

Family Ties and Connection to the Land: An introduction to Residential Schools for younger children (StrongStart - K/1 Focus)

Teacher Guide and Kit Created by District Indigenous Curriculum Support Teachers Gail.martindale@sd71.bc.ca, Lynn Swift Lynn.swift@sd71.bc.ca, Indigenous k/1 Teacher Colleen.devlin@sd71.bc.ca, District Teacher Librarian Joan.Pearce@sd71.bc.ca, and Early Learning Support Teacher Jacquie.Anderson@sd71.bc.ca,



Introduction:

Through stories, discussions, and play provocations, the purpose of this kit is to provide opportunities for students in the following ways,

- An introduction to residential schools in an age-appropriate context.
- Learn about the importance of connections to lands for Indigenous peoples.
- We are hoping that this leads you and your class to consider acts of reconciliation through caring for others here in the unceded and traditional territory of the [K'ómoks First Nation](#).

Play-Based Items

The play-based items in this Kit help students explore the inter-connections that Indigenous peoples still have to their land today.

For some Context...

See quote from the **K'ómoks First Nation Website** -<https://komoks.ca/department/lands-program/>

“As stewards of our lands, resources and the environment around us, we will honor our ancestors by adhering to our cultural laws and values, passed down generation to generation. We will move forward responsibly using accountability, transparency, environmental responsibility and K'ómoks cultures as the cornerstones of our land management practices. With the guidance of the Creator and our membership represented in our Lands Advisory Committee, we will protect our homelands to ensure environmental sustainability and integrity while building sustainable economic development on our lands.” – Our Lands Mission (accessed January 7, 2022)

See excerpt from [FNESC: BC First Nations Land, Title, and Governance](#) to get a sense of the **importance of the connection to the land:**

“Students build on their understandings of the connections of First Peoples and the land and see how traditional governance was in a large part concerned with managing the land and its resources. Then they learn about changes brought about by colonization through the Indian Act and other policies.” (See Page 37)

With regards to **teaching about residential schools** to children of a young age, Colleen Devlin SD71 Indigenous K/1Teacher, shares her philosophy,

The key message we want to give children is that they are loved...

- We are shaping the building blocks of knowledge and scaffolding for further study in the upper grades.
- Young children need to know that they are loved and people care for them and that the physical structure of these schools no longer exists.
- Standard 9 (BC Teachers' Council) makes this a foundational feature in our practice that we can convey in a kind and gentle way “contributing towards truth, reconciliation and healing.” “Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing, and being, histories and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Metis.”

Kindergarten and grade one enduring understandings, from our [Project of Heart Canoe Teaching Guide](#)

Through story and play, we raise the understanding of the **importance of family and culture in the growth of a child**. We acknowledge a time in Canada's history in which many young Aboriginal children **went away to live at the school, separated from their families**. Please keep in mind the variety of family situations in your classroom/school. Some students are more aware than others and this can be different depending on the time or circumstance. There are students in care, in blended families, those who have lost a loved one, and who have relatives who attended these schools. Ensure that there is space for students to voluntarily share their story. As preparation for these lessons, let the families know about the lessons and be sensitive about describing families.

[Reconciliation and Education | Starleigh Grass | TEDxWestVancouverED](#)

