MAINTAINING BALANCE
Staying Connected to Land, Culture & Language
Indigenous activities and learning on the land is a sure way to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of Indigenous peoples.

This list of activities was created in an effort to offer ways to keep Indigenous youth in touch with their home territory, identity and cultural heritage. Keeping Indigenous youth grounded to their home territory helps to keep family and close connections, familiar relationships and supports from home close to heart. Traditional activities and learning on the land helps to keep youth focussed on their work and goals while at school. Keeping Indigenous youth grounded in who they are, helps to instill pride and confidence, respect and responsibility to themselves, their families and community.

When Indigenous youth are grounded, they have learned about their responsibility to work collectively for the good of the community and demonstrate commitment to “giving back” in ways that will benefit community.

The activities listed also present an opportunity to educate both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of aspects of identity, culture and traditions that are important to Indigenous peoples. The activities can be incorporated into regular programming and completed one at a time or can be experienced as a full day of learning, acknowledgement and celebration of Indigenous peoples.

For a deeper understanding of historical and contemporary issues impacting Indigenous peoples, refer to the resource documents created by the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association made available at www.oneca.com

• Supporting Indigenous Well-Being in Schools, Web-Based Resources, 2018
• Supporting First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students Transitioning from First Nations Schools to Provincial Schools, A Resource Guide, 2018

Aboriginal students believed that the following teaching practices had a positive impact on their education:

- Teachers using culture to bridge learning and lessen the mismatch between home and school environments;
- Teachers providing tailored support to negotiate the literacy demands of schooling;
- Teachers providing specific and clear learning goals;
- Individualised teaching that accommodates student diversity;
- Teachers having high expectations for their students;
- Teachers building positive relationships with their students; and,
- Teachers giving students appropriate support for behavioural issues.  

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**Make a Medicine Pouch**

A medicine pouch can be used to carry medicines like tobacco, sweet grass, cedar and sage, a small stone or other item that is important to the carrier.

Materials needed: leather 6” x 4”, one 32” strip of leather, one 8” strip of leather, leather punch

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**Step 1:** cut the piece of leather into the shape shown in the picture; punch 22 small holes around the large perimeter of the cut out shape; punch 2 small holes toward the top of the cut shape.

**Step 2:** string the long leather lace through the holes (except the 2 holes at the top) as shown.

**Step 3:** pull the long leather lace tight to make the shape of a pouch.

**Step 4:** put the short leather lace through the 2 holes in the middle of the pouch at the front as shown in the picture.

**Step 5:** put the ends of the short lace through the 2 holes in the top of the pouch as shown. Pull the flap down to close the pouch and tie the leather laces to secure the contents of the pouch.

Medicine pouches come in different styles and sizes. YouTube is a great resource to learn other ways of making medicine pouches.

Learn about the four sacred medicines - tobacco, sweet grass, sage and cedar at: ojibweresources.weebly.com/ojibwe-medicines.html or at chippewaheritage.com/heritage-blog/four-sacred-medicines-muskiiki
Medicine Walks

Take a walk around the yard or neighbourhood to see how many native plants you can identify. Some plants are edible while others are medicinal. Research plants, their uses and their significance i.e. plantain, jewel weed, chamomile, dandelion, cattail, burdock.

Resources - Northern Bushcraft: northernbushcraft.com/guide.php?ctgy=edible_plants&region=on
Edible Wild Food: ediblewildfood.com

Trail Walks

Research local plants and trees and then take a hike on a nature trail or through the words to see how many native trees and plants you can identify. Learn about their uses for medicine and teas.

Resources - Ontario Trees and Shrubs: ontariotrees.com/id/howtid.php
Rocks In Indigenous Cultures

Discuss the messages in the story.

To compliment the story, take a walk in a natural outdoor area to search for rocks that are special to you. Examine the rocks and think about why you selected them. What stories do the rocks tell?

Picking Medicines

Ask an elder or traditional knowledge carrier to help pick medicinal plants for tea, i.e. pine or cedar.
Learn the process of giving thanks to the tree, where and how to pick medicines, and how to make tea for medicinal purposes.

