

## Whole World in our Hands: Experiential Activities

# First Nations Governance

## Governance in the Classroom

### Theme:

Alternative forms of government

### Prerequisite:

Knowledge of history of first nations groups in Canada, specifically Maliseet/Wolastokwik and Mi'kmaq peoples of New Brunswick. Knowledge of the current state of First Nations in Canada and the Indian Act.

### Curriculum Entry Points:

Grade 9 Social Studies, Grade 10 Personal Growth and Development, Grade 12 World Issues, Grade 12 Political Science



### Overview:

Students will participate in the creation of rules for the classroom as well as a talking circle to illustrate the importance of self-governance and alternative decision making.

This exercise will demonstrate for students the impact of self-governance and the importance of participating in the process of decision making around group governing documents. By experiencing the unfairness of arbitrarily imposed rules and not having their voices heard, they will come to understand the importance of dialogue and discussion.

**"When you put your knowledge in a circle, it's not yours anymore, it's shared by everyone." Douglas Cardinal, architect (Regina Leader Post, November 28, 1995).**

### Objectives:

- To engage students through active participation in learning about First Nations governance and gain a first-hand experience of governance
- Active involvement in the process of trying to obtain or regain autonomy and their own right to make up the rules of the class.
- The students will experience sharing in a Talking Circle (see the attached Talking Circle sheet)



### Main Concepts and Vocabulary:

**TALKING CIRCLE:** The Talking Circle is an excellent teaching strategy which is consistent with First Nations values. The circle symbolizes completeness.

**FIRST NATIONS:** The first people to live in Canada.

**MALISEET AND WOLSATOKWIKs:** The First Nations people of Western New Brunswick area.

**SELF-GOVERNANCE:** Returns decision-making authority and management responsibilities to Tribes. Tribes are accountable to their own people for resource management, service delivery, and development.

# Classroom Activity: Governance

## *Learning through Talking Circles*

### Time Required:

Two 60 minute periods

### Materials:

Handouts A, B and C

### Background:

Background information is provided in summary at the end of the lesson plan. It is provided as refresher material only, students should be familiar with the history of First Nations people in New Brunswick and Canada before completing this lesson plan. This background information should be quickly reviewed with the class before beginning this lesson.

### Activity Instructions:

#### Part A: Initial Setup (day one)

Physical Setup of classroom: The teacher, acting as facilitator, arranges the desks for the class in a circle ahead of time. Next the teacher posts a series of classroom rules. Make your "rules" fit your class and personality. (Some ideas are: everyone must take off their shoes, you can't smile or make any facial expression, you must hold your pencil in your left hand between 8:45 and 9 etc.) Make as many ridiculous rules as you can. Make the rules oppressive. Are there consequences for breaking the rules? Post the consequences as well.

#### Part B: Rules (day one)

Begin the lesson by letting the class know that you have decided to make some new class rules. There is to be no discussion about these rules. Begin the lesson with a review of the material the class has already covered on First Nations people. Divide the class into groups of four and pass out either Handout A or B to each group. Have each group read their case study and discuss the questions. Throughout this time strictly maintain the rules. Before dismissing the class ask them for their opinions on the new rules and how they feel about following them in class.

#### Part C: Discussion (day two)

When the students return the next day continue to enforce the oppressive rules from the day before for the first ten minutes of the day. Ask the students to share their responses to the questions. After a few students have had the chance to respond ask the class the following:

- Do they find it hard to share their thoughts and opinions when following these rules?
- Are the rules fair?
- Did they participate in the creation of the rules?

#### Part D: Talking Circles (Handout C)

Use the talking Circle format to discuss the idea of self governance for First Nations Peoples. Make sure to relate the experience of the class to that of First Nations people and the cases in Handouts A and B. (i.e. the frustration of having no say in what rules are created, having no power to change them, feeling voiceless) Have the class come up with new rules to replace the original set. The teacher should respect decisions made by the class as long as these decisions fall within the school guidelines and overall common sense. The purpose here is obviously not to take autonomy away from the teacher, but to allow the students to experience self-governance.

#### Part E: Conclusions

Have the students record the new class rules and solicit agreement from all for them. They will need to develop reasonable consequence for people who break their class rules. Talking circles can be used throughout the year to discuss the rules or other issues that come up in the class. After rules have been developed and agreed upon post them in the classroom.



