

Traditional Perspective on Land in Canada

Name: _____

Content: First Peoples land ownership and use

Curricular Competency: Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions

Curricular Competency: Develop a plan of action to address a selected problem or issue

Curricular Competency: Construct arguments defending the significance of individuals/groups, places, events, or developments (significance)

Curricular Competency: Ask questions, corroborate inferences, and draw conclusions about the content and origins of a variety of sources, including mass media (evidence)

Curricular Competency: Sequence objects, images, or events, and recognize the positive and negative aspects of continuities and changes in the past and present (continuity and change)

Curricular Competency: Differentiate between short- and long-term causes, and intended and unintended consequences, of events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence)

Curricular Competency: Take stakeholders' perspectives on issues, developments, or events by making inferences about their beliefs, values, and motivations (perspective)

Curricular Competency: Make ethical judgments about events, decisions, or actions that consider the conditions of a particular time and place, and assess appropriate ways to respond (ethical judgment)

First Peoples Principles of Learning: Learning is reflective

First Peoples' Traditional Perspectives on Land

For thousands of years, **First Peoples** in Canada have had a deep connection to the land. They see the land as a **living part of their community** — not just something people can buy or own. The land provides **food, water, shelter, and medicine**, so it must be **respected and cared for**.

Instead of owning land the way Europeans do, First Peoples believe that **everyone shares the responsibility** to look after it. People are seen as **caretakers**, not owners. They take only what they need and make sure the land stays healthy for **future generations**.

This way of thinking teaches **balance, respect, and gratitude** for nature — values that continue to guide many Indigenous communities today.

Different Perspectives on Land

First Peoples' Perspective:

First Peoples believe the land is **shared** and must be **respected and cared for**. It is seen as a **living part of nature** that connects people, animals, and the environment. No one "owns" the land — instead, people are **caretakers** who make sure the land stays healthy for everyone and for future generations.

Sometimes **First Peoples did have conflicts** over hunting or fishing areas, or over resources like rivers or trade routes. But their view of land was still **very different** from the European idea of "owning" land.

For First Peoples, land was not something that belonged to one person or group forever. Instead, each Nation or community had its own **territory** — a place they **used, cared for, and respected**. These territories were known and understood by neighboring Nations. When disagreements happened, they were often settled through **talking, trade, or agreements**, not always through fighting.

When Europeans arrived, they brought a new idea — that people could **buy, sell, or own** land permanently. This clashed with the Indigenous belief that **land cannot be owned**, only **looked after and shared responsibly**.

Western (European) Perspective:

When Europeans came to North America, they brought the idea that land could be **owned** by individuals or governments. People could **buy, sell, or fence off** pieces of land. In this view, the land is seen as something to **use for farming, building, or making money**.

Main Difference:

The First Peoples' perspective focuses on **sharing and caring for the land**, while the Western perspective focuses on **owning and using** the land.

Read the article on the next page.

What reconciliation feels like to people 'locked in the bathroom' for a century¹

Imagine someone knocks on your door.

It's a group, led by a man with a crown.

You invite them in, offer them a cup of tea and to sit down.

The man with the crown gives you a piece of paper. Then he tells you and your family to move into the bathroom.

Startled, you say no. This is my home, you say, a place my family has lived longer than anyone can remember. We are this place.

But you consent, the man says, shoving you into the bathroom.

Before you can argue, the door shuts. It is locked.

Forcing it open slightly you see that there is another man standing in the doorway now. He has a weapon.

Where do you think you're going, he asks.

Home, you say.

This is your home now, he says, brandishing a weapon and closing the door.

You ask politely to leave. You scream. You kick. You call for help.

No one is coming to help, says the man with the crown, and we have some new rules.

A piece of paper is slid under the door. On it are rules surrounding what clothes are to be worn in the bathroom. What activities are forbidden. What happens to those who resist.

Just then the man with the weapon — now calling himself "The Bathroom Agent" — comes in and asks why you aren't following the rules.

You tell him the rules are stupid.

So he hurts you. In front of your family. Then, he hurts them.

Life in the bathroom

For a long time the door stays locked and closed. You try your best to make a life though it is cramped and unsuitable. Not a place people can thrive.

Still, you succeed in ways you didn't imagine you could. You find ways to resist and continue your "old ways" by hiding them from sight. Wearing what you want. You even fight the rules even if the punishment is severe.

One day the Agent and some people come and take your children. You're told it's for the best. For years your children disappear and only some return. Some are never seen again.

When some children do return many are unhappy. When you ask why they tell you that they have been taught to hate life in the bathroom.

One day the Agent says you can leave for 15 minutes and grab some food. You have to carry a pass with his permission, though.

Travelling downstairs you see the house is different. It's flooded with people you've never seen before. New wings have been built. There's new paint and all the pictures you hung are gone. There's almost no evidence of you left. You barely recognize your home.

Returning, you ask the Agent how much longer this has to go on. He says the new rule is you can write questions on a piece of paper and he will present it to his leaders.

For a long time life is like this. Your family endures and resists and continues while a huge, constant, never-ending ruckus goes on downstairs. People are having an amazing time, and you're locked in the bathroom.

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/opinion-reconciliation-beyond94-1.4578359>

Until one day the door opens. The Agent says you can leave if you want.

You walk throughout your home. Everywhere are occupiers. Your home is barely recognizable. The food, the walls, the floors are all different.

All you recognize is the foundation.

A woman comes up to you.

Who are you, she asks.

I live here, you say.

No you don't. This is my house.

You tell her the story of inviting people in for tea. Of over a century in the bathroom. Of resistance to the Agent. Of lost children. Of lost relationships. Of violence. Of genocide. Of the struggles.

Well, she responds, you have the bathroom – why aren't you happy with that?

Angry, you tell this story to others.

One asks you why don't you just get over it and stop complaining.

One listens intently and a single tear falls down his cheek.

One tells you that her people suffered too and everyone should suffer a little bit.

And still you speak, telling the story of your dispossession. Over and over and over again. You convince some. Win some small victories.

But there is always more work and more and more people.

Then, one day, a well-dressed man who looks like the one with the crown comes up to you.

He says sorry for everything. That he regrets things have turned out this way. That he hopes your people and his people can reconcile. That a new relationship is possible.

You ask for your home back. To share at the very least.

"I'm not that sorry," he says, walking away.

Turning to the door, you remember the knock.

And refuse to go away.

*This column is part of our project **Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada**. Read more stories in the series and look for further coverage this week*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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How is the person in the bathroom's view of "home" different from the view of the people outside?

Did the speaker in the story know that the invitation in for tea, would turn into being locked in the bathroom? How did he feel about that?

Did the outside people care for the home, in the same way that the bathroom people cared for the home?

How might the story change if it were told from the perspective of the "Agent" or the man with the crown? What might they think is fair?
