



## 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:** Exploring the Languages of Metis

**Time Frame** 45 min

**Grade/Subject** Grade 4 Social and ELA

**Topic(s)** Explore the various languages that Métis people speak. Learn Classroom words in the languages

### 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

### 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”

<http://albertametis.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NationalDefinitionofMetis.pdf>

## Assessment FOR Learning

Students are:

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

## Assessment OF Learning

Students are able to locate French, Cree and Michif words

Students are able to identify why Métis people spoke multiple languages

## Differentiation/Adaptations

- Provide English and French words to students. Ask them to find the Cree and Michif words for the labeling activity
- Provide the English, French, and Cree words to students. Ask them to find the Michif words for the labeling activity
- Give them the French, Cree and Michif word. Ask the students to find the English word for the labeling activity
- Provide a label that already has all the words and create the image
- Pair students up to create their label
- Give students more than 1 item to label

Approx. time	Activity	Materials/Text References
Intro: 5min	Place the following 4 words on the board <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dog</li> <li>2. Chien</li> <li>3. Atim</li> <li>4. Sh'yaen</li> </ol>	<b>ANSWER KEY:</b> Michif/Sh'yaen nehiyawewin (Cree)/Atim French/Chien English/Dog



	<p>Ask students to guess what language each word is; either nehiyawewin (Cree), Michif, French or English</p> <p>Explain. Today we will be learning languages traditionally spoken by Métis.</p>	
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<p><b>New information and discussion:</b></p> <p>25 min.</p>	<p><b><u>Group Discussion</u></b></p> <p><b>Explain:</b> We will be exploring 4 languages that are traditionally spoken by Métis.</p> <p>The Métis people spoke many different languages. Michif, French, English, and nehiyawewin (Cree).</p> <p>Who can tell me what Michif is? (This is review from lesson #1) As new Métis communities formed, they would speak through a blend of both French and Cree, which changed into a language of itself; Michif.</p> <p><b>Michif</b> cannot be broken up into two languages (Cree and French) but instead honours both parents' cultures equally, and became a balanced blend of each culture and language.</p> <p><b>Français/French</b> is a birth language of the Métis. Métis children that participated in school or church would have also learned how to speak the French language. Many Métis people still speak French today.</p> <p><b>Cree/nehiyawewin</b> is an Indigenous language spoken across Canada. The Métis families retained their kinship with their Cree families while remaining a distinct community with a distinct culture. A majority of Métis people who speak an Indigenous language speak Cree. Many Métis people continue to speak Cree today.</p> <p><b>English</b>, although not as common, some Métis were able to speak the English language across the homeland. It was beneficial to be able to speak the English language when trading and/or negotiating with English settlers. Some Métis learned English as they may have had Scottish, English, or Irish ancestors that would have passed down the language.</p>	
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	<p><i>How would knowing all these languages be useful to the Métis people?</i></p> <p>ANSWER: Not only did these languages help form Métis identity (who they are) but allowed Métis people to communicate with others that lived around them, this included various European settlers and First Nations. Métis people were invaluable to the Fur Trade, and essential to the development of the country we now know as Canada.</p> <p>Activity: Label your classroom calendar together using French, English, Michif and Cree.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Place the labels on your class calendar as a class (see labels at the end of the lesson)</li> <li>2) Go through each word and try and say each word daily/weekly.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Closure</b> 15 min.</p>	<p>Assign each student a word from your room (example: window, board, pencil, computers) then ask them to find the Michif, French, and Cree word and place it in a label to go around your room. Ask them to include a picture.</p> <p>Use this website to find Michif words: <a href="http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php">http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php</a></p> <p>Use this website to search Cree words: <a href="http://www.creedictionary.com/">http://www.creedictionary.com/</a></p> <p>Use Google Translate to find French words <a href="https://translate.google.ca/">https://translate.google.ca/</a></p> <p>Example:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Window - English Fenêtre - French Saasii - Michif Wâsênamawin - Cree</p> </div>	<p>Use labels found at the end of this lesson for students to fill out</p> <p>See example at the end of this lesson</p> <p>List of words to use for the labels (this list is just an example, please add or take away words depending on the items in your room):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) pencil sharpener</li> <li>2) computers</li> <li>3) desk</li> <li>4) teacher's desk</li> <li>5) board</li> <li>6) door</li> <li>7) books</li> <li>8) library</li> <li>9) chair</li> </ol>



- 10) table
- 11) picture
- 12) poster
- 13) plant
- 14) markers
- 15) paper
- 16) art
- 17) science
- 18) counter
- 19) calendar
- 20) homework

### Extension Activities

- Review and practice reading label(s) daily
- Add more words
- Label other locations in the school or at home

### Resources/Links/Videos

- <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/149520>
- <http://www.creedictionary.com/>
- [http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif\\_dictionary.php](http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php)
- <https://translate.google.ca/>

### Credits

Foundational Knowledge Resource: Languages of Métis Rupert'sland Institute  
 \*Please note that while Rupert'sland 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.  
 Rupert'sland Institute - Métis Centre of Excellence, Education Team (2020)



## Activity

ENGLISH WORD:

FRENCH WORD:

MICHIF WORD:

CREE WORD:

PICTURE:

ENGLISH WORD:

FRENCH WORD:

MICHIF WORD:

CREE WORD:

PICTURE:





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**Example:**

ENGLISH WORD: **Window**

FRENCH WORD: **Fenêtre**

MICHIF WORD: **Saasii**

CREE WORD: **Wâsênamawin**

PICTURE:

