



Foundational Knowledge Overview - Languages of Métis

As an educator I should know...

Languages traditionally spoken by Métis are unique embodiments of Métis worldviews, history, and culture. The unique experience of the Métis Nation is woven into the language. Across the Métis Nation, language reflects evolving diversity and kinships.

“Michif language is the essence of the [Métis] culture. If you learn the language, you will learn who we are as a people.”

There are four languages traditionally spoken by Métis in Alberta: Michif, nehiyawewin (Cree, neh-hee-yaw-way-win)[1], English, and Français (French).[i] Examining languages through a Métis lens shares how language is intimately connected with identity and community. The benefits of teaching and learning languages in Albertan classrooms are manifold. Students who develop an appreciation for languages spoken by Métis are better able to understand Métis culture. Teachers who appreciate the importance of languages, and in particular, the relationship between language and identity, help to cultivate an education system that aligns with what Métis families hope their children will learn about their peoplehood.

The Importance of Language

Educators have the privilege of facilitating meaningful student engagement with Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing. This can be done by facilitating activities that explore Michif and other Indigenous languages used by the Métis. Through the mindful, informed selection of content and teaching methods, teachers can enhance their students' understanding of the Métis worldview. Stories that are shared by teachers in their classrooms are an expression of the provincial curriculum they are empowered to deliver. The narrative behind how these stories are expressed—their choice of words, metaphors, reinforcing ideas, and the language they use to express these stories—determines the message about the Métis that learners internalize.

A Language of Contact and Coming Together

Michif is a contact language that was developed exclusively by the Métis. “Contact language” describes languages that were birthed out of the joining of settlers and Indigenous people. As Cree and Ojibway women married settler men, new communities were formed, and these communities developed a unique language. Communities of First Nations and European families integrated their languages and together



formed a language that was neither First Nations nor European, but uniquely Métis. Michif was not originally a written language. It first developed orally, and was later made into a written language. The first written forms of Michif date back to the early 1900s. The language was developed organically, without the institutional influences of education systems and government which typically impose standardization in Latin languages. As a result of the oral, community-based development of this language, Michif is diverse and complex in its dialects and structure.

[1] This pronunciation of nehiyawewin may vary by region.

[i] Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 52-53.

**excerpt from Foundational Knowledge Resource - Languages of Métis*

Title/Unit: Michif Language Lesson - Cultural Items

Time Frame: 50 minutes

Grade/Subject
4 - Social and ELA

Topic(s)
Culture, Language, Métis

Métis Education Themes

- Languages of Métis
- Métis Culture and Traditions
- Homeland History
- Métis in Alberta
- Métis Nation Governance

Teacher Quality Standard (TQS) connections

How does this lesson contribute to my knowledge in the following areas?

1. Fostering Effective Relationships
2. Engaging in Career-Long Learning
3. Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge
4. Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments
5. Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit
6. Adhering to Legal Frameworks and Policies

Competencies

Critical Thinking • Problem Solving • Managing Information • Creativity and Innovation • Communication • Collaboration • Cultural and Global Citizenship • Personal Growth and Well-being



Vocabulary/Terms

Michif

Métis across the nation have four living languages today:

Michif, Cree, English and French.

Michif is a blended language of both French nouns and Cree verbs. It uses the language structure of both languages to communicate the unique culture and identity of Métis people.

Métis

“Métis means a person who self-identifies as Metis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation”

– Métis National Council, "National Definition of Métis and Acceptance Process: Consultation Document," 2, http://www.metisportals.ca/cons/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/national_defn_and_acceptance_process_february_2006_document.pdf

[Click here to learn about Métis Identity from the Métis Nation of Alberta](#)

Assessment FOR Learning

Students are:

- engaged
- respectful
- making predictions
- attempting to read the Michif words

Assessment OF Learning

Students:

- learn 3 Michif words
- are able to indicate why learning Michif is important

Differentiation/Adaptations

For the game “I Have, Who Has”

- partner work
- use the Michif online dictionary
- use a document camera
- play matching with the cards

Approx. time:	Activity	Materials/Text References
Intro: 5 min.	Write the following on the board in two columns as shown below:	White board/White board markers Projector/Sound system



	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Dog</td> <td>maamaan</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dance</td> <td>noohkoom</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fiddle</td> <td>daans</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grandma</td> <td>sh'yaen</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mother</td> <td>vyayloon</td> </tr> </table> <p>Tell students we will be matching the English words on the left to the Michif words on the right.</p> <p>Discuss first with a partner which English word belongs to which Michif word. Discuss their predictions and reasoning. As a class, match the correct answers.</p> <p>Explain: Today we will be exploring the Michif language.</p>	Dog	maamaan	Dance	noohkoom	Fiddle	daans	Grandma	sh'yaen	Mother	vyayloon	<p>ANSWER</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Dog</td> <td>sh'yaen</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dance</td> <td>daans</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fiddle</td> <td>vyayloon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grandma</td> <td>noohkoom</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mother</td> <td>maamaan</td> </tr> </table>	Dog	sh'yaen	Dance	daans	Fiddle	vyayloon	Grandma	noohkoom	Mother	maamaan
Dog	maamaan																					
Dance	noohkoom																					
Fiddle	daans																					
Grandma	sh'yaen																					
Mother	vyayloon																					
Dog	sh'yaen																					
Dance	daans																					
Fiddle	vyayloon																					
Grandma	noohkoom																					
Mother	maamaan																					
<p>New information & Application 40 min.</p>	<p>Métis people speak many different languages, but Michif is a distinctly Métis language. Métis people are well known for their adaptability. As new Métis communities formed, they would speak through a blend of both French and Cree, which developed into a language of itself; Michif.</p> <p>Michif is blended expression of both French nouns and Cree verbs. Michif cannot be broken up into two languages (Cree and French) but instead honours both parents' cultures, and became a balanced blend of each culture and language.</p> <p>Why is learning Michif important?</p> <p>ANSWER: Students who develop an appreciation for languages spoken by Métis are better able to understand Métis culture. Teachers who appreciate the importance of languages, and in particular, the relationship between language and identity, help to cultivate an education system that aligns with what Métis families hope their children will learn about their peoplehood.</p>	<p>http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/149521</p> <p>Cards for the game: Below you will find cards for a game of "I Have, Who Has". Print out and cut each card out. Print an additional copy and DO NOT cut it out. This can be used as the answer sheet for the game.</p> <p>TIP: For the game, have students go to http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php and type in their Michif word from their card and listen to it and PRACTICE saying it, BEFORE the</p>																				