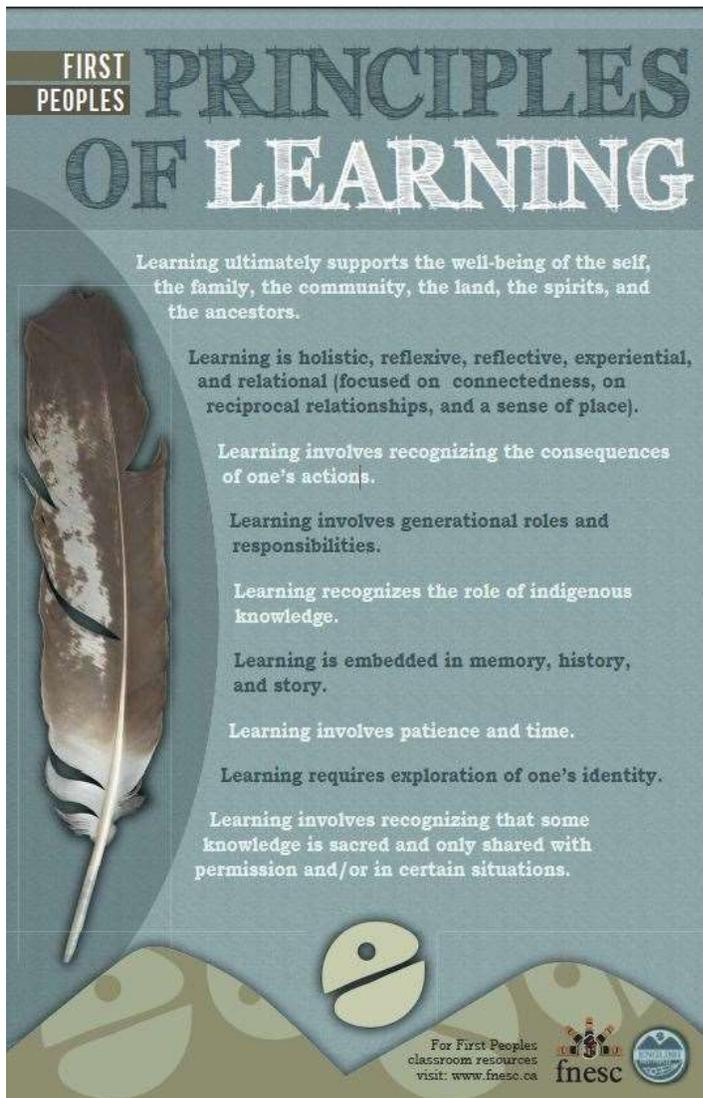
In this Ted Talk video Starleigh Grass talks about **3 key concepts when teaching about Residential Schools**. (listen from **3:25-6:05** for the 3 concepts)

- 1) There was a rich body of knowledge with ways of sharing and passing that knowledge on that existed here prior to contact. It is important to understand that something incredibly valuable existed here *before* Residential schools so that you can understand the depth of what was lost. The play-based items in this Kit help students explore the pre-contact life and deep connections Indigenous people have to this land.
- 2) Focus on the strength and courage of Residential School Survivors.
- 3) Always be looking forward toward reconciliation or ways to improve relationships.



*** Please note that in addition to Starleigh's suggestions we would like to add another concept on focusing on the resiliency of Indigenous peoples and how many people practice their culture today.**

First Peoples Principles of Learning Poster and Blog Site



See this [First Peoples Principles of Learning Blog site](#) for a discussion and deeper insight into the principles.

“This site is created to help educators in British Columbia understand how they might incorporate the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) into their classrooms and schools. Some educators will see that the Principles reflect what they already believe, and are doing in their schools and classrooms. Other educators will see concepts embedded in the principles that challenge some of the post-industrial Euro-centric beliefs about education. Either way, this site is not intended to be a comprehensive exploration of First Peoples (or Indigenous) education. It is instead, a beginning (or continuation) of a conversation.”

(Jo Chrona Nov 23, 2021 <https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com/>)

Core Competency: Positive Personal and Cultural Identity

Positive Personal and Cultural Identity involves the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the factors that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself; it includes knowledge of one's family background, heritage(s), language(s), beliefs, and perspectives in a pluralistic society.

People who have a positive personal and cultural identity value their personal and cultural narratives and understand how these shape their identity. They exhibit a sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and positive identity to become confident individuals who take satisfaction in who they are and what they can do. They contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of their family, community, and society.



POSITIVE PERSONAL & CULTURAL IDENTITY CORE COMPETENCY

A positive personal and cultural identity is the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of all the factors that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself. It includes awareness and understanding of one's family background, heritage(s), language(s), beliefs, and perspectives in a pluralistic society. Students who have a positive personal and cultural identity value their personal and cultural narratives, and understand how these shape their identity. Supported by a sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and positive identity, students become confident individuals who take satisfaction in who they are, and what they can do to contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of their family, community, and society.

