

# FOUR DIRECTIONS TEACHER RESOURCE KIT

## [www.fourdirectionteachings.com](http://www.fourdirectionteachings.com)

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This Teacher Resource Kit is an educator's guide to optimizing learning applications based on the Four Directions website. The curricula attached to the website include lesson plans designed to maximize opportunities for classroom activities that are immediately connected to the teachings found on the site. These lesson plans have been developed for junior grades (1-6), intermediate grades (7-9), and senior grades (10-12). Educators of kindergarten children and adults will also find suitable exercises that can be used with relatively minimal modification. The kit was developed with the classroom teacher in mind, and without assuming any prior knowledge of Aboriginal cultures or traditions on their part. It is assumed that the teacher will be resourceful and flexible in coordinating learning activities.

### GOALS

The primary goals of the Four Directions web site and supporting curricula are:

- To raise awareness and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal nations and their rich cultural traditions, and thus contribute to the broader retention of these cultural ways;
- To instill cultural pride in Aboriginal communities, especially among Aboriginal youth;
- To promote academic excellence, first in Aboriginal communities, and then in the broader national and international communities, through learning that relates to Indigenous content and methodologies; and,
- To further the development of a global multimedia education network, and of Indigenous capacity for contributing to this network.

The curriculum goals break down further as follows:

#### To provide quality educational *content*

The Four Directions website and curricula teach about Aboriginal knowledge and its place in the world. The lesson plans are designed to support the implementation of learning activities that initiate thought, discussion and learning processes based on well developed and well sourced curriculum content. Furthermore, this content brings *living* traditional Aboriginal

perspectives, knowledge and wisdom of the world to the forefront of the educational experience - rather than merely providing content that regards “Indians” as “topics.” Finally, the curricula provide opportunities to link and contrast these indigenous forms of knowledge with contemporary, scientific, and widely prevalent views of the world. All of these aims can be explored fruitfully in a variety of learning environments, regardless of the cultural background of the teachers and students.

#### To support indigenous educational *practices*

The lesson plans also aim to support the incorporation of indigenous education principles in the teaching and evaluation *process* as much as possible. Of course, education principles that might broadly be called “indigenous” cannot be easily imparted and practiced simply through exposure to this teacher’s resource kit and the accompanying curriculum. The practical application of such principles will depend on the cultural worldview and background of individual teachers and students. In other words, depending on a range of factors related to indigenous experience - and on where the experience of classroom participants lies in relation to these indigenous cultural factors - this curriculum aims to support the implementation of teaching *methodologies* that are distinctly indigenous. Ultimately, we hope the Four Directions curricula will contribute to the fostering of quality cross-cultural discussion on educational practice.

#### To support holistic education

The Four Directions education curriculum was designed to nurture the self-actualization of the whole person through the sacred circle concept. For both individual and group visitors to the website, there is ample opportunity for multidisciplinary learning. The Four Directions education curriculum is unique in that it weaves the study of the arts with the sciences and humanities, from a platform based in technology, using a culturally relevant framework. For each lesson plan, learner objectives are identified in terms of knowledge and understanding; inquiry and values; and skills and applications. Knowledge and understanding pertains to theoretical concepts presented through investigation and exploration exercises, as opposed to the innate personal objectives achieved through reflective exercises. The skills and applications refer to the development of skills in the areas of literacy, presentation, research, technology, communication, and so on.

#### To support Aboriginal literacy

50% of Native Learners (particularly those in the far north) meet the criteria for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), even though they are Canadian citizens (ONLC, 2001). With this reality in mind, the Four Directions education curriculum seeks to improve English literacy achievement among Aboriginal students. Although traditional language is widely recognized

as a fundamental link to cultural preservation, it is simply beyond the scope of this project to record the teachings in Aboriginal languages at this time – although over the longer term, we hope to address this area as well. Each teaching offers a reading in print form (PDF) in English and as well as an audio segment. French translations are included. The curriculum is written at an intermediate reading level (Grade 7); however, educators can make modifications to suit a variety of age and literacy levels. As well, each lesson plan offers vocabulary terms suitable for spelling and comprehension exercises.

