

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Elder Nation	Reg Crowshoe, Geoff Crow Eagle, Maria Crowshoe
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Blackfoot
Time Required	Senior (Grades 10 -12)
Subject Strand Links	3 - 4 hours
Traditional Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Science • Law • Architecture
Student Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tipi • The Circle Model • Tipi Symbolism • Governance
	<p><u>The Tipi</u> A Blackfoot tipi is deceptively sophisticated in terms of its <i>architecture</i> design and applications. The tipi features a circular <i>structure</i>, with a fire in the centre and an opening at the top. Tipis have no solid flooring, furniture or ceilings and there is but one entrance. Poles serve as the supports to the covering made of animal hides – buffalo and deer in the case of the Blackfoot. The circular shape, combined with the opening at the top, allows for the emission of smoke during fire use as well as encouraging healthy air <i>circulation</i> within the living space. Tipis were used as <i>dwellings</i> from <i>construction</i> materials that could be disassembled and moved quite easily, leaving but a trace behind. They continue to be used today for special ceremonial purposes.</p> <p><u>The Circle Model</u> In terms of cultural values and practicality, the tipi illustrates a design that perfectly meets the needs of traditional Blackfoot society. The circular shape is conducive to face to face communication by promoting a sense of equity and participation, <i>consensus</i>, in discussions and decision-making. There is nowhere to hide in a circle. The circle represents all things connected in the universe, the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements, the four sacred medicines, and so on. The opening at the top of the tipi also allows for constant visual contact with the sky world as well, heaven, and the Creator of all living things. The fire serves as a source of heat and comfort as much as for cooking, easily shared by anyone in the tipi. The fire represents the essence of being, the life force, and the connecting link between the worlds above and below the earth’s surface. The sole entrance can be opened or closed, allowing for light or privacy as required. The placement of the tipi is planned prior to</p>

construction with the entrance facing East in honour of the natural environment that provides everything needed for one's sustenance, again reflecting a consciousness of connection and active relationship with nature. Sitting in the tipi directly on the earth provides a definite *grounding* effect through the close contact with Mother Earth, again emphasizing kinship between man and nature.

Tipi Symbolism

The tipi was one of the places in which important discussions were held and decisions made in traditional Blackfoot society, however taken as a whole, the tipi is symbolic of the sphere of interconnected life forms and energy forces, levels of existence, that make up the universe - all that is seen and unseen, in the waters and in the clouds as well as those walking on the earth or living below its surface. The tipi represents these connections laterally as well as vertically, a perfect representation of life itself.

Governance

The House of Commons is where parliamentary procedure takes place in the federal government of Canada (in Ottawa). The Parliament buildings are imposing stone structures. Parliamentary sessions open and close with the ceremonial entrance of the mace brought through the Hall of Honour to the Commons Chamber by the Sergeant-at-Arms. The mace, originating from a weapon of long ago, is a long, gold staff that represents the authority of the House of Commons and is placed on the table central to the Commons Chamber. Today, gavels are used much the same way in courts and board meetings to imply authority. There is assigned seating of the elected members of Parliament, party in power on one side and Opposition Party on the other side, and the Speaker of the House in the middle. The Chamber is rectangular in shape with seats rising on either side as in an auditorium.

In terms of process, Question Period serves as an opportunity for government representatives, usually members of the Opposition, to ask questions of the government in power - to challenge their decision making. All must address the Speaker of the House when speaking. Question Period is usually lively and animated, occasionally becoming antagonistic and aggressive and difficult to follow when several people speak or shout at once, requiring the Speaker of the House to halt the debates, name calling, and so on. Decisions are legalized after voting and bill passage processes are completed.

