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# TEACH

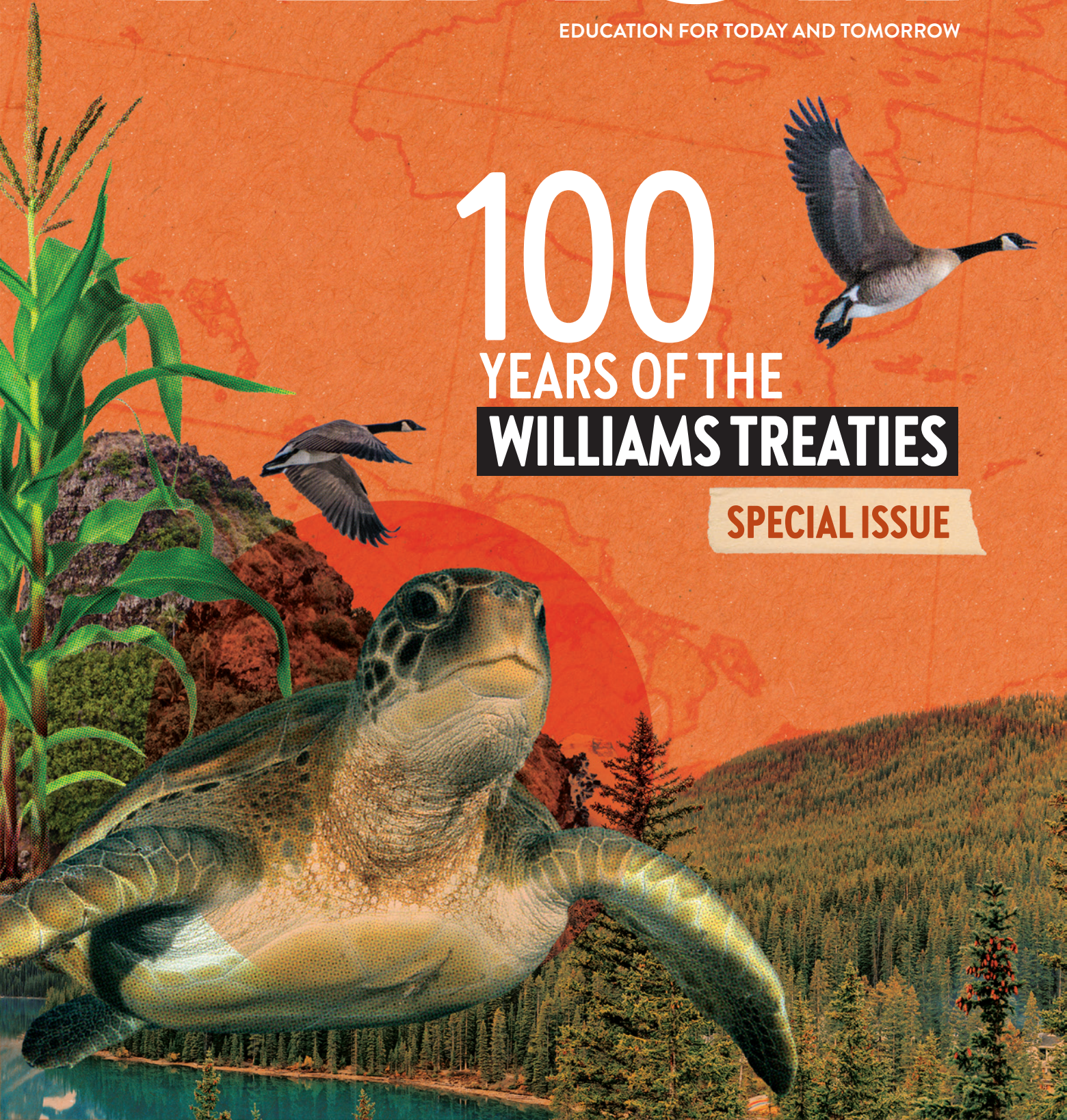
EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

# 100

YEARS OF THE

**WILLIAMS TREATIES**

**SPECIAL ISSUE**



# NOTES

One hundred years ago, in October and November of 1923, the Williams Treaties were signed between seven First Nations and the government of Canada, transferring huge parcels of land in southern Ontario to the Crown. There has since been much contention surrounding the Treaties, which stripped the First Nations of their hunting and fishing rights and only added to the already-fraught relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers.

Our special issue explores the series of events that led to the creation of the Williams Treaties, as well as their lasting impacts. And to assist you with incorporating this material in the classroom, we spoke with a number of educators and experts who provided suggestions on best practices for doing so. Thank you to all the contributors who made this special issue possible. We also wish to acknowledge the support of the government of Canada in its development and production.

To start things off, Krista Nerland, a lawyer whose practice focuses on Indigenous rights and treaty rights, presents a quick breakdown of treaty history in Canada. Building off this information, reporter Carolyn Gruske delves into the specifics of the Williams Treaties. Her piece presents a timeline of the Treaties, from events leading up to their inception, to the aftermath and the series of court cases that have followed.

Next, we asked educator and technology coach Joseph Filiplić to share his experience with teaching his Grade 9 social studies classes about treaties. In his article, Filiplić writes of his approach, as well as how he incorporates technology into those lessons, thus allowing students to demonstrate their learning.

As with technology, art can be a powerful medium to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. After the Williams

Treaties were signed and the seven First Nations lost access to much of their traditional territory, their ability to preserve cultural heritage through art was severely impacted. However, by reconnecting with those traditional art forms, Indigenous artisans are finding ways to heal from the generational traumas of the treaties, while also coming together to share in their knowledge. Read Fiona Tapp's article to learn more.

This issue's Curricula, developed by elementary school educator Emily Chan, expands on concepts of Indigenous ways of knowing, and is designed to help students in Grades 1-8 develop a deeper understanding of treaties.

Carolyn Gruske also offers guidance on how to approach the subject of treaty education with younger students. The first step, she says in her article, "Laying the Foundation," is simple: Don't be afraid. Teaching the treaties can be tricky, and many educators worry about getting it wrong. Thankfully there are a variety of resources out there, which Gruske helpfully provides links to.

Our issue closes with a piece from author, journalist, and playwright Drew Hayden Taylor, who is a member of Curve Lake First Nation. He writes of his childhood growing up in Curve Lake, and of how the Williams Treaties impacted members of his community, while also reflecting on present-day tensions that still exist between First Nation communities and settlers in the Kawartha Lakes region.

It is important to remember that those of us who live in Canada today are treaty people and, as such, have a responsibility to this land we call home. We hope this special issue fulfills part of that responsibility and, in doing so, helps bring us all closer towards meaningful reconciliation.

Until next time,

**KELSEY MCCALLUM**  
ASSISTANT EDITOR



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# WHAT IS A TREATY?

By Krista Nerland

A treaty is an agreement between an Indigenous nation and the Government of Canada (and often its provinces and territories as well). These treaties do not generally have an “end date,” and are intended to be the foundation for a long-term relationship between the parties—a Nation-to-Nation relationship which requires each treaty partner to fulfill their rights and responsibilities.

## PHASES OF TREATY-MAKING

### TIME IMMEMORIAL

#### INDIGENOUS

Before there were any Europeans on Turtle Island (North America), there were millions of Indigenous peoples already living on these lands in their own nations. Those Indigenous peoples had their own laws and protocols for establishing treaties of peace and alliance with their neighbours. These treaties regulated how people interacted with one other, provided for shared ceremony, and promoted trade.

1600s

## COMMERCIAL CONTRACTS

When Europeans first arrived in Canada, the initial agreements they made with Indigenous peoples were commercial in nature. These agreements tended to be through fur traders working for companies like the Hudson's Bay Company, rather than with European governments, and were built on Indigenous treaty-making protocols.

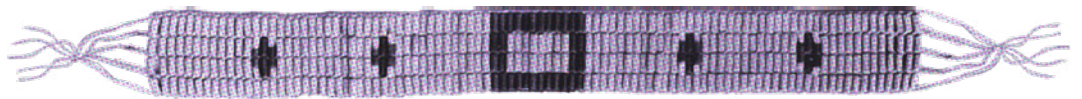
At this point, there were only a few of French and English fur traders in North America. Their small numbers and lack of expertise meant they were dependent on Indigenous peoples for their very survival. It was only by adopting Indigenous laws and processes for treaty-making that European traders were able to enter relationships with the local Indigenous peoples, and through this, gain access to their existing travel routes, trade sites, and furs. Indigenous peoples in this period tended to be focused on obtaining European trade goods.

LATE 1600s, 1700s

## TREATIES OF PEACE, FRIENDSHIP, AND ALLIANCE

As the British and French began competing for access to and control over North America, they focused on building alliances with Indigenous peoples who knew the landscape and had considerable military strength. In making these treaties, European powers continued to rely heavily on Indigenous treaty-making protocols.

Generally, for the Indigenous parties, the objectives of the peace and friendship treaties were to end hostilities with the British, facilitate trade, and guarantee that the British would not interfere with their land rights, harvesting, and way of life.





**Pre-Confederation Treaties (1725-1867)**

- Peace and Friendship Treaties
- Upper Canada Land Surrenders
- Robinson Treaties
- Douglas Treaties (Vancouver Island)

**Post-Confederation Treaties (1867-1930)**

- Numbered Treaties
- Williams Treaties

**LATE 1700s, 1800s**

**TERRITORIAL TREATIES**

Over time, especially after Britain defeated France and became the only colonial power on the scene, the context for treaty-making shifted considerably. In this period, Euro-Canadian governments entered treaties in order to gain access to Indigenous lands and resources, while also attempting to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian ways. Indigenous treaty partners, on the other hand, were increasingly motivated to protect their resources, territories, and autonomy in the face of increasing pressures from Euro-Canadian settlement.



◆ **UPPER CANADA LAND SURRENDERS (1764-1862)**

These were the first set of “territorial treaties.” They dispossessed First Nations of large portions of their lands in exchange for money. In the beginning, the Crown paid a one-time lump sum payment, but later, to save costs, a smaller payment was made once per year (this was known as an “annuity”). These treaties did not always establish reserved lands for Indigenous peoples to live on.