1. Relationships and cultural contexts

Sample "I" Statements

- I can describe my family and community.
- I am able to identify the different groups that I belong to.
- I understand that my identity is made up of many interconnected aspects (such as life experiences, family history, heritage, peer groups).
- I understand that learning is continuous and my concept of self and identity will continue to evolve.

2. Personal values and choices

Sample "I" Statements

- I can tell what is important to me.
- I can explain what my values are and how they affect choices I make.
- I can tell how some important aspects of my life have influenced my values.
- I understand how my values shape my choices.

3. Personal strengths and abilities

Sample "I" Statements

- I can identify my individual characteristics.
- I can describe/express my attributes, characteristics, and skills.
- I can reflect on my strengths and identify my potential as a leader in my community.
- I understand I will continue to develop new abilities and strengths to help me meet new challenges.

**The profiles emphasize the concept of growing and expanding.
They are progressive and additive.**

BC Council of Teachers' Standards of Education

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/edu_standards.pdf

While there is a specific standard that notes teacher responsibility with respect to knowing about indigenous ways of being and knowing, these concepts are also embedded throughout the other standards.

9 | Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

Educators critically examine their own biases, attitudes, beliefs, values and practices to facilitate change. Educators value and respect the languages, heritages, cultures, and ways of knowing and being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Educators understand the power of focusing on connectedness and relationships to oneself, family, community and the natural world. Educators integrate First Nations, Inuit and Métis worldviews and perspectives into learning environments.

Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action



Calls to Action: https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

**Specifically, the Education Calls to Action are numbered 62-65

**Truth and Reconciliation
Commission of Canada:
Calls to Action**



Talking about Residential Schools to younger Children

Every Child Deserves to Feel Loved: Teaching K/1's about Indian Residential Schools by an example from **Colleen Devlin** and how this worked in her K/1 class:

As difficult as this is it is a topic mandated in our curriculum for every grade including kindergarten. It is often hard on the teacher as well so do a pledge of self-care before you begin.... Plan a walk on the beach, a coffee treat or a chat with a friend or family member after you have taught lessons on the topic. Do your background work – know which of your children are in foster care or having a difficult time so you know who to keep a special eye on; also do research so you are more prepared (best source <https://www.bctf.ca/classroom-resources/details/project-of-heart>). Remember this is not ancient history – the last school closed in 1996. This article suggests some great early primary books, art projects, teaching kindness and generosity as another way to scaffold lessons.

We are doing the building blocks of knowledge and scaffolding for further study in the upper grades, five- and six-year-olds need to know that they are loved and people care for them and that this was in the past. Pictured here are the mainstay books I would use when talking with kids.



Amik Loves School is a gentle story as you read it you could say imagine if Elder _____ (the Ni'noxola assigned to your school, or an elder in your community) couldn't share her culture language or special songs with us because she wasn't allowed to do when she was at school. For some people this happened as schools like the one in this book. And I would leave it at that unless the class asked more questions. With Shi Shi Etko many pages lead to great stepping stones about ties to the land and rich culture and allow you to invite the children to think of what they would gather from their favourite places, what memories they enjoy with the grand parents or important people in their lives. As Starleigh Grass says we will never understand the richness of what was taken away for seven generations unless we deeply understand the value first nations place on land stewardship and multi-generational learning. A brand-new book called The Train is a special reflection of those lost, as this senior visits a place with important but sad memories of relatives and friends that never came back. It is gentle and full of love despite the topic. Throughout all our lessons, conversations and art jobs we reassure children that they are loved – loved by their families, their people at school and in the community.



As you can see these are all small little steps and as far as I go. I then let the children take the lead by asking questions – and there may not even be any! Be prepared for some random questions later as kids process. Parents may also have questions, refer them to the Truth and Reconciliation website. Doing an art project after these big ideas gives you a chance to circulate and check in on each child. Painting rocks or making orange handprints, making a Heart Garden with each heart bearing a special message to survivors written by each child. The other art idea pictured is inspired by George Littlechild – he has the class brainstorm feelings about going to residential school and being away from family, children then choose a photo to add to their painting – very powerful.