The following is an excellent short video to complement this activity: Elder Bertha Sky talks about Birch Trees as Medicine - youtube.com/watch?v=I1xhxSD7i_g

Nature Art

Take a walk in a natural area, preferably wooded, to gather up natural materials to create designs or scenes. Materials gathered could include: birch bark, twigs, stones, grasses, moss, tree fungus, etc. Use a backdrop of paper, cardboard or bristle board to create a piece of art from the natural materials gathered.

Medicine Wheel Teachings

Ask an Anishinabe elder or traditional knowledge carrier to share teachings of the medicine wheel.
Teachings of the medicine wheel are critical to living a balanced life physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. The teachings of the medicine wheel come to life when told by an elder or traditional knowledge carrier.

There are many images and descriptions of medicine wheels available on the internet.

Two examples:
ictinc.ca/blog/what-is-an-aboriginal-medicine-wheel

nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/healing-ways/medicine-ways/medicine-wheel.html
Indigenous Creation Stories

Research the creation stories of the Indigenous peoples in the area. Discuss the relationships and how those relationships (people, animals and the land) in the creation stories create ties between people and all that exists in creation. Some of the resources that exist online include:

Cree Creation Story: youtube.com/watch?v=Qn0zJ1QH2Ze
Hodinohson:ni Creation Story: Lessons of Life: youtube.com/watch?v=CAqvV--mWY4
Ojibway Creation Story: youtube.com/watch?v=Etn92Ms8plo

Story Telling with Elders

Invite an elder or traditional knowledge carrier to share stories about Indigenous culture and values. Discuss the teachings within the stories and how those teachings impact life.

Be Proud of Who You Are

The following article provides powerful messages from five elders in Canada. Discuss: the reason for the gathering, the messages from the elders, how life in the past impacts life now and what needs to happen to ensure Indigenous youth can be proud of their heritage.

‘Be proud of who you are’: Indigenous elders offer advice to the young about self-respect and reconciliation (National gathering of elders), by Terry Reith · CBC News · Posted: Sep 30, 2017 3:00 AM MT | Last Updated: September 30, 2017
cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/voices-elders-indigenous-1.4302299
Clare and her Grandfather

The story of Clare and her Grandfather is designed to enhance young people’s awareness of some of the many contributions and inventions by Aboriginal people. The story is meant to be a versatile teaching tool for children ages 7-12, although older students might enjoy the story and its images. Teachers of children in the target age group can use the story to initiate a broader examination of the many historical and contemporary contributions of First Nations and Inuit to Canada and the world.

Teachers are encouraged to contact local Aboriginal communities, cultural education centres and Friendship Centres to obtain more in-depth information. Teachers are authorized to reproduce Clare and her Grandfather as needed for their classroom or school use.

To access the story: aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ-ACH/STAGING/texte-texte/lr_ks_rr_claire_1341932502024_eng.pdf

Relationships in Nature

Importance of the Eco-System

Everything in nature was created for our use and benefit. Study bird, fish, insect and animal habitats. Learn about how the weather and the changes of the seasons. Understand how everything in nature works together. Discuss what you can do to help preserve the natural eco-systems.

Drum Making, Rattle Making

Hold a workshop to make an Indigenous drum or rattle. Examine the use of drumming, the use of rattles and song are used by Indigenous peoples either in social settings or in ceremonies.
Indigenous Social Songs

Research YouTube to find and learn Indigenous social songs and start a singing group. Incorporate Indigenous social songs into the school curriculum and special events, i.e. morning announcements, during play time, assemblies.

One source for Indigenous music: ohwejagehka.com/songs/index.html

Traditional Roles & Responsibilities

Ask an elder or traditional knowledge carrier to share information about the traditional protocols, roles and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples. Commit to the practice of traditional protocols on a daily basis i.e. land acknowledgement, giving thanks, showing respect for all things in creation.

Skirt Teachings (video)

Listen to the skirt teachings on the following video to gain an understanding of women’s connection to the earth.

