

THE FIRST PEOPLES

Figure 1-1 The Ksan Historical Village, shown here, is a replica of a Gitksan village that was once near Hazelton, British Columbia. The Gitksan people, like other First Nations and Inuit peoples across Canada, have an ancient history on their traditional lands.

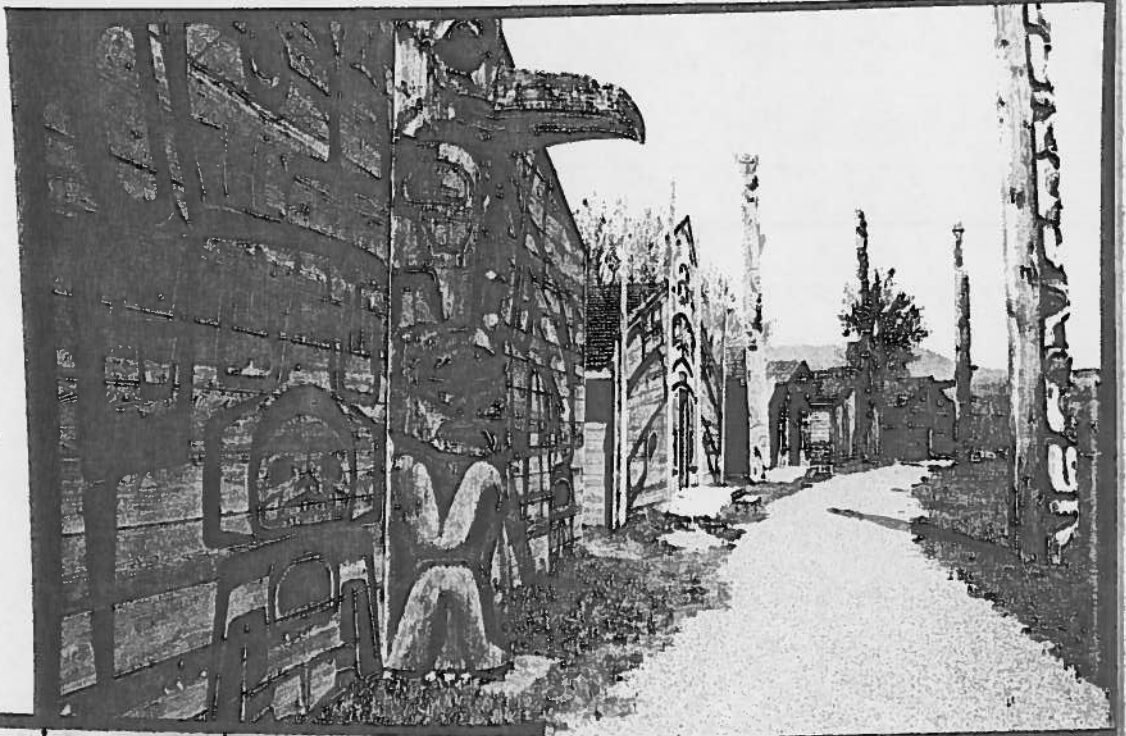


Figure 1-2 This Gitksan dance group performed outside the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997. The group's dance marked the opening of its community's appeal of a British Columbia court decision that denied the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples' claim to legal rights over their territories in northwestern British Columbia, along the Skeena River. In its landmark ruling, the Supreme Court overturned the judgment of the British Columbia courts. The Supreme Court ruled that the provincial courts had not given enough consideration to the Gitksan's and Wet'suwet'en's oral histories, which had been passed down through generations in stories, songs, and prayers. The court ruled that Canada's "laws of evidence" needed to change to accept oral history as having equal weight to other forms of evidence.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who were the First Peoples and how did they structure their world?

To explore this Essential Question, you will

- discover the diversity of First Peoples before European contact
- examine explanations about the origin of First Peoples
- investigate the diverse worldviews of First Peoples, including connections to spirituality, relationship with the land, language, values, and oral traditions
- examine various methods of social organization, community governance, and relations between nations

GETTING STARTED

The Essential Question for this chapter has two parts. Who were the First Peoples? The answer to this question is highly relevant today, for who they *were* is closely linked to who they *are*. The term **First Peoples** includes the diverse **First Nations** and **Inuit** communities living on the land before European contact. First Peoples are **indigenous** to Canada. This means their origins are here; they do not have another ancestral homeland.

How did First Peoples structure their world? This question and its answer are also highly relevant today. As Figures 1-1 and 1-2 indicate, First Peoples' traditional cultures—including their oral histories—are part of Canada's past, present, and future. Although much of this chapter describes First Peoples' cultures and traditions from long ago, many of the beliefs and traditions described are still practised by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples today.

- What do you know about First Nations and Inuit oral histories? Why do you think the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the legal system needed to change to accept oral history as evidence? To what form of evidence do you think the legal system is more accustomed?
- Why do First Peoples' communities, such as the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en, believe they have rights to specific lands in Canada?

KEY TERMS

First Peoples
First Nations
Inuit
Indigenous
language families
dialects
oral tradition
treaty
repatriate
worldview
holistic
consensus

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples have a long history in North America and their diverse and complex cultures continue to adapt to changing conditions.
- The oral traditions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples teach the importance of maintaining a balance between the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of life.
- The history of governance in Canada is characterized by a transition from Indigenous self-government through French and British colonial rule to a self-governing confederation of provinces and territories.

Thinking Historically

- 1. Establishing **historical significance**
- 2. Using primary-source **evidence**
- 3. Identifying **continuity and change**
- 4. Analyzing **cause and consequence**
- 5. Taking a **historical perspective**
- 6. Considering the **ethical dimensions** of history

VOICES

It really amazes me, when I think of my ancestors, how they survived in Canada's North, where the weather has no boundaries. They had to be brave and creative to use whatever resources were available to them. Who in the world would ever think of building a shelter out of snow? The Inuit people were architects and engineers.

— *Levinia Nuqaalaaq Brown, Inuk Elder, Rankin Inlet, Nunavut*

THE DIVERSITY AND ORIGINS OF FIRST PEOPLES IN CANADA

Canada's history began long before the first Europeans made their way to North America. For many thousands of years before European arrival, diverse First Nations and Inuit peoples lived across the continent. These First Peoples lived in all of the continent's varied geographic regions. Each community had ways of life that were uniquely suited to its environment.

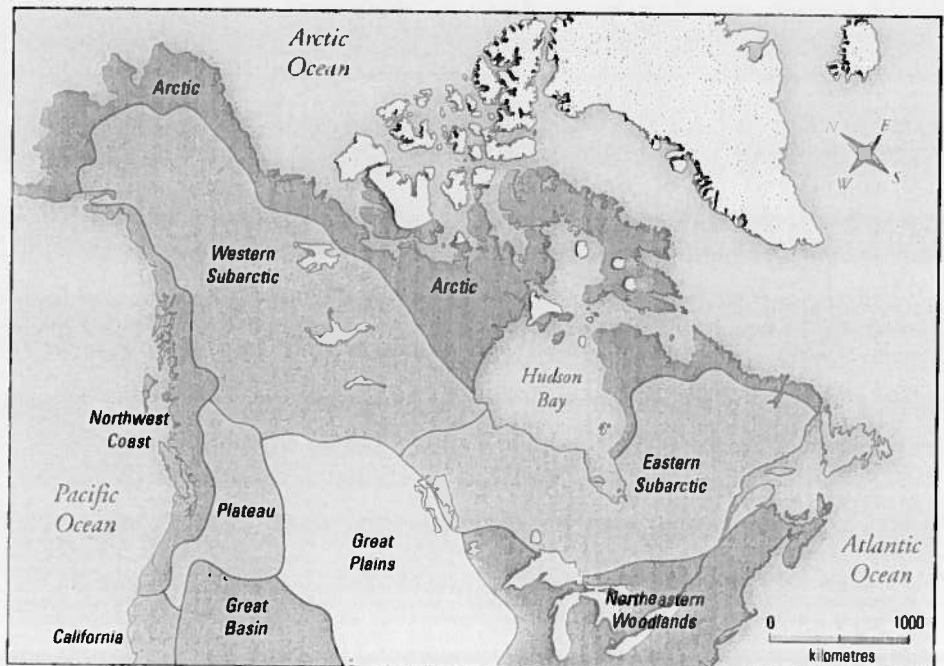
DIVERSE LANDS, DIVERSE CULTURES

No matter where they lived, First Peoples had systems for taking care of their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. They also had sophisticated methods for organizing their societies and interacting with other communities. Although these cultural traditions and ways of life varied widely across the continent, each was appropriate for the community and its territory.

For example, the First Nations living on the Great Plains had very different ways of life than First Nations living on the Northwest Coast. Plains First Nations relied upon bison as their primary food source, whereas First Nations on the Northwest Coast relied upon fish. This difference had a direct impact on each people's ways of life. Northwest Coast First Nations lived most of the year in permanent housing because they could acquire food from the nearby ocean. Plains First Nations, in contrast, required a more mobile lifestyle in order to use the resources from a larger territory. They had housing that was portable and easy to assemble: the tipi. For ocean travel, Northwest Coast First Nations used large dugout boats that could carry many people. Plains First Nations travelled mostly by canoe or by foot, using dogs to haul their supplies.

Figure 1-3 First Peoples' Cultural Areas

Traditional cultures were intertwined with geography. First Nations and Inuit peoples living in the same type of environment often had some similar cultural elements. Find the compass rose on this map. Why is it tilted?



DIVERSE LANDS, DIVERSE LANGUAGES

In the early seventeenth century, First Peoples across what is now Canada spoke about fifty major languages. These languages have been classified into twelve distinct **language families**. A language family is a group of languages that likely evolved from a common language.

