

Unit 8: Stories from the Sky

Grade 3



Overview

Long ago, First Peoples had an understanding of celestial objects that allowed them to make decisions crucial to sustainability. Through storytelling, the people were able to explain that which might otherwise not be understood. The metaphysical existence of the sun, moon and stars was important and relevant to the people in ways that science today portrays on a different level.

Long before modern day scientist and technology, First Peoples relied on celestial objects in many facets of life. These lessons will help students understand the importance of the sun, moon and stars to Aboriginal people.

Note: some of the activities in this unit include the use of internet sites for student content. If you are unable to facilitate student internet use (e.g., using a smartboard or computer lab), the activities can be modified by using the other resources cited, or by providing selected internet content in handout form.

Curriculum Connections

This unit can be used to help students achieve Grade 3 curriculum expectations in the following areas:

English Language Arts

- speaking and listening for specific purposes
- listening and speaking skills
- making predictions and asking questions about texts
- making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections
- responding to stories in a variety of ways
- reading grade-appropriate texts
- personal writing and representations that express connections to personal experiences and ideas
- enhanced vocabulary knowledge and usage

Science

- significance of celestial objects for Aboriginal peoples
- characteristics and movements of objects in our solar system
- constellations

Visual Arts

- creative process
- creating images from stories
- experimenting with materials, technologies, and processes

Themes Addressed

- seasonal cycle, seasonal activities
- sustainability & continuity
- relationship to the natural world
- relationality & connectedness
- language
- worldview
- beliefs
- art
- symbols and symbolism
- tradition and modernity

Authentic Texts

- The Adventures of Txamsm Series: *Txamsm Brings Light to the World*, by Mildred Wilson
- *How Raven Stole the Sun*, by Maria Williams
- *Raven Tales: How Raven Stole the Sun* (DVD) (note that this story is also available in graphic novel form)
- “Why Coyote Howls: A Star Story” as retold by Lynn Moroney – oral story available online at www.lpi.usra.edu/education/skytellers/constellations/preview.shtml
- *The Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back*, by Joseph Bruchac
- “Oot-Kwah-Tah, The Seven Star Dancers,” from *Keepers of the Night* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

Lesson Plans in this Unit

- Introduction to Celestial Objects (Science, English Language Art, Visual Arts)
- Stars (Science, English Language Art, Visual Arts)
- Aurora Borealis (Visual Arts)
- 13 Moons (Science, English Language Arts)



Suggested Instruction and Assessment Approach

Introduction to Celestial Objects

Science, English Language Arts, and Visual Arts — two 50-minute lessons

Materials and Resources

- The Adventures of Txamsm Series: *Txamsm Brings Light to the World*, by Mildred Wilson
- *How Raven Stole the Sun*, by Maria Williams
- *Raven Tales: How Raven Stole the Sun* (DVD)
- Bentwood Box template, 1 copy per student (available at www.wackykids.org/mini-bentwood_box.htm)

Procedure

Ask students why they feel the sun was so important to humankind; record students’ comments in the board. Ask students if they believe the sun was just as important thousands of years ago as it is today? Share with students that it is for many of these same reasons that the sun was so important to Aboriginal people in the past. Tell the students they will be hearing two stories today about the sun and what Raven did to make sure the people had the sun. One of these stories is from the Tsimshian peoples and the other is from the Tlingit.

Share with students that for thousands of years Aboriginal people shared the oral traditions and stories, and that some of these stories and teachings allowed the people to put some kind of understanding to the metaphysical world beyond Earth’s surface. These stories also allowed the people to pass on their

understanding of the world, as well as other knowledge and wisdom to the younger generations.

Lesson One (45 minutes)

Explain that this lesson and the next will look at variations of a popular First Peoples traditional story, that of “Raven Stealing the Light.” This story appears in different forms in many North American First Peoples cultures.

Introduce and read *Txamsm Brings Light to the World*. While reading the story, draw students’ attentions to the clothing the characters are wearing, as well as the animals that are native to the region.

Have students share their thoughts on the story. Record their comments on the board.