Unreserved’s Tuesday Teaching – Women’s Traditional Skirts, Skirt teachings with Myra Laramee, video posted by CBC radio, Unreserved CBC Indigenous, March 16, 2017
powwows.com/unreserveds-tuesday-teaching-womens-traditional-skirts

Create a Family Tree

Begin the work to develop a family tree. Help youth to understand family ties and how family influences them. This activity may lead into research about culture(s) and intergenerational impacts based on the lives and histories of family members. This is a great exercise to encourage story telling. Share stories or teachings passed on from past generations.

Clan Stories

Understanding Indigenous peoples means learning about clans. Ask an elder or traditional knowledge carrier about clans or research the internet. Discuss the significance of clans to Indigenous peoples.

Haudenosaunee Clan Stories: snpolytechnic.com/sites/default/files/docs/resource/clanstories.pdf
Corn Husk Doll
Corn Husk Dolls & the Legend of the No Face Doll

Cornhusk dolls were made by the Haudenosaunee and dressed in traditional clothing for the children. Materials needed to make a cornhusk doll: 12 cornhusks, water, scissors and string.

1. Soak the cornhusks in water until they are soft.
2. Arrange four cornhusks in layers. Place one cornhusk on the bottom. Place two cornhusks side by side in the centre. Place one cornhusk at the top. The pointy end of the cornhusk should be facing down.
3. Tie the four cornhusks together about 5 centimetres from the top.
4. Use scissors to round the straight edges at the top of the cornhusks.
5. Turn the cornhusk bundle upside down. Pull the long husks over the trimmed edges.
6. Tie the end with string to form a ball. This is the doll’s head.
7. Roll a cornhusk to form a narrow tube. This is the doll’s arms. Tie the ends to form hands.
8. Place the arms between the cornhusks under the doll’s head.
9. Tie the hanging cornhusks to make the doll’s waist.
10. Make shoulders by draping a cornhusk behind the neck & crisscrossing the ends over the waist.
11. Arrange six cornhusks, flat side up, around the doll’s waist to form a skirt. Tie the skirt and shoulders with string. You can also divide the skirt in two and tie string at the knees and ankles to make legs.

(Source: Canadian Aboriginal Art and Culture, Iroquois, Michelle Lomberg, 2008, p 12)

Follow up making a doll by reading, The Legend of the No Face Doll. The legend is a good teaching that reminds us to keep focused on our responsibilities.

To access this resource: snpolytechnic.com/sites/default/files/docs/resource/9_haudenosaunee_arts_dolls.pdf
What does it mean to be Indigenous?

Host a special event and invite special guests, elders or traditional knowledge carriers to provide information in response to the question - what does it mean to be Indigenous? (Cree? Anishinabe? Haudenosaunee? Algonquin? Abenaki? Huron? Inuit? Metis?)

The Seven Teachings (Anishnabe)

The seven grandfather teachings of the Anishinabe provide the foundation for living a good life. After learning about the seven grandfather teachings, discuss how to put these teachings into practice in everyday life.

To access the Seven Teachings: ojibweresources.weebly.com/ojibwe-teachings--the-7-grandfathers.html

The Gifts of the Seven Grandfathers - The following resource provides information and an activity. ojibwe.net/projects/prayers-teachings/the-gifts-of-the-seven-grandfathers

Sharing Circles

Sharing circles are a great venue to share stories or to discuss difficult issues in a safe environment. Care must be taken to create an environment where participants are willing to share.

Sharing (Talking) Circles in the Classroom, “To open hearts to understand and connect with one another” - tips from Lisa Howell, Pierre Elliot Trudeau Elementary School, March, 2015


Kookum and Youth Circles, Resource Book brings together women, residential school survivors and youth through storytelling and mentoring activities. The Resource Book, created by Equay-wuk (Women’s Group) is available at equaywuk.ca/Kookum%20Workbook.pdf

These are great resources to encourage dialogue with youth through sharing circles and storytelling. It includes information about Indian residential schools, Aboriginal culture and values, wellness, healing and employment.

