

ACHIEVING ABORIGINAL **STUDENT SUCCESS**

A Guide for K to 8 Classrooms

Pamela Rose Toulouse



PORTAGE & MAIN PRESS

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PREFACE

I grew up in a small northern Ontario First Nation called Sagamok Anishinabek, surrounded by my family – all of whom are Anishinabe peoples from the same area. For three years, from junior kindergarten to grade 1, I attended a little school house on the “rez.”¹ This was a community school where, although the provincial curriculum was taught, an abundance of Anishinabe language and culture was provided. I can still remember the comfort in knowing all my classmates and my teachers. I always felt safe in that school and was not afraid to take risks in my learning.

When I entered grade 2, I had to go to school in the neighbouring town. At first, I found this experience unnerving, and I retreated into myself. I felt awkward in this “new” system that did not include any content or strategies that were Aboriginal affirming. I am sure my teachers did the best they could with what they had and what they knew.

It is now close to 30 years later. Today, I see a national movement in education and in school boards – a movement to address issues of Aboriginal student success and culturally relevant curriculum. The changes that are occurring have also been prompted by the time immemorial efforts of Aboriginal people lobbying for rights and respect in student learning. This synergy has led to the development of many provincial and territorial policies and frameworks that focus on Aboriginal people. The contents of these documents spell out the goals and strategies needed to support Aboriginal learners in the classroom.

For the past couple of years, I have been very fortunate, as a recognized Anishinabek educator, to be called upon to provide in-service to teachers and administrators. I have delivered keynotes, facilitated workshops, and written many pieces on the topic of Aboriginal student success. This is a role I could only dream about when I was an eight-year-old Anishinabe girl from Sagamok.

Achieving Aboriginal Student Success is the culmination of my experiences in education and in life. I have written this book for all educators who are committed to equity and inclusion in their classrooms. I have examined Aboriginal policies on education and curriculum pieces to provide a resource that gives each educator practical ideas and strategies for the classroom. I have seen where schools and boards are in need of information, and this book helps fill those gaps. This is a literary journey where educators – like me and you – can quickly access information on Aboriginal people that is truthful and authentic.

¹ Rez is a cultural insider term for Reserve. This is a location where many Status Indians were legislated to live in lands set aside for Aboriginal people.

I encourage educators to introduce their students (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to the ideas found in this book. The strategies and information in this resource are about building bridges between cultures that fosters respect, appreciation, and understanding. The new pedagogy is long-overdue knowledge about the beauty and diversity of Aboriginal people.



INTRODUCTION

Who This Book Is For

Every province and territory in Canada has a government agency (department or ministry) that is committed to education. Each of these departments or ministries has policies, curricula, or positions that focus on **Aboriginal** students, and each promotes the same basic message: Aboriginal student success in the classroom is important and highly valued. Unfortunately, resources about how to ensure Aboriginal students achieve this success are hard to find. Such information is urgently needed – especially given that the majority of teachers of Aboriginal students in Canada are non-Aboriginal.

Achieving Aboriginal Student Success has been written to help fill this dearth in educational resources. The book is for all teachers of kindergarten to grade 8 who have Aboriginal students in their classrooms or who are looking for ways to infuse an Aboriginal worldview into their curriculum. Teachers and educators in all settings will find innovative ways to engage their students with the teaching/learning pedagogy presented. Although the primary focus of the book is the needs of Aboriginal students, the ideas are best practices that can be applied in classrooms of any makeup.

A Brief History of Aboriginal Education in Canada

There are four phases in the history of Aboriginal education in Canada: traditional, segregation, **assimilation**, and integration. Although the phases overlap, each defines a distinct period in the way Aboriginal people have been educated.

