

In Our Own Words

Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content
to the K-3 Classroom



Unit 5: The Spirit of Celebration

Grade 2



Overview

Ceremonies and celebrations are integral to all cultures, include First Peoples. This unit looks at the traditions associated with wide range of personal and community celebrations.

This unit can be developed over the course of the whole school year, particularly if the final celebration has an end-of-year focus. Alternatively, the unit can be the primary focus of study for a period of one to three months.

Curriculum Connections

This unit can be used to help students achieve Grade 2 curriculum expectations in the following areas:

English Language Arts

- speaking and listening for specific purposes
- listening and speaking skills
- reading grade-appropriate texts
- making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections
- responding to stories in a variety of ways

Social Studies

- gathering information from personal experiences and oral sources
- changes that occur in the school and community
- ways individuals contribute to community
- factors influencing identity
- cultural characteristics of Canada

Health and Career Education

- steps to achieve a goal

Dance

- moving in a variety of levels, pathways, dynamics, and directions
- moving in time to a variety of rhythms, metres, and tempi
- awareness of a variety of dances and their purposes
- willingness to participate in dance

Music

- performing rhythmic patterns
- singing simple songs
- participating in music activities from a variety of contexts
- appropriate performance skills

Visual Arts

- creating images for specific purposes

Themes Addressed

- ceremony
- tradition
- seasonal cycle, seasonal activities
- feasts
- family
- family and community roles
- performance (song, dance, drama, etc.)
- rites of passage

Lesson Plans in this Unit

- Personal and Family Celebrations
- Comparing Ceremonies

- Inviting People to Our Celebration
- Gift Giving
- Dance and Music
- Bringing it All Together

Approximate time required

6-8 hours

Authentic Texts

- *The Secret of the Dance*, by Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow
- *The Powwow*, from “Set B,” by Lorraine Adams
- *My Elders Tell Me*, by Marion Roze Wright
- *Raven Tales* – “The Games” (DVD)

Materials and Resources

- materials for making posters (poster paper, pens/paint, etc.)
- materials for making gifts
- optional: food and drinks for the feast



Suggested Instruction and Assessment Approach

Personal and Family Celebrations

Write the word “Celebrations” on the board. Ask students:

- What celebrations do you and your family have?
- What other celebrations can you think of in our community?
- What other celebrations have you heard of?

Brainstorm and discuss what students do in their own celebrations and traditions. Build a class understanding that many celebrations include common features such as:

- a particular purpose or event
- food and drink
- music and dance
- costumes and clothing
- stories
- gift-giving.

These characteristics can be seen as a definition of “celebrations.”

Interview

Provide students with questions to ask their parents, grandparents, or other older family members about what kinds of celebrations they had when they were young. For example:

- What was your favourite celebration when you were my age?
- When did this celebration take place?
- What was the reason for this celebration?
- Was there any special food for this celebration?
- Were there any special dances or music for this celebration?
- Were there any special stories told at this celebration?
- Do you still have this celebration today?

Based on the earlier brainstorm and the results of the interviews, create a class list of ceremonies. For example:

- birthdays
- religious holidays (e.g., Christmas, Diwali, Ramadan, Vesak, Easter)
- community holidays (e.g., Halloween, Earth Day, Remembrance Day, Canada Day)
- naming ceremonies
- rites of passage (e.g., births, weddings, walking out)

Comparing Ceremonies

Begin by showing students the book *The Powwow*. Walk through the pictures as a class. Ask students to predict what might be happening in the story.

Read the book as a class, or have students read the book in small groups.

"Wherever there are people, there are stories."
~ *Raven Tales — The Games*

Follow the same format for other books and stories. Suggested titles could include:

- *I Like Who I Am*
- *Secret of the Dance*
- "Potlatch Ceremony" from *My Elders Tell Me*
- *Raven Tales – The Games* — first part (up to 12:28, "...and the two villages came together in friendship.")
- Celebrations — Gitxsan Gweey'ya (provided at the end of this unit)
- additional local texts depicting ceremonies and celebrations

Help students locate the various nations from the stories on a map of Canada.

Compare the various ceremonies:

- What's the same? What's different?
- What about the ceremonies you do with your families? (e.g., baby naming ceremony, walking out ceremony, birthday, blessing of a new building, wedding, family reunion) What's the same? What's different?
- How are you expected to behave at these ceremonies? Is it different for children than it is for adults?

Extension

Set up pen pals / key pals with students in another part of the province to talk about their celebrations.

Inviting People to Our Celebration

Explain that the class is going to work together to plan and hold a celebration later in the year. Determine the focus and purpose of the celebration (e.g., mid-winter feast, beginning of spring, recognizing a school or community milestone or anniversary).