The goal for this lesson is for each student to learn 3 Michif words.

Listen to the following clip of a person speaking Michif, and see how many more words you can add to your list about animals. Pause after a Michif word and try and say it as a class. REMIND the students that they are trying to learn 3 new Michif words.

Students turn to engage with the language!

Listen to this Michif speaker speak about Métis cultural items <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/149521> Pause after a Michif word and try and say it as a class. REMIND them they are trying to learn 3 new Michif words.

Play I HAVE, WHO HAS. (see cards at bottom of lesson). Below there are 18 cards that have the cultural items heard in the clip above. Each student will get a card, if there are not enough cards, pair up some students, and if there are too many feel free to give some students two. It doesn't matter who you start with, as the game comes full circle.

- a. Pick a student to start
- b. Have this student read the first line, I HAVE ___ and say what the picture is in English.
- c. Ask the class to repeat the word the student said.
- d. Then the student reads the second line, WHO HAS ___ (TIP: to make it a bit easier, use a document camera and show the cards as you go)
- e. The students check to see what they have, the student with the card that matches, stands up and repeats step b..
- f. This continues until all the cards are read.

This game can be played as many times as you like. Shuffle the cards and give students new cards to work with. As they get better you can even time them to see how fast the puzzle can be solved. Challenge your students to beat their times. Remind them that they need three words in their vocabulary by the end of the lesson.

game starts.



<p>Closure 5 min.</p>	<p>Sitting in a circle, review the following question:</p> <p>What is one thing you learned today about the Michif language?</p> <p>Ask students to share the 3 new Michif words they learned.</p>	<p>Print one exit slip, found below, for each student.</p>
<p>Extension Activities</p> <p>Timing the “I Have Who Has game” and challenge students to beat their original time.</p> <p>Creating Michif sentences using http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php</p>		
<p>Resources/Links/Videos</p> <p>http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/149521</p> <p>http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php</p>		
<p>Credits</p> <p>Images used in game below: Free Google images</p> <p>Foundational Knowledge Resource: Languages of Métis Rupert's Land Institute</p> <p>*Please note that while Rupert's Land Centre for Teaching and Learning (RCTL) has consulted with a variety of Language & Culture carriers, it is recognized that there are a variety of dialects spoken or written amongst communities.</p> <p>Rupert's Land Institute - Métis Centre of Excellence, Education Team (2020)</p>		

Please note, some of the words may differ from the speaker in the voice clip due to different dialects of Michif. All the Michif words below were taken from the michif heritage dictionary (http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php) please go to this dictionary and click the yellow speaker icon beside each word to help you pronounce the Michif words in the game below.



I Have Who Has - Cultural Items Activity

Listen to the following Michif speaker list various Métis cultural items below in Michif:

<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/149521>

*Please note: Some of the words may differ from the speaker in the voice clip due to different dialects of Michif. All the Michif words below were taken from the Michif Heritage dictionary

(http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php).

Go to this dictionary and click the yellow speaker icon beside each word to help you pronounce the Michif words in the game below.



I Have aen wagon
(red river cart)



Who Has sayncheur
flayshii

I Have sayncheur
flayshii
(sash)



Who Has
aen square dance

I Have aen square
dance
(square dance)



Who Has
daans roon

I Have daans roon
(round dance)



Who Has
daans di Michif

I Have daans di
Michif
(jig)



Who Has vyayloon

I Have vyayloon
(fiddle)



Who Has mooshoom

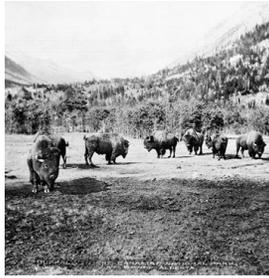


I Have **mooshoom**
(grandpa)

Grandpa

Who Has **maachii**
bufloo

I Have **maachii bufloo**
(buffalo hunt)



Who Has **noohkoom**

I Have **noohkoom**
(grandma)

Grandma

Who Has
kwashkwaypichikayhk

I Have
kwashkwaypichikayhk
(fishing)



Who Has **tooroo**

I Have **tooroo**
(pemmican)



Who Has **vyaand**
shaysh

I Have **vyaand shaysh**
(dry meat)



Who Has
mayshkootoona



I Have **mayshkootoona**
(trader)



Who Has
bufloo

I Have **bufloo**
(buffalo)



Who Has
kanoo

I Have **kanoo**
(canoe)



Who Has
lii raachet

I have **lii raachet**
(snowshoe)



Who Has
aen chim di zhvoo

I Have **aen chim di zhvoo**
(horse team)



Who Has
li pwasoon

I Have
li pwasoon
(fish)



Who Has
aen wagon



Print a reflection page for each student:

Name:

What is one thing you learned today about the Michif language?

Why is learning Michif Important?

What are the 3 words you are going to try to remember in Michif?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.