## **ABOUT THE WEBSITE**

### Indigenous Worldviews

The Four Directions Website reflects indigenous worldviews, which are based on principles of harmony and balance, as traditional ways of knowing originate from close observations and experience of the cyclical nature of the universe. Consequently, though Aboriginal nations differ significantly in terms of language and cultural practices, the commonality is an overall worldview that embraces concepts of cyclical interdependency and equilibrium, demonstrated through natural patterns of repetition. These concepts are reflected in the interactive Four Directions website design model (based on the concept of the Medicine Wheel, defined below).

### Who is the site audience?

Website visitors may include a variety of Aboriginal community members, including classroom students and teachers, parents, elders and others, as well as non-Aboriginal people interested in learning more about Aboriginal culture. However, despite the variety of potential website visitors, the overall learning objectives of the Four Directions education curriculum remain essentially the same: to provide an opportunity for interactive learning about Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives on the world.

## **KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**

Various words and phrases on the Four Directions website require definition for reader clarity. A glossary has been developed, which can be found on the website homepage. However, for the purposes of the teacher resource kit, we define several terms here. For example, the term “Indigenous” is used as a broad reference to the first known human cultures and communities native to the Americas, whereas “Aboriginal” is a term referring to the three legally-recognized native groups in Canada: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. “Worldview” is used in reference to a society’s philosophy, history, culture and traditions.

“Eurocentric” is used interchangeably with “Western” to represent the cultural beliefs and traditions consistent with European and North American societies.

### Medicine Wheel

The term “Medicine Wheel” requires a more detailed explanation, since the Four Directions website relies heavily on this concept. Basically, a Medicine Wheel is a circle divided into parts (usually four) that can represent a wide variety of teachings and meanings, but which all relate or counterbalance one another to form a whole – as with the four cardinal directions, the seasons, times of day, or stages of life. Other Medicine Wheels represent the many aspects of creation, such as the races of people, plants, the natural elements, aspects of being or character, animals and other living beings, and so on. The four directions circle design is the key unifier of all these elements and is repeated throughout the website.

The circle, when broken down into segments, depicts parity as much as interconnectivity, interdependency, and the life cycle. The four quadrants represent all things and their interrelationships in both physical and metaphysical dimensions, as inseparable elements of Indigenous culture. The centre of the Medicine Wheel represents the essence of traditional philosophy, which is balance of the infinite aspects of Creation. Visitors to the website will note that the central perspective in the circle is maintained to emphasize the centrality of a balanced position, as opposed to standing outside the Wheel looking in, as it were.

Medicine Wheels made of stones in a particular arrangement on the Earth have been found in various places throughout North America to mark places of special significance: places of energy for ceremony, healing, meditation, teaching, understanding and celebration.

### Indigenous Knowledge and Values

Indigenous traditional thinking has been described as being lateral and circular in orientation, in contrast to the linear, hierarchical thinking patterns of Western society. The indigenous worldview postulates that all things (human and nonhuman) possess a life force and are equal, interrelated, and interdependent. Furthermore, primacy of value is placed on the spiritual source of all Creation. Compare the traditional indigenous sense of complete and holistic equity to the modern Western worldview, which values humans above animals, plants, and minerals, for instance, and which, in modern times, has more often than not come to value humans as the highest form of intelligence and material and economic growth over spiritual attainment. Of course, this contrast applies only to broad cultural tendencies, and individuals of all races and

cultural backgrounds contain both material and spiritual inclinations, with one or the other predominating in different degrees.

In a traditional Aboriginal worldview, the natural environment is the traditional teacher of the natural order of things. Nature represents all that is sacred, the very basis of life, and it is ideally central to our thoughts and actions, or should be. This understanding is what comprises Indigenous ways of knowing, in which humans, animals, plants and minerals, for instance, are considered equals on a continuum of energy.