You are probably now thinking “Ya but ... what if a child asks a tough question....”

I would say there was a time not so long ago when children from families were taken to go to school and some of those children did not come back. Some of them died in those schools. It was sad and awful. But move on and say that it’s not going to happen now.

Interweaving themes of love and compassion will help the children feel like they can enact change – Monique Gray Smith has beautiful books that help teach about kindness and generosity. Young students know what social justice is – they may be moved to actions like baking cookies for the soup kitchen, making donations to the local food bank (a powerful way to support survivors and those still dealing with the inter-generational fallout of these schools) - it is through these actions we all bring about changes for our future.

Remember to do your act of self-care and encourage students to do the same.

[Power Point by Colleen Devlin Every Child Deserves to be Loved](#)



**An excerpt from FNEC Teacher Guide BC FIRST NATIONS LAND, TITLE, AND GOVERNANCE:
INTRODUCTION**

Dealing with Sensitive Topics

Some of the topics discussed in these activities may be sensitive for some students. How you deal with them depends on the age, maturity, and background of students, and teachers will be the best judge of how to approach the material. In presenting sensitive issues, teachers are not expected to be experts on all topics. Rather their role is as guide and facilitator. As students work through material that might be sensitive, teachers should be aware of the students' potential reactions to the topics examined. It is important to convey to students that the purpose of understanding the past is to be part of a more positive future. For some students, the topics discussed may be sensitive if they have personal connections with the topic. For others, the topics may be controversial, particularly if students feel they have no connection with the issues. Also, in classrooms with new Canadians, teachers will need to be aware that some topics may echo feelings that resonate with some immigrant experiences. Some considerations for dealing with topics with sensitivity include the following:

- Some sensitive topics are best taught through discussion rather than direct instruction.
- The teacher is responsible for ensuring exploration of sensitive issues so that discussion promotes understanding and is not merely an exchange of intolerance.
- Additional time may be needed to deal with students' concerns and questions.
- Issues may arise for students both in formal discussions and informal conversations in and around the classroom.
- Discussions will need to be closed appropriately. The teacher may need to play a role in ensuring potential conflict is contained in the context of the classroom.
- Students may need to be taught or provided with the tools and skills to discuss some of these topics rationally in the school and community.

[BC First Nations Land, Title, and Governance](http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PUBLICATION-Governance-BCFNLTG-2019-09-17.pdf) FNEC/FNSA pg. 21 <http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PUBLICATION-Governance-BCFNLTG-2019-09-17.pdf>

Teaching with Compassion and Understanding when Exploring Difficult Topics our Self-Care Poster.

A few years ago, the Indigenous Education Department created this poster to help teachers think about ideas for self-care and care for our students when teaching about difficult topics. You can get your own copy at the SD71 Print Shop.

Teaching with Compassion & Understanding when Exploring Difficult Topics

Prepare - let families/caregivers know via email or letter ahead of time.

Facilitate a Talking Circle, ask, What do you do to take care of yourself when you are emotional or have learned about a difficult topic?

Use Inviting Language - "I invite you to participate,"
"I invite you to think about....."
Allow room for some students to respond later, when they are ready.

Share Food or Tea

Acknowledge Territory - find out the Indigenous territory you live on and acknowledge that territory and the people who have lived there since time immemorial.

Response - give students an opportunity to respond (write a letter, create art, take a walk, have a talking circle) this allows you to check in with your students.

Knowledge Keepers - Consider working with Knowledge Keepers in the community such as Ni'noxola and Cultural Presenters.

Physical - do something physical (e.g. walk, brain gym, stretch, dance).

Acknowledge their Experience - pay attention and be open to what your students may know or not know. Some may have first hand knowledge of this topic or are already going through a difficult time in their lives. Some people may appear to be disengaged and this can be normal for their circumstance.