In terms of *gender* equity, there are significantly more males than females in Canadian government at present, but that number is changing as more women enter politics. The Senate is where many of the senior government representatives work to establish government policy. Similarly, traditional Blackfoot decision-making discussions open and close with ceremonial smudging and presentation of a bundle of sacred objects and assigned seating of those community members

	<p>deemed able and qualified to participate, males on one side and females on the other. The smudge altar is central, representing the place of highest honour. Decision making processes involve discussions, singing and dancing.</p> <p>In contrast to Parliament, however, traditional Blackfoot discussions are held with great respect and integrity for all speakers, in honour of the Creator and the gifts of knowledge and wisdom bestowed to the decision makers. This practice encourages gender equity and promotes the <i>transmission</i> of knowledge through the generations from grandfather to father to son and from grandmother to mother to daughter. The transmission of knowledge from old to young is highly regarded and elders' views are given the greatest of consideration. Respect for the Creator is of supreme importance as all power is understood to be given by the Creator, not by humans. And the bundle is not a symbol of war but instead made up of a mixture of objects such as feathers, plant leaves, animal bones, etc.; these items are symbolic of life and human kinship to the animal world and the plant world. There is training provided to the bundle custodian as to how to take care of the bundle. Finally, decisions are "legalized" in the tipi only after prayer for guidance and wisdom and acceptance/witnessing by all.</p> <p><u>Blackfoot Leadership</u> <i>Authorization</i> to lead in traditional Blackfoot society is determined by evaluation of qualifications based on one's cultural knowledge of songs, language and actions (dances). This knowledge could be transferred by community elders or through dreams or vision quests, emphasizing the spiritual source and connection to knowledge. Objects used to represent this authority, therefore, have great spiritual significance, such as the bundle or rattle, as all decisions made have to be respectful and considerate of all living beings which were created equally. Smudging with traditional medicines, tobacco in particular, begins the purification process to cleanse the participants before engaging in the discussion. The smoke of the burning plants infuses the tipi and transmits prayers for guidance and strength and wisdom to the spirit world, to the Creator, as the entire "legal" process is a sacred protocol given to the Blackfoot by the Creator.</p>
Learner Objectives	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To relate features of traditional Blackfoot communications methods to traditional Blackfoot cultural values • To understand the structure and components of the traditional Blackfoot governance model in comparison to those of the federal Canadian government • To demonstrate an understanding of the significance of the symbols representing Canadian Parliament and Blackfoot society • Analyze the philosophical base of the Western justice system as compared to that of indigenous society

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between environment and application • To demonstrate an understanding of the interconnectivity between living relations – animals, plants, humans, and elements • To identify the circle model as central to Blackfoot ideology • To identify the structure, components and symbolism of the Blackfoot tipi <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify similarities and differences between Blackfoot tipi and Parliamentary decision-making processes • To assess the nature of discussions held in a circle model space versus a rectangular model with various levels of seating • To relate Venue, Action, Language and Song as components of a traditional Piikani Blackfoot process <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop presentation and group communication skills • To illustrate conceptual understanding of similarity and difference through the drawing of a Venn Diagram • Demonstrate individual and collaborative communication skills • Navigate the internet with control
Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using a scale, a photo of the Statue of Liberty, or a gavel, open a discussion on symbols of law and justice. What are other symbols representative of cultures and societies around the world such as China, India, and Mexico? What do these symbols represent? What are their historical origins? 2. Introduce the concept of law. How does law in North America compare to law in other countries? What is the basis of law of justice? Who is subject to law and who is not? Is there any place where laws of some kind do not apply? 3. Brainstorm a list of possible scenarios that could happen if there were no laws pertaining to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Roads and highways b) Private property c) Child welfare d) Business ownership 4. Introduce the main elements of the process used to legislate in Canada in its simplest terms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Gathering of some kind in a special place for a discussion of the issues b) Presentation of information/facts c) A motion to initiate solutions to the problem d) Discourse on the options