1. **Traditional.** Traditional (time immemorial to colonial period) education practices of Aboriginal children and youth were, historically, a community responsibility (Aboriginal Services Branch 2005). Each of the 50 Nations in Canada had its own unique way of ensuring its young were culturally and linguistically educated. Elders and key cultural teachers worked with children in an engaging manner through observation, hands-on activities, reflection, storytelling, and practice (Benton-Banai 1988). Education was defined as a lifelong process that honoured and valued the learner.
2. **Segregation.** The *Indian Act* of 1876 gave the Crown and the Crown's representatives the power to make decisions about Aboriginal people (Baxter 2006). One of these judgments was the creation of residential schools (late 1800s to late 1980s). Aboriginal children from five to fifteen years of age were taken from their homes and placed in these isolated institutions.



Aboriginal children were forcibly placed in residential schools – such as this one – from the late 1800s to the late 1980s. Of the four phases identified in Aboriginal education, segregation is the most widely publicized.

3. **Assimilation.** Assimilation occurred with the creation of federal day schools in the **First Nation** communities (late 1940s to late 1980s). These day schools were run by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and the curriculum and teachers were often non-Aboriginal (Steckley and Cummins 2008).
4. **Integration.** Integration (late 1950s to present) began when Aboriginal students were transported to publicly funded schools in towns and cities (integration). School boards were funded by INAC in order to provide an education to Aboriginal students.

Since 1876, then, elementary and secondary education of Aboriginal students, in terms of curriculum and language, has been driven by a non-Aboriginal agenda. The education of Aboriginal children was controlled by external bodies, and, for the most part, focused on assimilation (Toulouse 2006). As a result, Aboriginal students and their communities became disengaged from schooling. In the 1970s, Aboriginal people took a political stand on education – they demanded that “Indian Control of Indian Education” become a reality. The key tenets of this movement reinforced that Aboriginal parental involvement and the affirmation of Aboriginal languages and cultures were paramount in Aboriginal student success (National Indian Brotherhood 1972).

A New Approach to Aboriginal Education

Today, there is another significant shift in how Aboriginal education is being approached. Each province and territory is seeking more authentic ways to engage with Aboriginal communities to ensure that Aboriginal worldview (**customs**, language, resources) is respectfully represented in schools.

Turtle Island and Gifts From Its Peoples

Many Aboriginal Nations refer to North America as “Turtle Island” (Benton-Banai 1988). This name comes from their creation stories – time immemorial legends that help Aboriginal people understand their origins. These creation stories, which are often told in storytelling circles by Elders, have been passed down from generation to generation (see appendix A for an Anishinabe Ojibwe version of the legend of Turtle Island).

An estimated 120 million Aboriginal people lived on Turtle Island at the time of non-Aboriginal contact in 1492 (Oswalt 2008). The people lived in harmony with their environments. Their intimate knowledge of the land and of the gifts from the land were highly valued by European explorers and early settlers. For example, Aboriginal people shared their cures for scurvy and other diseases, methods of transportation, and tools that enabled the Europeans to survive – and eventually thrive – in North America. One of the greatest gifts from Aboriginal people was, and continues to be, their holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. Long before eco-footprints began to occupy the discourse of environmental stewardship today, Aboriginal people honoured the earth and respected the lands on which they lived.

Many of the things that people today take for granted are inventions and innovations that Aboriginal people have given to the world. These include foods such as chocolate, corn, and potatoes; sports such as lacrosse and hockey; musical instruments such as maracas.

Overview of Aboriginal People in Canada

Did you know that there are over 500 Aboriginal Nations in North America? Each Nation has its own language, traditions, celebrations, customs, and ceremonies. These 500 Nations can be identified according to 12 distinct geographical regions: the Arctic, California, Circum-Caribbean, Great Basin, Great Plains, Mesoamerica, Northeast, Northwest Coast, Plateau, Southeast, Southwest, and Subarctic regions (Keoke and Porterfield 2002). (See Part 2, page 75, for grade-appropriate lessons related to these areas, which focus on some of these Aboriginal people’s gifts, inventions, and innovations.)