Indigenous Ceremonies, Pow Wows & Celebrations

Participate in Indigenous socials, ceremonies, pow wows and celebrations as they occur i.e. National Aboriginal Day, Treaty 3 Fall Harvest, moon ceremonies. The local Indigenous community, Friendship Centre or Native Women’s Centre are good sources for this information. For the Ontario pow wow schedule: ontariotravel.net/en/play/indigenous-experiences/pow-wows
Indigenous Languages

Learn greetings and common phrases in the languages of the Indigenous peoples of the area. Commit to incorporating them in everyday activities as well as special events.

Ceremonial Objects & Clothing

Ask an elder or traditional knowledge carrier to share protocols and knowledge about ceremonial and non-ceremonial objects i.e. eagle staff, masks, tobacco, clothing, regalia, cradle board.
What Grows in Your Garden?

Giving youth a role and responsibility in the planting and care of a vegetable garden provides many benefits. It helps them to understand where our food comes from, helps instill responsibility, pleasure and pride as they nurture and watch plants grow. This activity builds respect for nature and inspires cooperation and collaboration when many hands are involved.

Seasonal Harvesting

Research and practice Indigenous ways of giving thanks and harvesting foods i.e. berries, maple sap, corn, rice. Ask an elder or traditional knowledge carrier for assistance.

Indigenous Sports

Incorporate Indigenous sports into the school curriculum i.e. lacrosse, snowsnake, snowshoeing. If required, seek the assistance for demonstrations and/or building a snowsnake track. Lacrosse is a great active sport in the warm weather; snowsnake and snowshoeing are winter sports.
Teepee Teachings

Purchase and construct a teepee for small group activities. Seek assistance from an elder or traditional knowledge carrier to learn the teepee teachings. Incorporate the teepee teachings into daily life.

Cree elder Mary Lee shares teepee teachings at fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/cree.html

Traditional Foods

Find a few recipes you’d like to try and then create a kitchen in the classroom. Have students prepare the food for tasting. Dietitians of Canada, is a great place to get Indigenous recipes:


Host a Moose Call Competition

Research and discuss why Indigenous people hunt, how they hunt and when they hunt. Hunting for food at specific times of year is important if we are to leave enough (of this resource) for future generations.

Explore the sound of a moose call. Practice it and host a competition. A good moose caller will always be an asset to the hunt.

Story Time

When it’s story time the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada maintains a list of resources for youth, students, educators and families to incorporate into their studies and everyday life. Ranging from Early Childhood to Post-Secondary their selection of books, films, educational programs and toolkits provide a good start for those seeking to get a better understanding of Indigenous children and their families. To view resources: fnccaringsociety.com/educational-resources

Goodminds.com is another excellent resource. Goodminds.com a leading source for purchasing bias-free teaching and educational resources related to Native American, First Nations, Indigenous and Aboriginal studies. GoodMinds.com stocks over 3,000 Indigenous titles from Preschool to Adult.

Historic Relationships

Research or host a speaker that can share knowledge of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples through wampum belts. Contact the local Indigenous community, Friendship Centre or Native Women’s Centre to find a speaker who can share this knowledge.
Wampum Belt Teachings

Research the following wampum belts: the Friendship Belt or Covenant Chain Belt and the One Dish with One Spoon Belt. Discuss the meanings behind the belts and the reasons for their creation. Consider: What is the significance of these historic wampum belts today?

Treaties & Treaty Relationships in Ontario

Research the Treaty area where you reside. Read the actual treaty that affects the area in which you reside. Debate the pros and cons of the Treaty and its impact or affects on life today. Ontario Treaties & Treaty information can be accessed at: ontario.ca/page/treaties

Treaties - Classroom Activities

Primary / Junior Classrooms

1. Paint a picture showing the First Nations People talking to the early settlers of Canada. How would they have dressed? How would they have showed that they agreed?

2. Paint a picture of you and your friend making an agreement.

3. Talk about agreements. Ask students: How does it feel when you get more than you thought you would get? How does it feel when you get less? Why is it important to be fair to everyone? Role play some possible agreements, both fair ones and unfair ones.

