Digital Ground: Movements, games and language technology

NBE3U, Unit 6: Signal and Story, Lesson 8. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Digital tools can carry a hashtag across a continent, put an Elder's voice into a video game or give a community a keyboard in its own language. They can also spread misinformation and expose knowledge that communities want to protect. Indigenous-led initiatives show how to use technology on a community's own terms.

What students do: Students study three initiatives (Idle No More's use of social media in 2012–2013, the game Never Alone made with Iñupiat elders and storytellers, and FirstVoices, a language platform controlled by communities), analyse the role of media literacy and access in promoting Indigenous creators, and debate the benefits and risks of putting cultural knowledge online.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
E5.3	analyse the role of media literacy and media access in promoting the work of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit media creators, drawing on evidence from a variety of technological initiatives to support their conclusions
E5.1	describe the contributions of a variety of individuals, organizations, and initiatives to the development and production of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit media texts
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
E1.5	identify the perspectives and/or biases evident 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 comment on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power

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-led initiatives use digital technology. • We are learning to weigh the benefits and risks of putting cultural knowledge online.	• I can describe three digital initiatives and who leads them. • I can analyse how access and media literacy help creators reach audiences. • I can explain why communities control some knowledge online. • I can evaluate an initiative's effect on society with evidence.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Digital Ground deck.
- **Handouts:** Three Initiatives (page 1), Online on Whose Terms? (page 2).
- **Devices:** Optional: firstvoices.com, the official Never Alone site and trailer, Idle No More's official site.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	Online, on whose terms?	Discuss.	
8–40	**Three initiatives**	Stations.	Read and analyse.	Initiatives described.
40–55	**Literacy and access**	Who finds what?	Analyse.	
55–70	**Benefits and risks**	Four corners.	Analyse.	Evidence used.
70–75	**Exit**	Reflect.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Station cards with key facts highlighted.
- **ELL:** Visual summaries of each initiative.
- **Challenge:** Research a language app or digital archive led by a First Nation, Métis or Inuit organization in Ontario.

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Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Three Initiatives	Technology and media literacy (E5.3), contributions (E5.1), efforts to affirm cultural text forms (A3.5) and perspectives (E1.5)

Digital ground: key points

- **Idle No More:** Began November 2012 with four women in Saskatchewan; social media spread teach-ins and rallies across Canada and beyond.
- **Never Alone:** A 2014 game by Upper One Games (created by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Alaska) with about 40 Alaska Native elders and storytellers; narrated in Iñupiaq.
- **FirstVoices:** Launched 2003 by the First Peoples' Cultural Council; communities control their language sites; keyboards for over 100 languages.
- **Literacy and access:** Hashtags, app stores and platforms help audiences find creators; misinformation and poor connectivity get in the way.
- **Control:** Communities may keep sacred or restricted knowledge private; digital sovereignty means deciding what goes online.
- **Effect on society:** New audiences, language learners and policy debates; judge with evidence.

Teacher notes

- Idle No More began in November 2012 with four women in Saskatchewan (Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Sheelah McLean and Nina Wilson), opposing Bill C-45. The movement spread through Facebook and the #IdleNoMore hashtag, with teach-ins, rallies and round dances in malls (The Canadian Encyclopedia).
- Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna), released November 18, 2014, was developed by Upper One Games, created by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council in Alaska with E-Line Media. It was made with about 40 Alaska Native elders, storytellers and community members, is narrated in Iñupiaq, and won a BAFTA for Best Debut Game (2015). It is based on an Iñupiaq story; students discuss the game's process, not the story itself. Iñupiat are Inuit of Alaska: name this as a cross-border example.
- FirstVoices, launched in 2003, is run by the First Peoples' Cultural Council in British Columbia. Communities build and control their own language sites (some private), and it offers keyboards for over 100 languages and dictionary apps (Wikipedia, citing FPCC).
- The round dance is a cultural practice; describe it, don't stage 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.
- 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.
- Facts in this lesson were checked in November 2026. Media organizations, funding and leadership change; check for updates before teaching.

Coming up

Lesson 9, Plan Your Spotlight.

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