As you read this introduction, think about the following:

- The importance of your role in equitable classrooms that honour Aboriginal culture
- The critical connection between your provincial/territorial ministry or department’s stance on Aboriginal education and your school
- The impact that colonial history has had on Aboriginal culture, and the crucial role that education plays in healing and **self-determination**
- The influence of culturally meaningful curriculum to both Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in building understanding

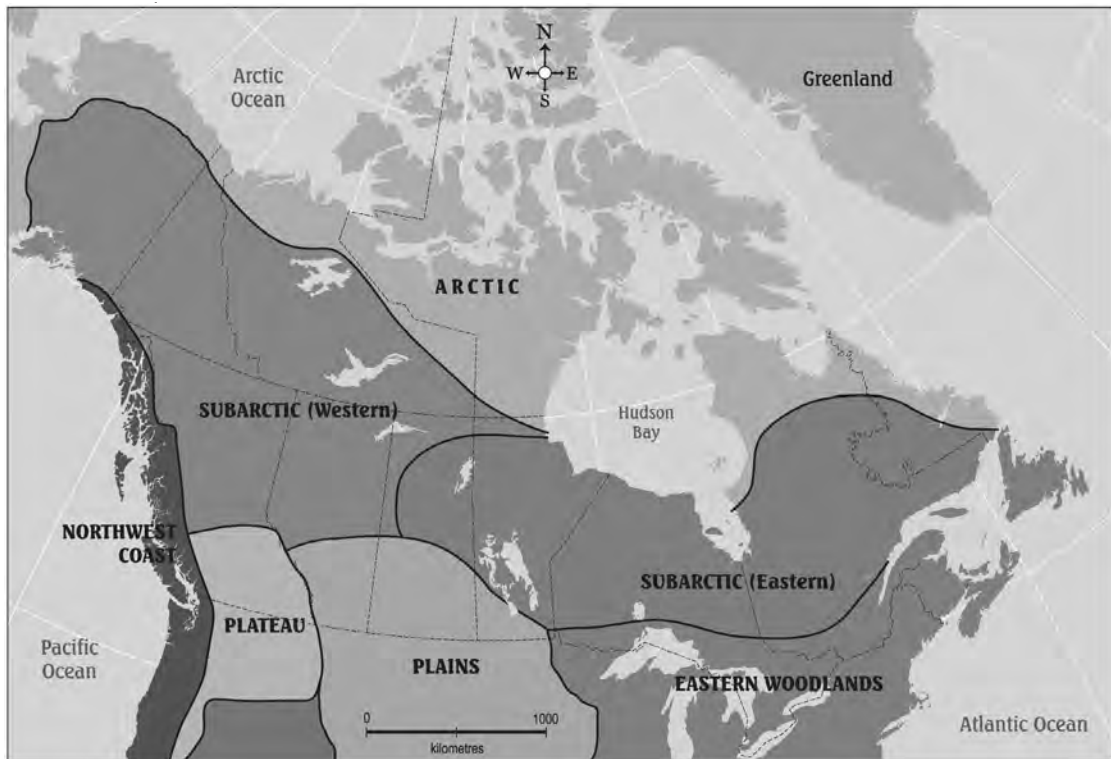


Figure I.1 There are more than 50 distinct Aboriginal cultures in Canada that belong to six geographical locations: Arctic, Subarctic, Northeast (also known as Eastern Woodlands), Great Plains (also known as Plains), Plateau, and Northwest Coast (Natural Resources Canada 2003).

Canada is home to more than 50 Nations or distinct Aboriginal cultures that live in six geographical regions (figure I.1). According to the 2006 census, there are 1 172 785 Aboriginal people in Canada. First Nations is the largest group, with 698 025 people, followed by the **Métis**, with 389 780 people, and the **Inuit**, with 50 480 people (Statistics Canada 2010; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2010). There are 615 First Nation communities in Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008).

More than 50 distinct Aboriginal dialects, belonging to 11 language families, are spoken in Canada: Algonquian, Inuktitut, Athapaskan, Siouan, Salish, Tsimishian, Wakashan, Iroquoian, Haida, Tlingit, and Kutenai. Only three dialects are expected to survive: Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut (Natural Resources Canada 2009a).

