

# School in The Bush

Narrated by a Cree teenager, this gentle documentary introduces viewers to the Cree way of life and communicates some of the jarring dichotomies experienced by native children in the white man's world. For decades, school-age native children were removed from reserves each September and bused to city schools and residences for an educational experience diametrically opposed to their own tradition. Only recently have some educational authorities become aware of the value of the Cree ways and, in a few areas of Canada, begun to respond to the different needs of native communities.



This film is comprised of material shot in the Mistassini area of northern Quebec, just before the official acceptance of native input into curricula for native children. In it, a young Cree woman reflects on a unique experience: a September-to-April winter spent not in a white school, but with her family during a traditional Cree winter in the bush. The year: 1972-73. The occasion: a National Film Board film, **Cree Hunters of Mistassini**, that was being shot in co-operation with three hunting families. **School in the Bush** is a classroom adaptation of this longer film and also includes excerpts from **Our Land Is Our life**, a 1973 companion documentary on the Cree people of northern Quebec.

**School in the Bush** focusses on the rhythms of this hunting culture's way of life: the building of the winter camp; the tasks carried out by women and girls and those by men and boys; the hunting; the celebration feast and rituals following a successful hunt; and the Cree's sensitive relationship to the land. For the Cree, schooling in the bush never stops. Life and education are the same process, and children learn by work-

ing alongside their parents. Thus they assimilate values of caring, and a basic set of ecological principles reflecting a profound reverence for the land.

This beautiful film clearly portrays Cree values, culture and schooling. It will stimulate an examination of one's own culture, and the discussion of cultures based on different value systems from one's own. It can also evoke serious reflection on optimal learning experiences and on what "learning" is.

## FOR SOCIAL STUDIES, VALUES EDUCATION

Grades 4 to 10

### Some questions for discussion:

1. How would you feel if you were taken from your family each year and sent to a foreign country for your schooling?
2. What are some of the tasks that female Cree have to learn? Male Cree? How do these tasks contribute to the life of the community?
3. Which of the values communicated in the film appeal to you the most? Does your culture share any of these values? Practise them?
4. Describe how Cree youngsters learn within their traditional environment. How does that compare to your learning experiences?

### Activities:

1. Imagine you are sent to a Cree hunting camp for a year's schooling. Write about your emotional experience and your learnings. You may wish to do additional research on the Cree way of life for this assignment.
2. Write an essay on what "learning" is. Include consideration of your own learning process, and how you best learn. If school is not an optimum learning experience for you, what changes would help make it so?
3. Research and write about the Cree religious beliefs or their reverence for the land.

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