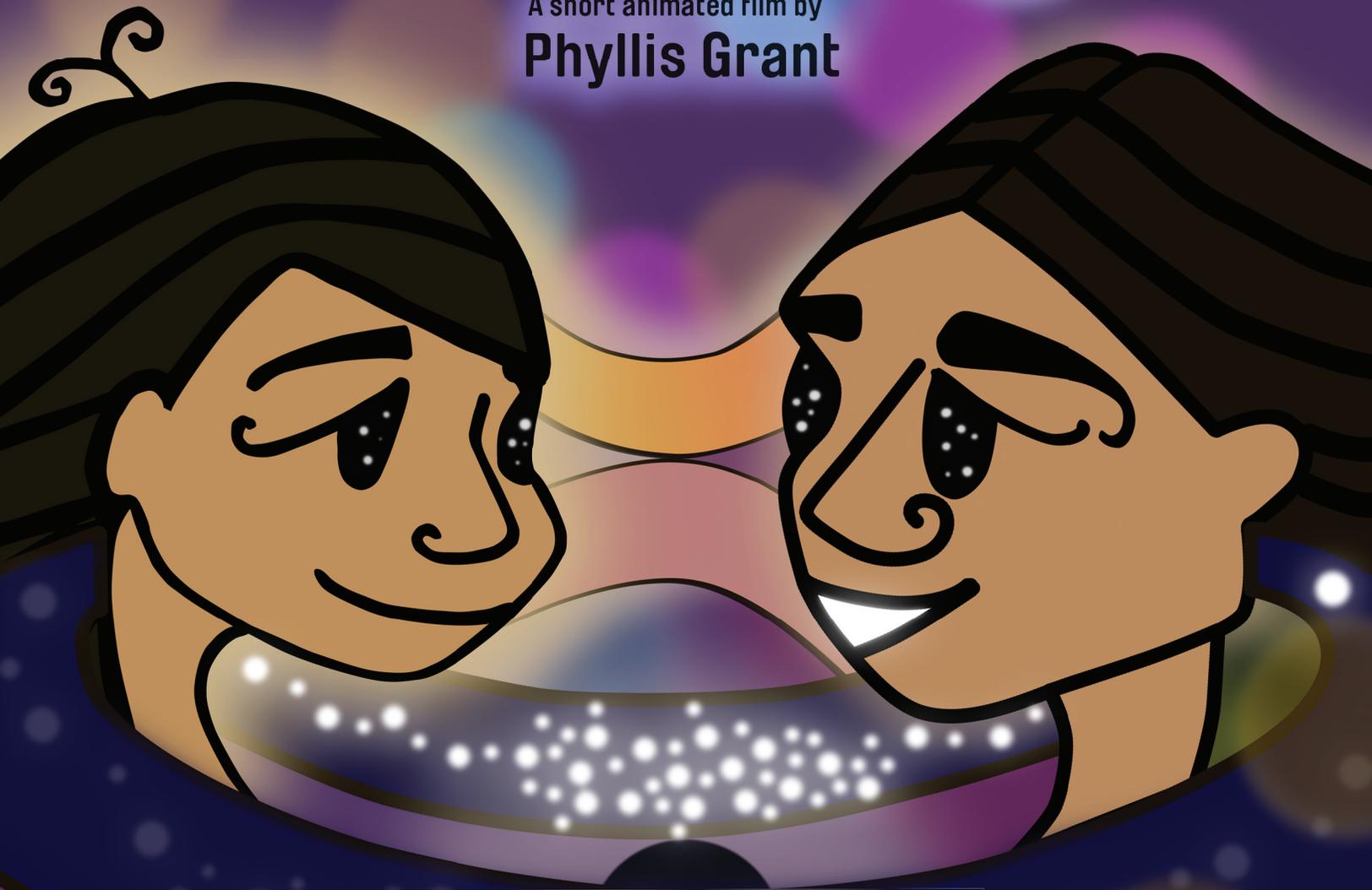


# Waseteg

A short animated film by  
**Phyllis Grant**



**TEACHING GUIDE**

## OVERALL OBJECTIVE

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Enable students to appreciate the unique nature of Mi'kmaq culture by exploring the world of dreams, identity, creation, courage and respect for elders.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

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Students from 8 to 12 years of age.