Pre-confederation and post-confederation treaties made with Aboriginal people guarantee them certain rights in their lands and territories. These **treaty** rights are guaranteed under the *Constitution Act* of 1982 (Natural Resources Canada 2009b).

How to Use This Book

Achieving Aboriginal Student Success is divided into two parts. Part 1, which covers chapters 1–5, includes teaching strategies, lesson ideas, outlines for full units, classroom management techniques, assessment tools, and suggestions for connecting to the community. Each chapter has a combination of one or more checklists, pictures, illustrations, maps, and other images that provide support for understanding and applying the teaching strategies. Teachers and educators will find useful and helpful ideas for the classroom that are relevant and easy to apply, as well as innovative ways to engage all learners. Every chapter has an “As you read, think about” section that sets reading goals and cognitive prompts for you.

Part 2 of the book includes two sets of culturally and grade-appropriate literature-based lesson plans for students in kindergarten to grade 8. The first set of lessons consists of activities about some of the 500 Nations and their contributions. The second set of lessons consists of examples of best practices in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and presenting. All lessons include background information, materials list, preparation guide, activity instructions and worksheets, ways to extend the activity, and assessment suggestions. The lesson plans can be implemented immediately and effectively in the school environment.

Answer keys and a glossary of key terms can be found at the back of the book. All glossary words appear in bold the first time they are used in the text. The story of Turtle Island and several maps can be found in the appendices, as well as a list of Aboriginal-named First Nations of Canada.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: Aboriginal Teaching Strategies in the Classroom provides an overview of

- The spiritual domain, with an example and questions to pose for infusing cultural concepts, resources, and artifacts
- The physical domain, with descriptions and examples of how to be interactive, collaborative, visual, and hands on
- The emotional domain, with descriptions and procedures of how to incorporate humour, storytelling, group talk, and reflection
- The intellectual domain, with descriptions and examples of how to conduct mini lessons, engage in respectful procedures/routines, and use relevant assessment tools

Chapter 2: Increasing Literacy Success by Implementing an Aboriginal Model provides an overview and checklist of classroom activities for

- Reading in a respectful environment
- Writing that is loved and celebrated
- Speaking as bravery
- Listening for wisdom
- Presenting as honest/humble
- Asking questions to ensure resources are respectful to Aboriginal people

Chapter 3: Character Education and the Seven Goodlife Teachings of the **Anishinabek** provides an overview and teaching strategies for

- Teaching of love
- Teaching of respect
- Teaching of wisdom
- Teaching of humility
- Teaching of bravery
- Teaching of honesty
- Teaching of truth

Chapter 4: Engaging in Partnerships With the Aboriginal Community provides an overview and checklist of strategies for

- Partnerships with parents/guardians and the Aboriginal community
- Partnerships with Aboriginal organizations/agencies
- Protocols with Aboriginal Elders and Métis Senators
- Partnerships with Aboriginal cultural resource people and role models

Chapter 5: Seasonal Lesson Ideas and the 13 Moons of the Anishinabek provides information on the 13 moons and lesson ideas for

- Season of spring, with the three moons
- Season of summer, with the three moons
- Season of fall, with the three moons
- Season of winter, with the four moons

PART 1

CHAPTERS 1 TO 5



1

ABORIGINAL TEACHING STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Aboriginal students – like all students – are very diverse in their learning styles. However, there are some general patterns in teaching strategies that have been shown to engage Aboriginal students more fully than other strategies (Toulouse 2008; Redwing-Saunders and Hill 2007; Hilberg and Soleste-Tharp 2002). These strategies put equal emphasis on the spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual worlds (figure 1.1).