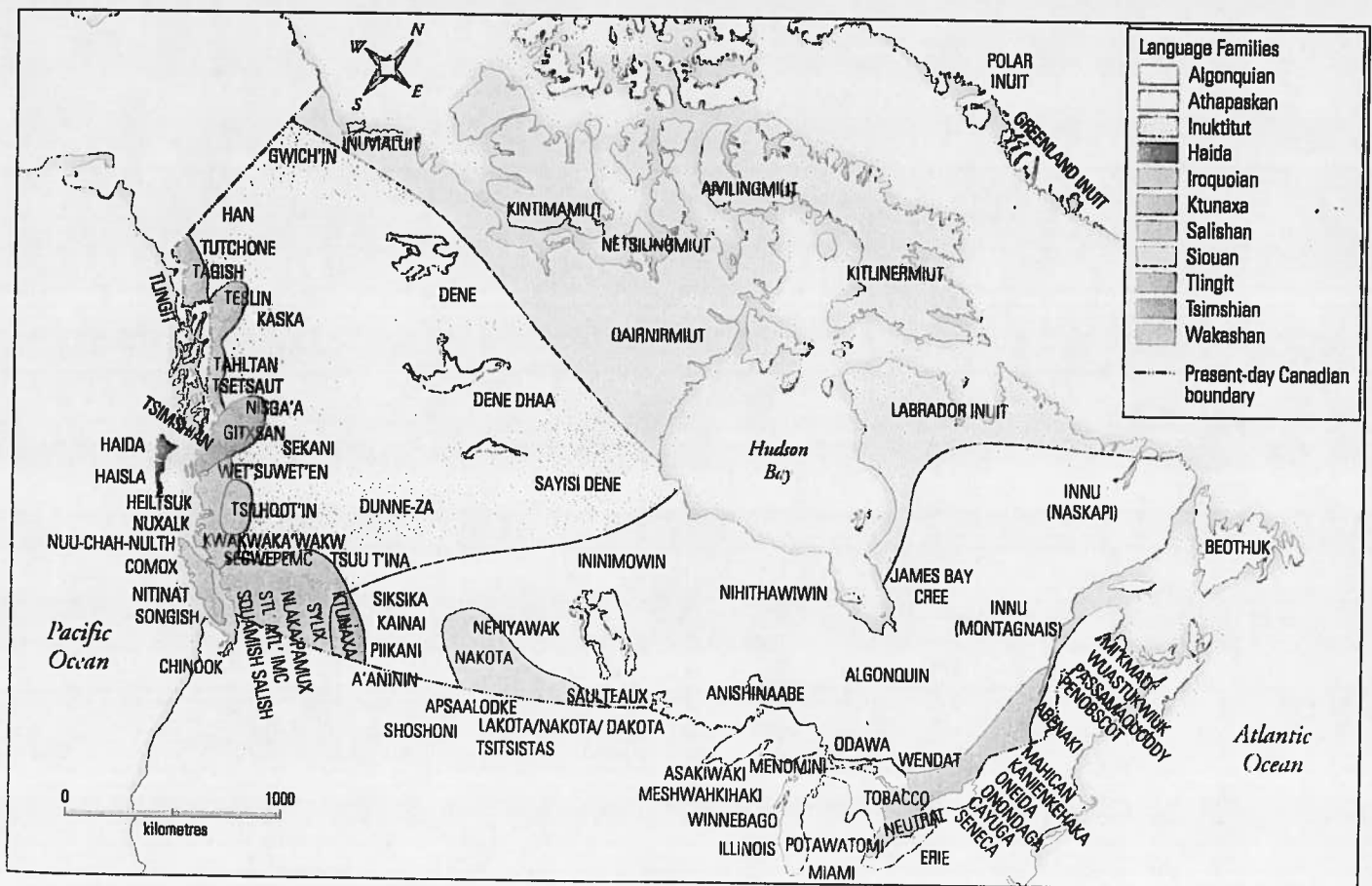
However, being from the same language family does not mean the languages are alike. For example, English and Hindi are both from the same language family, but the languages are quite distinct. A language can include many **dialects**, which are variations of the same language. For example, Inineew (Cree) is a language with five major variations. People speaking different Inineew variations could likely make themselves understood to each other, but not always easily. People speaking Inineew and Siksika (Blackfoot) probably would not understand one another, even though both languages are from the Algonquian language family.

SHAPING CANADA TODAY.

First Peoples include many First Nations and Inuit communities that are indigenous to this land. Later in this cluster, you will learn about the Métis, another nation indigenous to Canada, although the Métis Nation did not come into being until after European contact. As a group, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are referred to as *Aboriginal peoples* in the Constitution.

Figure 1-4 First Peoples and Language Families, c. 1670

Statistics Canada suggests that about 94 percent of Indigenous languages in Canada are at risk of extinction. It says that only the Inineew, Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Saulteaux), and Inuktitut languages may survive into the future. Why do you think so many languages are endangered? What conditions enable a language to survive? Note: Although not shown on this map, the language families extended north and south into what is now the United States.



WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF FIRST PEOPLES IN CANADA?

All human societies have stories about how they believe the world began. All cultures can trace their stories back to an oral account at some point in history. However, some societies have preserved their stories by writing them down.

In North America, we know First Peoples were the first humans to live on the continent. We also know that their history on the continent goes back thousands of years. But when and how did that history begin? What is the origin of the First Peoples? Explanations come from a variety of sources: archaeology, anthropology, genetics, linguistics, and each community's account of its own history. These accounts are part of the community's **oral tradition**. An oral tradition is a collection of prayers, stories, and songs that express a community's history, customs, beliefs, and values. The cultural traditions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities are based mostly on an oral tradition.

Many stories from the oral tradition have complex cross-references with other stories, ceremonies, and cultural traditions. All stories are best expressed and understood in their original language. Understanding deeper meanings in the story often depends on understanding the story's complex network of cultural connections.

E Today many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples' communities are recording their oral histories as a way of ensuring their preservation. How is the work of a historian affected by using translated, written versions of stories from a community's oral tradition, rather than stories told in their original language by a community member?

Figure 1-6 Many First Nations added to their oral tradition with written records that used symbols and figures called petroglyphs, or pictographs. Most, like these pictographs found at Tramping Lake, Manitoba, are found on cliffs, rocks, or cave walls. Other First Nations, like the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Saulteaux), recorded pictographs on birch-bark scrolls.

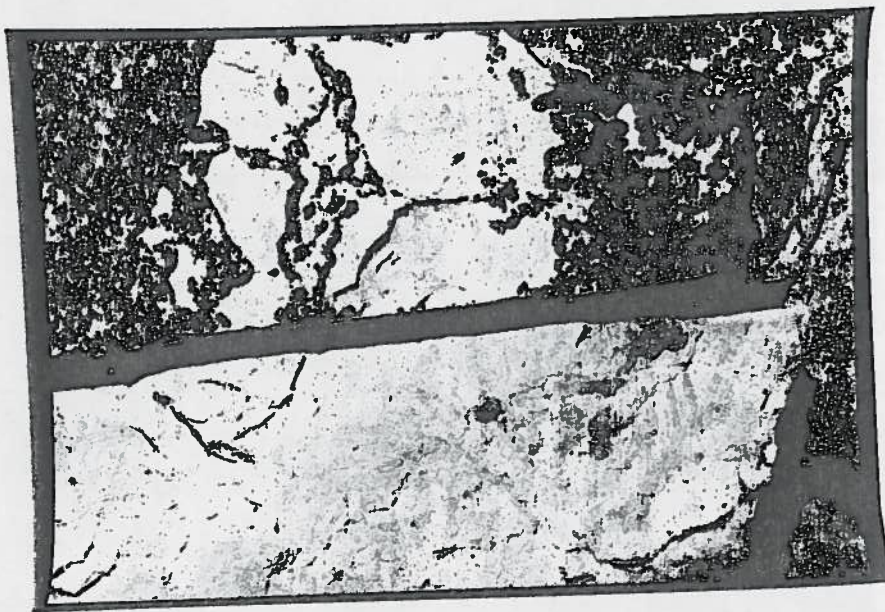


Figure 1-7 *Listening*, by Daphne Odjig, 1980. Artist Daphne Odjig was born and raised in the village of Wikwemikong, on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. She incorporates her Potawatomi, Odawa, and English roots into her works and is one of the best-known Aboriginal artists in Canada. How does this work reflect her cultural background?

VOICES

Origin stories say a great deal about how people understand their place in the universe and their relationship to other living things. I have been taught by Anishnaabeg Elders that all Creation stories are true. There is not one story which can be true for all peoples of the world. But each peoples' understandings and traditions of their beginning is their truth. Origin stories require the utmost respect. No people outside that tradition should question it or try to impose their own story.

—Darlene Johnston, Chippewas of Nawash First Nation

SHAPING CANADA TODAY.

On page 26, you will learn about some of the reasons why some First Nations are known by more than one name. A First Nation may also have different spellings for its name (e.g., Anishnaabe, Anishinabe, or the plural Anishnaabeg, as seen on this page). When quoting individuals or communities, this book uses the spelling they choose for themselves.

CREATION STORIES

Creation stories—stories that tell of the beginning of the world or a community—are as varied as First Peoples' cultures. Like other aspects of culture, a community's creation stories reflect the environment in which the people lived. Most importantly, creation stories show that the community is indigenous to the land: the people come from the land and are part of it. The stories give reasons for the community's identity, purpose, ceremonies, and beliefs. Stories are passed down from generation to generation and serve a variety of purposes. Creation stories express a people's understanding of the world and their place in it. They provide historians with insight into First Peoples' traditional lives and cultures.

Learning a community's creation story usually means approaching an Elder from the community using correct protocols. Each community has its own protocols, which often include bringing the Elder a gift. Creation stories are often considered a community's most significant cultural property and may be shared only under certain circumstances.

THE CREATION OF TURTLE ISLAND (NORTH AMERICA)

Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Saulteaux) peoples' traditional territory encircled the Great Lakes and stretched into southeastern Manitoba. The story that follows features Kitchi-Manitou, the Creator, a central figure in many stories from the Anishinaabe oral tradition. This story is shared by the Grand Council of Treaty Three, a political organization of twenty-eight First Nations in Ontario and Manitoba.

Long ago, after the Great Mystery, or Kitchi-Manitou, first peopled the earth, the Anishinabe, or Original People, strayed from their harmonious ways and began to argue and fight with one another. Brother turned against brother and soon the Anishinabe were killing one another over hunting grounds and other disagreements. Seeing that harmony, brotherhood, sisterhood, and respect for all living things no longer prevailed on Earth, Kitchi-Manitou decided to purify the Earth. He did this with water.

The water came in the form of a great flood, or *mush-ko'-be-wun'*, upon the Earth, destroying the Anishinabe people and most of the animals as well. Only Nanaboozhoo, the central figure in many of the Anishinabe oral traditions, was able to survive the flood, along with a few animals and birds who managed to swim and fly. Nanaboozhoo floated on a huge log searching for land, but none was to be found as the Earth was now covered by the great flood. Nanaboozhoo allowed the remaining animals and birds to take turns resting on the log as well. Finally, Nanaboozhoo spoke.

"I am going to do something," he said. "I am going to swim to the bottom of this water and grab a handful of Earth. With this small bit of Earth, I believe we can create a new land for us to live on with the help of the Four Winds and Kitchi-Manitou."

So Nanaboozhoo dived into the water and was gone for a long time. Finally he surfaced, and short of breath told the animals that the water was too deep for him to swim to the bottom. All were silent. Finally, Mahng, the Loon, spoke up. "I can dive under the water for a long way: that is how I catch my food. I will try to make it to the bottom and return with some Earth in my beak."

The Loon disappeared and was gone for a very long time. Surely, thought the others, the Loon must have drowned. Then they saw him float to the surface, weak and nearly unconscious. "I couldn't make it, there must be no bottom to this water," he gasped.

Many more animals tried. All failed and it seemed as though there was no way to get the much-needed Earth from the bottom. Then a soft muffled voice was heard. "I can do it," it spoke softly. At first no one could see who it was that spoke up. Then, the little Wa-zhushk (muskrat) stepped forward. "I'll try," he repeated. Some of the other, bigger, more powerful animals laughed at muskrat. Nanaboozhoo spoke up. "Only Kitchi-Manitou can place judgment on others. If muskrat wants to try, he should be allowed to."

So, muskrat dove into the water. He was gone much longer than any of the others who tried to reach the bottom. After a while Nanaboozhoo and the other animals were certain that muskrat had given his life trying to reach the bottom. Then one of the animals spotted muskrat as he floated to the surface. Nanaboozhoo pulled him up onto the log. "Brothers and sisters," Nanaboozhoo said, "muskrat went too long without air: he is dead." A song of mourning and praise was heard across the water as muskrat's spirit passed on to the spirit world. Suddenly Nanaboozhoo exclaimed, "Look, there is something in his paw!" Nanaboozhoo carefully opened the tiny paw. All the animals gathered close to see what was held so tightly there. Muskrat's paw opened and revealed a small ball of Earth. The animals all shouted with joy. Muskrat sacrificed his life so that life on Earth could begin anew.

