Short Fiction: Identity, borders and the Inuit short story

NBE3U, Unit 5: Stories Now, Lesson 8. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

A short story has no room to waste. Contemporary short fiction by First Nations, Métis and Inuit writers often turns on a single moment where identity is tested, at a border crossing, a family table, a northern store, and asks who decides who you are.

What students do: Students read one or two teacher-chosen contemporary short stories (for example, Thomas King's “Borders” and a story from Norma Dunning's Annie Muktuk and Other Stories), trace the turning point, analyse how the story represents identity, and evaluate its accuracy and complexity against the stereotypes studied in Unit 2.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
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
A3.4	evaluate a variety of contemporary text forms to determine how accurately they represent the lives and activities of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities, past and present, and explain, with increasing insight, how updated representations can influence society
C1.7	evaluate the effectiveness of texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, using evidence from the text to support their opinions

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 how short stories explore identity. • We are learning to evaluate how accurately texts represent lives.	• I can identify the story's turning point. • I can analyse how the story represents identity. • I can compare the story's characters with Unit 2's stereotypes. • I can evaluate the story's accuracy and complexity with evidence.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Short Fiction deck.
- **Handouts:** Story Arc (page 1), Representation Check (page 2).
- **Stories:** One or two teacher-chosen short stories from board-approved anthologies: for example, Thomas King, “Borders” (1993); a story from Norma Dunning (Padlei Inuk), Annie Muktuk and Other Stories (2017). Titles only; not included.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	Who decides?	Discuss.	
8–35	**Read**	Story.	Read and annotate.	
35–50	**Arc**	Turning point.	Map.	Turn identified.
50–68	**Check**	Representation.	Evaluate.	Evidence-based evaluation.
68–75	**Reflect**	Exit.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Teacher read-aloud of the first half.
- **ELL:** Story arc with picture cues.
- **Challenge:** Compare two stories' turning points.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Story Arc and Representation Check	Analysis (C1.6), accuracy of representation (A3.4), evaluation (C1.7)

Short fiction: key points

- **Turning point:** The moment a choice or realization changes everything, often small and quiet.
- **Identity:** Stories test who decides identity: governments (status, citizenship), communities, families or the self.
- **Complexity:** Characters are funny, flawed, proud, stubborn: not noble, savage, vanishing or victims only.
- **Accuracy:** Judge from specifics: places, everyday life, humour, language, change over time; check against creators' own words, not stereotypes.
- **Influence:** Updated representations can change how readers, including policy makers and schools, think about Indigenous lives.

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Teacher notes

- Preview: Dunning's collection includes adult themes; choose a suitable story. King identifies as Cherokee and Greek descent and has lived in Canada for decades.
- Including an Inuk writer keeps Inuit voices in the unit. Teach the term “Eskimo” as a historical, outside label; many Inuit find it offensive, and Inuit is the term to use in Canada. Historical texts use the words of their time, including terms now considered offensive (for example, “Red-skin,” “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.
- 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 9, Checking the Picture.

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