwellness.ca; English and French, with Cree, Ojibway and Inuktut on request at certain times), 1-855-242-3310; Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868; 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline (call or text 988); National Indian Residential School Crisis Line, 1-866-925-4419.
- 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 2, How Circles Work.

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