◆ **NUMBERED TREATIES (1871-1921)**

Like the Upper Canadian Treaties, the written texts of the numbered treaties suggest that First Nations agreed to give up huge swaths of their land. In exchange, they were to retain rights to harvest on those surrendered lands, subject to the Crown’s right to use portions for settlement, resource development, and other purposes. However, the oral agreements set out by Crown negotiators and agreed to by First Nations signatories at treaty councils often bore little resemblance to the written texts. First Nations typically agreed to share their lands with settlers, but not to surrender ownership or their right to govern themselves.

**MID-1970s ONWARD**

**COMPREHENSIVE LAND CLAIMS**

After the Williams Treaties concluded in 1923 and adhesions to Treaty 9 were made in 1929 and 1930, the Crown did not sign any more treaties with Indigenous nations until 1975. This is when Canada began entering into what we now call the era of “modern treaties,” after the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the *Calder v. British Columbia* case that Indigenous land rights existed before the arrival of Europeans. After this decision, Canada set up a process of resolving First Nations claims about land that had never been surrendered through treaties—known as “comprehensive claims.” Since 1975, Canada has concluded 26 different modern treaties with Indigenous nations.





## MODERN VS. HISTORIC TREATIES

All treaties before 1975 are known as “historic treaties,” whereas the treaties that deal with comprehensive land claims today are referred to as “modern treaties.”

Generally, the historic treaties were brief and dealt with only a few issues such as reserves, harvesting, and annuity payments. The entire written treaty sometimes consisted of only one or two pages (though much more was often communicated at the treaty council than made it onto the written copy).

Some historic treaties were negotiated in a single evening; however, modern treaties are the work of decades. They are much more comprehensive documents, with clauses and subclauses that take up hundreds of pages. They often cover areas like:

- ◆ Ownership, use, and management of land, water, and natural resources;
- ◆ Harvesting of fish and wildlife;
- ◆ Environmental protection and assessment;
- ◆ Employment;
- ◆ Taxation;
- ◆ Parks and conservation areas;
- ◆ Social and cultural revitalization; and more.

A map of comprehensive land claims and First Nation self-government agreements can be downloaded from the Government of Canada's [website](#).

While the historic treaties have a legacy of mistreatment and broken promises, the modern treaties have generally had a more positive impact. These treaties tend to recognize Indigenous peoples' inherent right to self-government and create institutions through which that right can be realized. They also recognize the right of Indigenous peoples to decide what happens in their territories, and to benefit from economic development activities that occur there. Though there have been challenges with the implementation of modern treaties, the result still tends to be better opportunities and better outcomes for the Indigenous signatories.



## WHY ARE TREATIES IMPORTANT?

When Europeans arrived on Turtle Island, Indigenous peoples were already here. They had governments, laws, religious practices, and territories in which their people lived and their laws operated. They had sovereignty—the power to govern their people and their land.

The starting point for understanding why treaties matter is understanding that Indigenous peoples have sovereignty on this land, and they never gave it up. They did not lose it to the European powers in a war. They did not agree to surrender it to the Crown.

Over time, more and more Europeans came into North America. The country we know today as Canada was created. But as it grew and grew, it never really addressed the fact that the land on which it was based had first belonged—and continues to belong—to someone else.

Treaties are important because they create the blueprint for a relationship between Indigenous peoples who never gave up their right to govern this land, and the newcomers who now live on it. If the Crown and the newcomers respect the significance of the treaty relationship and the sovereignty of their Indigenous treaty-partners, treaties can provide a foundation for all of us to live together on this land in a positive and meaningful way.



## WHAT DOES THE PHRASE

### “WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE” MEAN?

This phrase refers to the idea that both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples living in what is now Canada have rights and responsibilities that arise from the treaties between their nations. Every road, building, home, school, hospital, etc. in an area covered by a treaty was made possible *because* of that treaty. Every non-Indigenous person who lives on treaty lands is there thanks to a treaty.

Treaties provide a potential framework for co-existence on the land that is now called Canada. But for this to work, the Canadian government and its citizens need to engage seriously in the process of treaty renewal—including by recognizing Indigenous peoples' continued rights to govern themselves and make decisions about their territories.

**KRISTA NERLAND** is an associate at Olthuis Kleer Townshend.

Her practice focuses on litigation related to Aboriginal rights, Aboriginal title, and treaty rights; human rights and discrimination; and advancing Indigenous jurisdiction.

# LAND OF INCALCULABLE VALUE

A WILLIAMS  
TREATIES OVERVIEW

BY CAROLYN GRUSKE

In 1923, three parcels of land in southern Ontario totalling 52,384 km<sup>2</sup>—or just under five percent of the province—were the subject of a legal process that defined how they could be used and who would control them. The resulting Williams Treaties were not products of traditional treaty negotiations between sovereign First Nations and representatives of the Crown, and their creation sparked not only moral outrage, but also a series of legal challenges that lasted for nearly a century.

While the eventual settlement of the Treaties in 2018 did not wipe away decades of resentment or blot out the centuries of fraught Indigenous-settler relations that were the precursor to the signing of the Treaties, it did mark the end of a dark era, and—perhaps—the start of a better one.



## THE BASICS: THE WHERE AND THE WHO

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The areas of land comprising the Williams Treaties were the traditional territory of seven First Nations, specifically the Hiawatha First Nation/Michisaagiig of Rice Lake, the Curve Lake First Nation, the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, the Alderville First Nation, the Beausoleil First Nation, the Chippewas of Georgina Island, and the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the people of these nations hunted and harvested on the land and fished in its waters. Even as settlements grew into villages, towns, and cities, no formal surrender of the lands in question occurred and no treaty was signed. Meaning the areas still belonged to the First Nations, and not the Government of Canada or the province of Ontario.

## TREATY HISTORY IN CANADA

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The Seven Years War began in 1756 and saw France and England on opposite sides of the battlefield. The conflict was far-reaching, beginning in Europe and then spilling over into what would later become Canada. Eventually, after many battles, the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763 to end the war and most of France's territory in North America was ceded to Britain.

Keeping control over a newly conquered territory from thousands of miles away is always challenging for an empire. Britain didn't just have pockets of French settlements to manage; it also had to concern itself with the Indigenous nations who had lived on the land long before the arrival of the English or the French—Indigenous nations that had largely sided with the French during the war.

King George III's Royal Proclamation of 1763 outlined how Britain would govern its new territory and established English law as the law of the land. It also spelled out how the Crown viewed its relationship with the Indigenous nations, explains John Borrows, professor and Loveland chair in Indigenous law at the University of Toronto, and a member of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation.

"King George III said we are going to make lands in North America reserved for Indians," Borrows explains. "Those lands will be reserved for them until such time as a public meeting will be called and they will be asked if they want to surrender to or share their lands with the Crown."

To build upon the Proclamation, a meeting was held in 1764 in Fort Niagara in the hopes of cementing the British alliance with the Indigenous nations. Over 2,000 representatives of 24 First Nations attended. Unlike the delivery of the Proclamation—a written document, imposed from afar without discussion—the meeting at Niagara was a more co-operative and collaborative process, according to Nathan Tidridge, a history teacher at Waterdown District High School who co-teaches a dual credit high school/college course in [treaty studies](#).

"[It] allow[ed] the Indigenous people to explain how they underst[ood] the Proclamation and to ratify what was agreed to orally," Tidridge says. "For example, what [did] Nation-to-Nation mean? What [did] sovereign mean? That [was] all clarified."

## EVOLVING LANGUAGE

Teachers want to speak respectfully about Indigenous peoples in Canada, but that's hard to do, especially as language and terminology have shifted over time—and since certain seemingly outdated names and terms still have legal meaning, says John Borrows.

“If we're talking about general issues that aren't legally precise, we should talk about Indigenous people. That would be the category that best captures how people are describing themselves today,” he explains. “If there's a particular nation, then we would use that language, but the Williams Treaties actually do refer to Indians and tribes—it's a reference to what's in the legal text.

“What's protected in our Canadian Constitution,” Borrows continues, “is Aboriginal rights and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples are defined in Section 35 as Indian, Inuit, and Métis. The word Indian still has that legal force... and it also has this historic protection that flows through things like the Royal Proclamation.”

The resulting agreement, known as the Treaty of Niagara, was the first treaty agreement made between First Nations and the Crown. It included the surrender of a stretch of land along the Niagara River, and also established the specifics of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and new settlers to the land that would become known as Canada.

To signify this relationship, the English commissioned wampum belts. Made out of shells, the belts were decorated with symbols and pictograms, including two figures holding hands, and represented the negotiations and the relationship. But despite the seeming understanding arrived at by both sides, the Treaty of Niagara was never officially recognized by Canada. Nevertheless, the process set the standard for how Indigenous nations expected subsequent treaty negotiations to play out, and how modern courts interpret the responsibility of the Crown towards Indigenous peoples.

Following the Treaty of Niagara, as more settlers moved into Canada, and specifically into areas that are now part of Ontario, there was a drive by the government to strike more treaties and gain access to Indigenous lands and resources. Some treaty negotiations went well and were conducted respectfully, with both parties fully involved. Some did not.

While these other treaties came into effect, the Williams Treaties areas continued to be a source of contention and dispute. Boundaries were never clearly established and there were areas of overlap with other treaties, including the [Robinson-Huron Treaty](#) and [Treaty 20](#), especially as language used to set the borders was often poorly defined or explained in abstract terms (such as the distance one could hear a gunshot).

In 1867 under Confederation, the British North American Act assigned the federal government jurisdiction regarding “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians.” But the provinces were given the responsibility of managing public lands and control of natural resources—including timber and mineral rights, which were becoming very valuable as mining and forestry companies were looking to harvest wealth from the newly established country. The population of Ontario continued to grow and cities and towns continued to expand, and that created pressure on the governments to establish clear ownership of land titles.