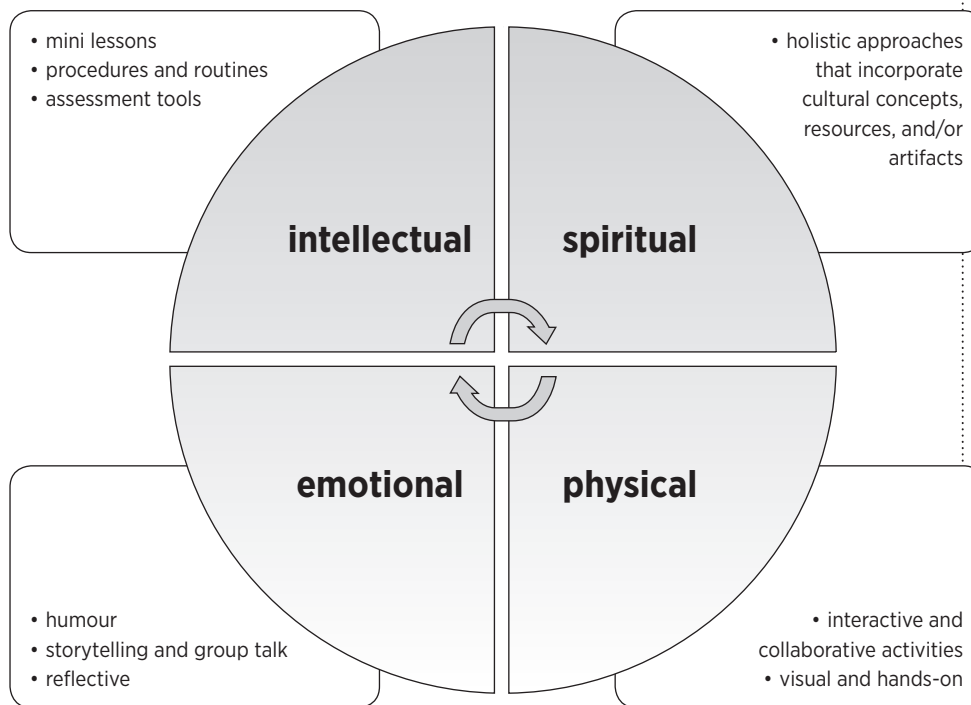


Figure 1.1 *The holistic wheel represents the ideal conditions for Aboriginal student success. The spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the self are interconnected.*

A Model of Aboriginal Teaching Strategies

Many of the 500 Nations possess a worldview that examines life from a 360 degree perspective (Dumont 1993) – that is, all events, planning, teaching, interactions, and other life moments are considered from this position. The four domains of the holistic wheel (figure 1.1) originate from time-immemorial teachings of Aboriginal people.

As you read this chapter, think about the following:

- The importance of using culturally appropriate resources, artifacts, and concepts in the classroom
- The value of implementing **differentiated** and Aboriginal-centred teaching strategies as a best practice for all students
- The need to carefully consider the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of all learners in the classroom
- The understanding that spiritual domain refers to the students' ability to have meaningful connections to others, including the world around them
- The significance of creating a community with all learners as a key factor in building cultural appreciation and understanding

Aboriginal people are great observers of the world around them, and the holistic wheel provides an ideal vehicle in which to approach life. Holism is an important teaching approach and strategy for Aboriginal students: the teacher introduces the larger picture before presenting the parts. When students begin to understand why they are engaged in a particular task, they find learning much more meaningful. As a teaching strategy, holism engages Aboriginal learners (Ignas 2004) by helping to bridge the significance of learning.

The Holistic Wheel

For the Anishinabek, each domain of the wheel is one aspect of the development in the life of a person.

- **The spiritual domain:** This domain refers to all those thoughts, activities, interactions, and rituals that intimately connect a person to the world. It includes one's ability to develop meaningful relationships with the earth, the earth's children, and other people. The key tenet of the spiritual domain is the belief in a purpose greater than the self.
- **The physical domain:** This domain refers to the basic necessities required for life. These include food, shelter, warmth, clothing, and overall health and well-being. The key tenet of the physical domain is the achievement of a physical state of being that is thriving.
- **The emotional domain:** This domain refers to one's mental state of mind. It includes an analysis of a person's level of participation in life. This domain examines inner-self talk and how it translates into behaviours with the self and with others. The key tenet of this domain is the ability to be reflective and to have the capacity and willingness for change.
- **The intellectual domain:** This domain is best described as the cerebral activities that a person engages in. It includes teaching and learning experiences of an inquisitive human being. Cerebral activities can occur in a wide variety of environments. The key tenet of the intellectual domain is the understanding that learning is lifelong.

