

The Invisible Nation

Lesson Plan

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Objective

Enable students to gain a better understanding of the past and present way of life of the Algonquin nation and its culture and development; how and by whom its rights were cast aside; the challenges its communities now face and how the students, as citizens, can support the Aboriginal peoples' struggle for their rights.

Target audience

Students aged 15 to 20.

Connections

Arts and culture
Languages and literature
Social sciences

Film needed for the lesson plan

The documentary *The Invisible Nation* (94 min)

Summary

This lesson will help students gain a deeper understanding of the Algonquin nation (*note 1*), by immersing themselves in Algonquin history, culture and tradition. The activities will show students how different governments and the Church took over Algonquin ancestral lands and settled the Algonquin on reserves, resulting in their loss of cultural identity. It will also show how colonization and logging affected them, the many injustices experienced by the different Algonquin communities over the decades and the sexual abuse suffered by many of their children at residential schools. Students will also understand the difficulties facing the communities today and the struggle waged by many to have governments recognize their rights. In general, the lesson aims to get students thinking about various ways in which they, as individuals, can support Aboriginal peoples in their struggle for their rights. Finally, it promotes teamwork (*note 2*), enabling students to work together to deal with the information and to draw upon each other's strengths.

Start and preparatory activity: Discovering The Invisible Nation

Approximate duration: 45 minutes.

Before starting, put up two maps on the classroom walls: one of Quebec and another of the Abitibi region, indicating the location of the different Algonquin communities (*note 3*). Explain that they will watch the film *The Invisible Nation* in several periods because of the complexity of the issues it addresses and its length—the film is divided into several chapters. Mention also that the activities will help them understand the issues.

Step 1: Ask students to briefly state what they already know about the Abitibi- Témiscamingue region and its inhabitants – population, wildlife, vegetation, territory, natural resources and economic activities. Write down their answers on a flip chart so they can refer to it during the activities.

Step 2: Briefly introduce writers and directors Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie and their documentary *The Invisible Nation*. Mention that it took over seven years to complete, including research. Ask if the students have ever heard the name “Anishinabeg.” Its meaning is revealed in the first few minutes (from the beginning to about 2 min 58 s), then explain that the Algonquins call themselves *Anishinabeg* which means ‘the real men.’ Gather their first impressions by using the following questions:

- What do the first minutes of the film teach you about the Algonquins, their culture and their land? (Examples: families gathered at the edge of the lake, songs of the moose legend, language, name, etc.).
- How do the images and music complement the facts?
- In your opinion, why did the directors choose the title *The Invisible Nation* for their documentary? What do you think of this?
- What does Richard Desjardins mean when he says: “I come from the same place that they do. The forest north of Montreal, in Abitibi. All my life I’ve seen them from a distance. But we’ve never approached one another. Two parallel worlds. I eventually realized I knew nothing about them. In fact, none of us knows anything about them.” Do you think that these words are meant for you?
- What prejudicial attitudes are often spread about Aboriginals? What do you think of these attitudes?

Step 3: Continue the film (2 min 48 s to approx. 5 min 55 s), then ask the following questions:

- What further information do the archival documents provide about the traditional Algonquin way of life (fishing, portage, canoeing, clans, territory, wigwams, nomadism)?
- What are the basic needs depicted here (housing, clothing, food)? How did sharing the territory make this possible? What difficulties did they have to overcome in winter to survive?
- On the map of North America, what parts of the territory are shown to have been inhabited by the main Amerindian peoples before the arrival of the Europeans? What alliances did some of these peoples make with the French and English colonizers for the fur trade?

End the activity by asking students to set up teams that will work together on the tasks in the remaining activities (*note 2*). Have each team gather information over the next few days about two of the nine Algonquin communities in the settlement guide on the Indian Affairs and Northern Canada Web site [The Nations](#). Make sure that all communities are covered in this brief research activity. Hand out the worksheet (supplied in Appendix I) to enable students to compile information.

ACTIVITY 1: Legitimate rights for all Algonquin communities

Approximate duration: 60 min

Step 1: Ask each team to present their research of the past few days on the Algonquin communities. Then sum up the discussions in writing by using the following questions: What did you first notice? What were your first impressions? What is similar or different from one community to the next? What area of the territory does each occupy? What access to water, education and medical services do these communities have?

Step 2: Explain that the Algonquin communities had their basic rights denied by governments and the Church, both of which attempted to assimilate them. Ask them what they know about the Charters safeguarding individual rights that were adopted by the federal and provincial governments. Ask students identify a right that is especially important to them.

Step 3: Ask them to say what they know about the United Nations [*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*](#) of September 13, 2007. Summarize the intent of this declaration. Continue viewing the film (5 min 55 s to 11 min 20 s) to watch the events which had a great impact on the Algonquin people: the [*Royal Proclamation of 1763*](#), how the government and the Oblate Fathers attempted to assimilate them, the Indian Act of 1875, the reduction of their territory and the arrival of the colonists.