Introduce and read *How Raven Stole the Sun*. Have students share their thoughts on the story (record comments).

Brainstorm similarities and differences in the two stories, and record ideas on the board

On a blank sheet of paper, have students create a 3-circle Venn diagram. Have them record the similarities and differences in the first 2 circles of the Venn (leaving the third circle empty at this time — it will be filled in after watching the Raven Tales DVD in the next lesson).

Lesson Two (45 minutes)

View the Raven Tales DVD: *How Raven Stole the Sun*. After watching the DVD; have students get their Venn Diagram out from the last Raven activity to record similarities and differences to the previous stories.

Distribute the Bentwood Box template and have students record (on three sides of the box) their favorite version of the story (book or DVD), title & characters, problem, solution and draw a picture on one side.

Once students have completed their written work on the boxes, they are to follow instruction for cutting out, and constructing the Bentwood Box.

Adaptations

The bentwood box activity can be extended by following the directions and activity found at www.wackykids.org/mini-bentwood_box.htm.

Stars

Materials and Resources

- “Why Coyote Howls: A Star Story” as retold by Lynn Moroney — oral story available online at www.lpi.usra.edu/education/skytellers/constellations/preview.shtml

Lesson One — Science, English Language Arts

Ask students why they feel stars are an important part of our night sky; record students' comments in the board. Ask students how they think the stars came to be in the sky. Share with students that First Peoples of the past had different stories to help explain possible ways things came to be (legends). Tell the students they will be hearing a story today "Why Coyote Howls: A Star Story," as told by Lynn Moroney (Chickasaw). Tell the class that Moroney's version of this story is a blend of tales found in several North American First Peoples oral traditions.

If not done in a previous lesson, share with students that for thousands of years First Peoples shared oral traditions and stories, and that some of these stories and teachings allowed the people to put some kind of understanding to the metaphysical world beyond Earth's surface. These stories also allowed the people to pass on their understanding of the world, as well as other knowledge and wisdom to the younger generations.

Ask students to put their heads on their desks and to use their imaginations as they listen to this story. Tell students they are to create a picture in their minds of what this story might look like in a story book.

When finished, the story, ask students to re-tell the story to a classmate. Once students have had a discussion, ask them to re-tell the story to you (teacher), and write the main ideas on the board.

Have students write their own story about constellations, or how the stars came to be in the sky. Tell students they must have a beginning, middle and end to their story, along with a picture. (This writing will probably take longer than one session and could be completed later if necessary.)

When students have completed their stories, they may share them with the rest of the class.

Assessment:

Refer to the assessment rubric, *Celestial Stories* (provided at the end of this unit).

Lesson Two — Science, Visual Arts

Authentic Text

- "Oot-Kwah-Tah, The Seven Star Dancers," from *Keepers of the Night* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

Procedure

If you have not already discussed constellations as a class, spend a few minutes talking with students about constellations and what they are. Ask students if they have heard of a few common constellations, such as the Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Cassiopeia, and Orion.

Ask students why they feel stars are an important part of our night sky — record student's comments in the board. Ask students why stars might have been important to First Peoples thousands of years ago? Share with students that it is for many of these reasons that the stars were so important to Aboriginal people in

the past. Tell the students they will be hearing a story today that was told by the Onondaga (Eastern Woodland peoples) about the forming of the constellation Pleiades.

Share with students that for thousands of years First Peoples shared their oral traditions and stories, and that some of these stories and teachings allowed the people to put some kind of understanding to the metaphysical world beyond Earth's surface. These stories also allowed the people to pass on their understanding of the world, as well as other knowledge and wisdom to the younger generations.

Ask students to put their heads on their desks and to use their imaginations as you read this story. Tell students you will not be showing them pictures as you want them to build a picture in their own minds.

Read the story. When finished, ask students to re-tell the story to a classmate. Once students have had a discussion, ask them to re-tell you (teacher) the story, and write the main ideas on the board.

Hand out blank paper and have students draw a picture that tells the story.