4. Colour a picture of your home. Would you be able to give some of it away if visitors came and wanted to live in your home? Draw your “selfie” of how you would feel.

Intermediate / Senior Classrooms

1. Create a wall display where they can post newspaper articles about current First Nations land claims.

2. Ask students to write a research report about a modern-day land claim in Canada (e.g. the Labrador Innu, the Northwest Territories First Nations, or the British Columbia Treaty Process, the Algonquins of Ontario). Students can address some of the following issues in their report:
   a. How long have the negotiations been going on?
   b. How does the agreement protect and revitalize First Nations cultures?
   c. How will the agreement affect non-Aboriginal peoples?
   d. How will First Nations and governments work together to manage resources?
Indigenous Flags

Research Indigenous flags in Ontario. Some flags represent Nations of Indigenous peoples while others are representative of Indigenous organizations. Discuss the significance of the symbolism contained on the flags. Indigenous parents or community members may be good resources for this research.

Shannen’s Dream | Student Leadership in Social Change

Lisa Howell, Pierre Elliot Trudeau ES & Sabrina Bonfonti, Blanket Exercise Consultant, March 2015

Lesson Idea: There is a wealth of resources for teaching about Shannen’s Dream. Many teachers and students have created poems, songs, videos and other projects inspired by Shannen’s story. There are a diverse range of lesson plans, social justice actions and writing activities for all grade levels. For example with younger students, focusing on questions like “What make a safe and comfy school?” “What do students need in their environment to learn and grow?”

Some educators and school staff with students have been inspired to create “Shannen’s Dream Club” to get involved with projects to support education funding equity, and/or to share the story with others. This extra-curricular approach is a great way to nurture students who are more passionate about the issue, as well as to create student leadership and mentorship between different age levels.

Educators often follow up on Shannen’s Dream activities with ‘Have a Heart’ or ‘Our Dreams Matter Too”, activities – letter writing and community walks on the topic of education equity for First Nations.


All Classrooms

1. Provide a writing prompt where students are invited to think about what it would be like to have to give up their land, their home.

2. Host a classroom visit. Invite a person knowledgeable about treaties and land claims to speak to the class. If students live in an area covered by a historical treaty, teachers could ask an Elder to share some of the oral history or a First Nations leader to discuss how the treaty affects his or her work.

3. Be sure that students prepare some questions for the speaker. Students should also present the speaker with a gift, preferably one that they have created with their own resources.

4. Using a First Nations and Treaty Map, ask students to find the treaty land:

   a. where they were born
   b. where they live now
   c. where their school is located.

Source: fnmi.cdsbeo.on.ca/for-educators/treaties-recognition-week-resources/classroom-learning-opportunities
Indigenous Language Resources

There are many on-line resources due to the many efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages. The following chart lists some of the resources that are available. Other sources for learning language are YouTube videos, Facebook sites and language apps.

- **Algonquin Linguistic Atlas**  atlas-ling.ca
  *An on-line, multimedia linguistic atlas of Algonquian languages. The atlas offers many training opportunities for sound editing and linguistic description training to aboriginal students.*

- **Anishinaabemowin**  anishinaabemodaa.com/lessons
  *Language, history, traditions, culture and news.*

- **APTN Kids**  aptn.ca/kids
  *This site is host to several children’s television shows that provide entertaining ways to learn some words in Indigenous languages, and to hear stories and legends.*

- **Cayuga - Daughters, Sisters, Mothers and Wives**
  *The book includes a short version of the Thanksgiving address, introductory Cayuga and words for a seed song.*

- **Cayuga - Ohwejagehká: Ha’degaenage**  ohwejagehka.com/cayuga

- **Cree Language Geek**  languagegeek.com/algon/cree/nehiyawewin.html

- **East Cree Language Resources**  eastcree.org
  *Stories, grammar, lessons, dictionary, and more.*