Ask: Who do we want to invite to our celebration? Discuss the protocols for who should be invited.

Have students work individually or in groups to create a poster to advertise the celebration. As a class, brainstorm the information that needs to be on the poster.

Assessment

Use criteria such as those outlined in the Poster assessment tool (provided at the end of this unit) to assess students' work.

Gift Giving

Explain that an important part of many First Peoples celebrations was the giving of gifts. Bring in an Elder from the local First Peoples community to talk about the relationship between gifts and celebrations, the significance of giving a gift, and the protocols associated with gift giving (e.g., thanking the participant for witnessing the ceremony, and passing on the responsibility for remembering and respecting the ceremony).

As a class, decide what gifts students will make as part of their celebration (e.g., woven cedar bracelets, beaded necklace or bracelet in the form of a medicine wheel, calendars, medicine pouch). Discuss the significance and purpose of the particular gift, as applicable.

Dance and Music

Invite a guest (e.g., district cultural teacher — consult your district Aboriginal contact for support) to teach a local dance or song to the students. (**Note:** Guest instructors should choose a dance that is allowed to be shared and danced by the students — i.e., not owned by a particular individual or group.)

Assessment

Assess students on their

- willingness to participate
- abilities to move in time to the rhythm and metre
- abilities to accurately perform rhythmic patterns.

Bringing it All Together

Hold the celebration, incorporating the elements you have prepared (e.g., welcoming invited guests, gift-giving ceremonies, performance of the song/dance). Depending on the time you wish to dedicate to the activity, you may also include elements such as traditional foods, music or dance by local First Peoples performance groups, etc.

Celebrations — Gitxsan Gweey'ya

Within the feast system of the Gitxsan is an event called the Gweey'ya. A Gweey'ya is a lighthearted song used by the Gitxsan to solicit extra funds from the spouses of the hosting clan. The song is sung by the host clan, “Poor, poor me, I am greedy, I want more money, so I remember, and they insert the name of the spouse.” The spouse dances up wearing a costume and presents his or her donation in a creative way. This portion of the feast was modified and used as a fundraiser for BC Children’s Hospital.

Gweey'ya. pronounced
GWAY-ee-ah

The Gweey'ya song was rewritten and modified for the occasion. The Ksan Performers came with their drums and singers. The Gitxsan children were listed under their clans, Frog (Lax See'l), Fireweed (Giskaast) and Wolf (Lax Gibuu). All the non-Gitxsan staff and children were divided equally among the three clans.

The theme of the first Gweey'ya was “Children are the Flowers of the Gitxsan.” Flower seeds were donated by seed stores and packages of flower seeds were mailed out with the invitations to the local businesses and other schools.

Each class had to decide a name incorporating the theme. The children decided on a costume and made a huge cheque that the entire class had to dance up with and present. The huge building was decorated with flowers that the children had made.

Since the Lax Gibuu was hosting the Gweey'ya feast, the children belonging to the clan had to bring juice and bannock and serve the seated Giskaast and Lax See'l.

This event opened the doors for the Gitxsan culture to be acted out in the school system. It has always been my belief that the Gitxsan children’s culture be accepted and recognized in the schools, in order to motivate the Gitxsan learners. Children must first know who they are and be established in their identity before they can fully appreciate and desire to learn about others.

The Gweey'ya creates the reality of the feast. The Gweey'ya brings the abstract teaching about the culture alive and allows the children to witness and be a part of the real thing. The Gweey'ya also empowers students who have participated in a traditional feast that was held for such reasons as death, name giving, pole raising, and gravestone raising. At the Gweey'ya these students are recognized for their knowledge of the proper way that events should be directed.

The Gweey'ya teaches all about the value of giving to those who are less fortunate. It has made our students aware that they must go beyond their community and help others. The students have watched their community give, and from this they will learn to help others who are in need, even if they themselves are in need. For this is the true nature of giving. At the Gweey'ya the education of the students went beyond the classroom, as they were given the opportunities to learn and value cooperation, caring, empathy, generosity and concern for others. All the students, Gitxsan and non-Gitxsan were given the opportunity to participate in an afternoon of cultural immersion. The students were a part of an event that showed them that anything is possible.