Aurora Borealis

Visual Arts, 45 minutes

Materials and Resources

- crepe paper or tissue paper (different colours – greens, blues, reds, orange/yellow)
- bowls of water mixed with vinegar (1 Tablespoon / 15 mL vinegar to 1 cup / 250 mL water), 1 bowl per group
- paint brushes, 1 per student
- white construction paper

Teacher Background

Although science has declared the northern lights to be electrically charged particles, from the sun, deflected by Earth's magnetic field, First Peoples of the past had their own ideas as to what the northern lights were. As with many diverse concepts from First Peoples, the meaning and understanding of the northern lights differs.

The following web site gives numerous stories to explain the northern lights:

- Legends and Folklore of the Northern Lights
www.indigenouspeople.net/aurora.htm
- An Ojibwa Legend
www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/LegendOfTheNorthernLights-Ojibwa.html

Procedure

Inform the students that they will be doing an art project today that will reflect images of the aurora borealis (northern lights). Share with students that different people around the world have had different ideas as to what exactly the aurora

borealis are, and where they come from. (It is up to the individual teacher how much detail they would like to go into on this topic) If the classroom set up allows for it, show students some of the suggested web sites, or have information from those websites to share with the students in printed form.

Have students work in small groups if possible as this will allow for fewer bowls of water and students can share their thoughts on their creative process.

Hand out white construction paper and pieces of crepe paper, or tissue paper. Have students spread the crepe paper, or tissue paper out on top of the white construction paper.

Once the white construction paper has been covered, put bowls of water (mixed with vinegar) and paint brushes on the tables. Have students brush the water mixture over the crepe paper, or tissue paper. Caution students not to use too much water as it will soak right through the crepe paper as well as the construction paper.

Once the papers are all wet, set them aside and let them dry. Clean up.

Once papers have dried (the next day) gently remove the crepe paper or tissue paper and see the beautiful creations.

Adaptations

Have students work individually or in groups to create poems to go with their artworks. Display students' work in the hallway or other exhibition space.

13 Moons

Lesson One — Science, English Language Arts

Authentic Text

- *The Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back*, by Joseph Bruchac

Teacher Background

Long before the arrival of European settlers to North America, First Peoples had their own ways of looking at, and understanding the world in which they lived. Key to sustainability for the people was having an understanding of the sky and all the information it presented to them. First Peoples did not use the typical calendar that we use today; their understanding was one with nature and could be identified today as a "solar-lunar calendar," where 365 days is the measure of the Earth going around the Sun (solar) and 28 days is the average measure of the Moon's synodic (the time period between two successive astronomical conjunctions of the same celestial) and sidereal cycles (lunar).

Procedure

Read aloud *The Thirteen Moons on Turtles Back*. When finished, ask students to re-tell the story to a classmate. Once students have had a discussion, ask for volunteers to re-tell the story, and record the main ideas on the board.

Ask students to draw and colour a picture of the story, and write a short paragraph underneath that explains their picture. When students have completed their work, they may share it with the rest of the class.

Tell the students they will be investigating the back of the turtle in an upcoming lesson. If any students have a turtle at home, ask them to count the large sections on its back (shell), as well as the small sections that surround the shell and have them report back to the class their findings.

Adaptation

For students who are non-writers, they may demonstrate their learning by drawing a picture then verbally explain it, without writing a paragraph.

Lesson Two — English Language Arts

Materials and Resources

- Thirteen Moons on a Turtle’s Back (www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mosmd/turtle.htm)
- two “Thirteen Moons on a Turtle’s Back” blackline masters, 1 copy of each per student (available online at www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mosmd/turtle.htm)
- scissors and glue sticks

Procedure

Remind students of the story *The Thirteen Moons on Turtles Back* from the previous lesson. Ask students if anyone has ever had the opportunity to check the back of a turtle to see if it did indeed have thirteen large sections and twenty eight smaller sections. Let students know that today they will be going on the internet to check out a website that has illustrations and information on the thirteen moons.

Have students access the web site, Thirteen Moons on a Turtle’s Back (www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mosmd/turtle.htm) through class or lab computers.

