

Focus:

Students recognize that changes to the land, animals, bodies of water, plants and climate of an area affect the way Aboriginal people live, their spiritual practices and their values.

Curriculum Connection:

5.3.1-1 Recognize how economic and political changes impact ways of life of citizens

Materials and Resources:



» DVD/Online video- "Eco-Despair", www.sacredrelationship.ca/videos



» Eco-Despair worksheet

Key Learnings:

- » In a western worldview the earth is a resource that human beings can own and access for their own comfort and benefit
- » In an Aboriginal worldview the earth is our mother, we must respect her and honor her as she gives us everything that we need to survive
- » Economic and political decisions and changes in Canada have had a negative effect on every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal citizens of this country
- » The Aboriginal people have not been included in the decision making about the land upon which they have lived for thousands of years

Teacher Preparation:

Preview the video: "Eco-Despair" from the DVD or Website prior to beginning the lesson. The following points are quotes from "Eco-Despair" to help in the preparation for this lesson.

- » Imagine that you are the earth... that it is a body and everyone is poking at you and pulling things from you.
- » We believe that the earth is alive and has a heart and organs like a human being.
- » She's a grandmother and a mother that nourishes us and here we are, her children, prodding at her every day and taking things from her and not even saying thank you.
- » If you take your mother and take a syringe and take blood out of her every day and see how long she lasts.
- » Someday nature herself is going to say that's enough.
- » Newcomers overlooked the knowledge that was already here.
- » If I destroy the water I destroy myself. It's 2 things but it's really 1.
- » That's how I lived a long time ago (got everything from the river, washed clothes there, got fish from there). Long time ago everything, now nothing.
- » Dead fish floating belly up in the river, sores on them, dead in the river so there's no way after that I'm going to eat fish out of the river.
- » Very FEW people benefiting from the destruction of the land but the people who live there are poor. It's not right. They are physically poor, no money, but also their health is poor.
- » They come and say we want a meeting with you because we are going to put a new plant up but meanwhile they already have the papers that says go ahead.
- » We are always run over. Anything we have to say doesn't matter.
- » They are supposed to talk to us to get our input but it's always after the fact.
- » They say they want to hear our concerns, our concerns are the water and the air and all of the things that we live on.
- » They take everything away from us and we never get any feedback on the meetings we had and what the Elders said.
- » Power plants, we fought that, even when they put dams on the creeks we were nothing, just like that ant on the ground, you stomp on it, we were like that.
- » What is the alternative?
- » We are not stupid, are we?
- » We need to use what's between our ears (our brains) use our imaginations.
- » What we are doing now is not sustainable.
- » We can't keep pouring chemicals into this (points to river).
- » We are not doing our part, we are not taking care of the gifts that are given to us
- » 'suits' will say let's be realistic, well let's be realistic. Where we are heading is unsustainable. Surely these suits have children and grandchildren.
- » I'm appealing to them as human to human. We are better than this. We don't have to be this greedy. We are smarter than this, or are we?

Teacher Preparation (continued) :

James Tully (2000) in the article "The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples For and of Freedom" provides a very clear definition of colonization and its effects on Indigenous people.

Colonization can be defined as the "historical process by which structures of domination have been set in place on Turtle Island/North America over the Indigenous peoples and their territories without their consent" (p.37). It also includes the government's action in response to Indigenous people's resistance against these structures.

There are four parts to colonization:

1. The arrival and settlement of European people brought war, pestilence/foreign disease and left Indigenous populations in ruins.
2. The overtaking of all power and authority over Indigenous territory and forcing Indigenous people into small parcels of land that were perceived to be of no use to the colonial government.
3. Treaty making and periods of cooperation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government.
4. The establishment of European-based governments on North American soil has resulted in the development of legislation (i.e. the Indian Act), policies of domination (i.e. Residential School policies), and the formation of colonial band councils that are controlled by the Canadian federal governments.

Since settlement, many laws and policies have been created by the British/Canadian government, without any consultation with Indigenous leadership. The stated purpose of the policies was to be rid of the Indian problem: to eradicate Indian culture and fully assimilate Indian people into the British (and later Canadian) identity.

These laws included:

- » The government took away Indian people's right to determine who is a member of their community. (In 1850 two separate acts were passed for the protection of Lands and Indians);
- » The government passed legislation that deemed Indian identity as inferior to British identity. (Gradual Enfranchisement Act 1857 & Grand Civilization Act 1869);
- » The government took all decision making power away from the Indigenous leadership. All control of every aspect of Indian life was controlled by the Federal government, who hired Indian agents to make decisions for each reserve. (This was begun in the 1850 Lands Act and consolidated into the Indian Act of 1876);
- » The government took all Indian children away from their parents and families to live at residential schools. At these schools, children were separated from the parents/culture and socialized to feel their Indian identity/spirituality was inferior to British/Christian identity/religion. (Residential School Policy);
- » The government passed a law that made Indian ceremonies illegal. This law remained in effect until the late 1960's. (1884 amendment to the Indian Act).

The result has been devastating, leaving Indigenous people feeling hopeless, helpless and powerless to be in control of their lives and their future. Many Aboriginal people still feel ashamed of their First Nation or Metis ethnicity. The Indian Act has been amended over the past 130+ years, but still carries much of the same laws that restrict Aboriginal people's ability to make decisions for themselves.

