

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

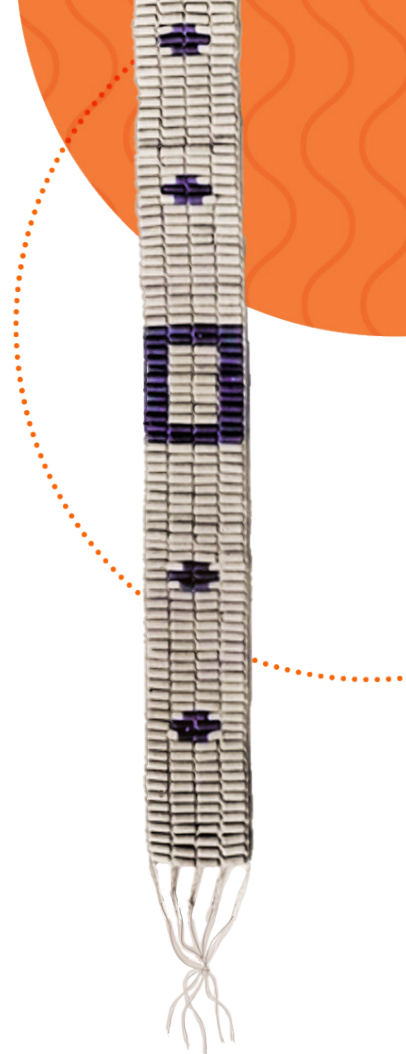
To begin, ask students if they know what treaty territory they are currently in.

- 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.

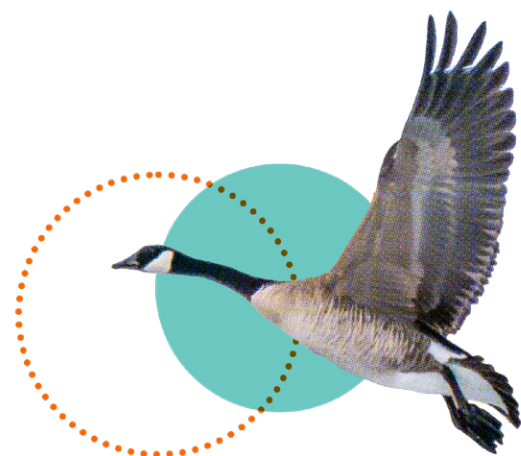
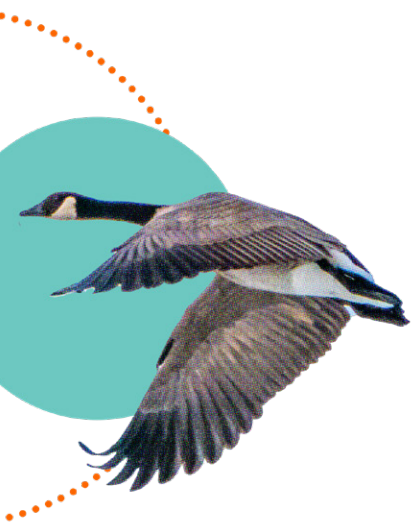
- Fill a bowl with enough treats for each person in the class.
- Ask students to take as many as they think is appropriate.
- Was there enough for everyone?
- Discuss the value of having agreements and protocols such as the ones made through the Dish with One Spoon treaty.

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).

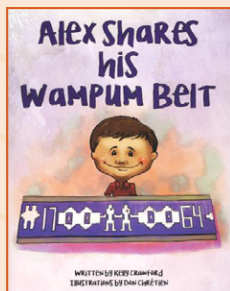
Alternatively, give students the option of choosing a different way to tell the story, such as through a paper or digital comic, a short video clip, Minecraft, etc.

STEP TWO: LAND-BASED LEARNING

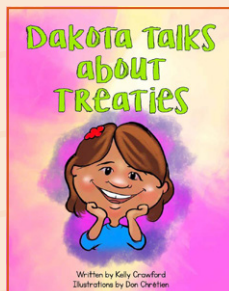
Start local. Learning about treaties involves getting to know both the present-day and the historical relationships on the land where we are situated. Land-based



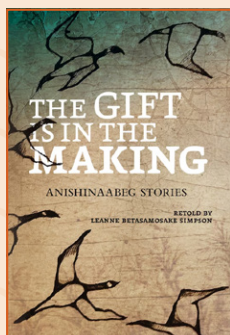
SUGGESTED BOOKS ON TREATIES



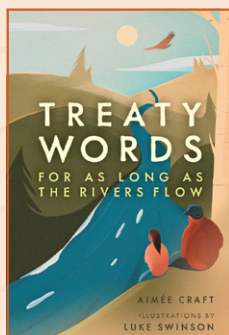
Alex Shares his Wampum Belt by Kelly Crawford, illustrated by Don Chretien (Anishinabek Nation, 2017)



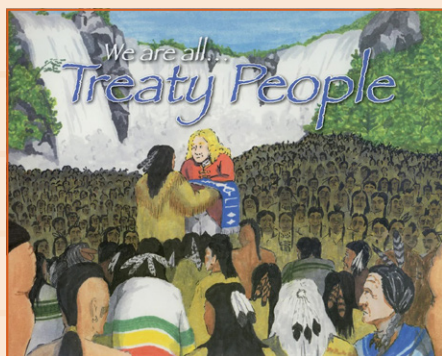
Dakota Talks about Treaties by Kelly Crawford, illustrated by Don Chretien (Anishinabek Nation, 2017)



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

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*.