The Indian Act came into effect in 1876 to address matters pertaining to Indian status, Indian bands, and Indian reserves. It also granted the federal government the power to regulate the day-to-day lives of Indians. In 1894, Ottawa and Ontario came to an agreement that since there was overlap in jurisdictions, any future treaty negotiations must involve the provincial government as well as the federal one.

## THE PUSH FOR A TREATY

The First World War brought a lot of changes to Canada. The economy was booming, especially the natural resource industries that made a home in the Williams Treaties areas. Indigenous peoples who had fought in Europe returned home with first-hand experience of how the world operated outside

of North America. Discussions about human rights and self-determination were at the forefront of the international conversation.

All of those elements played a role in kickstarting the Williams Treaties, says Jackson Pind, an assistant professor in the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies at Trent University and a mixed Settler-Anishinaabe historian from the Alderville First Nation.

He says there has been much discussion around whether, “the reason the government went for a treaty was [because] some of the First Nations in this area had spoken to the League of Nations and to British officials in London. Maybe the government was scared the First Nations would try to start their own country,” Pind adds. “They were worried because the First Nations were aware that the government had not kept their promises.”

In 1923, the provincial and federal governments set up a commission to settle questions about the area once and for all. Commissioners Robert V. Sinclair, Uriah McFadden, and Angus S. Williams visited the seven First Nations who lived in the Williams Treaties areas and [found](#) that they all “submitted ample and satisfactory proof of the occupation by them of the land referred to as the ancient hunting grounds of [their] ancestors... the value of which is almost incalculable.” The commission recommended that an official surrender of the land be undertaken.

Despite the nearly “incalculable” value, the province of Ontario set a hard limit of \$500,000 as compensation for the land. That is what the seven First Nations received—a fraction of the land’s true worth—once the Williams Treaties were established and the title of the lands officially changed hands.

As if the meagre payment wasn’t insulting enough, there was a missing element to the Williams Treaties that doomed their acceptance and legitimacy from the start: every other treaty signed by the Crown preserved the rights for Indigenous peoples to hunt, fish, and harvest from the land, in accordance with what was set out in the Royal Proclamation. The Williams Treaties did not.

Maurice Switzer is a traditional Knowledge Keeper, a member of the Alderville First Nation, and a Williams Treaties expert and author. He has taught everyone from grade-school-aged children to university students to general members of the public about the Treaties. He says the lack of hunting and fishing rights was not an oversight.

“My grandfather, Moses Muskrat Marsden, was in the room in Alderville in November of 1923,” Switzer explains. “I have a piece of paper he wrote years later, where he said all the Indians wanted to know was could they still hunt and fish as they always had? He even remembered the commissioner’s name, Uriah McFadden, who said ‘yes.’ That was a lie.”

Switzer adds that without the ability to read the treaty documents and without the ability to hire lawyers to work on their behalf (which was prevented by law at the time), the Indigenous peoples had no choice but to trust what was being told to them by the commissioners—the same people who dictated the terms of the Treaties, without any input or discussion from the Indigenous nations or their representatives.

## POST-TREATIES TENSIONS

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Although the Williams Treaties affected how Indigenous peoples living on those lands went about their daily lives, restricting their ability to support themselves, little changed, legally, until 1951 when the Indian Act was amended. At this time some of the most draconian restrictions were removed, including restrictions against political organizing, says Hayden King, executive director at Toronto Metropolitan University’s [Yellowhead Institute](#). King is from the Beausoleil First Nation on G’Chimmissing and lives in the Alderville First Nation territory.

“Finally, you could leave the reserve, you could hire a lawyer, or you could demand change,” he explains. “For the next twenty years, basically, Indigenous peoples clogged the courts with grievances... Some of the First Nations started speaking with each other and working with each other and organizing amongst themselves. Some of the Williams Treaties First Nations started to do that, and that really spearheaded a lot of the movement towards demanding the Treaties be addressed.”

Court cases began to be heard across Canada. Three brought the Williams Treaties into the realm of public discussion: *R. v. Taylor and Williams*, *R. v. Howard*, and the Alderville litigation.

In 1981, the Taylor and Williams case argued that areas of Treaty 20 (in and around Peterborough, the Kawartha Lakes, and Durham) overlapped the Williams Treaties, and that since Treaty 20 guaranteed the right to hunt and

fish, those rights should carry over into the overlapping Williams Treaties areas. The Ontario Court of Appeal agreed that Treaty 20 did grant those rights.

But in 1985, George Henry Howard, a member of the Hiawatha First Nation of Rice Lake, was fined \$105 for fishing out of season in a spot covered by the overlapping Treaty 20 and Williams Treaties, explains Dan Shaule, a historical researcher who has instructed at universities across Canada and is a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island.

“When [Howard] was in court, he argued that the 1818 treaty [Treaty 20] protected hunting and fishing rights,” says Shaule. “The Crown said no, the Williams Treaties surrendered your hunting and fishing rights. And the judge agreed with that.”

The Howard case also went to the Supreme Court of Canada, where it was dismissed.

The third major court challenge, the Alderville litigation, was first filed in 1992. The trial began in 2012 and continued through 2017. In the case, the Alderville First Nation sought financial compensation for the loss of its hunting and fishing rights in 1923. Before a judgment could come down, negotiations began between Ottawa, the province, and the seven Williams Treaties First Nations to resolve the outstanding issues that prompted the court case.

When a \$1 billion settlement was announced in 2018, it was the largest in Canadian history at the time: \$666 million from the federal government and \$444 million paid by the province. It also included a formal apology by both levels of government, an option for the First Nations to buy back 44.52 km<sup>2</sup> of land to add to their reserves, and the restoration of their hunting and fishing rights.

But no matter the size of the settlement, it isn't enough to account for nearly 100 years of mistreatment by a government that was supposed to have the best interests of Indigenous peoples at heart.

## SETTLEMENT USES

A tiny portion of the fund went directly to members of the seven First Nations, but those amounts hardly made up for lifetimes of inequality. Switzer says that his mother, who passed away just short of her 101st birthday, only received enough to cover the cost of a few years in a retirement home. She was the last living person who had been around to see the Williams Treaties first come into effect.

The majority of the settlement has been placed in trust by each of the seven First Nations and is being used to support their people and their communities. As a member of the Alderville First Nation Williams Treaty Trust, Switzer helps decide how the funds should be spent.

One of the uses the trust approved is to pay for every qualifying post-secondary student to go to university. As Switzer explains, the government doesn't consider university education a treaty obligation—“breaking their promise that they would always provide a school house,” he notes. Instead, it is classified as a discretionary expense, meaning that many Indigenous communities don't have enough funding for all their students who apply for it.

To date, 20 post-secondary students are benefiting from the settlement funds.

Some of the money has also been used to finance the repurchase of land for the reserve, which Switzer refers to as a “bizarre” situation—having to buy back what was theirs, rather than just having it returned as part of the settlement.

“I don't think Canadians can get their heads around the bizarreness of these things,” he says, referencing not just treaty history but also the harsh restrictions of the Indian Act and the horrors of the residential school system. “They can't believe this wonderful country they've grown up to think was the greatest country in the world would ever do such horrible things. And that's a challenge. You know, there is no other country I'd rather live in, but boy oh boy, our past is not rosy.”

**CAROLYN GRUSKE** is an award-winning reporter and magazine editor. She often writes about the intersection of business, technology, and the law, but she also has a deep interest in educational topics.

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# LEARNING FROM HISTORY: TEACHING THE TREATIES TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By Joseph Filipic





All people living collectively in Canada are “treaty people,” meaning that we all have rights and responsibilities for this land we call home.

Treaties are a foundational part of our country. Every city, town, road, and building that exists in a treaty area today is only possible because of a treaty that was signed in the past. Today, these treaties reflect an ongoing relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As treaty people, we must take the responsibility of learning about our past so that we can renew these relationships and better orient ourselves in the present and, ultimately, steer ourselves towards a positive future of meaningful reconciliation.

## EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION

I was never taught about Indigenous history as a child. When the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996, I was attending junior high in Edmonton. At that time, I didn’t have the slightest idea what a residential school was, nor that one had still been operating in Saskatchewan, a mere province away. I was also unaware that Edmonton was located within Treaty 6 territory or that I was living on the traditional territories of the nêhiyaw (Cree), Dene, Anishinaabe, Sauteaux, Alexis Nakota Sioux, and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), as well as the Métis homeland.

In fact, it wasn’t until I became a teacher myself and started teaching Grade 9 social studies for the Edmonton Catholic School District that I began discovering these parts of Canada’s history. When I first learned about the residential school system, I was horrified. I couldn’t believe this had never been talked about in classrooms when I was growing up.

Fortunately, education in Alberta has changed a lot since I was young. The current social studies curriculum has an Indigenous component woven throughout, so that students are now taught about the cultures, histories, and contributions of Indigenous peoples, including the legacy of residential schools and several of the numbered Treaties.

Edmonton Catholic Schools is a very diverse school board with students of all faiths and backgrounds. A

high number of students are identified as English as Additional Language (EAL) learners. We also have many Indigenous students. But as different as we are, we all have one common goal—to understand and respect the different cultures that exist within our school district. An obvious starting point to accomplish this is by discussing the histories of this country’s original inhabitants. Familiarizing ourselves with these histories helps to foster more intercultural awareness, empathy, and respect between students.

As an educator and a treaty person myself, I quickly recognized that I had an important role to play in conveying this information to the kids I teach. And to do so, the right tools would be necessary.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released [94 Calls to Action](#) to repair the harm done by residential schools and provide an inclusive framework for organizations. I felt I could respond to [Actions 62-65](#), which call upon governments and educators to develop mandatory, age-appropriate curriculum on Indigenous peoples in Canada. This includes creating educational resources for students from K-12 and sharing best practices for how to teach the material.