Nanaboozhoo took the piece of Earth from Muskrat's paw. Just then, the turtle swam forward and said, "Use my back to bear the weight of this piece of Earth. With the help of Kitchi-Manitou, we can make a new Earth." Nanaboozhoo put the piece of Earth on the turtle's back. Suddenly, the wind blew from each of the Four Directions. The tiny piece of Earth on the turtle's back began to grow until it formed an island in the water. The island grew larger and larger, but still the turtle bore the weight of the Earth on his back. Nanaboozhoo and the animals all sang and danced in a widening circle on the growing island. After a while, the Four Winds ceased to blow and the waters became still. A huge island sat in the middle of the water, and today that island is known as North America.

Figure 1-8 *Creation of Turtle Island*, by Nokomis, an Ojibwe artist and storyteller, 2003–2004.



HP Imagine that you are a member of an Anishinaabe community back in time before the arrival of Europeans and that an Elder is telling you this story. How would the story help you understand yourself and your people?

E

What's in a Name?

First Nations identities often depend on oral traditions, such as creation stories. In the excerpt that follows, Darlene Johnston, a member of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation and an Aboriginal law professor, explains why written historical accounts of First Nations identities are often contradictory and confusing.

Imagine a group of people living in the vicinity of rapids who call themselves the Passinaouek. They are known by their Aboriginal neighbours as the Rapids People. But their Aboriginal neighbours speak a different language and their term for Rapids People is Skiaeronon. So now we have two different names for the same people. Then the French come into the region and begin keeping written records and making maps. Before they meet the Passinaouek, they hear about them from the people who call them Skiaeronon. So the first French records refer to the Passinaouek as Skiaeronon. In time, the French meet the Passinaouek in person and, if they can understand their language, they may record their name correctly. But before long, the French will start referring to the Passinaouek by using their own word for people of the Rapids, Sauteurs. Now there are three different names for the same people. Eventually, the British enter the region and, for reasons unknown, start calling these people Jibbeways or Ojibways or Chippewas. The people at the rapids know that they have been there since before any of their neighbours arrived. But there are few, if any, historical records that confirm their presence in terms of their own self-understanding as Passinaouek. The introduction and recording of

different names bestowed by outsiders creates the potential for confusing a change of names with a change of peoples . . .

In my work, I have encountered evidence of identity which does not depend upon the language of the record-maker. I refer to this identity as totemic identity. It consists of the identifying symbols that Aboriginal people made on physical objects such as trees, canoes, houses and clothing. When the Europeans arrived with ink and parchment, these marks were used by Aboriginal leaders whenever their "signature" was required. In my personal experience, totemic identity has remained largely unchanged in the four centuries since contact. Let's return to the Passinaouek. In their language, the term refers to the "Echo maker" which is their metaphorical name for the Crane. A Crane chief would make his mark by drawing the image of a Crane. It wouldn't matter whether the record-maker referred to him as a Sauteur or a Chippewa, his mark would remain unchanged. Aboriginal use of symbols rather than letters has allowed evidence of totemic identity to persist despite changes in the naming practices and languages of newcomers to the Great Lakes region.

E

1. What does this reading tell you about the problems with written historical records?
2. Do you think a First Nation's totemic identity, recorded in the past on a tree or other object in the environment, should have legal standing as proof of land occupation? What significance might this type of evidence have today?

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE OF ORIGINS

While traditional stories offer one type of evidence for the origin of First Peoples in North America, science offers another kind of evidence. Archaeologists have proposed many theories about how human history began in the Americas. Some theories have been a subject of debate for centuries. And, as archaeologists make new discoveries, old theories may be revised and new theories formed.

THE LAND BRIDGE THEORY

One of the oldest scientific theories about the origins of First Peoples in the Americas is known as the Bering Strait land bridge theory. The Bering Strait is a waterway that separates North America from Russia. It covers a submerged landmass that was above water during the last Ice Age, when most of what is now Canada was covered by a thick ice sheet. Some scientists propose that people used this land bridge to migrate from Asia to North America. Then, over thousands of years, the people migrated throughout the Americas. Archaeological evidence suggests that most of this migration occurred between 25 000 and 12 000 years ago.

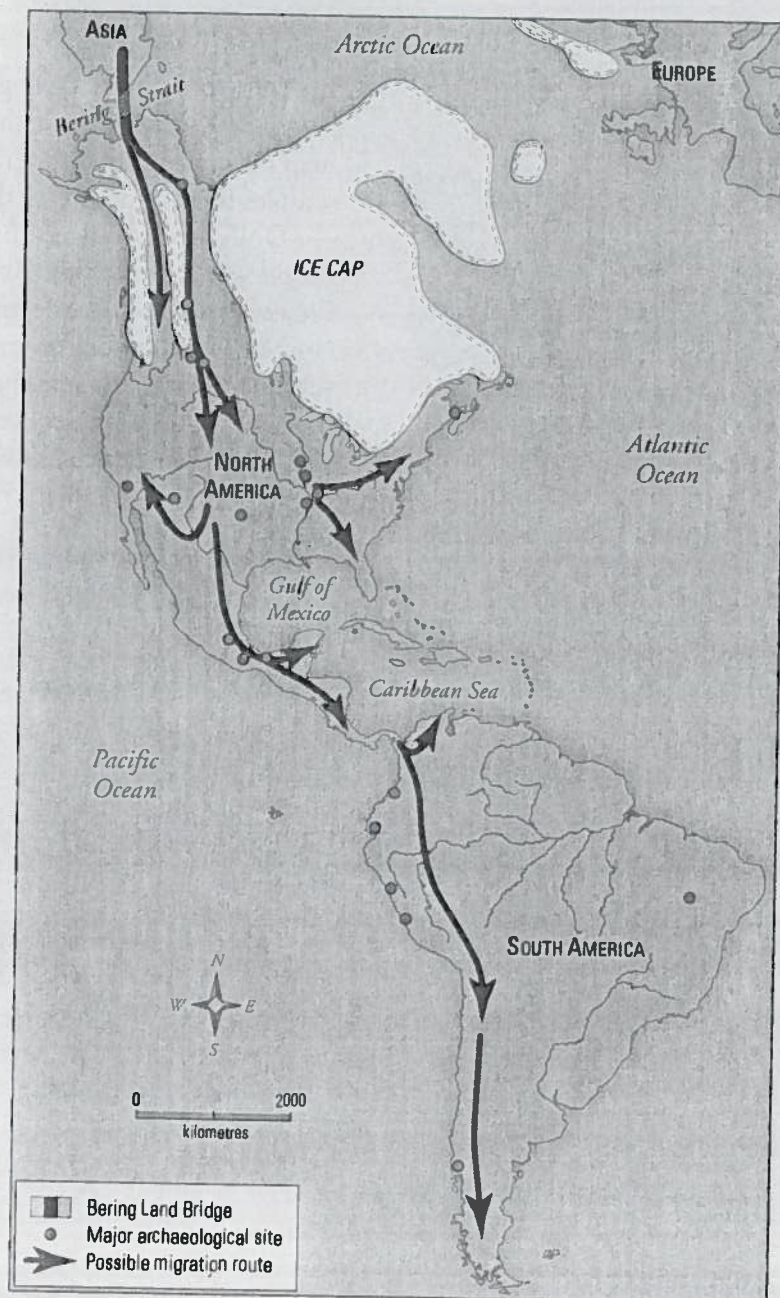
CHALLENGES TO THE LAND BRIDGE THEORY

The Bering Strait land bridge theory has been widely challenged in recent years. Radiocarbon dating of objects from archaeological sites does not conclusively support or refute the theory. In particular, findings at an archaeological site at Monte Verde, Chile, pre-date archaeological evidence of human settlement in North America by at least 1000 years. Some scientists argue that the Monte Verde findings mean people must have arrived in the region not by migration from the North, but by some other means.

E What are some of the benefits in using archaeological evidence to explain First Peoples' origins? What are some of the drawbacks?

Figure 1-9 Land Bridge Theory: Possible Migration Route

Some archaeologists suggest that people moved across the Beringia land bridge and then south through glacier-free corridors. They estimate that this migration, which took thousands of years, continued until there were people living all the way to southernmost tip of the South American continent.



OTHER THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF FIRST PEOPLES

Other theories suggest that people could have come to the Americas by crossing the Bering Strait by boat or while it was covered with ice. Some scientists propose that people from Asia, Europe, Australia, or Siberia might have crossed the ocean to the Americas. They might have landed at various points along the coastlines. Some archaeologists believe early ocean travellers may have moved from island to island across the Pacific to settle in South America long before First Peoples from the Bering migration made their way south to the continent. Other scientists say the technology for ocean travel at that time would have made such journeys impossible. Another theory, the Solutrean Theory, proposes that people may have first migrated to the Americas from western Europe during the Ice Age. According to this theory, people may have migrated west and south along the southern edge of the Atlantic ice cap, fishing and hunting sea mammals as they moved.

DNA TESTING

In 2005, the National Geographic Society of the United States launched the Genographic Project, which is a genetic anthropology study. Its goal is to map historical human migration patterns by collecting and analyzing DNA samples from hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

DNA studies suggest that all human beings descend from a group of people whose home was Africa about 60 000 years ago. The Genographic Project hopes to trace the migration paths of human beings around the world.

The Genographic Project is controversial among Aboriginal peoples. In some communities, Elders have asked community members not to participate. Some communities object because the project's goals appear to threaten the validity of their creation stories. Some First Nations have asked that their land claims with the Canadian government be settled before their people participate.



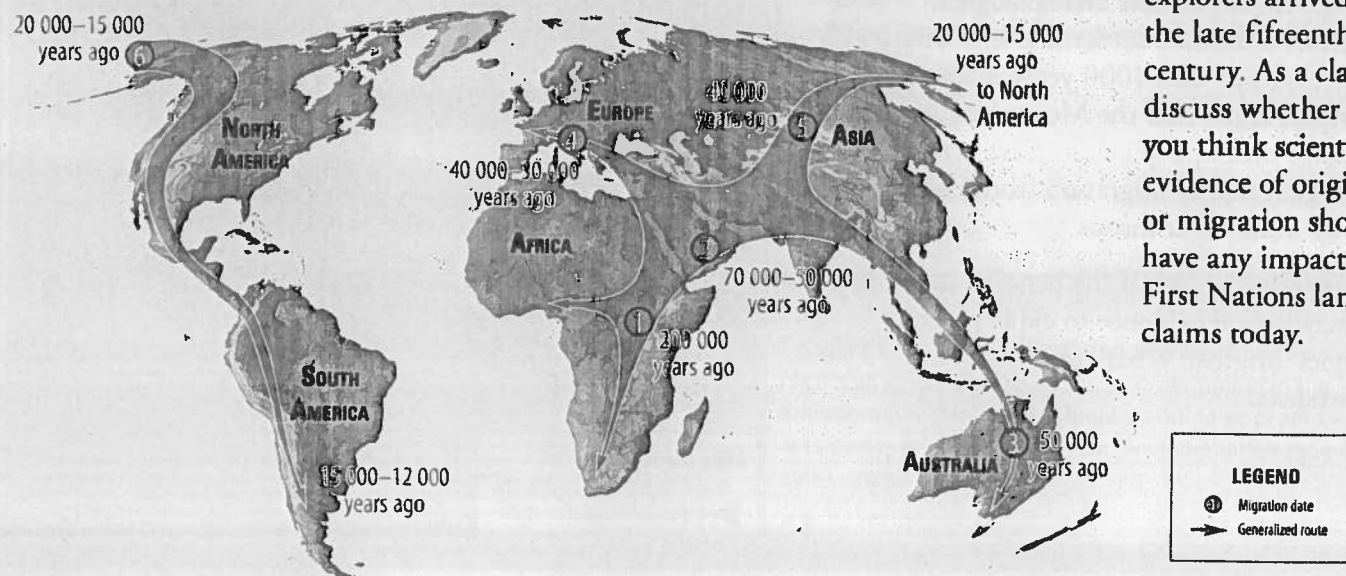
To learn more about why the Genographic Project is controversial in some Aboriginal communities, go to the *Shaping Canada* web site and follow the links.