## CONNECTIONS

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Ecology

History/geography

Languages

Arts and culture

## LESSON PLAN SUMMARY

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This lesson plan will enable students to learn about the culture and traditional way of life of the Mi'kmaq people. More specifically, it will help them comprehend the crucial, determining role played by dreams in daily activities. In viewing the short animated film *Waseteg*, students will gain a better understanding of the lifestyle, beliefs and other cultural characteristics of the Mi'kmaq. On a more general level, they will discover another way to view the world (cosmology) and expand their knowledge about First Nations. They will also be taught new ways to tell traditional stories through animation in order to preserve, learn about and share the Mi'kmaq culture in a changing world.

## START-UP

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Approximate duration: 45 minutes

We suggest you begin this lesson plan with a general discussion of students' current knowledge of First Nations people and culture.

### STEP 1

Before viewing the film, ask your students to say what they think *Waseteg*, the title of the animated film, might mean.

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** First Nations language, little girl, forest spirit, light of dawn, etc.

Next, show a map of North America or Canada and locate the various Native language families (Iroquois, Algonquin, Abenaki, Inuit) or First Nations (Mohawk, Algonquin, Mi'kmaq, Innu, Cree, Atikamekw, Naskapi, Malecite, Huron-Wendat, Abenaki and Inuit). Then ask the students to locate the Mi'kmaq territory.

**Online example:** [danielpaul.com/Map-Mi%27kmaqTerritory.html](http://danielpaul.com/Map-Mi%27kmaqTerritory.html)

## STEP 2

Watch the film with your students and get their first impressions using the following questions as a guide:

- **QUESTION:** What do the opening images teach you about the Mi'kmaq people?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** Interaction with nature, special relationship of men/women with their environment, sacred drum/dreams, interpreting dreams.

- **QUESTION:** Based on the film's images and narration, what ties do these people maintain with nature? Give concrete examples.

**SEVERAL ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE:** Stars/three girls, mutual ties between the sky and the earth; moon/grandmother/procreation; birch bark/clothing/boat, etc.). The Mi'kmaq world is composed of relationships between different types of beings: humans, animals, supernatural beings, natural forces, etc. Humans can manipulate natural and supernatural forces by using the appropriate formulas, and these forces can in turn influence humans (mutualism, interactionism).

- **QUESTION:** Which scene in the film (unity of time and place) held your attention the most?

**PERSONAL ANSWER**

- **QUESTION:** What does the name Waseteg mean?

**ANSWER:** Light of dawn.

- **QUESTION:** What does Walqwan, the name of Nokomis's grandson, mean?

**ANSWER:** Rainbow.

## PREPARATORY ACTIVITY

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Ask your students to divide into small groups and discuss the film's content in more detail using the following questions:

- **QUESTION:** What challenges do the Mi'kmaq face regarding habitation, food, transportation and dealing with the natural elements surrounding them?

**ANSWER:** Using what nature provides them in a sustainable way and making sure to express thanks for what the natural world makes available to them, having confidence in dreams and drawing inspiration from them each day.

- **QUESTION:** Do you see any similarities between what the early non-First Nations settlers did to survive in North America and the way of life of the Mi'kmaq?

**SEVERAL ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE:** Even though their cultures were completely different, the settlers had to learn many things from the First Nations, including their language if they wanted to know what the Mi'kmaq were saying to them. They also had to learn the secrets of medicinal plants to cure illnesses. The white man had to adopt many of the First Nations' customs in order to survive! The Mi'kmaq helped the Acadians adapt to their new way of life. They introduced them to their methods of fishing and hunting, and showed them how to make clothes and canoes and insulate their houses to keep out the cold.

Wrap up the activity by asking your students to do research either at home or at the library, using the Internet if possible, to gain a better understanding of the Mi'kmaq Nation. To facilitate the task, give each student the sheet provided in Appendix 1. Specify that this communication tool will also be helpful for jotting down their observations as they watch the film.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY: THE INFLUENCE OF A CULTURE THAT IS MORE VIBRANT THAN EVER

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Approximate duration: 60 to 90 minutes

During this activity, students will learn more about the culture, rituals and beliefs of the Mi'kmaq.