## THE TREATY HANDSHAKE

While reaching out to various supports made available by our school board and province, I came across the concept of the Treaty Handshake. It was a symbolic gesture that represented an agreement made between Indigenous peoples and the British Crown when the treaties were initially signed. The handshake was a physical expression of the two parties coming together in mutual respect and understanding.

To begin any discussion of treaties with my students, I first teach them about the Treaty Handshake. It makes for a good starting point because a handshake is something tangible that students can understand, and once I reiterate that handshakes symbolize a promise between two individuals, I can move into deeper conversations about treaties and whether the Canadian government has upheld the promises made in them.

## THE NUMBERED TREATIES

We start by investigating modern movements such as [Idle No More](#), which began in 2012 as a protest against the Canadian government's dismantling of environmental protection laws and resource exploitation on First Nations territory, citing this as an abuse of treaty rights. The movement laid a crucial foundation for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and impacted the social and political climate in Canada. Apologies from the government and the Church are also areas we discuss.

Next, we then look at the Numbered Treaties in more detail—especially Treaties 6, 7, and 8 because they have a presence in Alberta. I take a “5W+H” approach to teaching the treaties:

- ◆ *Who* is involved in the treaty?
- ◆ *What* specifics are covered?
- ◆ *When* did the treaty negotiations take place?
- ◆ *Where* does the treaty apply?
- ◆ *Why* is the treaty important?
- ◆ *How* are treaty rights administered?

I encourage my class to find answers to these questions by searching online and reaching out to our school board's Indigenous Learning Services department, or by visiting the [Indigenous Peoples Experience](#) at Fort Edmonton Park, so they have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the history, culture, and experiences of First Nations and Métis peoples—both before and after Canada became a country.

## TEACHING WITH TECHNOLOGY

Working with junior high-aged students, I like to incorporate technology wherever possible. Our social studies department is made up of many innovative teachers, and our lead teacher always creates meaningful assessments that challenge students to think beyond the classroom.

One such project developed by our lead involves students creating an interactive display similar to the [Virtual Tour](#)

offered by the Canadian History Museum. Living in a country as vast as Canada, we cannot simply board a plane and travel to Quebec to visit the museum in person. Thanks to digital resources like this, however, students are still able to experience what the museum has to offer, and gain valuable knowledge from its many galleries and exhibits.

I've adapted this digital learning project for my own classroom, utilizing it as a way for students to showcase what they have learned about Indigenous history and treaty rights. They are tasked with creating a digital display that must reflect three key elements:

1

An understanding of the historical context surrounding the various legislations that affirm Indigenous collective rights in Canada (i.e., the treaties, the *Indian Act*, land claims, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, etc.).

2

An explanation of what is affirmed by these collective rights in the present day and how they affect Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

3

An analysis of recent events/issues that have either improved the situation or still provide challenges to Indigenous communities, the government of Canada, and our country as a whole.

Often the project lends itself to PowerPoint presentations where students further expand on the above requirements. Other times, students get creative and end up designing interactive games in programs such as [Scratch](#).

Some have gone so far as to make mini museums in Minecraft where the “player” can explore the different rooms and learn about several of the treaties, the *Indian Act*, various apologies, and any current movements taking place. These mini museums even contain paintings to look

at, other characters to interact with, and plaques that can be read.

## MOVING TOWARDS A POSITIVE FUTURE

Through their research, students typically uncover some tough truths about the *Indian Act*, residential schools, and other aspects of Indigenous history. This leads to valuable class discussions about our past and the process to right the wrongs that were committed.

Learning about these difficult parts of our collective history is crucial because it helps students build a better understanding of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and our country. It also provides context for the issues and challenges faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada today.

I often survey my students at the end of the year. When asked about highlights and what units of study stood out to

them, the treaties are frequently mentioned. Students note that they enjoyed having the opportunity to be creative for the interactive display project, and that they were able to expand on skills they have learned in other areas of their education as well. Perhaps most importantly, they appreciate having gained a deeper understanding of where our nation began, what has happened along the way, and how to improve it moving forward.

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**JOSEPH FILIPLIC** works with the Edmonton Catholic School Division as a teacher and Tech Coach. He provides students and staff with a variety of supports for digital teaching and learning, as well as online class management. Passionate about the past, Joseph loves to spend time travelling, exploring, and learning about the vast histories that make up our world.





# HEALING THROUGH ART

●● *The Legacy of the Williams Treaties* ●●

*By Fiona Tapp*

The Williams Treaties were signed between seven First Nations and the governments of Canada and Ontario 100 years ago, in 1923. They were the last historic land cession treaties and transferred nearly all the remaining Indigenous land in southern Ontario to the Crown. Their legacy continues to affect that land and the people who live on it today.

The Chippewa peoples of Rama, Beausoleil, and Georgina Island in the Lake Simcoe area signed between October 31 and November 7, 1923, with the Mississauga peoples of Alderville, Scugog Island, Curve Lake, and Hiawatha signing between November 15 and 21, 1923.

The Peoples who had lived in these territories for generations received one-time payments worth only a fraction of the lands' true value, and were no longer allowed to hunt, fish, or trap in areas outside of their reserves. As this latter condition was in stark contrast to previous treaties, it is now understood that the Indigenous signatories were misled and purposefully denied access to the land for traditional use.

The legacy of these treaties includes decades of harassment and arrests of Indigenous peoples who protested against the treaty conditions, arguing that they never agreed to relinquish their hunting and fishing rights. Several court hearings and lawsuits have also been fought over the treaties, the most recent of which was settled in [2018](#).



## *Making Space for Art*

As we reflect—through a lens of truth and reconciliation—on the Williams Treaties, their history, and their impact on the communities they affected, we grapple with issues of colonialism, land rights, and healing.

For some Indigenous peoples, healing is expressed through art. It not only offers a therapeutic medium to work through generational trauma, but also provides a tangible and powerful way to educate and move an audience in the form of a painting, sculpture, or traditional craft.

Karonhianonha “She Protects the Skies” Mikayla Francis, Wolf Clan of Akwesasne, is a performer and the Communications and Outreach Manager at the [Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada](#) (IACC). The collective provides resources and a space for Indigenous craftspeople and artisans to share their work and monetize their art—both through an online marketplace called [IndigenARTSY](#) and through live weekly auctions.

The IACC welcomes a wide range of art forms including singing and dancing, photography, pottery, and traditional crafts. It is also a community of Knowledge Holders and Keepers who come together at workshops and through an annual [Indigenous women’s art conference](#) to share traditions and keep customs alive.

“Having that moment to actually sit at the same table with an Indigenous Knowledge Holder where they’re sharing their art form with you, it’s so intimate,” says Karonhianonha Mikayla Francis. “It’s not even like teaching, it becomes experiential and inclusive, where you make a personal, real, and genuine connection [with an artist].”

Akwesasne is east of the Williams Treaty lands, but as Karonhianonha Mikayla Francis explains, these lines and borders that divide natural resources were imposed on the local Indigenous populations by settlers. In fact, Akwesasne stands as a vital witness to colonialism; it spans U.S. and Canadian lines and, as a sovereign nation, finds itself directly impacted by policies and decisions made in both countries.



## *The Relationship Between Land and Art*

For the seven First Nations impacted by the Williams Treaties, losing access to the land affected their survival, cutting them off from vital resources like clean water and crops. But it also disrupted their ability to create art and crafts that preserve cultural heritage.



This chipping away at traditional art forms amounted to cultural erasure, further compounded by the Canada-wide residential school system which aimed to assimilate Indigenous children by forbidding them from practising their customs or speaking their own languages.

The way the land is treated still impacts Indigenous peoples and affects their access to art supplies today. Karonhianonha Mikayla Francis notes that pottery makers in her area can no longer use their local clay due to toxicity in the water. Instead they have to purchase clay from elsewhere. These changes in the natural landscape have also affected the sweetgrass harvest needed by basket makers.

“People have naturally found their own healing journeys by reconnecting with traditional art forms, but it’s like our materials are vanishing in front of us because of outside governments and politics that have been forced on us,” she says.

Gathering the natural materials needed to create traditional art and crafts is crucial in the process of healing. As Karonhianonha Mikayla Francis explains, “The healing component is when you actually go out to get the materials, in the fields gathering sweetgrass. That connection with nature taking time to harvest, you can’t take those moments when you’re just buying things at Michaels. There’s that natural energy around the very beginning of the art forms.”

One of the artists who is featured on IndigenARTSY is [Brittany Kidman Boyle](#), from the Alderville First Nations. She creates beautiful handmade products that combine both contemporary beading, as well as more traditional leather work in moccasins, mukluks, and regalia making. Harvesting and gathering the materials is an important part of her process.

“My moccasins and mukluks are fully beaded and sewn by hand using artificial sinew,” she explains. “I use furs harvested locally by trappers here in Temiskaming Shores, as well as the furs my husband harvests. I also create birch bark and porcupine quill jewelry and medallions. I harvest the bark myself during the strawberry season as my teachings have taught me. And the quills are harvested from roadkill.”

Boyle includes her young four-year-old son when harvesting materials and plans to include her daughter too when she is old enough to understand the process and its significance.

“I have looked into the land rights for my hometown [and] nation of Alderville First Nations. I have a strong connection with the land when harvesting my materials. I always leave Sema (tobacco) for my harvest and never take more than I can use in the year,” she adds.



## *A New Way Forward*

In 2018, the governments of Canada and Ontario agreed to a settlement with the Williams Treaties First Nations. The settlement included financial compensation and confirmation that each nation had the right to hunt, fish, and trap on their land.

“Our ancestors have fought since 1923 to exercise our rights freely and without encumbrance and finally we have been able to secure this for our people and for future generations,” said Chief Kelly LaRocca of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, in a press release following the announcement of the settlement. “It is a success for the Williams Treaties First Nations, but also for all Ontarians and Canadians who will see a new way forward in Crown-Indigenous relations.”

The process of truth and reconciliation involves deep introspection about our past. It also requires that we look forward by embracing what the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) call the Seventh Generation Principle, which teaches that decisions made today should stand the test of time and be sustainable at least seven generations into the future. We must ensure natural resources are preserved so that Indigenous culture, art, and values can be communicated to a new generation, revitalizing these once-threatened teachings.