30 Whatever the exact origins of First Peoples, it is unarguable that

they occupied the Americas for thousands of years before European explorers arrived in the late fifteenth century. As a class, discuss whether you think scientific evidence of origin or migration should have any impact on First Nations land claims today.

Figure 1-10 The Genographic Project : Possible Human Migration Routes

This map shows the general migration routes some scientists believe humans took from Africa. The Genographic Project plans to use DNA evidence to map these routes in more detail.



ED

Protecting Aboriginal Burial Sites

Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Saulteaux) peoples in southwestern Ontario traditionally believe that when a person dies, the body decays and eventually disappears, the soul leaves to a land of souls, and a shadow spirit remains behind with the grave. Today, many Anishinaabe people still feel a strong connection to the graves of their ancestors. To disturb these graves is to unsettle the community's sense of connection and harmony. Many other First Nations (and other cultural groups around the world) have similar beliefs.

However, in the name of science, many First Peoples' remains have been excavated and deposited in various museum collections around the world. For example, the Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois, has many Haida people's skulls that were collected during an expedition to Haida Gwaii in the early twentieth century. A representative of the museum, archaeologist Jonathan Haas, says the collection is an example of "science run amok." He has stated that the remains should have never been disturbed, but he explains that museums at the time had the goal of collecting a sample of everything in natural history. He states, "We thought we could go out and collect the diversity of the world: You collect one emu and you collect one Haida." Today many scientists still argue that ancient human remains contain valuable clues about human evolution and ancestry and that they should be studied.

Laws to protect burial grounds vary from province to province. In British Columbia, it is illegal "to damage, desecrate, or alter a burial place that has historical or archaeological value." However, to get around this law, all that is required is a permit. In 1995, the Nanoose First Nation tried to stop a company from excavating 100 bodies from an ancient burial ground. However, because some of the remains were over 400 years old, the courts ruled that Aboriginal rights to "ancient" burial grounds had not yet been established by law. The provincial government later purchased the land from the developer and made it a park.

The Haida people have been leaders in the efforts to **repatriate**, or bring home, their cultural objects and ancestors' remains from the world's museums. The Old Massett Village Council has stated that "We came from the bones of our ancestors. It is therefore our responsibility to care for them." A Haida spokesperson further explains the importance of her community's efforts to repatriate these remains:

Haidas have strong spiritual beliefs that make the repatriation project important. We believe that everyone has a spirit. The spirits of our ancestors have gone with the skeletal remains that are locked in museums. We believe there are 300 Haida spirits in museums that want to come home to Haida Gwaii. We all felt these spirits.

— Lucille Bell, Tsij Gitanee clan, 1998

Figure 1-11 Some First Nations repatriate cultural objects as well as ancestral remains. Here members of the Haisla First Nation from Kitimaat Village in British Columbia are shown moving a crated totem pole into a Vancouver museum in 2006. The totem pole had been repatriated after seventy-seven years in a museum in Stockholm, Sweden.



ED

1. Research the background and legal issues involved in a case of a First Nations burial site being excavated or otherwise disturbed. Write a position paper on the

issue, in which you clearly state the perspective of both sides of the debate. Include your own position on the issue, with evidence to support it.

EVIDENCE OF MANITOBA'S PAST

Figure 1-12 Many petroforms, which are arrangements of boulders by First Peoples, can be found in Manitoba's Whiteshell Provincial Park. Although the purpose of petroforms is not known, most are in the shape of animals, such as the turtle shown here.

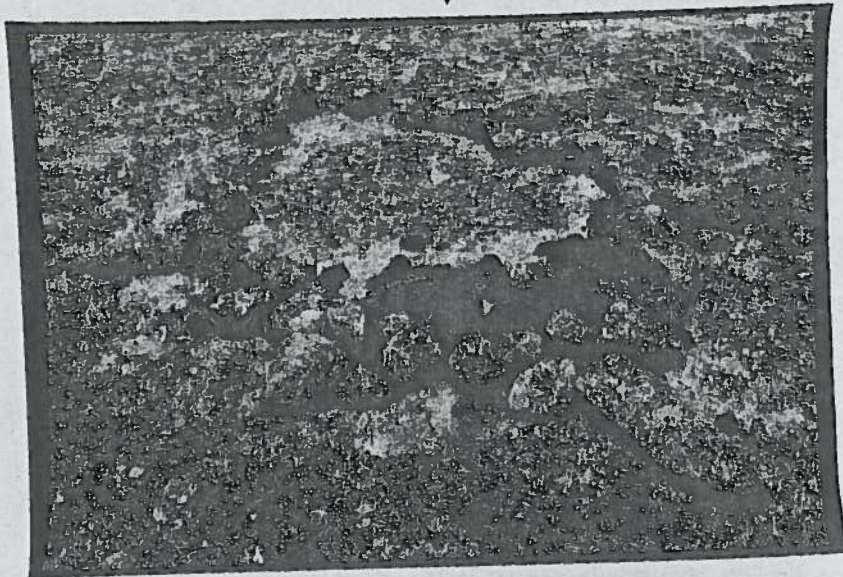
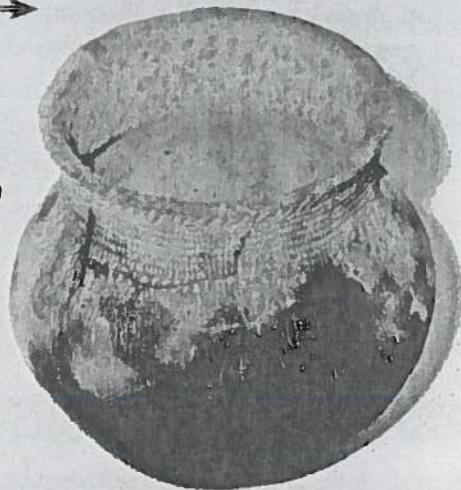


Figure 1-13 This replica of a Blackduck cooking pot was created using archaeological evidence found at the Stott site in Manitoba.



Many archaeological sites in Manitoba contain evidence of the province's earliest inhabitants. These sites have many clues about how First Peoples lived. For example, Lockport, Manitoba, has evidence of agricultural settlements along the banks of the Red River. Archaeologists have found large storage pits, tools made of bison bones, ceramic pots, and bits of burnt corn. Some artifacts are 3000 years old. The alluvial soils on the flood plain along the river is one of the few spots in the region that would easily support agriculture at that time. Other sites would have required the people to break thick prairie sod, which would have been extremely difficult without metal tools. Their choice of agricultural site shows that these early farmers understood the possibilities of their environment well. The evidence also shows that First Peoples at the site interacted with communities farther south, which commonly grew corn as a crop.

Other archaeological evidence has been found on the Stott family farm, located along the Assiniboine River about 8 kilometres west of Brandon. Here a farmer discovered many deep pits of bone. After studying the site, archaeologists found evidence that the region had been used for many centuries by various First Nations communities for bison hunting.

Duck Bay, on the western shore of Lake Winnipegosis, has more significant archaeological evidence. This site has evidence of a community dating back about 800 years. The people, probably ancestors of Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Saulteaux) peoples, are best known for their distinctive pottery. Known as the Blackduck potters, this community produced clay containers decorated with shallow stamps and impressions of cord-wrapped objects. Their pottery techniques were advanced, allowing them to produce large, thin-walled vessels.

RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

1. Summarize the different types of evidence about the origins of First Peoples in Canada. Make notes about the benefits and drawbacks of each type of evidence.

2. People working in archaeology and other scientific fields sometimes have goals that conflict with First Peoples' cultural needs. How should these differences be handled when dealing with First Peoples' cultural history?

TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEWS OF FIRST PEOPLES IN NORTH AMERICA

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

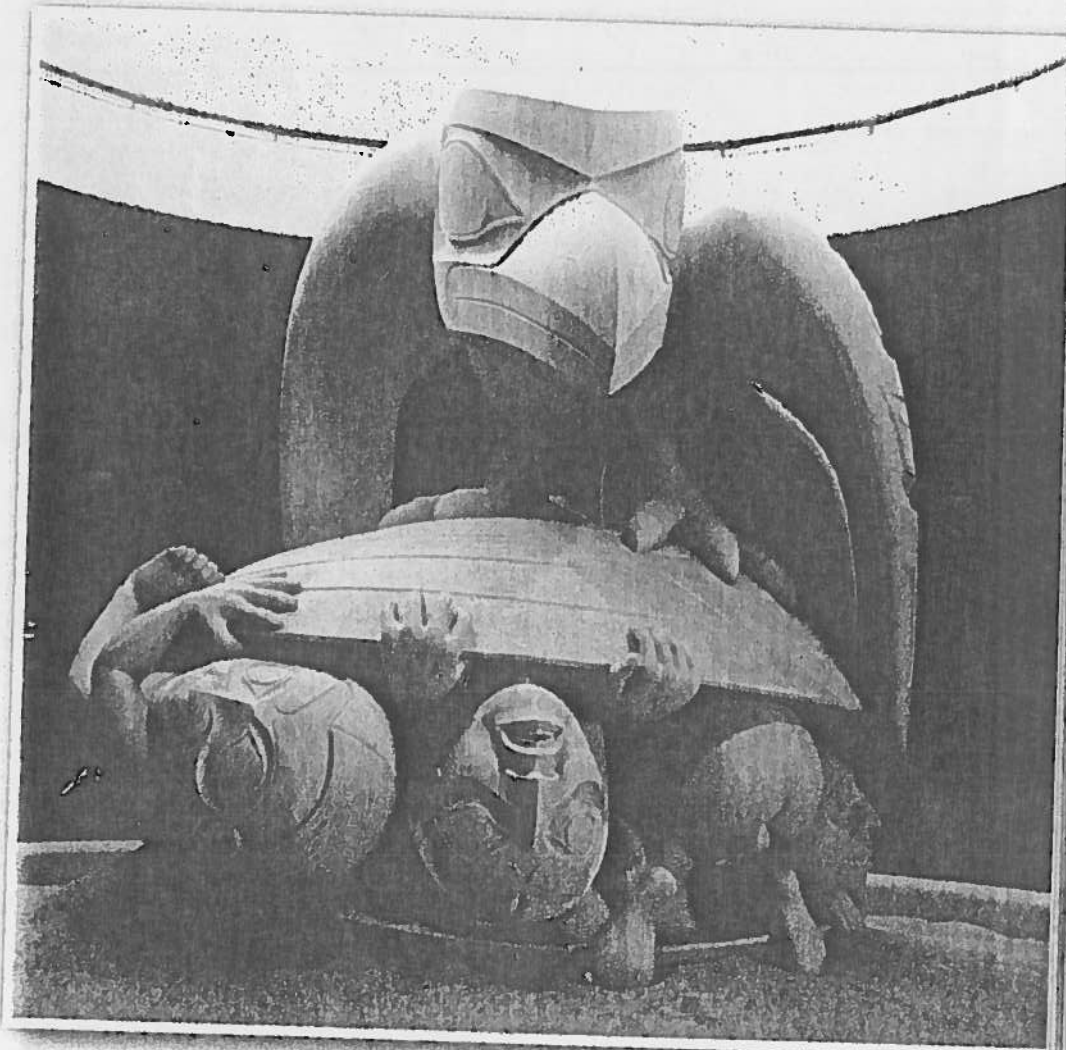
A **worldview** is a person's set of beliefs or assumptions about the world and how it works. A worldview may be understood through the analogy of wearing eyeglasses. We each look at the world through our own set of "lenses" that affects how we perceive the world, other people, and our experiences. We hold our worldviews both consciously and subconsciously. We may not always be aware of our worldviews, but they always guide our thinking and actions.