Guided Meditation - search the internet for guided meditation examples. You could also try progressive muscle relaxation.

Grounding Activity - guided imagery, breathing exercise, have a calming object to hold (rock, cedar bough, playdough).

Truth - know the importance of why you are teaching and learning about this subject.

Creating a Safe Space - knowing your students well and fostering a sense of belonging.

Vulnerability - be prepared that there may be feelings of guilt, shame or discomfort, that is not the intention. Allow yourself to be OK with making mistakes and make room for correction.

Take Action - consider an act of reconciliation - write your MP, volunteer, learn more, attend National Indigenous Peoples Day, Familiarize yourself with the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action on Education and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Imagery - take two deeps breath every time you see a photo. Use during lessons when needed or as a practice.

Name your Feeling - putting a name to your feeling because it shows that we have compassion and will do our best to not allow something like this to happen again.

Sounds - listen to calming sounds (i.e. waterfalls, nature sounds or music).



Indigenous Education Services
SD No.71 (Comox Valley)
indigenouseducation.comoxvalleyschools.ca
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Talking about Residential Schools to younger Children



Talking About Residential Schools with "When We Were Alone" | David A. Robertson | For Educators

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommends teaching children about residential schools as early as kindergarten, and many new curriculum guides across the country integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Learn how to approach this challenging topic with your students with this video featuring David Alexander Robertson, author of "When We Were Alone."

Monique Gray Smith Talking to Kids about Residential Schools:

“In this video, I share tips on both talking to kids about Residential Schools, but also how to prepare yourself as the adult to have these conversations. The video is for parents, grandparents, educators...anyone really with children in their lives.”

[Talking to kids about Residential Schools](#)



Some Learning Activities

First Nation Child and Family Caring Society Activity



“This is what a safe and comfy school looks like”. Use the ‘safe and comfy’ [schools booklet](#) to introduce concepts of child rights, health, and safety. What do children need to be ‘safe and comfy’ at school? At home? In their community?

One way to explain how long Indigenous people have lived here:

Beaded Timeline: <https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/indigenous-education/beaded-timeline/>

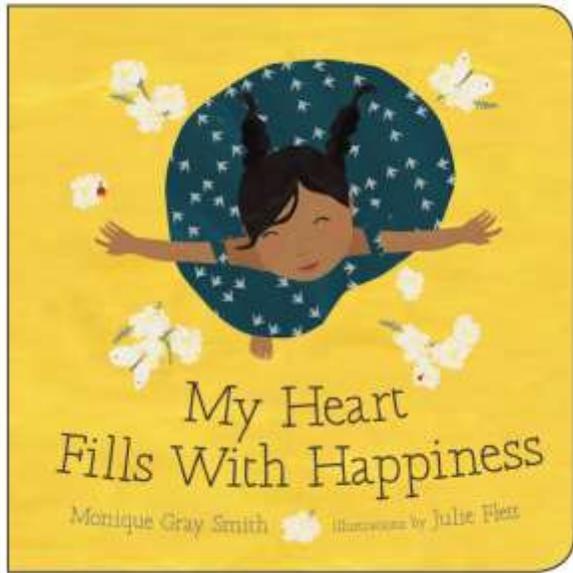
The Bead Timeline Story a visual representation of how long Indigenous people have been living in North America, at least 10,000 years, since **time immemorial**, importance of oral history, story, seasonal cycle and care taking of resources. Created by SD71, Suzanne Camp, District Resource Cultural Aide.

What does the word, Indigenous mean?

[The word Indigenous - explained | CBC Kids News](#)



My Heart Fills with Happiness, Lesson plan suggestion



I can fill a heart
with happiness ...