### STEP 1

Briefly go over the research your students did during the week.

### STEP 2

Ask your students to discuss what Waseteg's mother said before she died: "Every child is a gift of all creation." Use the following questions as a guide:

- **QUESTION:** What do statements like that mean for the Mi'kmaq people?

**ANSWER:** Each child must be respected as an entity belonging to a whole that follows the circular flow of uncertainties that nature can bring about. Each child is not only dependent on human nature but on the natural world that surrounds him or her.

- **QUESTION:** Do you find these words particularly moving or do they leave you indifferent? Explain your answer.

**PERSONAL ANSWER**

### STEP 3

Divide the class into small groups so that students can discuss the following questions. Ask them to appoint one spokesperson per team who will report on the group's answers:

- **QUESTION:** What is the role of the drum in this animated film?

**ANSWER:** The drum heralds an event, a happening.

- **QUESTION:** Why do you think Waseteg's two sisters are unable to see Walqwan, yet Waseteg succeeds in seeing him?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** She speaks the Mi'kmaq language, but her sisters don't.

- **QUESTION:** When the father and two sisters are awakened by the sound of the drum, how does Waseteg appear to them?

**ANSWER:** In the form of light and a rainbow.

- **QUESTION:** In your opinion, what is good medicine according to the Mi'kmaq?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** When life remains harmonious and provides beauty and pleasure, and respect for everyone.

## STEP 4

During this step, your students will learn about the Mi'kmaq language family, territorial base, social organization, rituals, customs and spirituality.

The students will need to have done research beforehand on the web (in class, at home or at the library – 45 minutes of Internet research from the URL addresses supplied in this lesson plan) and taken notes to be able to answer the following questions. Form groups of three or four students who will present their findings to their peers. Divide the questions up according to the topics explored.

### MI'KMAQ LANGUAGE

- **QUESTION:** What is the origin of the word Mi'kmaq?

**ANSWER:** It's the English translation of a word that the Mi'kmaq used when referring to themselves. According to Roth in *Acadia and Acadians*, the Mi'kmaq were known to the early French settlers as the Souriquois, "the salt water men," to distinguish them from the Iroquois, who inhabited the freshwater regions. The name "Micmac" was first recorded in 1676 in a memoir by de La Chesnaye. In a footnote concerning the word *megamingo* – earth – as used by Marc Lescarbot, Professor Ganong remarked "that it is altogether probable that in this word lies the origin of the name Micmac."

Therefore, it is plausible that *megumaagee*, the noun used by the Mi'kmaq (or the *Megumawaach* when referring to their land), comes from the words *megwaak* (red) and *makumegek* (on the earth), or as Rand noted: "red on the earth," *megakumegek* "red ground," "red earth." As a result, the Mi'kmaq identified themselves as the People of the Red Earth.

- **QUESTION:** From what language family does the Mi'kmaq language originate?

**ANSWER:** Algonquin.

- **QUESTION:** Do you feel that the Mi'kmaq language is in danger of becoming extinct? Is it still spoken today?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** It is still spoken by 20 to 30 percent of the Mi'kmaq population, but it is threatened with extinction. According to some studies, only three First Nations languages will survive beyond the current century: Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut.

- **QUESTION:** What differentiates First Nations languages (Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Cree, Innu) from Indo-European languages (French, English)?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** First Nations languages are polysynthetic and structured around the verb, while Indo-European languages are monosynthetic and structured around the noun.

## MI'KMAQ TERRITORY, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

- **QUESTION:** What is the ancestral (traditional) territory of the Mi'kmaq?

**ANSWER:** Newfoundland, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton Island, northern New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, the Magdalen Islands and the Gaspé Peninsula. The Mi'kmaq also shared land in the present-day states of New Hampshire and Maine with the Wabanaki (Abenaki) Confederation.

- **QUESTION:** Identify Canadian provinces that currently have Mi'kmaq communities.

**ANSWER:** Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec (Gaspé Peninsula).

- **QUESTION:** Name some Mi'kmaq communities and find out what their names mean.

