

ORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

PRE-TEACH/PRE-ACTIVITY

Discuss with students how various items in your class got their names. Explain to your students the concept that things have different names in different areas, languages and dialects. Ask your class how they would feel if they came to school tomorrow and the school had a new name that they didn't recognize. Expand this to have students try to explain directions to each other using different names for streets or parts of the city. Have them reflect on how difficult it would be to all of a sudden be told the name of a place that you have always known is wrong. Relate this to the importance of language and a common understanding of life within a community.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will recognize who the Indigenous Peoples in Canada are (Inuit, Métis, First Nations).
- Students will recognize the Indigenous Peoples in Canada have inherent rights, recognizing the diversity between and among these three groups.
- Students will be able to note differences and similarities between the three groups and identify where each group lives.
- Students will acknowledge that this is the country of origin for the Indigenous Peoples in Canada and that is why revitalizing and maintaining language and culture is critical.

ORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

FIRST NATIONS

“One of the first acts of colonization and settlement is to name the newly ‘discovered’ land in the language of the colonizers or the ‘discoverers.’ This is done despite the fact that there are already names for these places that were given by the original inhabitants. These names are more significant because they have some sort of connection to the people. This connection may have a spiritual, cultural or historical significance as other First Nations often call these places by the same names.”

“The land provided the people with all that was needed to exist. It contained a memory of activities that ensured life and survival. This is embedded with the names of the many landmarks. Manahcâ pânihk is ‘where the bows were harvested.’ Manawânis was ‘where eggs were gathered.’ Astahcikowin was ‘where food was cached.’ Pionapiwin was ‘where the winter camp was established.’ sokanihk was a name given to areas ‘where rivers were crossed.’ Some names had animal or human connections — Kiseyinô Kâsâsakitisihk is the ‘old man lying on his back,’ while Kakwayohk is the ‘porcupine hills.’

An interesting aspect of the many names given by the colonists, explorers, missionaries and other non-Indigenous usurpers of the land seems to be the number of

place names that have the devil or hell within them. Many of these places have a spiritual significance for Indigenous people, so to undermine the existing spirituality of the areas, the missionaries would incorporate Christian ideology into the naming of the locality. The missionaries refer to much of the New World as ‘the land of the devil.’ In a video interview at the Maskwacis Cultural College, Elder Sophie Samson said, ‘There was no devil here, he came across with the Moniyows (White People)!’ The New World was considered to be a place of heathens and savages that must be Christianized in order to enter salvation.

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An example of such a place was Maniôtô Sâkahikan. This is translated as ‘Spirit Lake’ or, in some instances, as ‘God’s Lake.’ There are numerous lakes and other waterways that have the word “Manito” in the name, not only in Cree territory but in other tribal areas as well. This particular lake had its name changed to Lac Ste.

Anne in honour of the mother of Mary. It is said that the missionaries chose the name because they knew of the special role and place of prominence of grandmothers in First Nations culture.”

— from “Language” by Bruce Cutknife, in the *First Nations volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



ORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

MÉTIS

“Like other Indigenous peoples, the Métis have their own geographic names for land and bodies of water. However, as a result of Euro-settlement and colonization, many Métis geographic names have been lost, replaced or anglicized. Often, these names are in a Métis heritage language such as Michif, Cree or French.

Perhaps the most noticeable land form in Western Canada that has a Métis place name is the Cypress Hills. Métis bison hunters called the hills — the highest elevation in Canada east of the Rockies — ‘montagne de cyprès’ because of the many jack pines in the region. The Métis used to call pine trees ‘cyprès,’ even though they are not proper cypress trees. The name for the hill formation was then anglicized to ‘Cypress Hills.’

Another famous landform in Western Canada is the Yellowhead Pass near Jasper, Alta. It is also the name of the well-known Yellowhead Trans-Canada Highway, among other things. The original name of the Yellowhead Pass was ‘Tête Jaune,’ meaning ‘yellow head’ in French. It was named after Pierre Bostonais, a famous Iroquois-Métis trapper with a mane of golden hair, who guided Hudson’s Bay Company through the pass in the early 1820s.