- **My Cree App**  tansi.tv/mycree

- **First Nations Languages Portal, Ontario Library Services - North**  olsn.ca/fnlanguages
  *Cree and Ojibway language resources, lessons, stories.*

- **First Peoples Voices, First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC)**  fpcc.ca
  *First Voices Kids*  firstvoiceskids.com/en/enter-kids
  *First Peoples Voice is an online Indigenous language resource developed by First Peoples’ that has gained international recognition. Community-based teams of fluent-speaking First Nations Elders and technically savvy youth are trained in the collection, editing and uploading of words, phrases, songs and stories. The FPCC website is host to a breadth of information about First Nations languages in Canada.*

- **Inuit - Tusaalanga**  tusaalanga.ca
  *Learn the Inuit language*

- **Learn Inuktitut Part 1**  youtube.com/watch?v=iPGAbctSHuY
  *This short video is part 1 of 4*
• **James Bay Cree**  [spokencree.org/Books/view/1/Spoken%20Cree%20Level%201](spokencree.org/Books/view/1/Spoken%20Cree%20Level%201)
  Language lessons

• **Kanien’kahá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Centre**  [korkahnawake.org](korkahnawake.org)
  Kanien'keh:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center, formerly known as Kanien'keh:ka Raotitióhkwa was formed in 1977 to preserve and promote the language and culture of the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke. Visit the site for news, programs, language videos and more.

• **Mohawk**  [firstvoices.com/en/Kanienkeha-Mohawk-EN/words](firstvoices.com/en/Kanienkeha-Mohawk-EN/words)

• **Mohawk Language in the Workplace**  [snpolytechnic.com/sites/default/files/docs/resource/mohawk_in_the_workplace_booklet_2015-snp.pdf](snpolytechnic.com/sites/default/files/docs/resource/mohawk_in_the_workplace_booklet_2015-snp.pdf)
  Deyohahä:ge: and Six Nations Polytechnic, 2015. Short lessons to learn words and phrases for use at home and at work.

• **Nish Tales, Walking and Talking with Nanabush (Anishinabe)**  [nanabush.ca](nanabush.ca)
  The Ojibwe Cultural Foundation invites you to walk and talk with Nanabush. Nish Tales: Walking and Talking with Nanabush is a language learning and story sharing site for kids and adults wishing to learn Ojibwe. Nanabush’s humorous escapades and great adventures have entertained generations of Anishnaabe and helped preserve our language. The humorous adventures of Nanabush are used to help people learn some basic Ojibwe. All media is in a bilingual format for reading, listening and watching.

  Ojibway words and phrases

• **Ojibway**  [ojibwe.net/lessons/beginner/words-to-use-in-class](ojibwe.net/lessons/beginner/words-to-use-in-class)
  Words to use in the classroom

• **Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre**  [occc.ca](occc.ca)
  Syllabic Chart, Language lessons and Cree / Oji-Cree Songs

• **Ojibway Cultural Foundation**  [ojibweculture.ca/pages/language-assessment-tool](ojibweculture.ca/pages/language-assessment-tool)
  This site provides 24 Ojibway language lessons.

• **Ojibway Language, Allison & Bridgette**  [ojibwaylanguage.weebly.com](ojibwaylanguage.weebly.com)
  This website provides an introduction to Ojibway Language and includes a variety of resources and activities. The website is a result of a project for the Ojibway Language course as part of the Aboriginal Community and Social Development program at Georgian College in Barrie Ontario.

• **Ojibwe Peoples Dictionary**  [ojibwe.lib.umn.edu](ojibwe.lib.umn.edu)

• **Omniglot**  [omniglot.com](omniglot.com)
  This is an online encyclopedia of writing systems and languages.

• **Speak Cayuga**  [itunes.apple.com/ca/app/speak-cayuga/id1095828408?mt=8](itunes.apple.com/ca/app/speak-cayuga/id1095828408?mt=8)
  Cayuga language app

• **Speak Mohawk**  [itunes.apple.com/us/app/speak-mohawk/id1281679652](itunes.apple.com/us/app/speak-mohawk/id1281679652)
  Mohawk language app