

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Wheel Nation	Mary Lee Cree
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Junior (Grades 1-6)
Time Required	3 – 4 hours
Subject Strand Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Arts • Social Studies
Traditional Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Directions • Four Aspects of Self
Teacher Summary	<p><u>Four Directions</u> The Four Directions represent the <i>interconnectedness</i> of the universe and all its elements: plants, animals, humans and the environment in which they live. The indigenous perspective views the world as a moving, changing, life force in which birth and death are natural and necessary processes. Balance is maintained through the interdependency of the life forces. The validity of this view rests on the knowledge of the fundamental relationships and patterns at play in the world. To traditional indigenous peoples, the world is sacred.</p> <p>Starting with the spirit that is created at the moment of conception, the nine-month journey towards the birth of a baby marks the beginning of entry into the <i>family</i> unit. The journey continues with each stage of life as infant, child, adolescent, adult, and elder. Development takes place spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally throughout the life journey however once you are a parent, you are a parent for life.</p> <p>However just as a baby is completely dependent on adult care for its survival, adults depend on their children for the regeneration, or continuation, of the life chain. Traditionally the <i>responsibilities</i> associated with raising a child belonged to a larger circle of all adults in the community. Today Cree grandparents often continue to act as primary caregivers of their grandchildren once they become youth to impart knowledge and <i>values</i>. In this way children view those around them as extended family, creating a strong sense of belonging and kinship.</p> <p>The life chain of plants and animals are similarly connected in the Four Directions and, with the elements, the planets, the seasons, and the four sacred medicines, provide the nourishment and the conditions to sustain life. Harmony exists when this spider web of interconnecting threads is respected and understood. Life begins in the spirit and returns to the spirit world following death.</p>

	<p><u>Four Aspects of Self</u> The emotional, mental, spiritual and physical elements of ones' life are referred to as the <i>Four Aspects</i> of Self which, when taken together, represent the four parts of one's being. These elements are gifts from the Creator, but each aspect commands responsibility in order to maintain healthy balance of the self in all respects. Neglect of exercising any one element leads to an imbalance of the whole in the traditional indigenous view.</p> <p>There is a correlation between the Four Aspects of Self and the Four Directions in the Medicine Wheel. The Eastern quadrant represents the beginning of a new day - a new life - and just as the sun rotates in a clockwise direction to the south, west and north, movement on the Medicine Wheel flows in the same direction. The baby is represented by the east; youth is represented by the south; adulthood is represented by the west, and <i>elderhood</i> is represented by the north. Similarly, the spiritual element of self is associated with the east. The spiritual connection to the baby in the eastern quadrant of the wheel comes from its birth from spirit. The youth's association with the physical aspect of self comes from the growth that takes place during this stage and the natural physical activity of children and adolescents. Adulthood is associated with the emotional aspect of self. Maturity brings the awareness of feelings and the confidence to express emotion. Life experience gives adults a broad perspective to better understand the world and the journey everyone walks. Adulthood provides the gift of recognizing what is important and the skill to provide what is necessary to live well and to be happy and healthy. This knowledge is what enables adults to make good parents. Elderhood is the fourth and final stage in the cycle of life and is associated with the mental aspect of self. This connection comes from the <i>wisdom</i> of age and experience. With less responsibility at this stage of life for looking after children and more time to reflect on life from a philosophical view, elders develop a superior mental awareness.</p> <p>The energy shifts with each stage of life just as the knowledge and responsibilities change. Just as no one can stay a baby or a child forever, change is a natural process. The stages of life follow a natural flow of sequence, generation upon generation.</p>
<p>Learner Objectives</p>	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain insight as to the perpetual nature of life and death • To identify the Cree as an Aboriginal people with traditional beliefs • To recognize change as a natural process <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand that needs, wants, values, and goals are interrelated • To understand the interconnectedness of the elements of nature • To identify the Four Aspects of Self as spiritual, physical, emotional and mental elements of one's being

	<p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To symbolize, describe, and classify family roles and responsibilities • To navigate the internet with some measure of control • To work well with others through cooperation and collaboration
<p>Teaching Strategies</p>	<p><u>Ice breaker activities that demonstrate connectedness and bonding:</u></p> <p>1. The Human Knot:</p> <p>This activity can be done either indoors or outside. Have the students make a circle and ask them to grasp the hands of the students on either side of them. The students can be very creative by placing their arms behind their back, between their legs, etc. Once everyone is connected, the students must untie their knot without letting go and breaking the circle.</p> <p>2. Missing Link:</p> <p>This activity can be done either indoors or outside. Make sure furniture such as desks and tables are pushed away from where the activity will take place. The students will form a large, perfect circle. Everyone will hold hands and face the inside of the circle. Have the students move in tightly so that students are touching each other, shoulder to shoulder. The students will now turn to their right and put both hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. Give the signal for everyone to sit down on the lap of the person behind them. Everyone's body will become a chair. Try to ease into the position in about three to four seconds. The circle should be strong and the students will not fall down. Ask the students what would happen if one person decided to leave the circle. Have someone leave the circle. The 'missing link' will cause the circle to collapse. The message of connectedness should be introduced to the students after the laughing stops. Remind the students about this activity again later in the context of the Cree tipi teachings. For other excellent activities, see the resources section for the book <i>Rediscovery: Ancient Pathways New Directions</i>.</p> <p><u>Major in-class activities:</u></p> <p>1. Conduct an exercise to help students identify their similarities and differences in terms of their families. Make a question sheet for students to fill in the boxes. There will be one question per box. Students will walk around the room to ask each other these questions. When they find someone in the room who answers yes to a question, they will fill in that person's name in the box. Questions are as follows:</p> <p>a) Does your grandmother live with you?</p>