Many influences "shade" or affect an individual's worldview. These influences include life experiences, new information and ideas, traditions and culture, language, and religion or spirituality. Every individual has a unique worldview, but people from the same culture and time period tend to have similar worldviews.

Taking a historical perspective—something you will be asked to do many times in this book—means trying to understand events from the worldview of someone in the past. Understanding Canada's history requires some understanding of this country's First Peoples and their traditional worldviews. If you have an Aboriginal heritage, you may already have this understanding. Aspects of traditional worldviews are still very much a part of many Aboriginal communities today. If you do not have this heritage, however, you may need help understanding worldviews that may be significantly different from your own.

HP How do you think stories about origin—whether from an oral tradition or a scientific tradition—affect a person's worldview? How do you think a person's worldview would affect his or her response to an unfamiliar explanation about origin?

Figure 1-14 *Raven and the First Men*, by Bill Reid, 1980. This sculpture shows part of a Haida creation story. Bill Reid spent much of his life exploring his Haida heritage through his artwork.



SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, from a First People's perspective, is a person's understanding of his or her relationship to the universe. The traditional worldviews of First Nations and Inuit peoples were built upon their spirituality, which played a role in virtually every aspect of life. Each community has its own unique spiritual traditions and ceremonies. However, most spiritual traditions share a few common characteristics.

One key feature is a sense of interconnection between all parts of the universe. Traditionally, most First Nations and Inuit peoples believed that everything has spirit, including plants, animals, and even rocks, rivers, and the sky. This type of belief can be found in cultures around the world.

Another key feature is the value placed on balance and harmony. All First Peoples have cultural traditions that help humans live in harmony with one another and the rest of the world. For example, traditionally First Peoples had many traditions to ensure harmony with parts of the environment that were critical to a community's survival. Hunting communities believed animals participated in the hunt by willingly sacrificing themselves to allow the people to survive. Different communities had different ways of recognizing the animal's sacrifice. Most communities took care to use as much of the animal as possible. This practice ensured that the animal spirits would not be offended by waste. The practice also ensured that a community's hunting practices were in balance with the needs of the rest of the environment.

Other hunting traditions ensured that respect was shown to the animals the people hunted. For example, some Ininew (Cree) communities made it a practice to never point at their prey or step in its tracks. Animal carcasses were treated with respect. Animal bones or parts that could not be used were disposed of carefully. The Sayisi Dene buried their prey's bones to allow the animal's spirit to collect them on the way to the afterlife.

In many communities' spiritual traditions, people were counselled to balance themselves as well. People were taught to find harmony between their spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical aspects. This spiritual goal is one shared by many cultures around the world, even today.



Let's Discuss

Today's environmental problems are causing many people to rethink the way they see the place of humans in the world. How could First Peoples' spiritual traditions lead this new way of thinking?

Figure 1-15 Majorville Medicine Wheel, Alberta. Archaeologists have found evidence that some Medicine Wheels have been used for thousands of years. Most archaeologists believe the structures had ceremonial or spiritual purposes.



The Meaning of the Medicine Wheel

A Medicine Wheel means different things to different First Nations. Sometimes the term refers to enormous spoked circles of stone that were created by ancient peoples. Today the term often refers to diagrams that are used as teaching tools. These more contemporary Medicine Wheels are a circle divided into equal parts. Most have four parts that can mean various ideas: the seasons, the stages of life, the cardinal directions, and so on. Read each of the statements below about the four directions on a Medicine Wheel. How are the statements alike and different?

The Medicine Wheel is, in essence, a circle divided into four parts, representing the four directions, which relate to and counterbalance one another to form a whole; this symbol is used to represent Aboriginal philosophy on the meaning of life. Medicine Wheels are not necessarily a tradition belonging to all North American Aboriginal peoples; however, many Aboriginal groups have some variation of the Wheel. Nevertheless, the traditional knowledge and views of the various First Peoples of North America typically share a circular model of thinking. As a whole, the Medicine Wheel represents the relationships between various elements of the world, both seen and unseen, and emphasizes how all parts of the world and all levels of being are interrelated and connected through a life force originating in the creation of the universe. All parts of the wheel are important, and depend on each other in the cycle of life; what affects one affects all. For this reason, the Medicine Wheel teaches that harmony, balance, and respect for all parts are needed to sustain life.

— Lillian Pitawanakwat,
Ojibway Elder, Birch Island First Nation, Ontario

The number four has great significance for the Mohawk peoples. Like many other Aboriginal peoples, the Mohawk respect the four directions as messengers from the Creator, sent at the beginning of time. The Mohawk refer to the four directions as the Four Sky People, the Four Sky Dwellers, or the Four Brothers: East, South, West, and North. Some believe that the North and East are twins and the South and West are twins. Together the four directions have the job of helping Mother Earth. South and West provide the climate for the growth of food for nourishment and survival, whereas North and East provide the relief and rest through cold and snow to allow Mother Earth to rejuvenate.

— Tom Porter, Mohawk Elder, Akwesasne First Nation,
Québec and Ontario

The Four Directions represent the *interconnectedness* 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.

— Mary Lee, Cree Elder, Pelican Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan

EXPLORATIONS

1. **HP** Western views of time are linear. Traditional First Nations and Inuit views of time are circular. How would traditional ways of life and worldviews of First Peoples encourage a circular view of time and history?

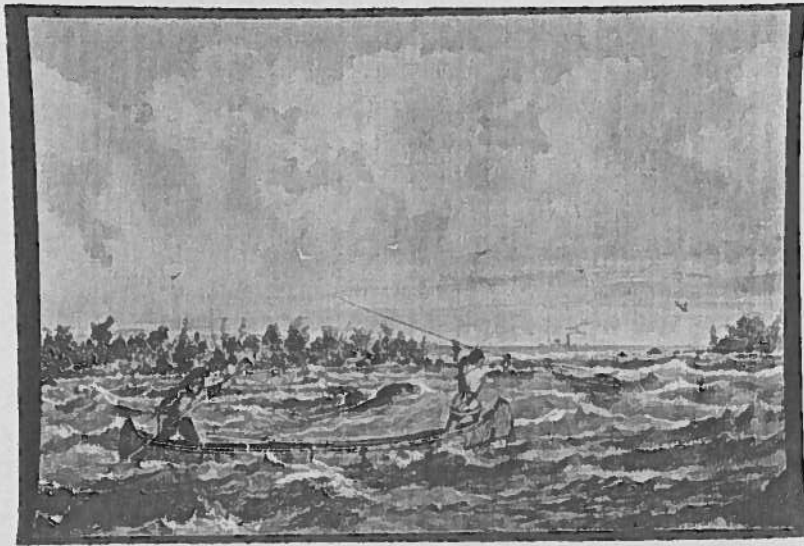
2. **HS** The Medicine Wheel is not the only form of circle in traditional First Nations and Inuit cultures. Research the meaning and symbolism of the circle in one of its other forms. Examples include tipis, drums, or talking circles.

CARETAKERS OF THE LAND

The traditional worldview of First Peoples did not include a sense of ownership of the land. Instead, communities saw themselves as caretakers of the land in a give-and-take relationship.

Communities had traditional territories defined by natural or geographic features, such as rivers or forests. Communities might negotiate with other communities to use or pass through traditional territories. Negotiations helped ensure a sustainable use of resources and show of respect for the communities involved. Locations with especially good resources were often used by many communities. Sometimes communities cooperated with one another to make use of these resources, such as the great bison herds.

Figure 1-16 *Fishing at Sault Ste. Marie*, by William Armstrong, 1869. Traditional First Peoples' methods of harvesting the land's resources balanced the needs of the community with the resources of the land.



First Peoples viewed the well-being of the land as being inseparable from the well-being of their communities. The resources of the land were not to be exploited or abused: they were gifts from the Creator. Decisions about how to use the land considered the needs of the land, the people, and the people's descendants. The Great Law of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) required chiefs to guide their decisions by considering the welfare of people seven generations into the future.

Through their oral tradition, communities had detailed knowledge of the resources of their traditional territories and how and when to use them. Communities with a mobile lifestyle did not wander randomly. They moved

seasonally through their people's traditional territory according to the knowledge and traditions of their ancestors. These movements helped them take advantage of each resource, whether berries, rice, fish, animals, maple syrup, or medicinal plants.

CCC What differences and similarities do you see between First Peoples' traditional relationship with the land and your relationship with the land today?

LANGUAGE

Most philosophers believe that complex thought cannot exist without language. Language, therefore, plays a critical role in a people's worldview. Communities have words to describe what they see and experience. Their words reflect their world. Most First Peoples' languages are verb based. Verb-based languages reflect a perspective in which the world is described, and experienced, as full of motion, energy, and change. In contrast, a noun-based language, such as English or French, reflects a world seen through discrete objects and divisions, such as living/nonliving and black/white. Verb-based languages blur such boundaries and focus upon connections and relationships rather than differences.

VALUES

Worldviews are also built upon a culture's values. Traditionally, First Peoples saw co-operation, autonomy, sharing, and diversity as important values. In most communities, the people believed that all members of the community contributed to its well-being, so food and other goods should be shared among all. Those who shared the most were usually the most admired. Members of the community generally wanted the respect of others more than they wanted material goods.

Cultural values of sharing were also practical. Many communities moved regularly, so having many possessions to move was a problem. And because of the large size of animals such as the bison (commonly called the buffalo) or moose, it made sense to share the work and resources of the hunt.

On the West Coast, where resources were relatively plentiful, many First Nations had a formal ceremony for sharing: the potlatch. The word *potlatch* comes from the Nuu-chah-nulth word *pachite*, which means "to give." Held on a variety of occasions, the potlatch was a way of helping community members. The host family for the potlatch showed its wealth and social status by distributing gifts to its guests. Gifts included food, canoes, blankets, copper, and many other items.

ORAL TRADITIONS

All of the values and ideas that feed into a community's worldview can be seen in its oral tradition. Stories about a community's origins are only part of its oral heritage. Stories are also shared to entertain, educate, preserve cultural ideas and traditions, and teach moral values. Some stories were also a form of record keeping and might detail alliances or treaties.

