Who Is Telling This? Narrative voice and control of the story

NBE3U, Unit 5: Stories Now, Lesson 4. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

In Unit 2 we saw Indigenous people described from outside. In contemporary novels by First Nations, Métis and Inuit writers, the narrator's voice is a choice: whose eyes we see through, what they know, and what they keep back. Voice is where a writer takes control of the story.

What students do: Students identify narrative point of view, narrator reliability and shifts in voice in their novels, compare how point of view shapes what readers learn, and analyse how the author's choices of voice and style develop the novel's themes.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
C2.3	identify a variety of elements of style in texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, in relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources, and explain, with increasing insight, how they help communicate meaning or reflect a world view and enhance the effectiveness of the text
C1.6	analyse texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, in terms of the information, themes, ideas, and issues they explore in relation to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, explaining with increasing insight how various aspects of the texts contribute to the presentation or development of these elements
C1.4	make and explain inferences of increasing subtlety about texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, supporting their explanations with well-chosen stated and implied ideas from the texts

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 analyse narrative voice and point of view. • We are learning how style develops a novel's themes.	• I can identify the point of view and narrator in my novel. • I can explain what the narrator knows and doesn't know. • I can analyse how one stylistic choice develops a theme. • I can support my analysis with quotations.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Who Is Telling This? deck.
- **Handouts:** Voice Map (page 1), Style and Theme (page 2).
- **Books:** Circle novels.
- **Reader:** “A Red Girl's Reasoning” (Unit 3 reader) for the warm-up.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–10	**Warm-up**	Outside or inside?	Compare.	
10–25	**Point of view**	Tools.	Note.	
25–50	**Voice map**	Circles.	Analyse.	Evidence of voice.
50–68	**Style and theme**	One choice.	Write.	Choice linked to theme.
68–75	**Reflect**	Exit.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** A point-of-view chart with examples.
- **ELL:** Focus on one passage of dialogue.
- **Challenge:** Analyse a shift between narrators or timelines.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Voice Map and Style and Theme	Style (C2.3), analysis of themes (C1.6), inferences (C1.4)

Voice: key points

- **Point of view:** First person (I), close third (she, filtered through one mind), omniscient, or multiple narrators.
- **Knowledge:** Narrators know only what they see; gaps create suspense, irony and sympathy.
- **Control:** When a First Nations, Métis or Inuit character narrates, readers see the community from inside; this reverses the outside gaze of Unit 2.
- **Style:** Sentence length, humour, Indigenous-language words, dialogue and silence all carry meaning.
- **Theme:** Link one stylistic choice to one theme: for example, short, broken sentences during a crisis show fear and loss of control.

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Teacher notes

- The warm-up uses Johnson's “A Red Girl's Reasoning” (1893), a public domain historical text from Unit 3, to show a character who speaks back inside a story narrated in the third person. 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.
- Historical texts use the words of their time, including terms now considered offensive (for example, “Redskin,” “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.
- 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.

Coming up

Lesson 5, Poems Now.

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