Through this worldview, traditional Aboriginal society perceives the process of learning, then, as a way of knowing, accomplished through the use of *all* the senses, and from an interdisciplinary, if not multidisciplinary, perspective. The Four Directions learning activities and website design were purposefully designed to engage all the senses as much as possible, and to approach learning from a broad view, as opposed to isolating the content into one subject area or using only a small number of standard learning strategies. The aim is for the lesson plans to provide meaningful exercises for learning while embracing the sacred circle concept.

Aboriginal cultural values are inherent in the traditional teachings on the Four Directions website. It is assumed, therefore, that educators will be respectful of these values and conscientious in recognizing them as representative of the traditional norms and practices of regional Aboriginal groups. These lesson plans provide a launching point for educators who are interested in learning more from Aboriginal communities and educational organizations. It is hoped that visitors will in fact be struck by the sophistication of the teachings as demonstrative models of very advanced cultural expression that offer tremendous insights and perspectives on the world. In light of recent global changes in the environment, the wisdom of the elders has never been so timely.

Furthermore, some visitors educated in a Western mindset (which will be most of us) may experience confusion with some of the traditional teachings, in that there are what appear to be gaps in logic in the telling of the stories. Visitors are reminded to view the teachings for their symbolism in a broad sense, as opposed to fixating on details or “inconsistencies.” The truths expressed by the elders represent higher-level intellectual processes that reflect a supra-rational, poetic view of the world - with all the finer energies that exist above us and below us, within us and around us, seen and unseen. Visitors are encouraged to stretch their minds so as to freely embrace these ideas as they are.

### Traditional Teachings

Historically, traditional teachings were shared by elders for the spiritual, social, and educational development and survival of a community as much as for

cultural entertainment, with themes ranging from the metaphysical and cosmological (such as Creation Stories) to the morally informative (such as the story of how Naapi, the Blackfoot Trickster, lost his eyes as a result of transgressing the rules of nature); in fact, most teachings hold multiple layers of meaning.

“Traditional teachings” refers to spiritual and/or intellectual wisdom shared by elders. Today, the opportunities for elders to share traditional teachings in community are limited. Despite their infinite depths of knowledge and wisdom, traditional teachings risk being lost to future generations unless concerted efforts are made to share them with youth. Beyond simply sharing the teachings, Four Directions aims to bridge traditional knowledge to modern society through the use of advanced technology, to assist in making the teachings more personally relevant and accessible to youth.

A variety of elders and traditional teachers were chosen for participation in this project to represent Aboriginal teachings from a variety of communities and groups. Those visitors who are familiar with Aboriginal traditional teachings might find the teachings on this site to be different from how they understand them to be. This is to be expected, as these teachings represent the personal interpretations of traditional teachings of a small group of elders. There are likely to be variations on how these teachings are represented in any given nation.

Visitors to the website should also be aware that worldviews vary from nation to nation, and some Aboriginal groups such as the Mohawk, Haida and Blackfoot do not traditionally use the Medicine Wheel per se. Nevertheless, all teachings on the site are placed within a broad interactive “Medicine Wheel” framework as a common navigational tool, which in turn allows for learning links between the various nations represented on the site, by highlighting fundamental commonalities among nations in their ways of knowing. In presenting teachings from nations where the Medicine Wheel is explicit, the Medicine Wheel framework is explicit, and for nations where this is not the case, the wheel is less explicit. This was done under the guidance of the project’s Aboriginal Advisory Council. Visitors are encouraged to view the teachings in their entirety and follow the teachings from a thematic perspective as opposed to blanket figurative associations from Wheel to Wheel.

### Rationale

The Four Directions lesson plans are intended to serve as engaging tools to learn about Aboriginal perspectives, whether the learner is a Grade 7 student in Iqualuit, a Grade 11 student on the Moose Cree First Nation, or an adult in Halifax. The curriculum extends beyond the learning of Aboriginal culture from a purely historical context to include the study of literature, science, geography, and sociology from an Aboriginal perspective. The intent is to draw in the learner to make his or her own connections between present-day knowledge and the

wisdom of the elders, ultimately developing an understanding of his or her connection to community and beyond. The goal is for the learner to see himself or herself as having meaning and value in the world. As Aboriginal youth have long demonstrated underachievement in the scholastic arena in Canada, this is a particularly significant aim of Four Directions.