# Community Activity: Invite A Speaker!

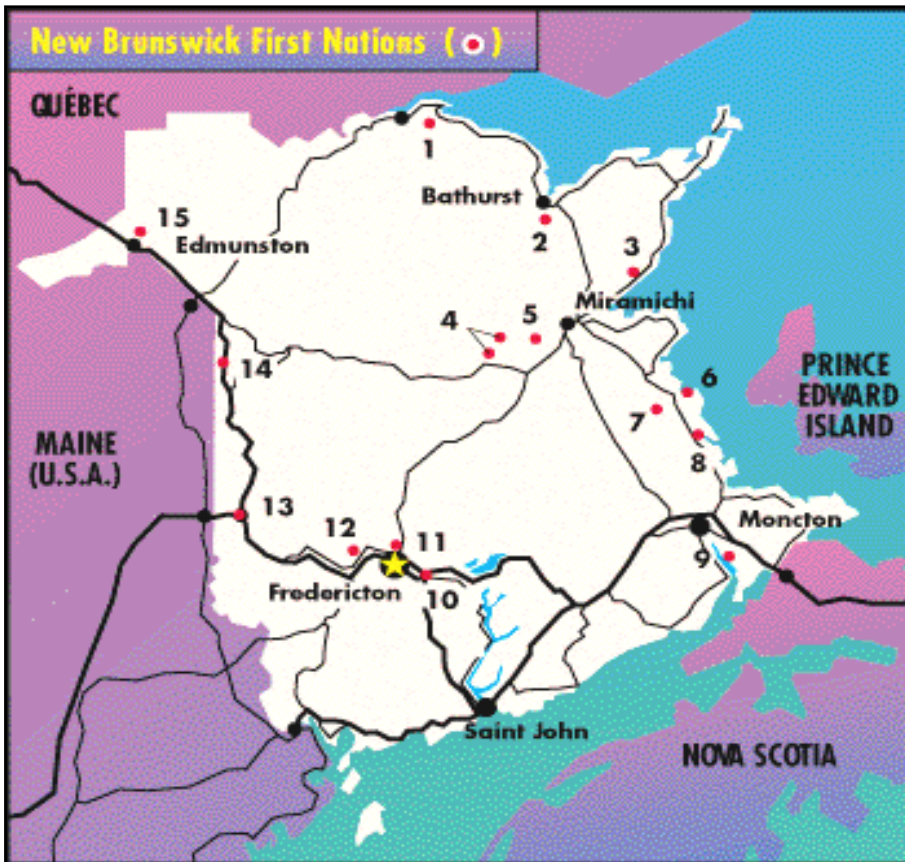
Invite a speaker from a local First Nation group to talk to the class or school about the history of his or her people in New Brunswick. This could be either a classroom, school or community event.

Contact the St. John River Valley Tribal Council for contact information on specific First Nations within the river valley area.

Address: 7 Wulastook Court

Woodstock First Nation, NB E7M 4K6

Telephone: (506) 328-0987



1. Mik'amaq Nation at Eel River Bar
2. Mik'amaq Nation at Pabineau
3. Mik'amaq Nation at Burnt Church
4. Mik'amaq Nation at Red Bank
5. Mik'amaq Nation at Eel Ground
6. Mik'amaq Nation at Indian Island
7. Mik'amaq Nation at Big Cover
8. Mik'amaq Nation at Bouctouche
9. Mik'amaq Nation at Fort Folly
10. Maliseet Nation at Oromocto
11. Maliseet Nation at St. Mary's
12. Maliseet Nation at Kingsclear
13. Maliseet Nation at Woodstock
14. Maliseet Nation at Tobique
15. Madawaska Maliseet First Nation

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Aboriginal Self-Government* Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, Ontario, November 1997.
- Archibald, J. et. al.. *Courageous Spirits: Aboriginal Heroes of Our Children*, Teacher's Guide. Mokakit Education Research Association, Theytus Books Ltd., Penticton, B.C., 1993.
- Bigelow, Bill. *Rethinking Columbus: Resources for teaching about the impact of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas*. Rethinking School, Wisconsin. 1998 (available through Falls Brook Centre)
- *The Circle of Life: First Nations Content & Perspective for Middle Years Students*. February 23, 1996, Maureen Johns Simpson, Indian and Métis Consultant, Regina Public Schools.
- *The First Peoples: Constitutional Review Commission* (no date). Indian and Métis Resource List for K - 12, Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, March 1994.