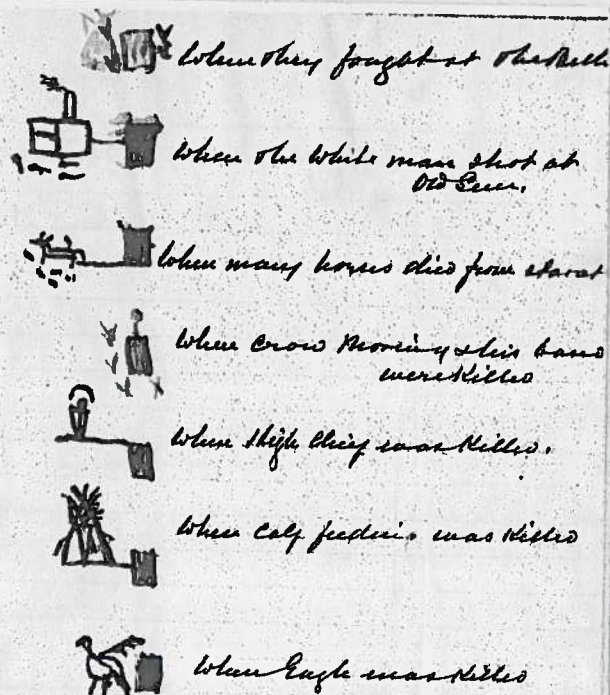
To tell especially significant cultural stories, such as those related to spiritual ceremonies or creation, storytellers paid great attention to detail and accuracy. Such stories were viewed as belonging to the community. Often only certain people had rights to tell them. Other stories could vary from storyteller to storyteller and could have many variations.

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) used wampum belts as a way to help record important treaties and agreements. Wampum belts are made of small shells strung together in a specific pattern to serve as a "memory keeper." The belts included symbols that could be read by Elders like a history book.

WEB CONNECTIONS

To learn more about traditional First Nations values, go to the *Shaping Canada* web site and follow the links.

Figure 1-17 Some communities had a tradition of keeping a winter count. A person keeping a winter count would record the most significant event of each year using a picture or symbol. This photograph shows part of a winter count covering the years 1864–1917 by Bull Plume of the Piikani (Peigan) First Nation. The English translations next to Plume's pictographs were written by W. R. Haynes, an Anglican missionary.



RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

1. Create a web or other graphic organizer to show some of the main ideas that contribute to traditional First Peoples' worldviews. Create an organizer to represent the main components of your own worldview.

2. In the next chapter, you will learn about how First Peoples and European explorers interacted in the early days of North American exploration. What do you think were some of the differences between the worldviews of First Peoples and early European explorers? Why are these differences historically significant?

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Social organization is the way a group of people relate to one another. A community's social organization may be based on written laws. However, most communities also have many unwritten ideas about how people should act. No society can hold itself together if people do not share an understanding about how things should operate and how people should behave.

KINSHIP COMMUNITIES

Traditionally, First Peoples lived in social groups based on a variety of kinship relationships. Kinship is a genealogical connection between people. The exact composition and size of First Nations and Inuit peoples' kinship groups varied widely depending on the culture, community, region, and sometimes time of year.

Figure 1-18 *Family*, by Norval Morrisseau, 1990. What does this painting say about family? How does it reflect ideas about worldview?



EXTENDED FAMILIES

For many First Peoples' communities, the basic social group was the extended family. For example, the Ininew (Cree) people of the Plains and Eastern Woodlands lived in extended family groups that might include a couple's children, uncles and aunts, cousins, parents or grandparents, and brothers and sisters.

CLANS

Some First Nations and Inuit people considered a clan to be their primary social group. Clans are based on a common ancestry, which could be human or animal. For example, traditional Wendat (Huron) society had eight clans: Bear, Beaver, Deer, Hawk, Porcupine, Snake, Turtle, and Wolf. Each clan had a creation story that traced its ancestry back to certain animals. Clans often decorated their homes and artwork with images of their animal ancestry. In contrast, nations from the

Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Confederacy—an alliance of related First Nations from what is now southern Alberta—had clans that functioned much like Ininew extended families. These clans were organized around a chief, his brothers, and parents. Niitsitapi clans were often more based on territory than strict kinship. People were free to join new communities, so most clans included many people who were not blood relatives.

Some clans were patrilineal, in which people inherited their father's clan membership. In this case, daughters joined their husband's clan when they married. Other clans were matrilineal, in which people took their mother's clan membership. In this case, sons joined their wives' clans when they married. For example, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) clans were based on maternal lineage. Six to ten clan families related through their maternal lineage lived together in a longhouse.

COMMUNITY SIZE

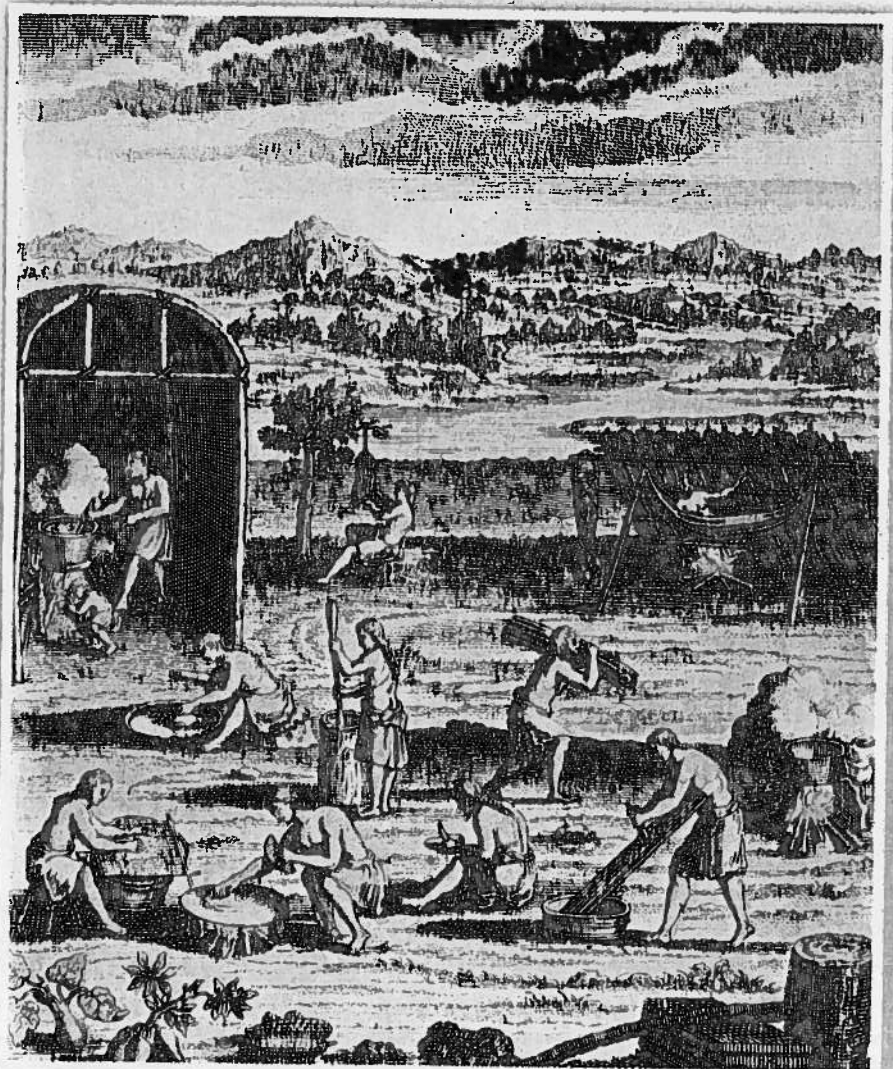
The size of a community usually depended on the availability of resources. Social groups had to be large enough that the people could take care of their basic needs, such as food, shelter, and safety. But communities could not grow so large that they overhunted, overfished, or otherwise depleted their territory. The exceptions to this were among some communities around the Great Lakes and in the Pacific Northwest. Some of these large settlements would move every decade or so to allow depleted areas to rejuvenate. Their environments had enough resources that the community could deplete one small area and move to another without causing overall imbalances.

In some regions, the food supply varied or was spread over a wide territory. In these places, communities tended to be small and mobile. However, even these small groups would gather regularly with other communities. These gatherings generally brought together people who shared common ancestors, language, or culture. The gatherings allowed people to participate in celebrations and spiritual ceremonies, to socialize and find partners for marriage, and to take advantage of certain resources. The Sayisi Dene, for example, lived most of the year in small groups of up to four related families as they hunted the caribou that was the staple of their diet. Each spring, these groups would gather in what is now north-central Manitoba, near Little Duck Lake, for fishing and various ceremonies.

The Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) nations had similar social gatherings. Most people lived in small clan groups in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains during winter. Each summer, various clans gathered on the prairies to hunt bison. Summer gatherings could include hundreds of people.

C&C Summarize the different approaches described on this page to deal with the management of community resources. How does your own culture deal with this issue?

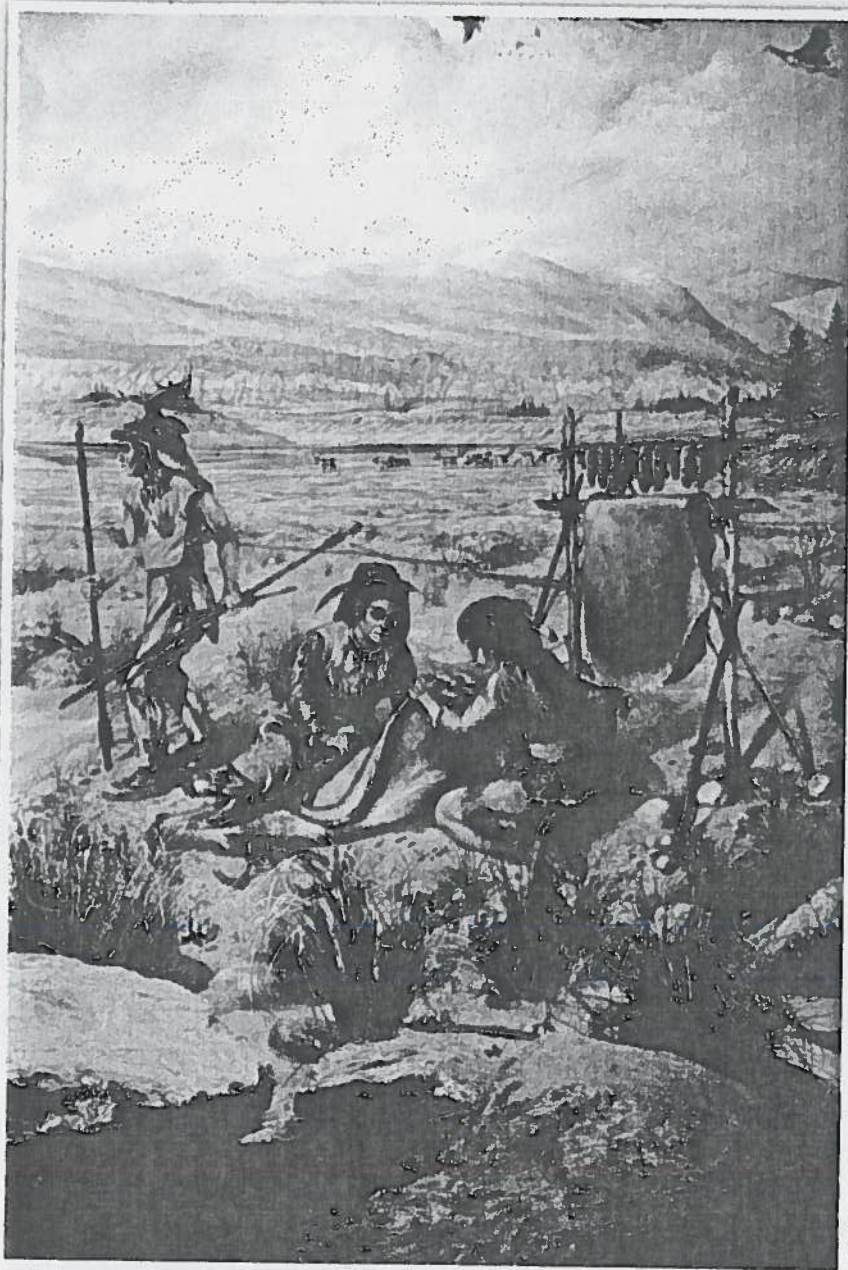
Figure 1-19 Some Haudenosaunee villages were home to up to 1500 people. How do you think larger communities divided labour compared to smaller communities? What kind of work is shown in this 1664 French engraving of Haudenosaunee village life?



ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Most societies divide the jobs needed for a community's survival and well being among people in the community. Most First Peoples' communities traditionally depended on a network of mutual support. This mutual support resulted from traditions that gave people responsibilities for their relatives, which could include people related by blood as well as other members of the community. An aunt, for example, might have specific responsibilities for many young women in the community—her nieces. In turn, nieces might have responsibilities for aging women—their aunts. In general, individuals had responsibilities to contribute to their community's

Figure 1-20 What kind of division of labour can be seen in this photograph from a museum diorama of a caribou-hunting community?



support and communities had responsibilities to support individuals, including those affected by illness, old age, or injury. People depended on one another, just as they depended on the environment.

DIFFERENT, BUT EQUAL: GENDER EQUALITY

Young men often worked as hunters and defenders of the community. Women usually organized the camp or village, prepared game, and planted and harvested crops. Most communities showed some flexibility in gender roles. Traditions were not meant to exclude an individual's special skills. If a woman proved to be a good hunter, she hunted. If a man was better suited to harvesting plants, that is what he did. People were taught to accept and welcome each person's contributions, whatever they were.

In Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) societies, men hunted, defended the community, and handled relationships with other villages and nations. Women selected chiefs, managed the longhouses, and oversaw the production and distribution of food. As in other First Peoples' communities, the work of men and women was equally valued. Their communities depended upon the contributions of both genders.

THE WISDOM OF ELDERS

In the past, as today, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities turned to Elders for advice and leadership. Elders are individuals recognized by their communities as having knowledge and wisdom. Elders can be men or women, young or old. Although they do not have to be a specific age, they have to have experiences or special gifts that have given them wisdom.

Elders often teach by example: by the way they live their lives. This way of living is often characterized by kindness, humility, and patience. By reflecting the values of their community in how they live, they naturally attract the respect of others. In this way, Elders are natural leaders. People in the community turn to them for advice and information about how to live in harmony with each other and the land.

Figure 1-21 Elders are traditionally the historians of a community. Elders know and share the community's traditional stories. Elders also pass on practical knowledge, such as good locations and methods for fishing and hunting, or traditional methods of clothing construction. Here Elder Siipa Isullatak teaches children how to sew at an elementary school in Iqaluit, Nunavut.



PROFILE

Elder Gladys Taylor Cook



Gladys Taylor Cook, or Topahdewin, spent much of her life working with Aboriginal youth at the Agassiz Youth Centre in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, and with Aboriginal female offenders at the Portage Correctional Centre. Ms. Taylor Cook used both her Dakota heritage and life experiences to help hundreds of people over the years.

At the age of four, Ms. Taylor Cook was removed from her home and sent to a residential school. There she lived all but six weeks a year away from her family. As an adult, she learned to use this difficult and lonely experience to help other people overcome challenges in their lives. By relating her own life experiences, she became an inspiration to others.

Ms. Taylor Cook spent much of her life teaching workshops about Aboriginal cultural and spiritual teachings. She was recognized by the Governor General of Canada for her contributions to community service and has received numerous other awards, such as the Order of Manitoba and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award. She is most remembered for her work with youth and women in their communities.

Figure 1-22 Gladys Taylor Cook (1929–2009).

EXPLORATIONS

1. As seen in Gladys Taylor Cook's profile, how has the role of Elder changed and stayed the same since traditional times?
2. Research some of the protocols used by different communities in asking Elders for advice. How do these protocols reflect the community's cultural traditions?

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

Education is the way young people learn what is expected of them and is a way to provide them with the worldview that will allow them to fit into their society. In First Peoples' communities, young people were viewed as gifts of the Creator. They were traditionally mentored and taught by the whole community, not just their parents or specialized teachers.

Children were taught their community's history, spiritual ideals, and practical skills that would help them and their community to thrive. They learned by doing, often assisting community members in various tasks. Even very young children might be given a token bundle of firewood to carry. As children got older, their responsibilities increased.

Another type of learning in some cultures was through dreaming or visioning. Certain dreams were believed to be messages. The dreamer might consult an Elder or medicine person regarding the dream's significance. In some cultures, adolescent children underwent a vision quest, during which they were isolated from the community for several days to fast and pray until they were given a vision (a teaching) from a spirit guide.

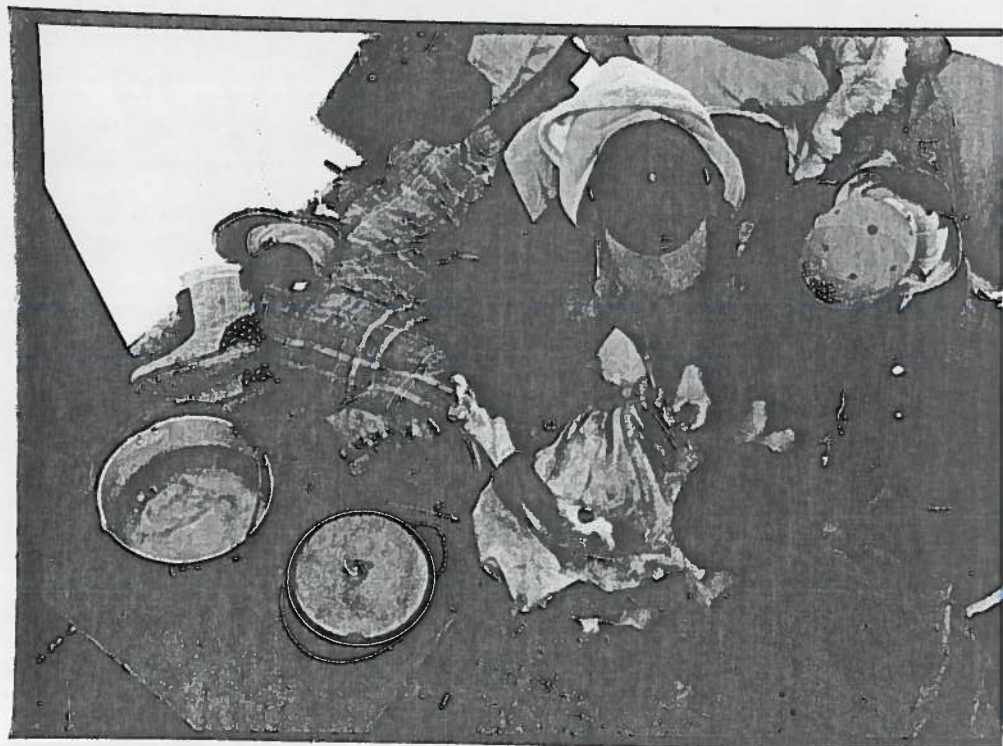
A person's education was **holistic**: it placed equal importance on mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. Much education was accomplished through storytelling. Children had to think critically to understand the meanings of the songs and stories shared with them. Lessons were rarely stated—people were expected to think about stories and infer their significance. Individuals were free to make their own choices; people were rarely told what to do. Even children were allowed to make their own decisions and to learn from their mistakes. Stories were intended to guide people to make well-informed decisions.

VOICES

In our system of education, knowledge is earned. One learns to listen, like a human being who has the gift to hear what is said. We don't put knowledge in a person's head or hand. We give directions, not answers. We don't trap people into thinking answers are given from the outside. Answers come from the inside.

— Wes Fineday,
Weekaskoosseyin First Nation,
Saskatchewan

Figure 1-23 In traditional education, young people learned through praise, reward, and recognition through various ceremonies. Young people also learned by doing practical tasks with other community members. Many communities still pass on knowledge in this way. Here a Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Elder shows teenagers how to cut a caribou leg at a camp near Old Crow in Yukon Territory.



JUSTICE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

All societies have ways of dealing with conflict between community members. In traditional First Nations and Inuit communities, rules were rarely broken because individuals did not see their own needs as separate from those of their community. Most goods were shared freely, so crimes like theft were rare. Those who showed disrespect for people, the natural world, or the spiritual realm were seen as being out of balance. For less serious offences, humour and shaming was sometimes used to influence people's behaviour. No one wanted to look foolish, so most people followed their community's customs.

In the case of a conflict between members of a community, each person would generally be given the chance to present his or her perspective on the issue. Each person was encouraged to see the other's point of view. The goal was for both parties to understand one another's perspective.

If people did break a community's customs, they were reminded of the community's expectations, usually by family members or Elders. The offending individuals were encouraged to make amends with those they had hurt. The goal was not punishment, but rather the restoration of harmony.

In many communities, the most serious crimes were those related to hunting, since an entire community's survival rested on the success of a hunt. Many communities believed that an individual's hunting offences could affect hunting success for the whole community, including their descendants. In Sayisi Dene communities, for example, if an individual repeatedly broke hunting customs, other hunters might refuse to hunt with him. Some offenders might have to live alone, on the fringe of the community.

Inuit communities had similar ways of handling offences. Individuals who committed minor crimes would be counselled by Elders and family members to see the error of their ways. Those who committed rare serious crimes, such as murder, were considered a danger to the community. The offenders would be constantly watched by other community members for signs of another offence.

Many provinces and territories today work with Aboriginal communities to create restorative justice programs. These programs combine traditional First Peoples' approaches to conflict resolution with the provincial and federal legal systems.

HP Taking a historical perspective, discuss with a partner why isolation or community supervision worked to deter crimes in traditional First Nations and Inuit communities. What aspects of traditional justice and conflict resolution methods do you think would work today?

RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

HP 1. Take a historical perspective to consider how the various methods of social organization discussed on pages 36–41 connect to First Peoples' traditional worldviews and spirituality.

HP 2. Take a historical perspective to think about how methods of social organization reflect some of the practical needs of First Peoples' communities and their survival.

VOICES

We are told today that Inuit never had laws or *malligait* [rules that had to be followed]. Why? They say, "Because they are not written on paper." When I think of paper I think you can tear it up and the laws are gone. The *malligait* of the Inuit are not on paper. They are inside people's heads and they will not disappear or be torn to pieces. Even if a person dies, the *malligait* will not disappear.