Today, Aboriginal people are still left out of the decision-making processes regarding how land and water is used for human consumption, agriculture and resource development. Aboriginal people have historically held an interconnected worldview; all aspects of life are connected/related, thus we must respect the entire natural world (the land, water, plants and animals) because this is what gives people life.

Many Aboriginal people have witnessed significant changes to the land, water and ecosystems over the past 100 years. They have witnessed a great deal of economic development, which has had a huge impact on the health of the land, the water and on the people.

When we consider the effects of colonization, we understand that Aboriginal people have been left out of the discussions regarding how land should be used, and their worldview is not represented in the laws and policies created about how the land and water should be protected. The differences in the European and Indigenous worldviews (as they pertain to the natural world) could be described as follows:

Aboriginal Worldview

Western Worldview

Economic

- » Self-determination is a right of all people. We must make decisions that are good for us, but also respects all other people and being's ability to make decisions for themselves.
- » Freedom to live within a value system dictated by natural laws.
- » All cultures have gifts that should be shared with other cultures.

- » European/Canadian culture, worldview, philosophy and science is superior to Indigenous.
- » Indigenous culture is primitive. Indigenous people did not have science nor philosophy until the arrival of European people.
- » Humans create political systems whereby whomever "wins" is given the right to make all rules/policies.

Political

- » Sustainability Sustainance (take only what you need; live in a way that promotes the sustainability of all living things)

- » Belief that the land and water exist for human use.
- » Belief that new science and technology will always be developed to fix the mistakes/pollution/destruction of the land.
- » Ownership and control of land.

Teacher Preparation (continued) :

The lack of participation in decision making (and resulting changes they have witnessed to the land) has been very difficult. This effect on many First Nations and Metis people in Alberta is a pervasive feeling of sadness and despair connected to the water and the land.

Thus, Eco-despair is a result of policies and laws that has damaged essential human relationships (including the loss of the sacred relationship between the people and the water) manifests itself as hopelessness, helplessness, powerlessness and voicelessness.

Launch:



Ask students what it means to be a citizen of Canada. Facilitate a brief discussion that considers:

- » Do all citizens of Canada have the same rights?
- » How are decisions about our environment made in Canada?
- » Are different worldviews considered by decision-makers in Canada when it comes to issues involving our environment?

Explain to students that the class will be viewing a film called “Eco-Despair” that examines how political and economic decisions in Canada have impacted, and continue to impact, the lives of some of the Aboriginal citizens of Alberta.

Ask students to choose to make notes on one of the following four focus areas:

1. Aboriginal worldview regarding the earth, the land, water and nature.
2. Sustainability issues based on the current use of land in Alberta.
3. The way in which government and industry have interacted with Aboriginal people.
4. How have these actions affected the lives of Aboriginal people?

Activate:

Distribute the worksheets to students before the film starts so that they have a framework for their notes on the video.

Briefly discuss each of the focus areas to ensure that all students understand what it encompasses.

Instruct students to circle the focus area that they have selected to make notes on during the viewing of the video.



View the video as a class.

Connect:

1. Following the viewing of the video invite all students who chose to focus on point 1, Aboriginal worldview regarding the earth, the land, water and nature to take turns sharing some of the points that they noted with the rest of the class. Invite other students to comment on, or add their own perspectives on, the points raised by students focusing on the Aboriginal worldview regarding Mother Earth.
2. Next invite students who chose to focus on point 2, Sustainability issues based on the current use of land in Alberta, to present and discuss in the same manner as was done with point 1. Guide students to relate what they discussed about Aboriginal worldview to what is noted in the film regarding sustainability issues. (Note: the discussion will continue to build as students are guided through the 4 points.
3. Continue to share and discuss student observations, notes and responses focusing on point 3, the way in which government and industry have interacted with Aboriginal people. This is an excellent opportunity to draw upon previous learning and experience that relates to colonization as students examine how government and industry have historically treated Aboriginal people compared to other Canadian citizens, and how they continue to do so.
4. Move towards the summary of the discussion by having students who chose to focus on point 4, How have these actions affected the lives of Aboriginal people? Share their observations, notes and perspectives. Help students to connect this issue to the overall issue of colonization of Aboriginal people in Canada, the inequitable treatment of Aboriginal citizens in Canada and how over 150 years of this relationship has impacted the lives of Aboriginal citizens of this land, the earth, and therefore, the lives of all citizens of this country.
5. Finally, introduce the concept that by respecting and accepting the wisdom and experience of Aboriginal people of this land could be, and has always been, the answer to the preservation of the environment, land and water of Alberta, Canada and the world.

Challenge students to select a government representative or industry representative to whom they will write a letter explaining their perspective and urging the recipient of the letter to take action to respectfully seek the wisdom and guidance of Aboriginal people.

Eco-Despair Film Notes

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Circle the focus area that you are choosing to make notes on as you view the film:

1. Aboriginal worldview regarding the earth, the land, water and nature
2. Sustainability issues based on the current use of land in Alberta
3. The way in which government and industry have interacted with Aboriginal people
4. How have these actions affected the lives of Aboriginal people?

In the chart provided make notes about what you see and hear in the film that helps you to consider the focus area that you have chosen. In the "Quote" section write down what you hear a person in the film say. In the "Visual" section make a note of what you see in the film that relates to your focus area.

Quotes	Visuals
<i>Example: Someday nature herself is going to say, "That's enough."</i>	<i>Example: I see a well head leaking oil which makes me know that the land is being destroyed.</i>