Karonhianonha Mikayla Francis also works with the [Native North American Traveling College](#) to visit schools as a travelling troupe presenting Indigenous social song and dance—which can include dancers, singers, and storytellers—to educate both teachers and students. In

her own family, she enjoys watching her aunt, a fashion designer, make traditional regalia and ribbon skirts, and finds the process is both enriching and communal.

“It’s almost like a therapy session when everyone is beading together,” she explains. “It reminds me of how it would have been in longhouse days pre-contact, pre-colonialism. Just a long house full of family gathered around each other, your entire mother’s lineage. We’re supposed to be doing these art forms together, and that’s the way it was naturally pre-contact. Art reconnects us; it brings everybody back together. And that in itself is healing unknowingly.”

To connect with Indigenous artisans and craftspeople in the regions affected by the Williams Treaty and further across Canada, visit the following galleries and exhibitions:

- The [Art Gallery of Ontario \(AGO\)](#) in Toronto features artwork created by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.
- In Ottawa, see work from famed Indigenous artists like Carl Beam, Faye HeavyShield, and Shelley Niro at the [National Gallery of Canada](#).
- Purchase artwork and expertly created craft pieces from the [Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada \(IACC\)](#) or support artists from the Curve Lake community at the [Whetung Ojibwa Centre](#).
- To learn more about the process of truth and reconciliation and the legacy of residential schools, visit the permanent exhibition at the [Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#) in Winnipeg, the world’s first museum dedicated to human rights.



FIONA TAPP is a former teacher and school administrator of 13 years. She writes about education, parenting, and travel for a variety of publications including *National Geographic*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Sunday Times*, and many more.



# WHOSE LAND IS THIS?

By Emily Chan



**GRADES:**

1-8

**SUBJECTS:**

HISTORY  
INDIGENOUS STUDIES  
LANGUAGE ARTS  
VISUAL ART

**DURATION:**

4-5 CLASSES



**KEY CONCEPTS AND THEMES:**

Treaties, Creation Stories



**KEY VOCABULARY:**

Land Acknowledgement, Treaty, Treaty People, Turtle Island, Wampum Belt



**EXPECTATIONS/OUTCOMES**

**Students will:**

- Expand their knowledge about treaties and what it means to be a treaty person;
- Learn about the history and symbolism of different treaties;
- Understand the importance of Indigenous creation stories and how they can help us recognize the values that are to be protected in treaties;
- Use a variety of skills to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

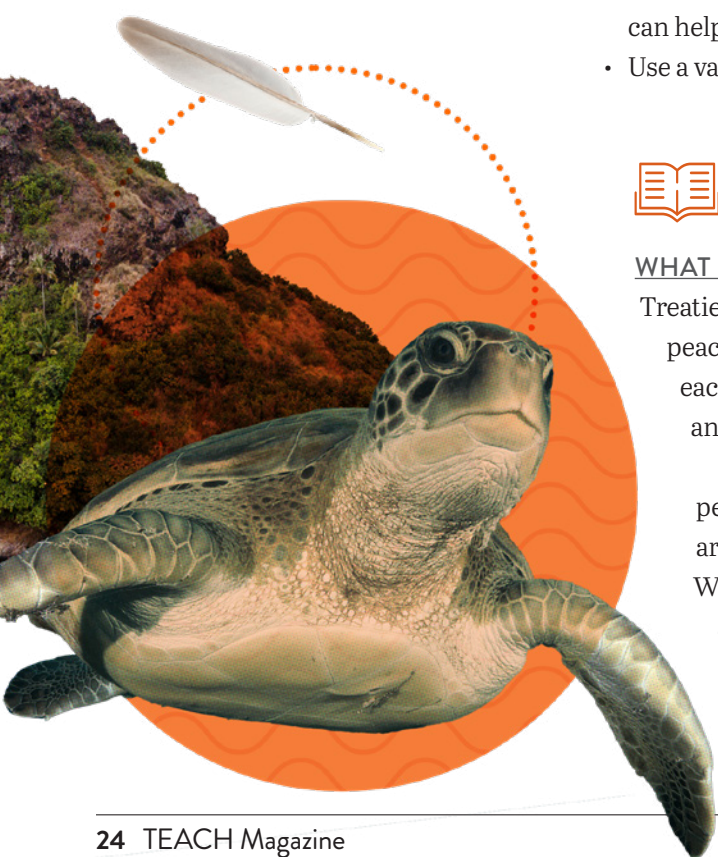


**BACKGROUND**

WHAT IS A TREATY?

Treaties are formal agreements between groups of people about living peacefully. They articulate the responsibilities that people have with each other as well as the reciprocal relationships they have with land and resources.

On Turtle Island, also known as North America, Indigenous peoples had treaties among different nations long before Europeans arrived. One of the first treaties was the Guswentha, or the Two-Row Wampum Treaty, which was made between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch government in present-day upstate New York. Wampum (shell) beads were woven together into belts as a way to physically represent the terms of the treaty. The rows on the





belts represented the distinct, non-interfering, and equal paths of the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, living alongside each other in respect, peace, and friendship.

Over time, other kinds of treaties were also developed, such as peace and friendship treaties, written treaties, pre-confederation treaties, and numbered treaties. Today, treaties are still considered sacred covenants between nations, as well as with European settlers. Treaties are constitutionally recognized between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples, as mandated in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

Treaties do not cover all areas in North America. Many areas of Canada are on unceded territory, which means that Indigenous peoples never agreed to share those parts of their ancestral lands through treaties.

### WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE

When teaching about treaties, consider the big picture: treaties are not artifacts of the past. They are part of an ongoing relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the land on which we live.

All people living in North America are “treaty people,” meaning that each one of us is responsible for learning about our collective history. In doing so, we must also find ways to understand how our present-day relationships can help ensure the future well-being of this land and everyone living on it.

## PART ONE INTRODUCTION TO TREATIES

### STEP ONE: TREATY TERRITORIES

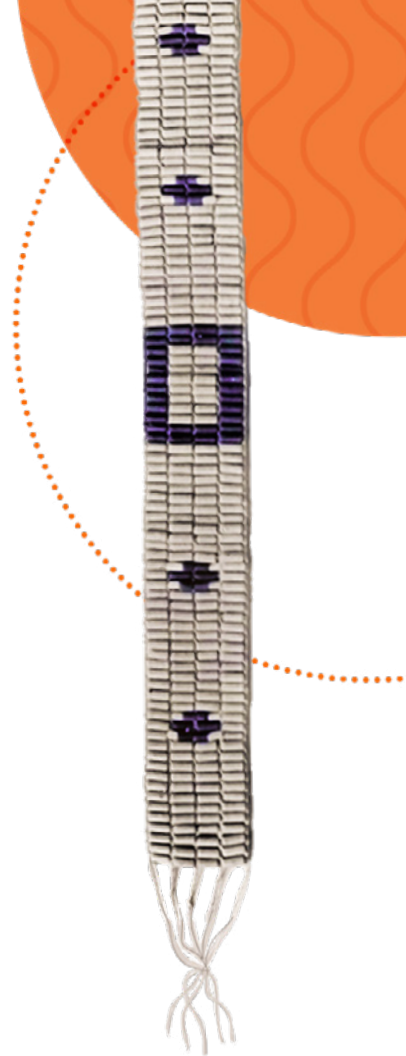
To begin, ask students if they know what treaty territory they are currently in.

- Have students visit [Native Land Digital](#).
- Use the sliders along the top of the search bar to include “Territories” and/or “Treaties.”
- Search for a location.
- Ask students to list which First Nations and/or treaties are associated with your local area.

Have students suggest other locations on Turtle Island that are important to them. Use the research project guide [Whose Land Is This?](#) to learn about the communities, languages, and cultures of the Peoples who live in these places.

### STEP TWO: TREATY WITH HOOF NATION

Introduce students to other treaties such as the Treaty with Hoof Nation by reading this [story](#) by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. It is an excellent story to teach about treaties from an Anishinaabe worldview. After, ask the following questions:



- Who belongs to Hoof Nation?
- What did the animals do when people did not treat them well?
- What agreements did the people make with Hoof Nation?

You can also make a [vocabulary wall](#) with Anishinaabemowin words and images of each animal and season mentioned in the story.

### STEP THREE: DISH WITH ONE SPOON TREATY

Together as a class or in small groups, have students watch the following videos to learn about the history and importance of the Dish with One Spoon agreement:

- [Dish with one Spoon wampum belt](#) (video created by the Anishinabek Nation)
- [Dish With One Spoon](#) (video from the Lambton Kent District School Board)

After, as a class, students can demonstrate what they've learned from the videos by role-playing using a bowl of treats that you provide.

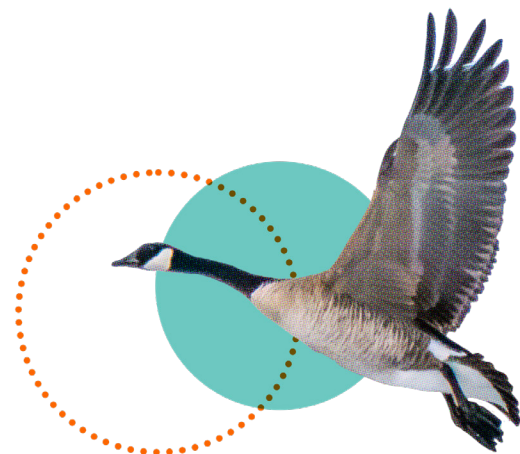
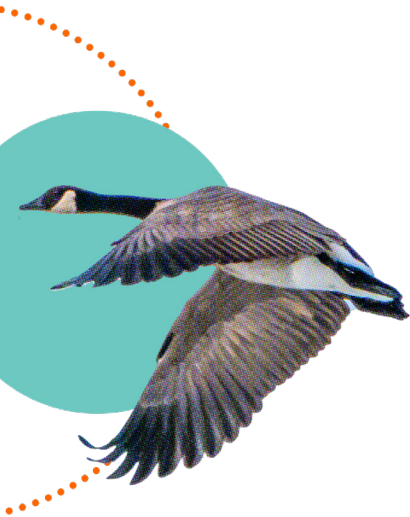
- Fill a bowl with enough treats for each person in the class.
- Ask students to take as many as they think is appropriate.
- Was there enough for everyone?
- Discuss the value of having agreements and protocols such as the ones made through the Dish with One Spoon treaty.