—Mariano Aupilaarjuk,
Inuk Elder, Rankin Inlet

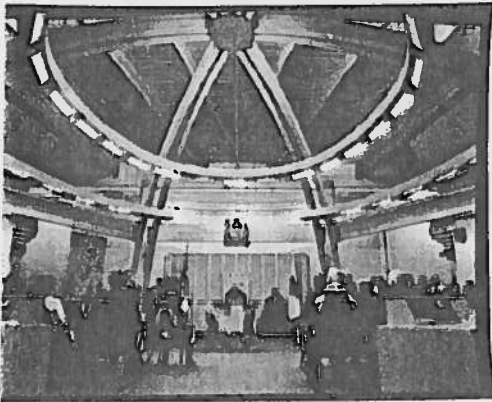
VOICES

The philosophy, the values, the customs in Aboriginal societies are also the law. Law is not something that is separate and unto itself. Law is the culture and culture is the law.

—Leroy Little Bear, Kainai First Nation,
Alberta

GOVERNANCE AND RELATIONS BETWEEN NATIONS

Figure 1-24 The Nunavut Legislative Assembly has a circular chamber in the tradition of many First Peoples' decision-making bodies that once met around a council fire. Compare this seating arrangement to that of Canada's Parliament. How do you think each arrangement affects the discussion and decision-making processes?



CHECKFORWARD

You will learn more about the formation of Nunavut in Chapter 17.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE: DISCUSSION AND CONSENSUS

As with other cultural traditions, it is difficult to generalize about First Peoples' models of governance. Different communities governed themselves in ways that best suited the size and needs of the community. All communities, however, were fully self-governing. Each had institutions to ensure order, whether in small family hunting groups, large agricultural villages, or seasonal gatherings.

In general, most groups made decisions through discussion and **consensus** (group agreement). People had the opportunity to give their viewpoints and were expected to listen to and respect other people's views. Councils or other decision-making groups worked to ensure decisions could be supported by all community members. People worked to make decisions that would address the good of all, including future community members and the natural and spiritual worlds. Once a decision was made, communities generally expected everyone to abide by it.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

In some communities, leaders were often chosen from the same families. However, individuals would keep authority only as long as they had the confidence of their community. If they did not, community members would turn to other people as leaders. In other communities, leaders earned their authority through their actions or ability in particular areas. Leadership could change depending on the circumstances. If you were a good hunter, you led during hunting season. If you had good diplomatic skills, you might lead the community in times of conflict. The rest of the time, people with skills in consensus building might hold more influence.

Among the Inuit, all members of the community were expected to contribute to decisions. Emile Imaruittuq, an Inuk Elder from Iglulik, Nunavut, describes how community members were obligated to be involved in decision making:

If I was going out hunting with two older men and the older one wanted to cross through very rough waters and I didn't think it was safe, even though I was the youngest, I could say that I thought we should wait for better weather. If a person who is older is making a decision and you think it is wrong, you have the obligation to tell them that.

Because so many decisions had life or death consequences, Inuit traditions placed responsibility for decision making on all members of the community.

RELATIONS BETWEEN NATIONS

First Peoples had traditional territories. Some were large and others small, depending on the availability of resources and the people's ability to defend the territory. Although after contact with Europeans the territories began to change, most communities had lived in the same territories for thousands of years. This longstanding tenure on the land meant neighbouring communities often had long traditions of interaction. Most of these relationships were friendly, involving trade, friendship, and political alliances.

TRADE

When different First Peoples' communities interacted, they frequently did so for trade: to acquire goods that they could not produce or acquire themselves. In turn, they would trade goods they had in abundance. Trade was viewed as an activity that should be beneficial to both sides.

Archaeologists have found evidence of trade in various minerals. Silica, a stone that could be flaked into tools, is the most common trade good found at archaeological sites. Obsidian, a volcanic glass that was useful as a sharp cutting tool, was also a valuable trade item. Archaeologists have used X-ray analysis to trace the source of obsidian and silica artifacts to several major sites in North America. By comparing these sites to where such artifacts have been found, they can speculate about trade relationships and routes.

Ⓔ Archaeologists have found little evidence of trade in plant and animal products. Why is this the case? Why do you think archaeologists still assume this type of trade existed?

Trade also included constructed goods and technology, such as canoes and arrowheads. Some First Nations would trade for an item and then later trade the same item with another community. In this way, some goods were traded from community to community, making their way across the continent. Trading events could last weeks and were often combined with social events. Trading sometimes involved cultural and technological exchanges, as well as friendships, marriages, and military alliances.

Some locations appear to have been major trading centres. Many communities travelled to these places to use certain resources and trade with other groups. One of these trading centres was at The Forks, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. There, archaeologists have discovered evidence that shows the area has been an active trading centre for over 6000 years. The rivers provided the transportation routes that brought communities together, resulting in an exchange of goods and ideas.

PEACE AND CONFLICT

Many nations had informal friendships and alliances. For example, the Nehiyewak (Plains Cree) and the Nakota (Assiniboine) had overlapping territories and a friendly relationship that lasted long after European contact. Other nations had more formal alliances, or confederacies. For example, the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Confederacy included three large nations of related clans: the Kainai (Blood), the Piikani (Peigan), and the Siksika (Blackfoot). The confederacy gathered each summer, intermarried frequently, and continue to share bonds of culture and language to the present day.

Alliances were maintained by regular gatherings, gift giving, mutual support, marriages, adoptions, and shared ceremonies. Some communities created formal treaties to share resources and settle conflicts. These treaties were recorded through the oral tradition and regularly renewed in gatherings and councils. Accommodation was the first approach to resolving conflict; war was used only as a last resort.

THE HAUDENOSAUNEE CONFEDERACY

The Great Law of Peace of the People of the Longhouse is one of the earliest-known treaties between First Nations. Oral history compared to eclipse data indicates that the treaty was reached in 1142, when a solar eclipse occurred. The treaty includes 117 articles governing the relationship between five Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) nations. The League of Five Nations included the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk), the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca. Two centuries later, the Tuscarora nation joined the confederacy and it became the League of Six Nations. These large nations lived along a 180 kilometre stretch of the southern shores of the Great Lakes. Each nation had similar, but not identical, languages and cultures.

Before the formation of the confederacy, the Haudenosaunee nations had a long history of warfare with one another. Peace was founded by Skennenrahawi (also known as Dekanawidah), the Peacemaker, who carried his message of peace from the Creator. He counselled the Haudenosaunee nations to stop using war as a method of resolving conflicts. He recommended instead a relationship founded on compromise and consensus. The Great Law of Peace was passed orally from generation to generation for centuries. It was written down for the first time in 1880.

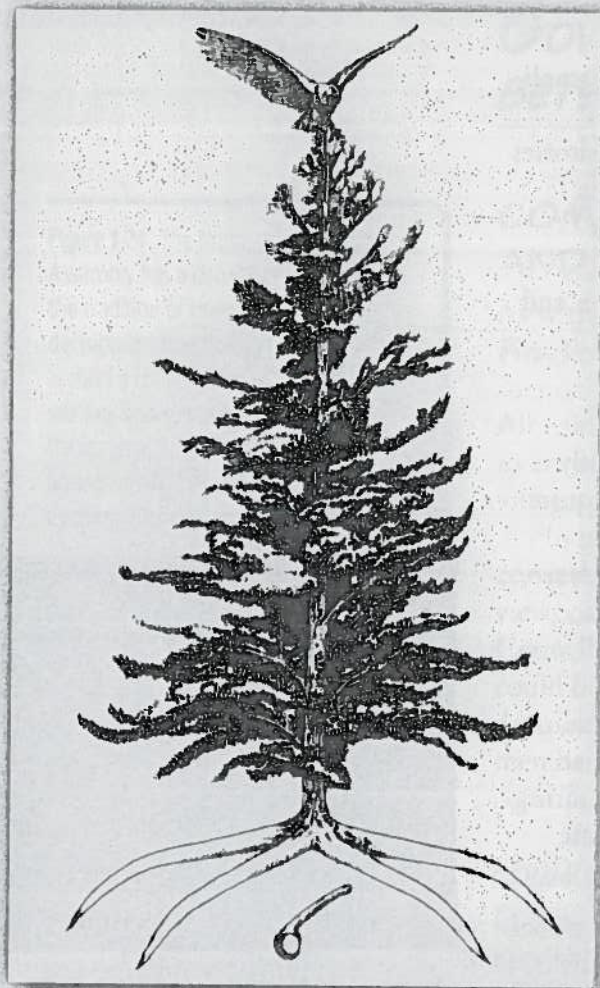


Figure 1-25 *The Tree of Peace*, by John Kahlonhes Fadden, member of the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) First Nation, 1991. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is symbolized by a white pine tree with roots that grow in four directions. An eagle sits on top of the tree, keeping watch. Skennenrahawi told the people that all nations that would agree to bury their weapons (hatchets) under the tree could find shelter under its branches.

RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

1. In what ways did geographic or environmental factors influence traditional First Peoples' governance?

2. What are beneficial consequences of making decisions by consensus? What are drawbacks?

THE HAUDENOSAUNEE GRAND COUNCIL

The Great Law of Peace established a Grand Council of fifty chiefs representing the nations of the confederacy. Not all nations had the same number of chiefs on the council. However, each chief had one vote and decisions were made unanimously using complex protocols described in the Great Law of Peace. Some decisions took a long time, but the primary concern was that decisions represent all views. Peace depended on people from all nations supporting decisions of the Grand Council. The Grand Council met annually to settle the social and political disputes among member nations. It also made decisions about defending the confederacy's territory and its resources from outsiders. The Grand Council still meets today using the protocols set out in the Great Law of Peace.

TAKING A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

HP

The Two Row Wampum Treaty

In 1645, the Kanienkehaka (Mohawks) and the Dutch in what is now New York state reached an agreement known as the Two Row Wampum Treaty. The treaty recognized the cultural and political autonomy of both peoples and ensured their peace. In his 1999 book, *Peace, Power, and Righteousness*, Taiaiake Alfred, member of the Kanienkehaka First Nation and director of the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria, describes the treaty as follows:

The metaphor for this relationship—two vessels, each possessing its own integrity, travelling the river of time together—was conveyed visually on a wampum belt of two parallel purple lines (representing power) on a background of white beads (representing peace). In this respectful (co-equal) friendship and alliance, any interference with the other partner's autonomy, freedom, or powers was expressly forbidden. So long as these principles were respected, the relationship would be peaceful, harmonious and just.

When the British defeated the Dutch in 1666, the same treaty was extended to Britain and was called the Silver Covenant Chain. Today the Kanienkehaka take the position that they are not under the jurisdiction of the Province of Québec and that their relationship with Canada is still governed by the Silver Covenant Chain.

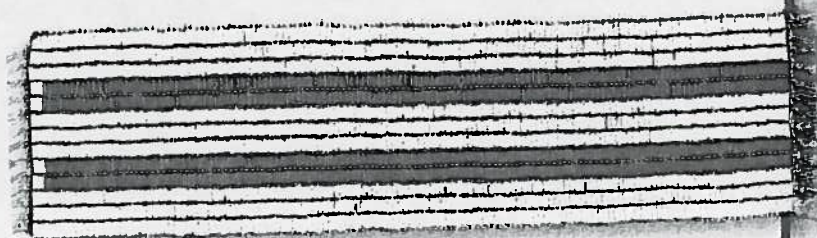


Figure 1-26 The Two Row Wampum Treaty was recorded in the symbols expressed by this belt made from the white shells of the Atlantic whelk and the purple shells of the Quahog clam.

HP

1. Research the Kanienkehaka relationship with the Governments of Québec and Canada. Take a historical perspective to understand the basis of

the Kanienkehaka assertion of autonomy. What is the perspective of the Governments of Canada and Québec?