Have students read the information on the web page to develop an understanding that although First Peoples differ from one another, there are many aspects of their lives that are similar. Ask students if they see a “pattern” (similarity) between the moons of the First Peoples, and the pattern on the back of the turtle.

Have students return to desks, and hand out copies of the “cut and paste” activity. Students will complete this activity following the verbal instruction you give, as well as the written instruction on the handout. Early finishers can colour the blank copy of the turtle with the thirteen moons and twenty-eight segments on its back.

While students are quietly colouring, you can re-read aloud the Joseph Bruchac story of *The Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back*.

Inform students that during our next lesson we will be learning about some of the activities First Peoples did during the various “moons” of the year. Students should

come prepared to compare what they and their families do during the various “months” of the year.

Adaptation

For struggling readers or non-readers, read the information from the website aloud as a class.

Lesson Three — Science, English Language Arts

Materials and Resources

Stories and calendars representing the 13 moons concept, one or more of the following

- resources from the local First Peoples culture(s)
- Gitxsan Moons (handout provided at the end of this unit)
- 13 Moons of the Secwepemc (Connecting Traditions — Secwepemc Pre-Contact Village Life)
http://secwepemc.sd73.bc.ca/sec_village/sec_villfs.htm
- The 13 Moons of the Wsanec (Saanich people)
www.racerocks.com/racerock/firstnations/13moons/13moons.htm
- Thirteen Moons and the Turtle (Anishinaabemdaa)
www.anishinaabemdaa.com/moons.htm

Preparation

Preview the various 13 Moons resources available (see preceding list), and determine which you will use with your class. Ideally, local resources will be used, but if these are not available any of the others will work as alternatives.

Procedure

Remind students of the story “The Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back,” and let them know that today we will be dividing those moons up into seasons. Ask students to think about some of the things they, and their families, do during the different seasons. On the board, write the names of the season (winter, spring, summer, fall) and under each heading make a list of things the students identify. Be sure to include things that adults must do to be prepared for the upcoming seasons. For example:

- In late fall we prepare for winter by cleaning up the yard, getting winter tires put on our vehicles.
- In spring we bring out our bikes and check that they’re in working order.

Facilitate access of the relevant resource(s) for the 13 Moons. For the resource chosen, have students begin by investigating which “moon” they were born under. Ask students what they usually do at that time of year.

Then have students look at the remaining moons, and the seasonal activities that take place in each. Check out some of the months where certain holidays take place — e.g., Remembrance Day, Halloween, Christmas, Diwali — and investigate what the First Peoples used to do during those months (moons).

When the resources have been investigated, have students look at the lists on the board (that you recorded during the introduction) and draw a picture that

demonstrates what it is they, or their family, do during a particular moon or month.

Assessment

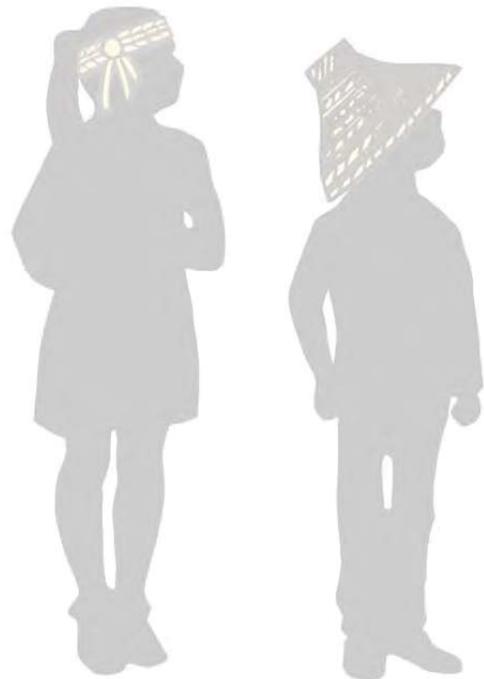
Assess students' work according to criteria such as those outlined in the assessment tool, *Relating to the 13 Moons* (provided at the end of this unit).