### STEP FOUR: WILLIAMS TREATIES

Have students watch this [video](#) of Maurice Switzer, educator, Knowledge Keeper, and Williams Treaties expert, read from his book, *Grandpa...what is a treaty anyway?* The book features a young eagle and her grandfather talking about the origins of treaties in the past, and compares them to promises we make with each other in the present.

Next, have students create their own school-based treaty within the class or between classes (e.g. across primary and junior grades). Ask students the following questions and have them record their answers:

- Can you think of when you are feeling good about being at school?
- What do you love doing at school?
- What's a quality that you appreciate about how students treat each other?
- How can students promise to take care of the schoolyard or surroundings?
- Students can then use these reflections as a guide for writing their own treaty.





## PART TWO

### CREATION STORIES AND INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

Every culture has its own origin stories. For some Indigenous peoples, their creation stories begin with Turtle Island, also known as North America. These stories can help others understand the values, roles, and responsibilities of Indigenous communities, as well as their relationships with each other and the natural world. This knowledge can also allow us to recognize the importance of treaties and the things that are to be protected under a treaty.

#### STEP ONE: TURTLE ISLAND

Have students read creation stories from different First Nations as a class. Here are some examples:

- [Turtle Island creation stories](#)
- [Skywoman: Legends of the Iroquois](#)
- [Turtle Island: The Story of North America's First People](#)

After, hold a class discussion and ask students the following:

- Are there any clues from these stories about how people lived throughout history?
- What did people eat?
- How did they express themselves and communicate their understanding of the world?

Students can apply what they've learned about First Nations creation stories by making a shadow puppet play for one of the stories. Younger students can work in small groups and older students can work in pairs.

To prepare the shadow puppet play, ask students to consider:

- Who are the important figures in each story?
- What are the lessons and significant moments?

They can use a story arc to map out these points.

Materials needed: box board (e.g. cereal boxes), clothes hangers (cut and straightened) or bamboo skewers, tape, silhouette template shapes, large sheet, screen, light source (projector or bright desk light).

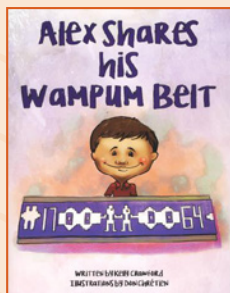
Alternatively, give students the option of choosing a different way to tell the story, such as through a paper or digital comic, a short video clip, Minecraft, etc.

#### STEP TWO: LAND-BASED LEARNING

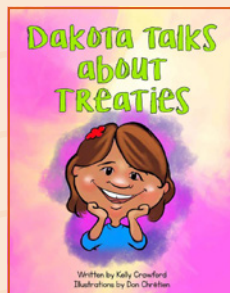
Start local. Learning about treaties involves getting to know both the present-day and the historical relationships on the land where we are situated. Land-based



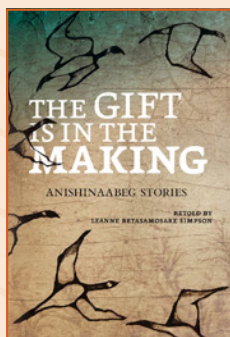
## SUGGESTED BOOKS ON TREATIES



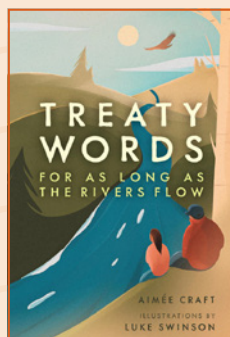
*Alex Shares his Wampum Belt* by Kelly Crawford, illustrated by Don Chretien (Anishinabek Nation, 2017)



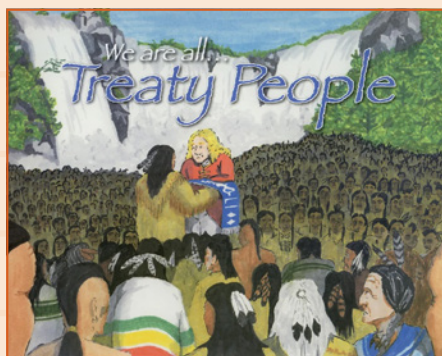
*Dakota Talks about Treaties* by Kelly Crawford, illustrated by Don Chretien (Anishinabek Nation, 2017)



*The Gift Is in the Making: Anishinaabeg Stories* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (HighWater Press, 2013)



*Treaty Words: For As Long As the Rivers Flow* by Aimée Craft, illustrated by Luke Swinson (Annick Press, 2021)



*We Are All Treaty People* by Maurice Switzer, illustrated by Charley Herbert (Anishinabek Nation, 2011)

learning can take place in your school yard, or at a nearby park, forest, farm, or body of water. Consult with your school board's Indigenous education and/or outdoor education department, First Nation, local park(s), or conservation area for field trip ideas to make learning connections about treaties and contemporary Indigenous stewardship initiatives.

- The Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation invites classes to participate in a grassroots public education initiative called the [Moccasin Identifier Project](#), which honours significant Indigenous cultural and ancestral sites. Here's an [education kit](#) for Grades 1 through 8, available in both English and French.
- The Talking Treaties Collective is a collaborative group that created a [land-based learning guide](#) for High Park in Toronto/Tkaronto. Using prompts and hands-on activities, this cross-curricular field trip resource teaches about local ecosystems, Indigenous stewardship, and sacred locations, as well as Land Back, the Indigenous rights movement. Consult your school board's Indigenous Education department, municipal conservation area, or local First Nation for a stewardship resource that may be available for a park in your school area.



### FURTHER LEARNING: GOING BEYOND A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Share your school's Land Acknowledgement with the class. After, have students consider the following:

- Name your own ancestry and/or some things you love about this land where you live.
- What is something that you are learning with respect to historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples?



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### INTRODUCTION TO TREATIES

- [Getting to Know Turtle Island](#): a guide to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into K-8 curriculum
- [Heritage Minutes: Naskumituwin \(Treaty\)](#): a one-minute video clip about the making of Treaty 9

- [Treaties in Ontario: what are they and what do they do?](#): this CBC News article looks at the 46 treaties in Ontario
- [Treaties with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, explained](#): a video from CBC Kids News
- [Treaties with Indigenous Peoples in Canada](#): an article from the Canadian Encyclopedia
- [A Treaty Guide for Torontonians](#): created by the Talking Treaties Collective, this digital book explores what it means to be a treaty person in Toronto
- [Treaties](#): a brief overview of treaties from the Government of Ontario's website
- [We Are All Treaty People](#): this special issue of *Kayak Magazine* can be used as a reading comprehension resource for Grades 4 and up

### SPECIFIC TREATIES

- [Dish With One Spoon](#): learn more about this treaty through the Best Endeavours website, which was designed to help settlers learn about treaties and settler colonialism
- [Peace and Friendship Treaties, Atlantic Canada](#): a video by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
- [Wampum Talk: We Are All Treaty People](#): a video by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
- [Williams Treaties](#): an entry from the Canadian Encyclopedia

### INDIGENOUS CREATION STORIES

- [Haudenosaunee Confederacy](#): learn more about how the Confederacy began by visiting their website
- [Haudenosaunee Creation Story](#): a narrated retelling of the Haudenosaunee creation story
- [Turtle Island](#): an entry from the Canadian Encyclopedia
- [Turtle Island – where's that?](#): an article from CBC Kids

### LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- [Starting from the Heart: Going Beyond a Land Acknowledgement](#): a resource by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
- [Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto](#): a video by Local Love Magazine
- [Land Acknowledgement Poem: A Dish With One Spoon](#): a video of Anishinaabe Elder Duke Redbird reciting a poem about Dish With One Spoon territory

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**EMILY CHAN** is an elementary public school teacher in Tkaronto. She has been on several writing teams to create resources for educators, including *Starting from the Heart: Going Beyond a Land Acknowledgement*, *Indigenous Land-Based Learning*, and *Addressing Anti-Asian Racism*.

# LAYING THE FOUNDATION:

## Treaty Education for Young Students

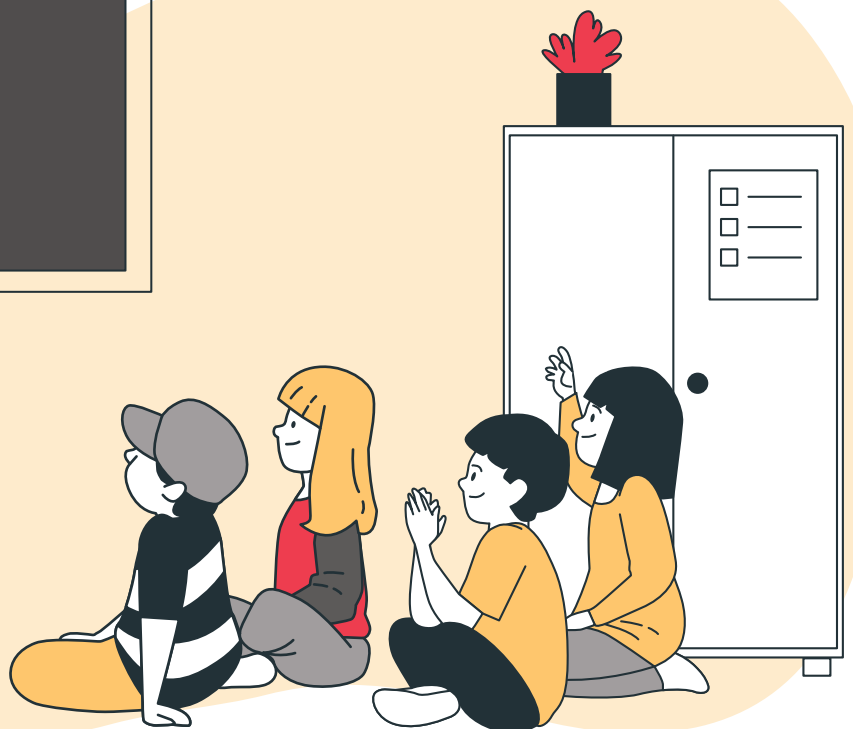
By Carolyn Gruske



Officially, the Williams Treaties have 100 years of history tied to them. Unofficially, they are the products of hundreds of years of history leading up to their creation. Explaining what the Treaties are and the effects they had is challenging enough when standing up in front of a high school class, but teaching junior elementary school students about the Williams Treaties—or any of the treaties between the Crown and Indigenous peoples in Canada—is a seemingly impossible task for even the most experienced teachers. Fortunately, people with expertise and experience in treaty education say the first step is simple: Don't be afraid.