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e) Decision making/voting f) Passing of a resolution g) Recording of decisions in writing h) Enforcement of decision/legislation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. View Question Period in the House of Commons – this takes place every day that the House sits and is televised and/or available online through CPAC – see additional resources. 6. Discuss the nature of the communications in Parliament. How do speakers behave? How do they express themselves? What is the nature of their questions? Which cultural values do they represent in their exchanges? How are the discussions finalized? 7. Now compare and contrast this form of governance with the traditional Blackfoot governance model as explained by Blackfoot elders Reg Crowshoe, Geoff Crow Eagle, and Maria Crowshoe. 8. Read the summary above and discuss. 9. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com to hear the teachings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Go to the Blackfoot teachings, under “Introduction” to learn about the Piikani Nation and the Tipi Circle Structure. b) Go to “Elder/Ceremonial Grandparent (East)” to learn about Blackfoot leadership and authority. c) Go to “Ceremonialist (West)” to learn about the transfer of knowledge. d) Go to “Bundles” to learn about the authority of the bundle. e) Go to “Societies” to learn about the organization of Blackfoot governance systems. 10. Discuss the elements of authority acquired by traditional Blackfoot: Venue, Action, Language and Song. Venue refers to the place of discussion. How is that important? Action refers to the dancing and mimicking of animals to convey their spirit and teachings. Why would dancing have any impact on one’s ability to communicate and be an effective decision-maker? Language refers to knowing how to speak Blackfoot. Why would that make a difference in terms of how one expresses himself or herself? Song refers to knowing how to sing the traditional songs. Of what importance is singing in terms of leadership? 11. In groups, draw a Venn Diagram of Parliamentary Procedure and Traditional Blackfoot Governance, identifying similarities and differences in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Where discussions are held b) How suggestions are put forth c) Who the participants are d) The roles of the different kinds of participants e) How decisions are made f) How the decision-makers are chosen, or authorized
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	<p>g) How decisions are legislated (or carried out) h) The dominion/jurisdiction of the decisions made i) The objects used to represent legislative authority</p> <p>12. Wrap up the lesson with a selection of various discussion topics and optional exercises below.</p> <p>Discussion Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does an indigenous society that considers all living things to have a spirit and to be related and equal in value compare to Western society’s worldview? To what extent does spirituality play a role in Canadian government today? Was it always this way? What factors contributed to these changes? • How does a society based in oral communications operate differently from a society that is based on writing? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each system? • What is the significance of the circle in terms of the tipi as a setting for discussions and decision-making? How does this setting contrast with a board room and a board table, for instance? How does environment impact on the discussion itself? • Compare the bundle used by the Blackfoot to the mace of Parliament. What do these objects demonstrate in terms of cultural values? What does the bundle say about how traditional Aboriginal people see the seriousness of words and ideas, and how they are sacred? What does this reflect on the importance attached to speaking with care and respect? • Compare the practice of smudging with the hammering of a gavel to authorize a meeting. How do these actions illustrate different approaches to conduct business? How has reverence for the mace or gavel changed over the centuries? How does the traditional Blackfoot approach build spirituality into process (legislation, governance, etc.)? • Think about the issues related to the separation of church and state. In what ways did traditional Native values emphasize that governance is spiritual and looks to spirit for authority? • Why might the Canadian judicial process be a source of conflict for traditional indigenous people? • From a traditional Piikani perspective, do we have authority today from the land to mine it, or to sell the water or lumber? Who gave us this authority, the Creator or people? What motivates people to either protect it or develop it? • How does a song, or music, or a story affect us? Is the effect more emotional, or is it more an effect on the mind, on our thinking? <p>Optional Exercises</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit court proceedings and have a follow-up discussion on the Canadian legal process in action • Organize a mock Question Period based on issues of importance to the school • Visit Parliament in Ottawa • Invite an Aboriginal sentencing circle representative to the school to speak to the class on how this process operates and why Aboriginal communities are using it. What effects are the communities noticing now that they have this process in place? • Write a report on the nature of contemporary governing processes in North America versus those of traditional Blackfoot society.
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture • Structure • Dwelling • Construction • Circulation • Grounding • Gender • Transmission • Consensus • Governance • Authorization
Materials Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale • Gavel • Picture of Statue of Liberty • Feather
Evaluation	Teacher evaluation of group activities and Venn Diagram

Student Summary

The Tipi

A Blackfoot tipi is deceptively sophisticated in terms of its *architecture* design and applications. The tipi features a circular *structure*, with a fire in the centre and an opening at the top. Tipis have no solid flooring, furniture or ceilings and there is but one entrance. Poles serve as the supports to the covering made of animal hides – buffalo and deer in the case of the Blackfoot. The circular shape, combined with the opening at the top, allows for the emission of smoke during fire use as well as encouraging healthy air *circulation* within the living space. Tipis were used as *dwellings* from *construction* materials that could be disassembled and moved quite easily, leaving but a trace behind.

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The Circle Model

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Diagram for **BLACKFOOT Curriculum**