Read *My Heart Fills with Happiness* by Monique Gray Smith and then have students fill out the Journal page above telling something that can fill their heart with happiness. Click on following link for the [I Can Fill my Heart with Happiness BLM](#)

[My Heart Fills With Happiness by Monique Gray Smith](#)



***You Hold me Up* by Monique Gray Smith, Lesson Plan**

Click on the following for the [You Hold Me up Lesson Plan BLM](#)

Adrienne Gear Reading Power: Orange Shirt Day Lesson and book list

<https://readingpowergear.wordpress.com/2021/09/19/orange-shirt-day-a-day-of-remembrance-memory-bags-and-anchor-books/>

“September 30th is Orange Shirt Day and the first National Day of Remembrance: a day to acknowledge and honour the victims of the Canadian residential school system. Leading up to this day, it is important to begin the conversations around Truth and Reconciliation, no matter what grade you teach. As with many classroom conversations, picture books provide an access point into the discussions.”

BC Hydro Orange Shirt Day Lessons focus on Water:

<https://schools.bchydro.com/blog/orange-shirt-day>

“Respect for others and the environment go hand in hand. Since B.C is powered by water, for Orange Shirt Day this year, we would like to highlight the unique relationship Indigenous Peoples have with water. With the help of Indigenous educators and subject matter experts, we developed new teaching resources that will have your students learn about energy, water conservation, reconciliation, and more.”

Note from Lynn and Gail: Please note that though this says it's an orange shirt day resource, it can be used anytime. The lessons, visuals, and videos found in the slideshow for each lesson are excellent and for all grade levels.

For a sample video click below:

[Indicators](https://vimeo.com/434167015) - <https://vimeo.com/434167015>

Belinda Claxton, Tsawout First Nation, explains how in her territory indicators from nature point out changes in the environment. For example, the song of the Swainson Thrush signifies the salmonberry is ripening and that is time to go pick them.

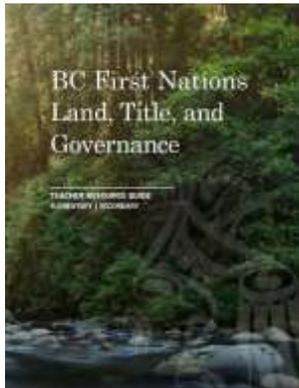
Connection to the Land we Live in...

Play Based Items in the Kit:

	CREATING BUILDS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• problem-solving skills• imagination & personal expression• small & large muscle control and coordination• measurement, geometry & spatial sense		PLAYING BUILDS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• self-awareness & regulation• math concepts & vocabulary• confidence & well-being• empathy & understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• decision-making skills• cooperation• physical skills• curiosity
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Play Based Items in the kit and possible inquiry questions and activities to pursue...

Before you begin some background information -Exploring the **Strong Connection to Land** [FNESC BC First Nation Land, Title and Governance:](#)



<http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PUBLICATION-Governance-BCFNLTG-2019-09-17.pdf>

Unit One Section 4. The Land and Government (page 37)

“Students build on their understandings of the connections of First Peoples and the land, and see how traditional governance was in a large part concerned with managing the land and its resources. Then they learn about changes brought about by colonization through the Indian Act

and other policies. a. Our Relationship with the Land Students will build an awareness of what is meant by “The Land” and explore at a personal level way that the Land is important.

- Ask students to think about the question, “Why is the Land important?” If necessary, discuss what we mean by the Land. For example, it includes the ground, the air, the water, and all the plants and animals that live on the earth. You may want to explain that there are similar words we can use, such as the Earth, or nature. Discuss or explain to students that in the past, First Nations communities depended on the land around them to for everything they needed to live. Ask, “How would your life be different if you couldn’t go to the store to buy your food or clothes?”

- Ask students to imagine that they had to get everything they needed from the land around them. Would they be able to survive? What types of things would they need to know? What would they need to do? “

Here are some laws about the land:

- Thank the plants and animals when you take them.
- Only take what you need.
- Share your food with others.
- Only take food from your own land. (Blackline Master 10)

***A note from our team: It is important to recognize that many Indigenous peoples still live in an inter-connected way with the land and its resources.**

As children play, they process what they have been hearing during readings and the class discussions that follow. This provides teachers with the perfect opportunity to engage children in conversation that deepens their understanding.



This picture shows some ideas for using play-based materials to re-create life on the coast prior to contact.