### GETTING PAST THE FEAR

“Some teachers are hesitant because they don't have the background, they don't have any knowledge of the subject matter, or even a relationship [with the Indigenous peoples affected]. They don't want to do it because they're afraid to do it wrong. That's really hard for educators,” explains JoAnne Formanek Gustafson. An occasional teacher, Formanek Gustafson is Anishinaabe, from Treaty 3 Territory in northwestern Ontario near Fort Frances.



In addition to spending time in the classroom and studying to be an art therapist, Formanek Gustafson runs workshops and training seminars to educate teachers about Indigenous issues. She is also one of the co-authors of a list of [treaty education resources](#) compiled for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

According to Formanek Gustafson, there are some very basic places for teachers (at any level) to begin speaking about treaties.

"I would say, given the history [of Indigenous peoples in Canada] that we're aware of now, one of the first things I always focus on with educators is creating empathy so that the students will feel a more human connection to what they're reading or learning about, as opposed to them developing the mindset of [absorbing] dry facts—the sort of mindset that I think (for the most part) people are finally beyond now."

Jodie Williams, Indigenous Education Consultant for the Dufferin Peel Catholic School Board, also cites fear as one of the major impediments when it comes to teachers' willingness and ability to teach about treaty or Indigenous history.

"It's a topic that is hard for a lot of teachers, because they have to be educated," she says. "They have to unlearn what they thought was respectful [knowledge] and they're afraid of teaching the wrong information or not using the correct language, so the number one hesitation is fear for exactly those reasons."

Williams is an educator, but she is also co-chair of the First Nation, Métis & Inuit Education Association of Ontario, an organization that supports K-12 teachers in the area of Indigenous education. Specifically, in terms of treaty education, the organization has [created](#) resources, videos, and lesson activities for teachers to use. (Most school boards in Ontario have a membership in the association and teachers should be able to use that to access member-only material. Individual memberships are also available.)

All of the material is vetted by a province-wide Elders Advisory Council. Many of the Elders are fluent in their Indigenous language and some are residential school survivors. Having that level of Elders involvement and scrutiny, Williams advises, is vitally important to ensure what is being presented to teachers is accurate and respectful, which isn't always true of information found online or in other sources—even textbooks.

## EASILY UNDERSTOOD CONCEPTS

As with any other subject, teaching about treaties is like creating a structure out of building blocks: laying down the basic foundations and then adding more information and complexity over time.

When talking about the concept of a treaty, there is a basic explanation that junior elementary students can easily grasp, says Formanek Gustafson: "When you're starting with small kids, you don't need to get into any depths. To start with, a treaty is a promise. There's a promise on both sides."

Maurice Switzer echoes that approach. Switzer, who lives in North Bay, is a traditional Knowledge Keeper and an expert on the Williams Treaties. He is also an author, having written two books that have been used in schools to teach children about treaties. One is a graphic novel aimed at older students, entitled [We Are All Treaty People](#). The other is a picture book/video resource for younger children called [Grandpa...what is a treaty anyway?](#) It was created as a project with the Near North District School Board. The book's illustrator is Jack Smallboy, a Moose Factory Cree member and a residential school survivor who also resides in North Bay.

Switzer explains that younger students don't need to hear about how governments broke treaties or how the treaties didn't contain what their original drafters promised. Instead, he thinks it's best to put treaties into terms even the youngest students can understand, which is what he did in his picture book.

"The thing that they identify with the most in the story is the part where I liken it to kids having mutual agreements with their parents, like chores: you do chores for your mom and dad, and then they do things for you. That's similar to the mutual responsibility part of a treaty. They love that part," Switzer says, adding that he always asks children about the chores they do and how they negotiate those deals, driving the engagement and making the treaty concept real for the students.



He takes a similar approach when explaining why treaties were necessary in the first place—to create agreements between the newcomers and the people who had made this land their home for generations. During these group discussions, Switzer makes sure to paint both Indigenous peoples and settlers in a sympathetic light.

He also says that even young children are familiar with the concept of immigration—with families living in other countries and moving to Canada, especially since some are immigrants themselves—and that many also know what refugees are, so that’s the context he uses when he describes early immigrants and their relationship with the Indigenous peoples.

“Most of the people who came to this part of the world were refugees,” he explains. “They had no freedom of speech. They lived like slaves. They call them serfs: they couldn’t own their own land, in many cases, because in their countries, it was only the wealthy that had those privileges, so they were refugees.”

Switzer also notes that, “there are stories that are good to talk to young kids about: stories about how the Indigenous peoples welcomed the settlers—as long as they came in peace—and they showed the settlers survival skills... Those are the positive stories. The negative ones, there’s always time to tell those, and I prefer to do that when the students are a bit older. The stories about good relationships, those are a good way to start elementary kids on the learning track.”

And if junior elementary students have a hard time conceptualizing immigration, there are similar analogies that should also work, even for the youngest kids. For example, Formanek Gustafson suggests talking about going away on a trip, and how many sleeps the trip will last—just grounding the idea of being away from home (and how students would be expected to behave while being away) in a way that is relatable.

Switzer also likes using physical items while teaching younger students. When he visits a classroom, he usually brings in a wampum belt. His are copies of the original belts that were exchanged between Indigenous nations and settlers to mark the conclusion of treaty negotiations or other types of agreements. He commissioned them from Indigenous artists. One measures approximately six feet in length and all are made from traditional, hand-crafted shell beads. The tactile nature of younger students

leads to them touching the belt, asking questions, and getting excited about treaties.

For those who don’t have wampum belts of their own, Switzer notes that at one time, LEGO replicas of the purple and white Treaty of Niagara belt were produced by the Anishinabek Nation (also known as the Union of Ontario Indians) and were endorsed by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for use in the classroom. The LEGO wampum belts were part of a teacher’s kit for elementary educators called “We Are All Treaty People.” In 2021, the Anishinabek Nation decided to build upon that kit, and created an interactive online treaty education resource called *Ezhi-nawending: How we are related*. The resource includes 80 animations and videos, as well as interactive games, with the goal of teaching elementary students about topics such as wampum and natural law.

## INDIGENOUS SOURCES

In fact, going to First Nations and other Indigenous sources for teaching material and teacher training is something Switzer, Formanek Gustafson, and Williams all strongly encourage. They especially emphasize that learning about geographically local treaties and local Indigenous nations is the best way for teachers to familiarize themselves with the topic, to avoid a “pan-Indianism” approach to treaty or Indigenous history and to make the teachings relevant to students.

“Make sure that not everybody gets painted with the same brush,” says Williams. “Be careful and make sure there’s an understanding that Indigenous people come from diverse, very different nations and know that there’s diversity within the nations themselves. That’s what we try to focus on: that kids are walking away with a sense that Indigenous people come from brilliant, sophisticated, amazing civilizations and nations, and that those nations continue to exist today.”

The other recommendation that all three endorse is to make good use of the school board’s Indigenous education lead if there is one available. (In Ontario, for example, one is attached to every school board in the province.) That person will have an understanding of the local Indigenous nations and their histories, including the local treaties, and be willing to share their knowledge.

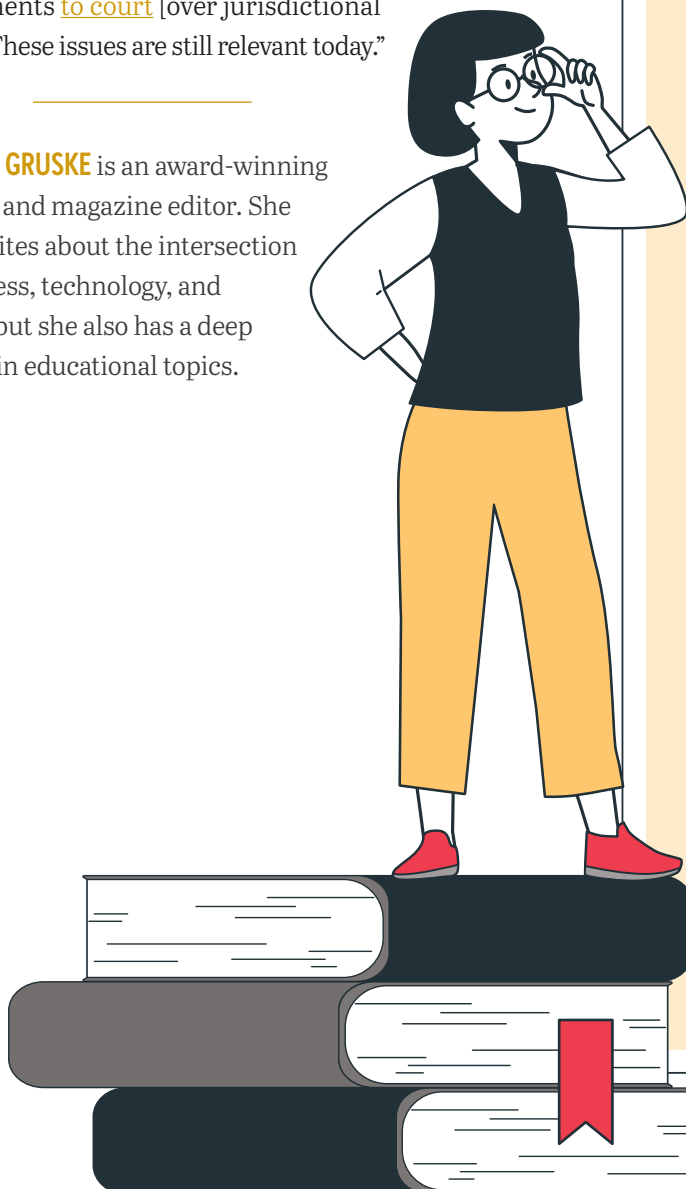
Indigenous education leads should also be able to help teachers find experts who are willing to come into



the classroom and share their experiences and wisdom—an approach that helps the teacher avoid becoming the ultimate authority on the topic. This, in turn, should allow wary teachers to be more comfortable talking about treaties in the classroom, which is of increasing importance since the new curriculum guidelines for Grades 1-3 that were released in September have a focus on treaty education and were created with the expectation that it will be taught from primary through secondary school.