**ANSWER:** Listuguj (Quebec): "river with five arms"; Pabineau (New Brunswick): from *pabina*, "small cranberry bush"; Eskasoni (Nova Scotia), the largest traditional Mi'kmaq community: from *we'kwistoqnik*, "where the fir trees are plentiful"; Elsipogtog (New Brunswick): "river of fire."

## SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE MI'KMAQ

- **QUESTION:** To what confederation do the Mi'kmaq belong, and what other Nations were part of it?

**ANSWER:** The Mi'kmaq are part of the Wabanaki Confederation, which included the Penobscots, Passamaquoddy, Wabanaki (Abenaki) of Maine and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet, or Malecite).

- **QUESTION:** What is the difference between a patriarchal society and a matriarchal society?

**ANSWER:** Patriarchal society: social system dominated exclusively by men; matriarchal society: matrilineal system of descent where women have the authority.

- **QUESTION:** Are the Mi'kmaq a matriarchal or patriarchal society?

**ANSWER:** They are a patriarchal society, but that does not mean that women are excluded from the decision-making process. The Récollet missionary Chrétien Le Clercq noted that elder women were allowed to address the Band Council.

- **QUESTION:** What is the traditional Mi'kmaq dwelling called and how is it made?

**ANSWERS:** a) *Wikuom* (wigwam): the largest could house 10 to 24 people during the warmest months; the cone-shaped model could house 10 to 12 people and was used in winter.

b) Birch bark was used to cover the tarpaulin of their *wikuoms* because it was a tight and portable material. *Wikuoms* were always clean and warm in winter, cool in summer, and could be easily transported.

- **QUESTION:** Coming back to the film for a moment, what is Waseteg's favourite tree?

**ANSWER:** The birch.

- **QUESTION:** What did the Mi'kmaq use for transportation and what species of tree was used to construct their means of transportation?

**ANSWER:** The canoe. The bottom was wider than usual and the centre of the gunwale (upper side edge) and both ends were curved. This distinctive shape enabled the Mi'kmaq to navigate along the coast, in shallow streams and even through rapids. The canoe was constructed of birch bark over a light wooden frame. The length varied from three to eight metres. A small canoe could hold a load weighing hundreds of kilos, and yet it was light enough to be carried by one person.

- **QUESTION:** What material was used to make the traditional clothing of the Mi'kmaq?

**ANSWER:** The Mi'kmaq made their clothing from the skins of mammals, birds and fish. The skins were smoked and tanned with animal brains and bird livers and fat. The skins were stretched and worked on with care to produce splendid furs and skins that could then be easily sewn. Pointed instruments made of bone were used to pierce the skins, and thin filaments of animal tendon were used for thread. Before Europeans arrived, Mi'kmaq women made luxurious, highly ornamented clothes for their families. Basic materials were skins and furs, which they dyed with mineral pigments and embroidered with porcupine quills and moose hair.

Before 1500, men and women wore leggings, loincloths, moccasins, loose-fitting robes and "sleeve" jackets, which resembled two halves of a bolero jacket cut down the middle and tied together at the centre back and front. Women also wore hide dresses, in two styles. Children were clothed like their fathers or mothers, according to their sex, and babies were wrapped in the softest furs or in the skins of birds until they could walk.

By 1600, Mi'kmaq women had begun replacing the hide and fur of the garments with cloth. Silk ribbon appliqué took the place of painted designs, and glass beads were used instead of porcupine-quill decorations. However, it took much longer for the style, cut and ornamentation of Mi'kmaq clothing to change.

- **QUESTION:** What were the traditional foods of the Mi'kmaq?

**ANSWER:** Fish, including salmon and sturgeon, porpoise, whale, walrus, seal, lobster and other shellfish, squid, eel, seabirds and their eggs. They also hunted moose, caribou, beaver, porcupine and smaller animals such as squirrels. In the summer, they ate berries, roots and edible plants. They dried and smoked meat and fish to preserve them.

- **QUESTION:** What are the medicinal qualities of the teaberry that Nokomis gives to her grandson?

**ANSWER:** Teaberry has long been used as a popular medicine to relieve headaches, colds, flu, rheumatism, lumbago, gout and sciatica. Modern pharmaceutical research has demonstrated that methyl salicylate is antiseptic, possesses antirheumatic qualities and closely resembles aspirin.