	<p>b) Do you have a baby brother? c) Are you a twin? d) Do you have a baby sister? e) Do you have more than 20 cousins? f) Do you have an aunt who likes to travel? g) Do you have an uncle who drives a truck? h) Do you have a pet fish? i) Does your family go hunting? j) Have you eaten deer meat? k) Have you ever slept in a tipi? l) Does your mother ride a snowmobile? m) Does your father cook you breakfast? n) Do you have a teenage sister who talks on the phone a lot? o) Do you have a teenage brother who has a girlfriend? p) Does your family practice some form of spirituality or religion? q) Does your family speak more than one language?</p> <p>2. Discuss the results of the exercise. Who was surprised by the answers? What do they show us about each other? What happens if we assume everyone else's family is like ours?</p> <p>3. Now assign pairs of students based on commonalities from the sheets e.g. Two who answered yes to the first question will work together, two who answered yes to the second question will pair up, etc. Working in pairs, discuss the item shared in common. E.g. How long has your grandmother lived with you? Where did she live before? What's her name? What do you call her? What does she like to do for fun? How old is she? What makes her mad? Etc.</p> <p>4. Each pair will share what they learned about their partner with the class. As they do so, make a list of the family members mentioned e.g. baby, mother, father, uncle, etc. Make a separate list of the family interests that are mentioned e.g. Camping, fishing, going to church.</p> <p>5. Discuss the notes on the board. Introduce the concept of the family unit and how it differs from family to family. Explain that each person of the family is unique as well. Explain that the things that are important to us make up our values, such as spending time with friends, or talking on the phone, etc.</p> <p>6. Our values change somewhat as we grow older and develop new responsibilities. What are responsibilities? What do you have to do to look after a baby? Who looks after the baby? Can a baby feed itself? Why not? Who looks after the home? Who buys groceries? Who cooks the meals? What happens when you become older and start to have trouble walking, or seeing? Who looks after you then? Who is responsible for taking out the garbage?</p>
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	<p>7. Introduce the circle of life concept as the cycle from the beginning of life as a baby to the stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and elderhood.</p> <p>8. Introduce Cree elder Mary Lee to share traditional teachings on the roles and responsibilities that people have as they grow through these stages of life: responsibilities for looking after one's body, one's mind, one's feelings; and one's spirit.</p> <p>9. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com to hear the traditional teachings.</p> <p>a) Go to "Introduction" for a brief introduction to the Four Directions and the Medicine Wheel</p> <p>b) Go to "Four Directions" and "East" to learn about the eastern quadrant of the Medicine Wheel</p> <p>c) Go to "Four Directions" and "South" to learn about the southern quadrant of the Medicine Wheel</p> <p>d) Go to "Four Directions" and "West" to learn about the western quadrant of the Medicine Wheel</p> <p>e) Go to "Four Directions" and "North" to learn about the northern quadrant of the Medicine Wheel</p> <p>10. Create four subjects for study and let the students choose which group to join: Baby, Youth, Adult or Elder. In each group, identify the person's role in the family. What are this person's values? What are this person's gifts to the family? What are this person's responsibilities?</p> <p>11. Wrap up the lesson with a guided reading of the summary above and select from optional exercises below.</p> <p>Optional Exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a collage to illustrate one's family. Use magazine photos, family photographs, and drawings to symbolize parents, siblings, extended family members, and their roles and responsibilities. Present to class. • Visit a retirement home to talk with elderly people. Match one elderly person per student for an interview of the elder's life. What was life like for this person as a baby? What was his/her childhood like? What kind of adulthood did this person have? Did this person have children? What about grandchildren? What does this person value the most in life and why? Write a report. • Invite an Aboriginal elder to the class to discuss the Four Directions. • Research the vocabulary words in a dictionary and study the meanings. • Draw a Medicine Wheel depicting the placement of four directions, the life cycle and the Four Aspects of Self. • Host a feast and invite parents and community members to give thanks for all their blessings in life. • Play a recording of The Circle of Life song by Elton John. Study the lyrics (see link below) and explain how this song relates to the circle of life described by Ms. Lee. • Learn more about Cree culture and traditional stories through a great DVD series called <i>Stories from the Seventh Fire</i> (see the resources section).
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnectedness • Responsibilities • Family • Aspects • Self • Elderhood • Wisdom
Materials Required	
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Oral presentation of research projects. 2. Teacher evaluation of written reports. 3. Anecdotal record for student behaviour.

Diagram for CREE Curriculum