Indigenous peoples lived in connection to land and place, following the seasonal round from their land.

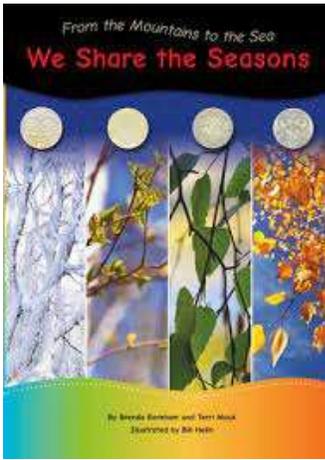
Seasonal Round: <https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/indigenous-education/seasons/>

My Seasonal Round Integrated Unit

https://www.openschool.bc.ca/elementary/my_seasonal_round/pdf/SeasonalRound_unit.pdf



<https://youtu.be/JaSUQ9yHvRM> The story of Neekna and Chemai follows a seasonal round in the Okanagan Valley BC.



Look for ***We Share The Seasons*** part of the From Mountains to the Sea Series by Strong Nations in your School Library or at the LRC!



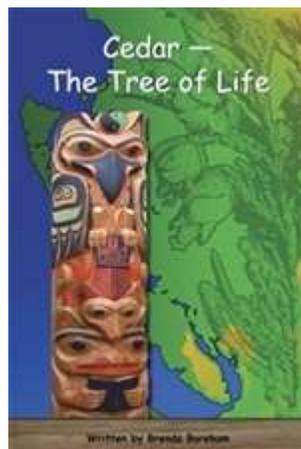
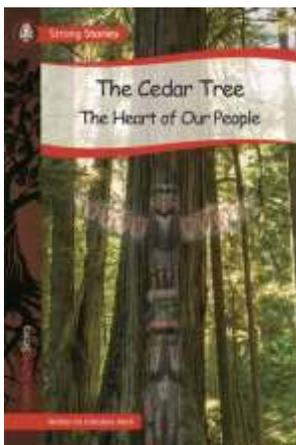
Cedar was used to build big houses, dugout canoes for travelling, as well as being woven into clothes, baskets, hats, and other useful items. What are ways that we can make sure these trees will be seen and known by your children and grandchildren? How can we look after these trees so they can continue to provide?

For further information on our local nation, please refer to the K'ómoks First Nation website:
[K'omoks First Nation](http://www.komoks.ca)



Cedar Tree of Life: <https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/indigenous-education/cedar-tree-of-life/>

Indigenous Plants: <https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/indigenous-education/plants/>





Learn about the importance of, and the strong connection to animals for Indigenous peoples:
<https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/indigenous-education/animals/>

Think of all the other animals that make up our living world (insects, halibut, herring, ducks, clams, etc.)

“Native American Relationships to Animals: Not Your "Spirit Animal"”

Indigenous peoples' relationships with animals are the result of tens of thousands of years of connections to their environments. The non-Native concept of "spirit animals" has seen a recent rise in popularity, in and out of the classroom. Finding animals, they connect with can be a fun activity for many students. However, using the concept of a "spirit animal" while teaching Native American culture trivializes Native relationships to the animal world.

In Native American traditions, animals are sometimes used to communicate the values and spiritual beliefs of Native communities. Animals' importance is also evident in the creation stories of many tribes. Animal imagery is often used to share family, clan, and personal stories.

We ask that you do not copy such imagery from totem poles, pictographs, etc.

Clan and kinship systems within many American Indian tribal communities reflect relationships to animals. Each animal carries history and meaning. Clan and kinship systems are specific to each tribal community and may vary widely from one another. **We ask that you do not adopt clans into your classroom.**

[The story of American Indians in the Western Hemisphere is intricately intertwined with places and environments.](#) Indigenous Peoples strive to be respectful of their environments. Many believe in thoughtfully honoring the lives of animals by only taking what is needed. To respect Native Americans and animal life, we suggest that your classrooms work to support your local environments through advocating for animals and their natural habitats.”

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/native-american-spirit-animal>

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian November 15, 2021