- **QUESTION:** What is the difference between the Great Spirit and the other gods you know about?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** For the First Nations, the Great Spirit is the creator. In *Kanien'keha* (Mohawk), the Great Spirit is called *Sonkwaiatison* or *Orenta*.

- **QUESTION:** Based on what you saw in *Waseteg*, what can dreams teach us?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** Waseteg dreams about the stories she hears in the village about Walqwan ("rainbow"). The Native peoples have developed complex narrative traditions and music ceremonies as well as meta-commentary about dream processes and outcomes. The Huron-Wendat were the pioneers of dynamic psychiatry, i.e. using the powers of the psyche for healing purposes through practices such as the Dream Festival.

- **QUESTION:** Showing respect for elders is a fundamental value for the First Nations. Find examples of this in *Waseteg*.

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** The grandmother's relationship with her grandson.

- **QUESTION:** Stories and tales are an integral part of the Mi'kmaq culture. What can they teach us about life?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:** In reciting a legend, we bring a story from the past to life. The art of storytelling has made it possible to hand down these stories from one generation to the next through oral tradition. This tradition is also the reason that some stories exist in different versions.

The oral tradition of the First Nations often makes reference to legendary myths that are generally based on factual occurrences. The purpose of many legends is to explain the origin of and reason for animals, seemingly incomprehensible phenomena, places or events. The stories are usually short and descriptive. The environment is treated with great respect as are animals, which often assume symbolic roles. The horse represents strength, speed and elegance; the eagle represents omnipresence, watching out for danger, domination.

The unique stories we call legends are the result of a rich oral tradition that gives life to the ancient beliefs, customs and spirituality of the Native peoples.

## STEP 5

*(Internet research on the animation techniques and professional careers of Phyllis Grant and Alanis Obomsawin; short presentation by the teacher on the art of the mandala.)*

Have a roundtable discussion focusing on the following questions and end the discussion by asking students to use the mandala as a source of inspiration for creating their own mandala by playing with the colours, volumes and rhythm of their own graphics.

- **QUESTION:** What is the animation technique used by director Phyllis Grant?

**ANSWER:** Drawing on paper, digital rendering.

- **QUESTION:** Do you know of any other techniques used by film or video directors who make animated films?

**PERSONAL ANSWER:**

**Drawing:** on paper, film, or acetates.

**Manipulation of 2D objects:** sand, paper cut-outs, modelling clay, paint, pinscreen.

**Stop-motion (3D objects):** puppets, modelling clay, figurines, various objects, pixillation.

**Computer-generated image:** 2D digital animation, 3D animation.

- **QUESTION:** Is the director of the film a Mi'kmaq? Find the location of her community on a map.

**ANSWER:** Yes, she is from the Pabineau community (New Brunswick).

- **QUESTION:** Phyllis Grant, the film’s director, teaches the art of the mandala in her community, but what exactly is this art form?

**ANSWER:** Traditionally, the mandala is made in the form of a circle with a centre usually contained inside a square that is subdivided into smaller squares with four gates of entry. Some of them portray Buddhist divinities symbolizing various levels of consciousness.

The elements composing this archetypal form can vary, depending on its origin: Tibetan, Indian, Chinese, Navajo First Nation, etc. However, its basic structure is universal: a circle with a central point.

The Sanskrit word “mandala” means “circle.” The term is used by Buddhists to designate a specific painting created to enhance meditation and open the path to awakening. The entwined images, their symmetric arrangement and the succession of figures that are either peaceful or angry, are the open book of the world and of one’s own spirit.

- **QUESTION:** The film’s narrator, Alanis Obomsawin, is an Abenaki documentary filmmaker who was raised on the Odanak reserve, not far from Sorel, Quebec. What could we call someone whose profession is making documentary films?

**ANSWER:** A documentary film/video director.

- **QUESTION:** What is the title of the film that Alanis Obomsawin made about the Mi’kmaq in the 1980s, and what were the issues involved?