A classroom environment that includes the four domains is culturally respectful and Aboriginal-learner friendly (Toulouse 2007; Aboriginal Services Branch 2005). Within each of these four domains are particular strategies that engage Aboriginal students in an authentic manner.

Classroom Strategies

The Spiritual

The spiritual can be described as a holistic approach to cultural concepts, resources, and/or artifacts.

With holistic teaching, the cultural whole is identified and then presented in its parts. In the classroom, it is important for each lesson to celebrate

Aboriginal culture in some way and to make connections to the real world. Drawing upon authentic and meaningful Aboriginal resources informs all students and builds a sense of community (Redwing-Saunders and Hill 2007). This approach also helps students develop an appreciation for Aboriginal cultures (Morrison 2009), and it builds bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Lipka and Adams 2004).

To effectively use the spiritual teaching strategy, it is helpful for teachers to meet ahead of time and brainstorm a cultural concept, resource, or artifact relevant to their area. Ask questions, and let the answers to the questions become the basis for culturally appropriate curriculum. In the Anishinabek territory in Ontario, for example, educators began planning their classes by first examining various quill boxes and holding a brainstorming session. The following questions arose during the session:

- What is the purpose and meaning behind these quill boxes?
- How is the history of the quill box an integral part of Aboriginal past and present?
- How can the quill box become a springboard of activities for a language arts lesson? A mathematics lesson? A science lesson? A social studies lesson? A history lesson? A geography lesson? A visual arts lesson? A music lesson? A drama lesson? A health and physical education lesson?
- What specific curricular expectations (outcomes) can be met by implementing activities around the quill box and across the subject areas? How will I rewrite these expectations (outcomes) in their subjects so that they become meaningful **learning goals** for the students?
- How will the cultural teaching and history of the quill box be introduced and maintained throughout these activities?
- What authentic resources will I need to make this happen? What teaching strategies do I need to use to engage Aboriginal learners? What types of assessment tools are the most appropriate for these activities?
- How does this approach assist all students in their learning?

The Physical

Students learn best in classrooms that are highly interactive and collaborative (Hilberg and Soleste-Tharp 2002) – when they can interact with their peers and engage in dialogue, problem solving, and/or constructing for learning relevancy. It is important, therefore, that each lesson being planned and implemented incorporate manipulatives and visual organizers, and engage students in pairs, small groups, and larger groups (Toulouse 2008). The lessons best suited include activities (art based and/or kinesthetic) that demonstrate the expectations (outcomes) as learning goals. Teaching strategies need to reflect the physical domain of learning.



Quill boxes are used to keep traditional medicines and dried foods safely stored. The use of the quill box is an example of a holistic approach to curriculum planning. The quill box is just one cultural artifact out of thousands that can be used as a springboard to activities.

A mini lesson is a focused 12- to 15-minute teacher-directed session that concentrates on a particular expectation (outcome), skill, value, resource, technique, or other learning opportunity/concern. It is often highly engaging and draws upon a variety of techniques to teach a particular concept. For example, a math mini lesson could involve the use of an interactive whiteboard (IWB) on which the teacher shows a quill box and highlights the many geometric figures located within the design of the box. The teacher may also highlight areas of symmetry on the quill box and share the history and use of the item. This approach enables learners to make cultural connections to their learning.

To do this, the activity can be written in student language. For example, according to the Ontario grade 3 math curriculum for the unit about geometry and spatial sense, students are required to “complete and describe designs and pictures of images that have a vertical, horizontal, or diagonal line of symmetry” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005). By providing students with a series of mini lessons on symmetry (vertical, horizontal, diagonal) – using Aboriginal art, quill boxes, hand drums, or rattles – the teacher has created an activity that is Aboriginal based. The students can then be given other samples of Aboriginal resources and asked to locate the lines of symmetry. The learning-goal statement for the grade 3 student might be: “I have correctly located vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines of symmetry on the quill box.” The activity could be extended by providing the students with an Aboriginal design, then having them fold the paper and recreating a symmetrical version of the design. The learning-goal statement for the students might then be: “I have drawn the other half of the Aboriginal design. I can explain why or why not this is symmetry.” Throughout this activity, the teacher would always provide background or historical information on the Aboriginal artifact or art piece to ensure connections to culture.