Adaptation

If sufficient computer resources are available, have students visit the other web sites listed and compare the “definitions” for each moon in other regions. What activities are most common? Which activities and concepts vary by region?

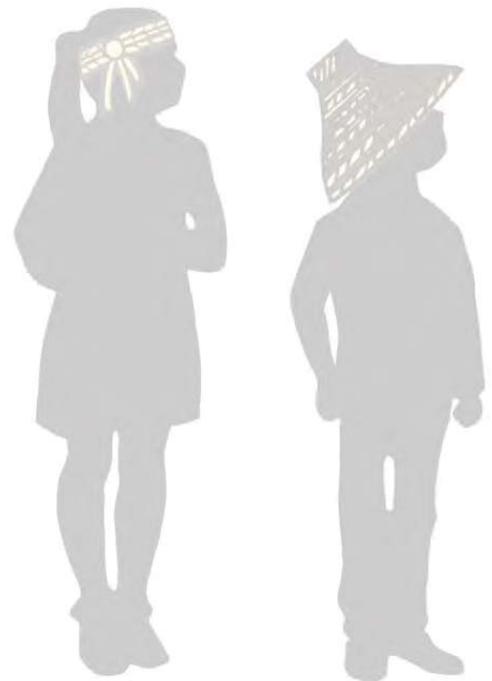
Celestial Stories

Emerging	Developing	Acquired	Accomplished
Story is very brief	Story includes beginning, middle, and end	Story develops logically	Story develops smoothly from an engaging opening; tries to create suspense or interest; reaches a satisfying conclusion
Elements of story are loosely related events without an introduction	Story often loses focus and ends abruptly	Story includes sequenced events from a “story problem” to a reasonable solution	
Characters are not described	Characters are identified	Characters have some individuality	Characters are well-developed
Story has is no clear dialogue	Story may include dialogue	Story includes some variety of dialogue	Dialogue often sounds natural



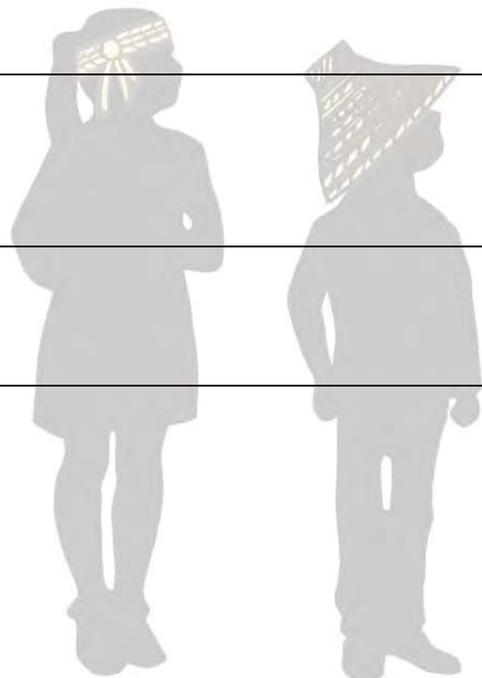
Aurora Borealis Artwork

	1	2	3	4
Elements of Design	The student did the minimum, or artwork was never completed	The student did the assignment in a satisfactory manner, but lack of planning was evident	The art work shows that the student applied the principles discussed in class adequately	The art work shows that the student applied the principles discussing in class in unique manner
Creativity	The piece shows little or no evidence or original thought	The student's work lacked sincere originality	The student work demonstrated originality	The student work demonstrates a unique level of originality
Effort	The student did not finish the work in a satisfactory manner	The student finished the project, but it lacks finishing touches or can be improved upon with little effort	The student completed the project in an above average manner, yet more could have been done	The student gave an effort far beyond the requirements of the project



Bentwood Box

Criteria	Rating	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces high quality, creative work 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows originality and take risks to demonstrate learning 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> applies all art concepts, especially those stressed for the project 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> solves problems him/herself 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> always participates in class and always use class time well 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses all materials appropriately with no reminders; always clean up 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> follows all classroom rules and never cause a classroom disturbance 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is helpful 		



Gitxsan Moons

As in many First Peoples cultures, the Gitxsan calendar was created by the events of the seasons.