Philosophical inquiry may be defined as critical and creative thinking about fundamental questions on the nature of existence (metaphysics), the theory of knowledge (epistemology), and ethical, political, aesthetic and religious aspects of human nature and action, from varying systems of thought. The study of philosophy develops skills to uncover presuppositions, identify core premises, evaluate arguments and explore new perspectives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994). Four Directions seeks to explore these fundamental questions from an Aboriginal epistemology.

The teaching strategies implemented in the lesson plans will create cooperative learning opportunities for students who will benefit by strengthening their communication skills. These skills will assist in helping students to interact in the communities in which they live. The content of the traditional teachings is broad in nature, encompassing a range of topics. Consequently the lesson plans developed for these teachings are equally wide-ranging, challenging, and diverse – spanning above and beyond any perceived ‘limits’ of any age level, grade level, or subject area. For this reason, the learning activities call for a holistic approach to both learning and teaching.

Various learning styles are addressed through the Four Directions curriculum in recognition of the multiple intelligences of learners as first theorized by Harvard educator Howard Gardner: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, intrapersonal (e.g., insight, metacognition) and interpersonal (e.g., social skills). Gardner also theorized that various cultures exhibit dominant learning modalities such as the Puluwat people of the Caroline Islands who demonstrate superior spatial intelligences as they navigate their canoes in the ocean. Similarly, Aboriginal educators make reference to Native Learning Styles which relate directly to the Medicine Wheel’s Four Aspects of Self: Spiritual, Emotional, Mental and Physical, with these combined to represent one’s needs from a holistic framework. The Spiritual quadrant represents the visioning in learning; the Emotional quadrant represents the relating element in learning; the Mental quadrant refers to understanding in the learning process; and the Physical quadrant represents the acting on the knowledge of the learning. Gardner and Aboriginal educators actually support the same principles in the delivery of meeting the needs of different types of learners: a) that individuals should be encouraged to use their preferred intelligences in learning, b) that instructional activities should appeal to different forms of intelligence, and c) that assessment of learning should measure multiple forms of intelligence.

Furthermore, contemporary Aboriginal educators believe that for Aboriginal children to succeed, their education must be: learner-centred; geared to action and the application of knowledge; experiential in nature; community-based; and developed with the support of elders and Aboriginal teachers (Hill, 2001). Four Directions reflects these principles. Studies done in Aboriginal communities experiencing poor scholastic achievement among youth have found that these educational practices are effective in bringing about positive change. Addressing learning styles helps youth to improve their reading levels, life skills, self-esteem, cultural pride and overall educational attainment. Instructors of Aboriginal children are encouraged, therefore, to incorporate additional learning activities that adhere to learning strategies effective for Aboriginal children and youth wherever possible.

### Elder Contacts

Some lesson plans suggest elders be invited to facilitate classroom activities to supplement the learning based on the lesson plans and the visits to the Four Directions website. For those individuals unfamiliar with doing so, there are certain cultural protocols that need to be followed. Firstly, it is recommended that the educator contact a local First Nation for advice in locating an appropriate elder to contact. A listing of First Nations is available at <http://www.aboriginalcanada.com/firstnation>. Alternatively, one might contact a local Indian Friendship Centre for an urban-based elder to contact. A listing is available at [www.nafc.ca](http://www.nafc.ca).

It is suggested that the educator identify the specific nature of the learning activities in which an elder's participation is desired. This will help to explain to any potential elders the students' needs and expectations. One should not expect that every elder is expert on every teaching. It is also important to confirm the nation of the elder so as to better understand the origin of the elder's knowledge and practices. They may vary from what is presented on the Four Directions website.