Visual and Hands-On

Many students are visual learners who benefit from hands-on activities. It is important for the teaching strategies in the classroom to use this approach (Gaquin 2006; Hilberg and Soleste-Tharp 2002). Aboriginal cultures respond to the visual and kinesthetic realms, and, therefore, culturally appropriate

PART 2

LITERATURE-BASED LESSONS A AND B

KINDERGARTEN: GIFTS FROM THE INUIT OF THE ARCTIC

Background Information for Teachers

Many First Peoples live in the Arctic – in harmony with the area’s vast and cold landscape. The Inuit, Yupiaq, and Aleut are just a few of the distinct Aboriginal Nations living in this region. They live in harmony with their landscape and are scientists for the far North (Ipellie 2007) – their intimate knowledge of the land gives them a perspective of the landscape that no others possess. Many items used today were invented by Arctic peoples. These include portable space heaters, mukluks, flotation devices, kayaks, snow goggles, shovels, parkas, igloos, and dogsleds (Keoke and Porterfield 2002). Each innovation was made with materials taken from the land or obtained through elaborate trade systems with other Aboriginal Nations.

Materials

- *The Inuit Thought of It – Amazing Arctic Innovations*, a book by A. Ipellie
- map titled, “12 Geographical Regions of Turtle Island” (see appendix B)
- map of Arctic geographical region (see appendix B)
- interactive whiteboard or chart paper¹
- markers
- crayons
- clear tape or stapler
- “Inuit Inventions” booklet (see BLM-A K.1) (This is a two-page activity sheet.)

Preparation

1. Make a photocopy of “Inuit Inventions” (BLM-A K.1) for each student, and put the booklets together. Bind the booklets with clear tape or staples.

Activity: Part A

1. Have students gather in a circle. Show the map, “12 Geographical Regions of Turtle Island.” Next, show students the Arctic geographical area map, and point out where some of the Inuit lived. Link the map of the Arctic geographical area to the map of Turtle Island. Discuss some of the many inventions and innovations the Inuit have given to the world.

Important Note! Many cross-curricular subjects are in this kindergarten lesson, including language arts, the arts, social studies, and science and technology.

¹ Whenever whiteboards are mentioned in this lesson and the lessons that follow, teachers can use chart paper instead.

Activity: Part B

1. Have students remain in a circle. Show them pictures of the people, animals, and land of the Arctic from the book, *The Inuit Thought of It – Amazing Arctic Innovations*. As you show each photo, ask the students to identify what is in the picture.
2. Introduce the term *Arctic*. Explain that the Arctic is a place in the far north. On a map, point out the Arctic. Introduce the term *Inuit*. Explain that the Inuit are one of the main groups of First Peoples that live in the Arctic. Tell students that this is where the Inuit have lived for thousands of years.
3. Let students know that they are going to learn about some of the inventions of the Inuit. Show students the activity booklet titled, “Inuit Inventions.” As a class, review the inventions and words from the booklet. Have students sound out the words with you. Now, ask the students:
 - What are some things you have learned about the Arctic and the Inuit?
 Make a list of students’ responses on the whiteboard, and, as a class, review.
4. Send students back to their desks. Give each student a copy of the activity booklet, “Inuit Inventions.” Review the activity, and have students complete the exercise.

Directions to students:

Complete the mini booklet “Inuit Inventions” by colouring the pictures and tracing the words. When you are done, print your name in the space on page 2 of your booklet.