# *Handout A*

## *Protestors refuse to leave Aboriginal campsite*

Members of an illegal Aboriginal camp at Kings Domain, near the Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne, say police will have to forcibly remove them.

Melbourne City Council has given the campers until 4:00pm AEST today to leave but a meeting with Lord Mayor John So and Victoria's Aboriginal Affairs Minister Gavin Jennings has failed to convince them to move on.

The group has been there for a month protesting against the treatment of Australia's Indigenous community.

Group spokesman Robbie Thorp says it is a ceremonial site but he does not expect that will stop the police from evicting them.

"But you know that's not the first time that's happened, it'll be the images flashed around the world that Australia is continuing to commit genocide on the Aboriginal people and it's reflected by the way that they're breaking up our camp where we are practicing our religion here," he said.

Mr Thorp has defended the group's right to camp there.

"This is not an eyesore, it's not a bad place, what other places in Melbourne can Aboriginal people meet and do their business?" he said.

"We have been subject to these by-laws and these Government laws which we are saying are illegal - they haven't got the right to apply their law to Aboriginal people in this country."

The council says it has offered to help move the fire so that it stays alight.

It has also organised a meeting with the protesters for this evening.

**QUESTIONS:** Are there similarities between the treatment of indigenous people in Canada and in Australia? Does it appear that Australian Aborigines have the right to self-govern? Why does self-governance for indigenous people appear to be a world wide issue?

# *Handout B*

## **Environmental Justice Case Study: Indigenous People's Land Rights in Guatemala**

The Peten region of Guatemala has undergone a series of colonizations conducted by the Guatemalan government since the 1960s. The colonization of the region has recently increased as a result of the Peace Accord signed ending the 36-year Guatemalan civil war. The construction of roads, the development of large cattle ranches and agro-businesses, and the formation of the Guatemalan Biosphere Reserve have forced many indigenous and poor people off their native lands. The landless peoples have either moved deeper into the dense forests or escaped to refugee camps in Mexico. Government and military intervention prevents the development of permanent settlements. A group called the People's Communities in Resistance has been battling for the rights of indigenous and poor people in Peten. In 1996, the Communities in Resistance marched on Guatemala City to speak with Guatemalan president elect Alvaro Arzu. This event was the first time an indigenous people's organization in Guatemala sought formal recognition - and in step with Guatemala's policies toward indigenous people's rights, President Arzu refused to talk with the Communities in Resistance leaders on the steps of the capital building. This organization, along with other indigenous rights groups, is currently working with the new Guatemalan government for indigenous peoples civil and land rights.

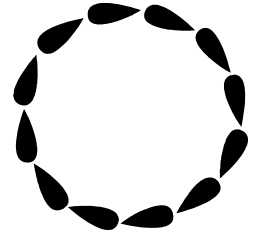
Source: Environmental Justice Case Studies from the University of Michigan.

**QUESTIONS:** How are land rights linked to self-governance? Does it appear that the indigenous people in Guatemala are given the right to self-govern? Do you see any similarities between the desires of these indigenous people to self-govern and the First Nations in Canada?

# Handout C

## Guidelines for Talking Circles

Talking Circles last in general from twenty minutes to half an hour depending on how many people are participating.<sup>23</sup>



### To begin:

Organize the group to form a circle. If using a large group of students (thirty or more, perhaps) it is recommended that they are organized into an inner circle and an outer circle. Whoever is sitting in the inner circle can speak while those in the outer circle listen. Students can take turns being in the inner circle.

During the circle time, people are free to respond however they want as long as these basic considerations are followed:

- All comments are addressed directly to the question or the issue, not to comments another person has made. Both negative and positive comments about what anyone else has to say should be avoided.

- Only one person speaks at a time. Generally the person holding the object speaks. Students can indicate their desire to speak by raising their hands.

- Silence is acceptable. There must be no negative reactions to the phrase, "I pass."

- Going around the circle in a systematic way invites each person to participate without a few vocal people dominating the discussion.

- The group leader facilitates the discussion in non-judgmental way. In other words, instead of responding with words like, "great" or "good", the leader can acknowledge or clarify comments, such as, "I understand you are saying that..." speakers should feel free to express themselves in any way that is comfortable: by sharing a story, a personal experience, by using examples or metaphors, and so on.