It is customary to offer an honorarium to the elder for his or her time and knowledge in sharing a teaching with the class or school. Secondly it is customary to offer transportation for the elder, possibly a meal, and a gift of tobacco. Local First Nations and Friendship Centre cultural teachers will help to explain the protocol further.

The following elders shared teachings in the Four Directions project:

- Mi'kmaq nation (New Brunswick/ Atlantic Canada) - Stephen Augustine
- Mohawk nation (Southeastern Ontario/ upper New York State) - Tom Porter
- Ojibwe/ Potawatami nation (Mid-northern Ontario) - Lillian Pitawanakwat



- Cree nation (Saskatchewan) - Mary Lee, Cultural Advisor, Joe Duquette High School
- Blackfoot/ Piikani nation (Southern Alberta) – Reg Crowshoe, Jeff Crow Eagle, Martin Eagle Child
- Haida Nation (Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C.) - Diane Brown, James Young, Ernie Wilson, Mabel Williams

## Website Interactivity

The Four Directions website interface is modeled after the Indigenous worldview of lateral space and time interconnectivity. Starting at the home page ([www.fourdirectionteachings.com](http://www.fourdirectionteachings.com)) visitors enter the website, by viewing the introduction to the teachings. This section allows users to become familiar to the site and all that it encompasses.

Once inside of the website, the visitor may choose one of the 5 teachings from the various Nations. This is the main navigation area. Simply rollover the 5 ovals to hear and see what Nation they represent. The various Nations are laid out in such a way to represent the east to the west locations, that they reside in.

To proceed with a teaching, the visitor needs to click on the oval that represents that Teaching. This will bring in the subnavigation. Once this button has been pressed, a larger and more complete version of the Teaching will appear and show the various aspects of the teaching, in graphical format. Moving your mouse over these various sections will also indicate what section of the teaching they are linked to, using audio clues. Simply click on a section to enter that portion of the teaching, and the wheel navigation will tuck away into the Top left hand corner of the window, and commence the teaching. The user will be presented with a teaching that can be controlled by the bar located at the bottom of the webpage.

To retrieve this Navigation wheel, the visitor simply needs to click on the "tucked away" oval in the top left-hand corner, and the navigation will re-appear.

When the Navigation wheel is present, if the user wishes to enter a new section of this teaching, simply click on the new section area, and the wheel will tuck away again, and begin the teaching in that area.

As the user comes to the end of a teaching section, the Navigation wheel will re-appear, indicating which section it is proceeding to next, at which time, the wheel will tuck away in the top-left hand corner once more, and play the next teaching. Visitors can freely move around the teaching, by clicking on the tucked away Navigation wheel button in the top left-hand corner of the site, and choosing a new area to explore.

All readings provided (in PDF), audio recordings of the elders traditional teachings, and lesson plans in English and French will be located in one central point, called Resources page, and sorted by the teaching it encompasses.

The names of the nations represented in the teachings will appear on the screen to indicate which section of the site you are in. Links will be found within each of these nations where connections can be made in subject matter, from Mohawk to Cree, for instance.

To get out of the Navigation wheel area (the subNavigation area), the visitor would click on either side of the highlighted Navigation and the original 5 oval navigation will appear again, bring in the Main Navigation.

Four Directions is designed to replicate the fundamental flow of movement and interconnectivity of the indigenous experience. The virtual reality of the Medicine Wheel on the website maintains a central, internal, user base as marked by appropriate sign posts such as the rose (Ojibwe) or the tipi (Cree) while encouraging travel to higher and lower planes. Lateral movement is equally possible. Visitors explore the nature of Indigenous thinking by literally opening the doorways to simulate travel through theoretical dimensions through the click of a mouse. This multidimensional learning environment offers readings, sound recordings, and fun and interesting interactive links, all self-controlled. This is an unprecedented opportunity, where interactive technology meets education. Above and beyond the cognitive development foundation of the curriculum, the Medicine Wheel content design reflects a transformational learning environment so that visitors determine the authenticity of their own learning experience.