Extending the Activity

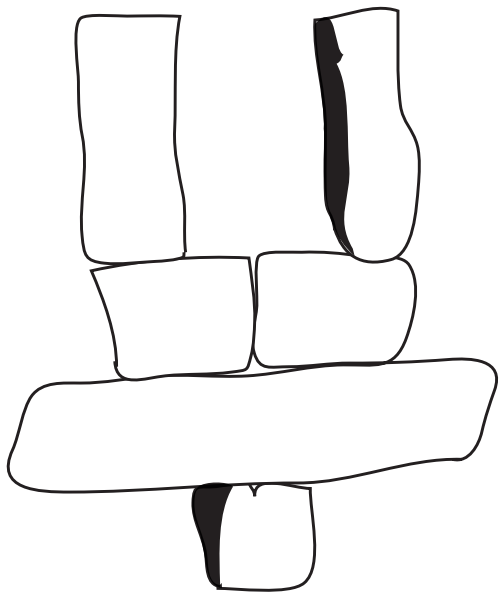
- Read aloud *A Northern Alphabet* by Ted Harrison. This is a great A to Z picture resource that explores life north of the 60th parallel.
- Play some Arctic winter games (see Kids’ Stop publication link at the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website at <www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ach/lr/ks/index-eng.asp>).

Student Assessment

- Have students share their completed booklets at individual student/teacher conferences. At the conference, ask them to identify two things they have learned about the Inuit peoples and the Arctic region. Think about the curriculum in terms of your province or territory’s language arts, the arts, social studies, and science/technology expectations (outcomes).

5

inukshuk



4

goggles
snow



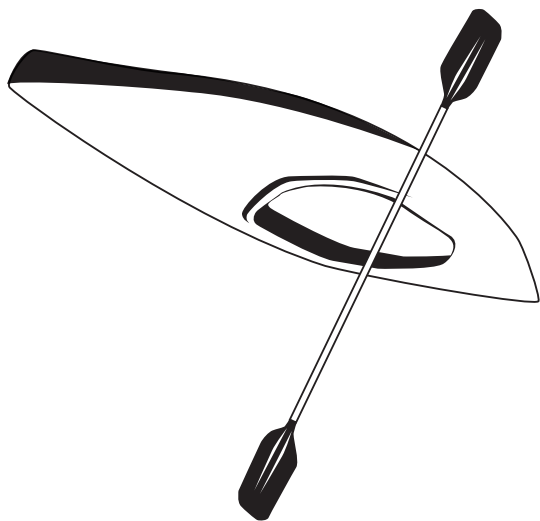
Inuit Inventions

1



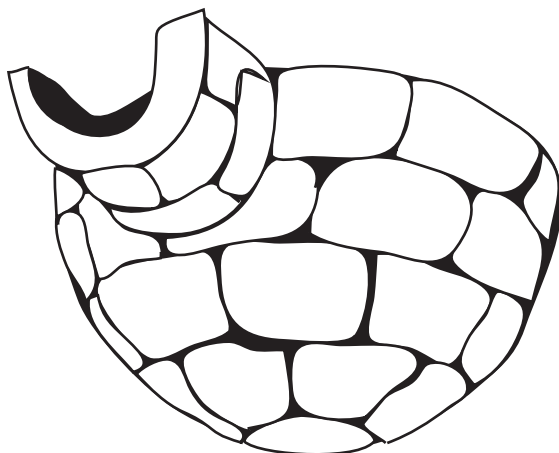
3

kayak



9

igloo



My name



parka

2

7



The Office of Student Success introduces students to their college experience by providing a collegial and academically enriched environment. As the point of entry for freshmen and incoming transfers, our support programs facilitate ongoing student engagement while promoting intellectual growth and development. The Office of Student Success encourages social integration through a variety of programs designed to assist students in succeeding during their DSU experience, as they progress toward graduation. Student Success at the U. The University of Utah. Student Success at the U. Resources. Home.Â Student Support. You came to the University of Utah for an education, but sometimes roadblocks get in the way. Whether you need academic assistance, a welcoming space to study or meet friends, or help with personal obstacles, weâ€™re here to help with support to get you back on your feet. American Indian Resource Center. A home away from home for American Indian students and allies.