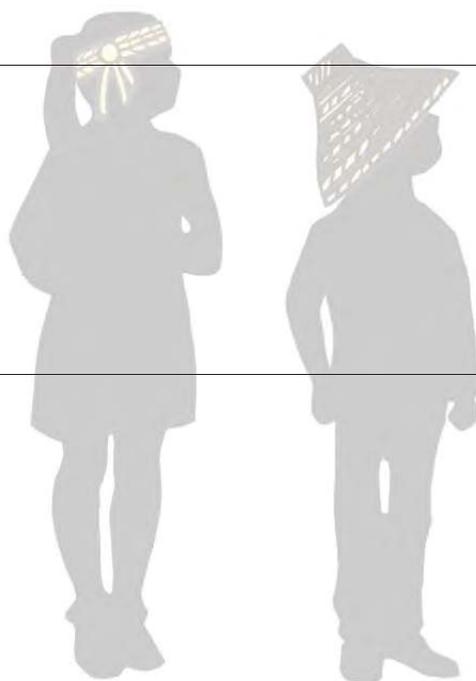
By undertaking the Gweey'ya, the children are allowed to incorporate their culture into their education. The Gweey'ya takes a portion of the Gitksan feast and allows the learners to experience a sense of identity, the importance of culture and the knowledge that we are all connected. In order that the students learn effectively they must be participants and not only spectators. The Gweey'ya connects the Gitksan curriculum to the school lives of children. The opportunity to make a contribution to BC Children's Hospital helps the children to practice meaningful involvement with the world around them.

The Gweey'ya is an event that has enhanced the education at our school. The idea that was born to comfort the friends of Matthew has been of great benefit to BC Children's Hospital and the learners at our school. In paying a tribute to Matthew's memory, our school recognized the educational value in accepting the Gitksan children as learners and teachers.

Assessment Tool

Poster

Rating		Comments
	Student's poster includes complete and accurate information about the ceremony.	
	Student's writing is neat and legible, with well-formed and properly spaced letters.	
	Student's poster makes effective use of colour and shape.	
	Student's poster makes effective use of the whole space.	
	Student offers positive comments about peers' work without being prompted.	



Acknowledgments

This teacher resource guide document has been developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) with assistance from the British Columbia Ministry of Education and support from the Education Partnerships Program of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. FNESC appreciates the support of both the Province and the Government of Canada for this very important undertaking and would like to thank all who participated in the process of developing this resource. In particular, FNESC acknowledges and thanks all the individuals, communities, and organizations who provided the authentic content that enriches the material included in this resource guide.

Writing Team

Karmen Smith-Brillon (Gitxsan)	Project Manager: First Nations Education Steering Committee
Debra Hooper (St'at'imc Nation — T'it'qet Band)	School District No. 83 (Salmon Arm)
Jacqueline Hunt (Wuikinuxv/Kwakiutl)	Wagalus School (Tsax̱is — Fort Rupert)
Jane Smith (Gitxsan)	School District No. 82 (Coast Mountains)
Anne Hill	Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education
GT Publishing Services Ltd.	project coordination, writing, editing, and layout

In addition, FNESC acknowledges and thanks

- all those who worked on the previous Ministry of Education and FNESC resources that provide a foundation for much of the background information included here (including *Shared Learnings*, the English First Peoples 10-12 curriculum documents and Teacher Resource Guides, and *Teaching Mathematics in a First Peoples Context Grades 8 and 9*)
- the other individuals, communities, and organizations who provided the authentic content that enriches the material included in this teacher resource.

Many of the strategies and unit plans in this guide incorporate the use of grade-appropriate story books and other learning resources identified in *Authentic First Peoples Resources for Use in K-7 Classrooms* (FNESC, 2012). This guide is available online at www.fnesc.ca.



Personal Thanks

Debra Hooper

I must begin by saying to the parents I have been blessed with; “kukwstum’ckal’ap / thank you” for without you I do not know where I would be. To the people I have met along my journey; Elders, teachers, resource people and children in the classroom, thank you for guiding me in a direction that has allowed me to be involved in helping others learn about, and understand First Peoples in our country. To the people at FNEESC, who do such amazing work, thank you so much for inviting me to be a part of the instrumental work you do to support teachers in British Columbia classrooms. And, last but not most definitely not least, to my amazing family and friends, you are the best and I thank you for always, always supporting me.

Jacqueline Hunt

I would like to thank my amazingly supportive family, friends, and mentors for their dedication, patience, time and encouragement. Thank you to our Elders, whom hold the key to our past, present, and gently guide us toward the future, my appreciation is beyond words. I would also like to thank the Grassroots Garden Society for including Wagalus School in their pilot project this project enriched our students’ lives and fostered a new love for learning. This project was the inspiration for the “Gifts from the Earth” unit. I am forever grateful to those who have passed on their knowledge, wisdom, and dedication to life-long learning.

Jane Smith

I would like to express my gratitude to the Gitxsan Elders who took the time to tell me stories and teach me to understand and speak Sim’algax. They are now in the spirit world, but their teachings live on. These exceptional individuals have been significant forces in my life. I thank them for their wisdom, their courage, their faith, their commitment, and their sense of humour, their generous sharing, and their tremendous patience with me throughout my life.



fnesc

www.fnesc.ca

2012