The Qu’Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan is known as Kâ-têpwê (‘who calls?’) in Cree. The Métis kept the name and adapted it to the name of the valley and to one of their road allowance communities, Katepwa, which extended across the length of the valley.

Another prominent geographic feature in southwest Manitoba and northeast North Dakota with Métis provenance is Turtle Mountain, or Turtle Mountain Plateau. In Michif/French, the Métis called this wooded uplands, ‘la montagne tortue.’ A well-known Métis folksong in Michif has the same name.

Reclaiming or restoring traditional place names is important to many Métis. A major Métis name restoration occurred in 2007 when the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada agreed to change the name of the 1885 Battle of Fish Creek National Historic Site (a monumental location in the 1885 North-

west Resistance) to the Battle of Tourond’s Coulee/Fish Creek to recognize the Métis community name for this place, Tourond’s Coulee. This change required a great deal of lobbying by the local Métis community, the Gabriel Dumont Institute, Friends of Batoche and Parks Canada. Many in the Métis community are working to restore other Métis geographic names and to commemorate them.

Often, name changes to Métis places or geographic features are documented in the historical record or have been chronicled in the Oral Tradition. Métis author Maria Campbell wrote about the area around her Métis road allowance community, Nugeewin—the stopping place — in her acclaimed autobiography, *Half-Breed*. Nugeewin was where Indigenous people stopped on their way to cross Puktahaw Sipi, or Net-Throwing River, to get to their hunting and trapping grounds. In 1925, Nugeewin was replaced by Park Valley. In 1915,

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Foundational knowledge and perspectives

MÉTIS

the federal government decided to turn the surrounding territory into a national park (later officially named Prince Albert National Park), displacing many local Métis and Cree. This displacement also resulted in local Indigenous names for lakes and rivers being changed. For instance, Puktahaw Sipi became Sturgeon River, and Notikew Sahnkikun became Mariah Lake. The erasure of Métis place names and geographic features in this fashion occurred across the Métis Homeland.”

— from “Worldview” in the *Métis* volume of the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



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Foundational knowledge and perspectives

INUIT

“When places are significant for any reason, they are named, for how else can one speak of the place in conversation with another? In many Indigenous cultures, place names are descriptive, but not necessarily unique, as is the case with Western or European naming. For example, in the Sanikiluaq area, there are a dozen bays simply named ‘Kangiqsualuk’ (large bay). While there may be one hundred bays without names, these dozen are significant enough to be named, perhaps due their relative association with other geographical features along routes, but otherwise do not merit more descriptive, unique names. When these bays are spoken of, they are mentioned in context with other nearby named places, thus eliminating confusion.

Across Inuit Nunangat there are places called Upirngivik (spring camping), Aulattivik (peninsulas where animals were hunted), Uivvaq (where you have to go around) or simply Tasiq (lake) or Qikiqtarjuaq (big island). The names spring from local language and, for Inuktitun speakers, evoke mental images of these places. Islands named Taqtu (kidney) or Ummanna (heart-shaped) or Qaiqsu (bedrock) instantly communicate shape and texture and, when passing in proximity, recognition.

The distribution of traditional place names indicates the incredible extent of Inuit land use and occupancy across vast stretches of territory. Inuit, despite the changes they’ve experienced in the past decades, continue to have a strong association with the Land, and a continued reliance on subsistence hunting. The place names of their ancestors are brimming with helpful information about hazards, harbours, currents, routes, good camping areas,

fishing lakes and walrus haul-outs, all of which assist the traveller on their journey.

With the passage of time, there are fewer Elders that grew up and travelled on the Land with their families that can still pass down expert knowledge. Place names research that culminates in the names being made official is essential to preserving this tangible source of traditional knowledge for tomorrow’s generations.”