“We’re still very new in this sector of education, but ideally, we want it to look like a scaffolding of learning,” says Williams. “Certainly, there are common understandings that we want to really drive home and number one is that it continues to be about land sharing: we’ve never surrendered or ceded land. That’s why we’re seeing situations like the Treaty 9 First Nations taking the Ontario and Canadian governments [to court](#) [over jurisdictional issues]. These issues are still relevant today.”

**CAROLYN GRUSKE** is an award-winning reporter and magazine editor. She often writes about the intersection of business, technology, and the law, but she also has a deep interest in educational topics.



## ADDITIONAL TREATY RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

- This [educational package](#) from Canada’s National History Society contains magazines that focus on treaty history and the treaty relationship. It also comes with an Educator’s Guide.
- Find videos, curriculum resources, and an online game on the [Treaties page](#) of the University of British Columbia website.
- [This is our Understanding](#) is an online experience created by the Anishinabek Nation. It is geared towards secondary students and explores various topics related to treaties. It also includes an interview with Maurice Switzer.
- A group of educators at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study share a [lesson study](#) about treaties for Grade 5/6 students.
- Learn more about treaties and the promises they were meant to uphold through this five-minute [video](#) from the First Nation, Métis & Inuit Education Association of Ontario.
- The [Indigenous Education page](#) of the Ontario Teachers’ Federation website provides books, webinars, and other links to support teachers in the classroom.
- [Indspire](#) is an Indigenous national charity that invests in the education of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people. It offers mentoring programs, workshops, an online resource centre, and more to assist educators.
- This ten-minute [video](#) by the Anishinabek Nation is accompanied by inquiry prompts that explore some of the promises that were broken after the treaties were signed.
- The Grand Erie District School Board provides a series of [links](#) related to treaty awareness on their website.
- See what progress has been made towards Indigenous education in Ontario, and what still must be done to fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s education requirements, in this 2023 [report](#) from People for Education.

I am from a place called Curve Lake First Nation. It's located deep in the nether regions of the Kawartha Lakes area in Ontario. In some ways, my home is an odd place.

Technically you'd have a difficult time finding an actual lake called Curve Lake. I believe, and I could be wrong, that the name is a reference to how the lakes that border the land curve around it, creating a peninsula—those specific lakes being Buckhorn and Chemong Lake. About a hundred years or so ago, the community and Chemong Lake were called Mud Lake. Not quite as attractive a name. Thus the change, one would assume. And who knows, in today's climate, there might be a lot less mud in the lake.

Names aside, that is where I come from, and currently still reside. Just ask around. People will tell you where I live. Specifically, I still occupy the house my mother scraped enough money together to pay for. I've been under that roof since bell bottom jeans were in fashion (the first time around).

Back in the 1970s, CBC shot a one-hour television drama here. It was quite exciting. But usually Curve Lake is a quiet, practically boring community. Most of my childhood was spent waiting for something to happen. At least, that's what I remember.

# THE LAND BENEATH MY FEET

By Drew Hayden Taylor

Photo Credit: Kelsey McCallum

But on occasion, things do happen in and around Curve Lake that have an oddly disproportionate effect on the area, and to a lesser extent, the entire country.

If you're a fan of treaty law, in 1977 two members of Curve Lake First Nation—Doug Williams and Wayne Taylor (no relation)—were arrested for hunting bullfrogs out of season. This was a violation of the 1923 Williams Treaty, which limited Indigenous hunting and fishing rights. The simple act of spearing bullfrogs to feed their families had larger implications, resulting in the case winding its way through court. The final outcome was decided by the Supreme Court of Canada, who refused to hear the province of Ontario's appeal. The good guys actually won that one.

I was 15 at the time and didn't really understand what all the fuss was about. Although I became good friends with Doug and his family, and always tried to be supportive of the issue, not being a fan of fried bullfrog legs or the intricate ins and outs of treaty law meant that my support was only so effective. Still, this became a pivotal point in local history and it continues to be commented on, in legal contexts, to this day.

Speaking of freshly fried bullfrogs, nothing goes better with them than some nice tasty manoomin. Recently, manoomin—or as the settlers call it, wild rice—has become somewhat of a contentious issue in our territory. This lovely plant that grows strong and lush in our lakes has, for a variety of reasons, pissed off a lot of settler people.


But perhaps a history lesson is in order. A thousand years ago, ten thousand years ago, even a hundred years ago, and all the years in between, manoomin used to grow wild and free in most of Ontario (and parts of the northern U.S.). It was delicious and tasty, and our people grew strong and healthy from consuming it.

The local waters were perfect for it, shallow, clean, and calm. Notice my use of the past tense. This was before the advent of civilization and Western expansion. In this case, I'm referring to the Trent Severn Waterway, a collection of locks that were built to connect Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay. In order to better facilitate the movement of big boats and log drives along the route, the water level had to rise.

This rising water had two specific effects: first, it flooded a good chunk of land belonging to several First Nation communities along the waterway, including my own; and second, it obliterated a large swath of manoomin fields, so much so that the plant practically became extinct in our area. From then on, we had to buy manoomin in stores—if we could afford it. It went from being a staple in Indigenous homes to being on the top shelf of high-end grocery stores.

To make a long story short, this absence of manoomin added to the eventual shift in First Nation diets. Processed and refined foods began to fill the larders of Rez homes. Hamburgers, french fries, pop, and ice cream became the nouveau





survival foods. The end result of that, of course, was obesity and diabetes. As a kid, I think I had manoomin as part of a meal maybe five times in total.

Then came James Whetung, a man from my Reserve who wanted to do something about this problem. On his own, he decided to reintroduce manoomin to the area. At one time, he told me, the Kawarthas were the “breadbasket” of the Anishinaabe nation. Thus began a 20-year odyssey.

James started planting manoomin seeds all over the Kawartha Lakes, focusing specifically on Pigeon Lake. And, as if they remembered their distant past, those seeds grew and once again the lakes became lush and fertile, practically overrun with manoomin.

Of course, this in itself became a new problem. Manoomin, when fully grown, stands a good foot or two above the waterline. Add to that the increasing value of cottages in the area (a newspaper article once reported that a lakefront cottage within a three hour drive of Toronto costs as much as a home in its downtown core, if not more) and you see the issue. Suddenly, money was involved.

In the intervening years since manoomin had originally grown in the Kawartha Lakes, numerous cottages and homes had sprouted up along the shoreline. In those dwellings lived people who did not like how manoomin’s very existence interfered with swimming, boating, and fishing. Rumour had it that property values were being affected. All those who complained were, for the most part, non-Native. Or as we say in the community, “pigment denied.” As a fellow playwright once said, “ay, there’s the rub.”

The ensuing conflict between James and the shoreline inhabitants became so heated that eventually I wrote a play about it. I also co-directed a [documentary](#) exploring Native/non-Native disagreements around land and water issues, with the manoomin controversy headlining. And,

to my knowledge, it has yet to be resolved. Sometimes on a quiet summer night, you can still hear the grumbling.

I am not sure if manoomin was included in the Williams Treaty, or in any treaty for that matter, but it’s important for every Canadian to know that we are all treaty people. Anybody who has a passport and watches *Hockey Night in Canada*, this refers to you. Many think treaties only affect Indigenous people, but like any bargain or agreement, there are two sides. And there is an ebb and flow to treaties, meaning they can be amended and revised.

Elsewhere in Ontario, Sauble Beach knows something about the fluid nature of treaties. The town is a popular tourist spot along the shore of Lake Huron. An Ontario Supreme Court justice [recently ruled](#) that a local First Nation community called Saugeen, which has been fighting to regain possession of a 2.5 km stretch of shoreline in the area for over 150 years, is and always has been the rightful owner. The stretch of beach was originally reserved for the Saugeen First Nation as a valuable fishing ground under Treaty 72, which was signed back in 1854. Then the community’s rights got lost in the sands of time. But not anymore.

There once was a time, surprisingly not that long ago, when Indigenous people weren’t allowed to hire lawyers. But those days are over. Now we have our own lawyers—Indigenous lawyers—who can read these treaties backwards and forwards. In the past, government treaty negotiators would come to the table not speaking our languages. Now, we speak theirs.

One final note. For most Native people, treaties can be like the Bible; they may have an inordinate amount of impact and influence on our everyday lives, but very few of us have ever taken the opportunity to actually read them. We just “kinda” know what’s on those pages.



I think it's time to change that.

Life here in Curve Lake is still pretty quiet and peaceful. Most of us like it that way. Maybe someday they'll come back to shoot another TV drama. Until then, I have to figure out where one can find a treaty to read around here.

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**DREW HAYDEN TAYLOR** was born, raised, and still lives in Curve Lake First Nation, located in Central Ontario. It's easy to find, just go to the centre of the universe and you're there.



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