▶ The stories and feasting moon — **January**

Rainbow ring around the moon. The ring represents the circle of stories. The stories are told and retold and customs and traditions are perfected during this quiet time of winter.

▶ The cracking cottonwood trees' and opening water trails' moon — **February**

When the cottonwood trees snap because of the bitter cold. When the false thaw comes and ice melts and canoes can be used on the rivers.

▶ The black bear's waking moon — **March**

The bears sit in front of their den in the early Spring, trying to wake up and get accustomed to the daylight and fresh air. They are safe from the hunters because they are thin after their long winter's sleep.

▶ The Spring Salmon's returning home moon — **April**

Spring salmon return to the rivers of their birth.

▶ The budding trees' and blooming flowers' moon — **May**

Trees wake up and start to come into bud, flowers are blooming. Nature is reborn.

▶ The gathering and preparing the berries moon — **June**

The season begins for berry picking and preserving for the long winter months ahead.

▶ The fisherman's moon — **July**

Season of moving to the fish camps to preserve salmon for the winter months.

▶ The grizzly bear's moon — **August**

The grizzly bears are fishing and eating spawning salmon, fattening up for the long winter months ahead.

▶ The groundhog hunting moon — **September**

Gitxsan go to the mountains for the groundhogs. The groundhogs are easy to hunt. They are slow moving and fat from eating all summer.

▶ The catching lots of trout moon — **October**

The Gitksan are finished with all the preparations for winter and take time to go trout fishing. Trout fishing signifies the completion and celebration of the summer work. The trout are plentiful, hungry and easy to catch.

▶ The getting use to cold moon — **November**

A time of cold, but some warm days too.

▶ The severe snowstorms and sharp cold moon — **December**

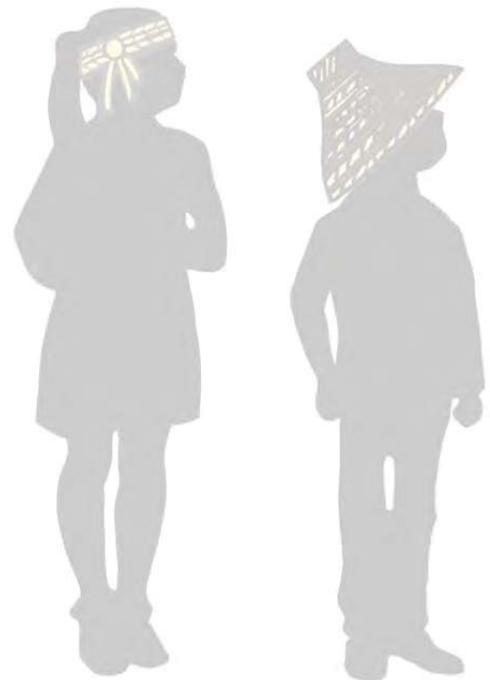
A time of extreme cold. Winter has no compassion.

▶ The Shaman's moon

The **blue moon**, or the 13th moon. The most powerful moon, not named. The Shaman uses this moon to cleanse and practice good luck. Fasting, praying, sleeping alone in the four directions around the fire and gathering at the sweat lodge daily. A powerful moon for the dreamtime.

Relating to the 13 Moons

	Emerging	Developing	Acquired	Accomplished
Elements of Design	The student did the minimum, or artwork was never completed	The student did the assignment in a satisfactory manner, but lack of planning was evident	The art work shows that the student applied the principles discussed in class adequately	The art work shows that the student applied the principles discussing in class in unique manner
Creativity	The piece shows little or no evidence or original thought	The student's work lacked sincere originality	The student work demonstrated originality	The student work demonstrates a unique level of originality
Effort	The student did not finish the work in a satisfactory manner	The student finished the project, but it lacks finishing touches or can be improved upon with little effort	The student completed the project in an above average manner, yet more could have been done	The student gave an effort far beyond the requirements of the project



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- 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.



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