**ANSWER:** *Incident at Restigouche* (1984). The fishermen of Listuguj, Quebec, had been using nets to catch salmon from the Restigouche estuary for several decades. Fishing rights were part of their ancestral rights decreed by the federal government. On June 9, 1981, the Quebec Minister of Recreation, Hunting and Fishing, Lucien Lessard, sent a telex to the Chief of Listuguj, Alphonse Metallic, demanding that the nets be removed within 24 hours, i.e. by midnight on June 10.

**The first raid.** On June 11 at 11:20 a.m., a helicopter and 550 provincial police officers conducted a raid and removed the illegal fishing nets. Phone lines were cut and a dozen brutal arrests were made. Among those arrested were two youths under the age of 18. The bridge was blocked on the New Brunswick side by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but they were unable to stop the students from slipping back into Listuguj when school let out. The 10 men were incarcerated in the New Carlisle provincial prison. Listuguj received the support of Dale Del Riley, president of the National Indian Brotherhood, as well as support from several Aboriginal groups in Canada, including the Mohawks of Kahnawake, Quebec, who blockaded the Mercier Bridge [I can’t verify the 1981 blockade; perhaps author is thinking of the 1988 and 1990 blockades of the Mercier?] in Montreal to show their solidarity. The Conference of Chiefs, which was supposed to take place in Victoria, British Columbia, was moved to Restigouche.

**The second raid.** Nine days later on June 20, at 5 a.m., police conducted a second raid. The fishermen tried to pull in their nets before they could be confiscated, but the police attacked the fishermen with rubber bullets and tear gas. First Nations members from all over Canada (and as far away as Alaska) came to help the people of Listuguj.

In an interview between Minister Lessard and filmmaker Obomsawin at the end of *Incident at Restigouche*, Lessard expresses his regret that the events had negative consequences for the people of Listuguj.

## RECAP ACTIVITY

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Suggested duration: 60 minutes

Ask your students to compare the way of life of the Mi'kmaq with that of another Native Nation (Maoris in New Zealand, Talamancas Caribes in Costa Rica, Inuit in Nunavik).

### OBJECTIVE SHARING

Have your students explain why showing respect for elders should be a fundamental value and why contemporary societies have moved away from that value.

In what ways might they be more respectful of their elders in their everyday life?

Lastly, why is it important for the First Nations to take charge of their history and culture, and share them with the rest of the world through art and the media?

### NOTES:

1. This lesson plan has been designed for students of various age groups. You can adapt it in accordance with the needs of your students and your restrictions on time..
2. You can write these questions on the board or distribute them to each team.

## URL ADDRESSES

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Newfoundland and Labrador heritage website – Mi'kmaq:

[heritage.nf.ca/aboriginal/mikmaq\\_culture.html](http://heritage.nf.ca/aboriginal/mikmaq_culture.html)

[heritage.nf.ca/patrimoine/aboriginal/micmac\\_f.html](http://heritage.nf.ca/patrimoine/aboriginal/micmac_f.html)

[cacouna.net/mikmaq\\_e.htm](http://cacouna.net/mikmaq_e.htm)

[danielnpaul.com/Mi%27kmaqCulture.html](http://danielnpaul.com/Mi%27kmaqCulture.html)

[museum.gov.ns.ca/arch/infos/mikmaq2.htm](http://museum.gov.ns.ca/arch/infos/mikmaq2.htm)

[indianamarketing.com/anglais/nations/micmac.htm](http://indianamarketing.com/anglais/nations/micmac.htm)

[encyclobec.ca/main.php?docid=174](http://encyclobec.ca/main.php?docid=174)

[animaterra.org/articles/le-mandala-figure-du-sacre](http://animaterra.org/articles/le-mandala-figure-du-sacre)

# APPENDIX 1 – OBSERVATION SHEET – WASETEG

## THE MI'KMAQ PEOPLE

Fill in the table below using information based on your web research.

Population	
Characteristics of the land	
Official language	
Economic activities	
Natural resources	
Climate	
Social organization	

## MI'KMAQ WAY OF LIFE

During the various screenings, fill in the table below based on information in the animated short film *Waseteg* (you can explore both traditional and contemporary eras).

Approximate number of inhabitants	
Clothing	
Beliefs and rituals	
Food	
Type of housing	
Languages spoken	
Means of transportation	
Main economic activity	
Type of education	
Games/leisure activities	