### Lesson Plans

Lesson plans are organized into Junior, Intermediate and Senior levels. Click on any link to download the appropriate PDF file. Three lesson plans are available for each traditional teaching. Each lesson plan includes:

- The name of the elder from whom the traditional teaching originates
- The elder's nation
- The recommended lesson plan grade levels
- The estimated time required to conduct the learning activities
- The traditional teaching name
- A summary of the traditional teaching (a teacher summary for the junior grades and a student summary for the intermediate and senior grades)
- Learner objectives (knowledge/understanding; inquiry/values; and skills/applications)
- Subject strand links (general provincial curriculum links)

- A strategy (step by step instructions with an introductory exercise, investigation exercises, internet exploration exercises, group discussions, reflection exercises, and optional assignments and school and class projects)
- Vocabulary
- Materials required
- Evaluation (suggested methods for assessment and evaluation)
- Additional resources (hyperlinks and print materials)

## **CONTENT**

In a condensed list, the Four Directions curriculum integrates content material pertaining to the origin of human life on earth; the changing of the seasons; the cardinal directions; the life cycle from birth through to death; and values to live by for a healthy lifestyle. For every teaching on these subjects, the site provides detailed readings and audio recordings word for word from the elder participants. The subject content is quite expansive in scope and has potential for a multitude of subject links, and educators are encouraged to find additional applications in subject areas not identified on this site. For instance, the Cree teachings on the cycle of life (from conception through to death and beyond) is taught here through a Family Studies perspective. This content could be similarly taught from a Biology perspective or perhaps an Economics perspective, etc.

Technology plays a major role in the delivery of this curriculum. Information literacy development is assumed in this curriculum with expectations that students will use the content as a tool to access, select, gather, critically evaluate, create and communicate information to solve problems and make decisions. Nevertheless as much of this content is normally accessible only through personal contact with elders, it will be a challenge to supplement the content with additional readings and exercises specific to the content of the teachings presented on the website. However collaborations with local First Nations may help to implement elder visit programs, reading programs, and community-based research projects that could work towards the creation of further traditional teaching content. Effective planning in these areas may well lead to the establishment of English Literacy Development programs, Career Education programs, Special Education programs, and Cooperative Education programs, with the Four Directions as a springboard.

Each lesson begins with an exercise to try to identify learner's prior knowledge of the content. They then proceed through some means of social interaction to establish investigations and analysis of the content based on particular situations. Successful learning will involve a number of strategies to consolidate the construction of personal meaning from the information available in the teaching. The integration of the content with what the student already knows will eventually form the basis of the creation of new knowledge.

No distinction has been made in Four Directions curriculum between academic and applied subject content for the senior grades. Course delivery considerations and expectations are similar; however, various options have been provided in the “Optional Exercises” to accommodate course requirements.

## **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

Assessment and evaluation strategies on the Four Directions website are designed to support the learning objectives explained above. Lesson plans suggest options for evaluation to allow for self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment in equal measure.

Cooperative learning plays a large role in indigenous culture and education in which sharing is paramount. As such, educators are encouraged to create evaluation tools appropriate for the development of cooperative learning skills in terms of communication (listening, encouraging, explaining, questioning), group work (taking turns, performing different team roles, leadership, coming to consensus), and presentation (voice projection and clarity, physical posture and presence, timing, visual and audio aids). In recognition of the process of learning, educators should explore developing evaluation tools that do not focus entirely on end result content, ie. Static knowledge. Alternatively strategies that attend to the dynamics of the students’ educational growth are preferred. For instance, visits by elders or other guest speakers provide excellent opportunities for students to practice effective communications, manners, and courtesy; student interactions with these individuals can be assessed. This is true of school trips as well. Similarly peer evaluations are taken more seriously by students when they realize that their opinions count: they are being assessed by their community peers, not just the teacher. Lastly, self evaluation allows for private reflection on the development of skills and the acquisition of knowledge; when given adequate time to develop comfort in using this form of evaluation, students’ self-awareness will increase. Together a three-pronged approach of teacher, self, and peer evaluation strategies will help to create well-balanced student portraits.

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