— Lynn Peplinski, *Traditional Place Names Manager, Inuit Heritage Trust*

“I have always had an aversion to English place names. They mean nothing to the people who live there. Why

anybody would name the place where I grew up, Repulse Bay, I have never known. It is not repulsive in any way; it is a very beautiful place. We call it Naujaat. Nauja means ‘seagull,’ and Naujaat refers to the cliffs there where seagulls nest in summer. It is a much more fitting name than Repulse Bay.

Naval officer John Rankin, I gather, was not of the greatest character, and has been re-

membered historically as a liar and fraud. Why anybody would name a place after him, I do not know. And Sir Martin Frobisher, the namesake of Frobisher Bay, Iqaluit’s former name; didn’t he bring a whole shipload or two of iron pyrite, commonly known as ‘fool’s gold,’ to England and have to dump it all overboard? Iqaluit is a much better name for Nunavut’s capital.”

— from *“Nunannguaq: Capturing the Character of Our Land”* by Michael Kusugak, in the foreword to the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*

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Points of inquiry and activation related to the Giant Floor Map



- **Locate your community on the Giant Floor Map and place a pylon there.** Ask students if they could rename their community, what would they name it? Why? What factors influenced their suggestion (e.g., nature, a famous person, a nearby geographic feature)? Next, have students select another place on the Giant Floor Map and create a new name for it based on their knowledge of the area or what they see on the map. Allow time for students to explain their ideas to the class.
- **Look at the map and have students identify places where they do not recognize the name.** Explain that the original names have been used where possible on this map. Have students research other original names, focusing on local places, and add them to the map with sticky notes. Additionally, have them add original names that are no longer being used. Look at the northern part of the map and identify places that are important to Inuit people. Ask students to select one location that is labelled on the map and one that is not identified on the map. Why were some places labelled and others not? Mark these places on the map using the pylons provided in the teacher's kit and explore the names of these places, allowing time for students to share what they have learned with the class. Discuss how the map looks now.
- **Distribute the Inuit Place Names cards to students and have them place each in the correct place on the map.** Host a class discussion about how this can be done with other parts of Canada as well, and create additional cards for the map. Discuss how places are named from an Indigenous perspective as opposed to the settler naming traditions.

ORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

Age appropriate application and experiential learning

ELEMENTARY

K-6

- **Explore the Giant Floor Map** and have students use a red pylon to locate place names with a Eurocentric origin (e.g., St. John's) and a yellow pylon to locate ones they feel have an Indigenous origin (e.g., Iqaluit). Have them compare their findings.
- **Look at a space you are familiar with** (e.g., community, school yard), and have students draw a map and name spaces according to their appearance or function. Compare these names to the ones that are more commonly known.
- **Have students look at their own names** and learn about any history behind how their name was chosen and the meaning of their name. Then have them relate this to the map and how places are named.

INTERMEDIATE

7-9

- **Have students research the process of naming or renaming** buildings and streets in your community. Ask students how these things are selected. Can they think of how they might change the process to be more equitable and representative?
- **Identify rivers, mountains, creeks, hills, valleys and other physical features on the Giant Floor Map** and research the stories and legends associated with them. Was there an Indigenous name used before or do Indigenous Peoples refer to this place differently? Compare and contrast the names used for this one location.

SECONDARY

10-12

- **Have students research the process of renaming places in Canada** with their original names. Haida Gwaii is a good example to begin with. Have students look into other locations that have been officially recognized with their original names.
- **Have the students make a list of as many places names in Canada**, or names of bodies of water, that have an Indigenous name or an Indigenous origin (such as Manitoba or Saskatchewan). How are these names different?

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DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING

- Have students deliver a **presentation** based on local research or to conduct an interview with local language speakers to discuss original names.
- Ask students to make a **word web** of place name meanings in your part of the country.
- Have students **integrate** a land acknowledgement into the school or classroom routine.



LEARNING TO ACTION

- Create a **map of your school or community**, renaming locations based on Indigenous naming conventions, and write the new place names in your local Indigenous language.
- Reach out to **local Indigenous organizations and/or communities** to learn about the original names of your community and natural features within it.
- Campaign to have a **building or a street name changed** to better reflect the community and Indigenous perspective.