Sound and Language: Music, voice and the Polaris Prize

NBE3U, Unit 6: Signal and Story, Lesson 6. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit musicians use recording studios, archives and stages to carry languages and sounds forward on their own terms. Their work has changed what Canadian music sounds like and who it is for.

What students do: Students listen to teacher-chosen tracks or performances by Jeremy Dutcher (Wolastoqiyik), Tanya Tagaq (Inuk), The Halluci Nation and a Métis musician, analyse how language, sampling, archival recordings and performance create meaning, and evaluate the influence of these artists on identity and heritage in Canada.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
E5.2	analyse the influence of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit media texts on identities and heritage in Canada, commenting with increasing insight on the role of media production as a social and cultural force in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities
E2.2	identify conventions and/or techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain, with increasing insight, how they convey meaning and influence their audience in the context of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures
E1.3	evaluate how effectively information, themes, ideas, issues, and opinions are communicated in media texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, relevant media texts from non-Indigenous sources, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, and decide whether the texts achieve their intended purpose
E1.4	explain why the same media text might prompt a variety of different responses from different audiences

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 how Indigenous musicians use media to carry language and identity forward. • We are learning to analyse techniques in music and performance.	• I can describe the contributions of at least two Indigenous musicians. • I can analyse how language, sampling or archival sound creates meaning. • I can explain why audiences might respond differently to the same track. • I can evaluate a musician's influence on identity and heritage in Canada.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Sound and Language deck.
- **Handouts:** Listening Log (page 1), Influence (page 2).
- **Media:** Teacher-chosen tracks or official live performances (2 to 4 minutes each): Jeremy Dutcher, Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa (2018); Tanya Tagaq, Animism (2014); The Halluci Nation; and a Métis fiddle or song performance from an Indigenous-led source. Preview lyrics and videos.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	What does a language sound like?	Listen.	
8–20	**The artists**	Who and what.	Note.	
20–45	**Listening log**	Three tracks.	Listen and analyse.	Techniques noted.
45–60	**Different ears**	Audience responses.	Discuss.	
60–75	**Influence**	Identity and heritage.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Listening log with technique prompts.
- **ELL:** Lyrics or descriptions where available.
- **Challenge:** Read an interview with one artist and summarize their purpose in your own words.

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Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Listening Log and Influence	Techniques (E2.2), effectiveness (E1.3), audience responses (E1.4) and influence on identity and heritage (E5.2)

Sound and language: key points

- **Jeremy Dutcher:** Wolastoqiyik, Tobique First Nation; 2018 Polaris Prize; sings in Wolastoq with archival wax-cylinder recordings of ancestors' songs.
- **Tanya Tagaq:** Inuk; 2014 Polaris Prize for Animism; reimagines throat singing in experimental music.
- **The Halluci Nation:** Formerly A Tribe Called Red (renamed 2021); electronic music sampling powwow drums and vocals.
- **Techniques:** Language choice, sampling, archival sound, layering, performance and visuals.
- **Different responses:** Speakers of the language, community members and new listeners each hear different things.
- **Influence:** Language revitalization, national awards and new audiences change what “Canadian music” means.

Teacher notes

- Sources (checked November 2026): Jeremy Dutcher, a Wolastoqiyik member of Tobique First Nation, won the 2018 Polaris Music Prize for Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa, which draws on century-old wax-cylinder recordings of Wolastoq songs (Polaris Music Prize; CBC Music). Tanya Tagaq won the 2014 Polaris Prize for Animism. A Tribe Called Red, an Ottawa group, renamed itself The Halluci Nation in April 2021; its members have included Bear Witness (Cayuga) and 2oolman (Mohawk, Six Nations of the Grand River); its album Nation II Nation was shortlisted for the Polaris Prize in 2013. Snotty Nose Rez Kids (Haisla) were shortlisted in 2018.
- Inuit throat singing (katajjaq) is a cultural practice. Students listen and analyse; they do not imitate it. 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.
- Choose a Métis musician from an Indigenous-led source (for example, a Métis Nation cultural program or APTN performance) so that First Nations, Métis and Inuit music are all represented.
- Preview every clip, episode or post before class. Choose excerpts that are short, non-graphic and suitable for your students; check your board's approved media list.
- 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 7, Podcasts and Voices.

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