Step 4: Ask your students how they would have reacted if, as was the case for the Algonquins, their first names had been changed, they had been registered as numbers in the civil register, and their identity had been stripped away. Specify that Aboriginal peoples did not have the right to vote until 1969. Then, have the teams read Article 8 of the United Nations [*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*](#) which stipulates:

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture. 2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities; b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources; c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights; d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration; e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

Step 5: Ask the spokespersons from each team to give a brief summary of their discussions. End this activity by asking your students to examine the United Nations [*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*](#) more closely over the next few days.

ACTIVITY 2: Topics and problems to explore!

Approximate duration: 2 periods of 75 minutes

Period 1

Before continuing the film, explain that to gain a better understanding of the issues and problems raised in this documentary, each team should note down its observations on two worksheets (Annexes II and III) (*Note 4*). Assign each team a chapter of the documentary and one of the problems raised in the film (different ones for each team). Explain that they will be called on to discuss it as a team after each viewing period. This enables team members to gather information from several angles, giving them a broader point of view of the issues and challenges faced by the different Algonquin communities. Give each team member two observation checklists and outline what they're for. Tell them that they will watch the remainder of the film in two periods.

Step 1: Continue the documentary from “Dismembering” to “Treaty No. 9” (11 min 21s to 46 min 53 s). Have all team members note down their observations on their worksheets while they are viewing their assigned chapter. They are also to note down observations about the problem assigned for further study as they watch the entire film.

Step 2: Ask students to return to their teams for discussion. Ask the secretary of each team to record on a flip chart the main problems raised by the film and the information they discovered when watching their assigned chapter of the film. Say that this sheet will be useful when pooling the observations of all teams.

Period 2

Step 1: Continue viewing the documentary from the chapter “The Invasion” up to the end of the chapter “The Third Power” (46 min 54 s to 1 hour 31 min).

Step 2: Ask the students to discuss their observations as a group and the secretary of each team to record on a flip chart the main problems raised by the film and the information they discovered by viewing their assigned chapter of the film. Explain that this sheet will be useful when it is time to pool the observations of all teams.

During the week, ask students to find out what the people they know think about Aboriginal peoples.

ACTIVITY 3: From awareness to acts of solidarity

Before beginning, ask the teams to set up the flip-chart sheets containing the results of their observations in the four corners of the classroom. Then, scroll the film's credits so that the students note that the documentary ends with the definition of the word "ethnocide."

Step 1: Gather their impressions by using these questions:

- What do the directors understand by the term "ethnocide?"
- Why did they choose to use this definition to describe what has happened to the Algonquin people?
- What do you think about this?

Step 2: Ask students to move from one sheet to another, reading the pages set up around the classroom. Then ask them to join their groups and discuss all the observations noted down by the groups throughout the viewing periods.

Step 3: With the whole class, help your students to summarize their observations by using these questions:

- What attempts were made to assimilate the Algonquin people? Who made these attempts?
- How were the Algonquins treated by governments and by the Church? Why? What were the consequences?
- How is it that some Algonquins, former nomads, became sedentary or squatters?
- What are the effects of the way of life adopted by these groups on their communities today?
- What were the impacts of logging on the Algonquins? Give examples.
- What problems raised by the film struck you the most? Why?
- In your opinion, what are the root causes of the different social problems, particularly those of young people?
- What role can education play to help these communities? Is the establishment of schools on reserves a solution? Explain?
- What impact might the struggle of some Algonquin communities have on obtaining recognition of their basic rights?

Step 4: For a deeper understanding of the cinematographic nature of the project, ask the students the following questions:

- How would you describe the approach taken by Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie in making *The Invisible Nation*? The tone? The text? The images? What does this approach tell you about the intentions of the filmmakers and their team? Give examples to illustrate your comment. How does the narrator, Richard Desjardins, choose to introduce certain chapters of the documentary ("...they are very lucky because...")?
- What did you learn from the archival film footage used? What do you think of the tone, texts and images of these documentaries? What do they contribute?
- How are the territories of Abitibi shown in this film (bird's eye view)? When? What effect could this have on the viewer?
- How might the film change your perception of Aboriginal peoples? Of Algonquins? How might it eliminate or reduce certain prejudices held about Algonquins?
- Why is the point of view of Whites shown to a lesser degree in this documentary? What was the intention of the directors in mainly adopting the point of view of the Algonquins?
- Why is access to the territory and to natural resources the most important point of the documentary, according to its directors?

End this activity with a Dazibao-type of exercise (see note 4) by posting large flip-chart sheets on the walls. Ask each student to take a few minutes to think of a way he or she would like to support the struggle of Aboriginal peoples, and tell them to write in down on the sheets.

Recap

Suggested duration: 60 minutes.

Ask the class to prepare, either individually or in teams, a short report to present a more in-depth portrait of one of the communities.

Reflective Sharing

After doing the activities suggested in this lesson plan, the students should be able to:

- Name some of the nine Algonquin communities and locate them on their territory;
- Identify the main issues and problems presented in *The Invisible Nation*;
- Express an opinion about these issues;
- Explain how the documentary could be used to raise awareness, to educate and even to make claims.

Notes:

1. This lesson plan is intended for groups covering a wide age range. We suggest that you adapt it according to the level of your class, using some or all the activities.
2. We suggest that you assign each student a specific role to play in the team activities. E.g. secretary, spokesperson, discussion leader, researcher, consensus builder. Roles can be changed from one activity to another, so that each student tries out different ones.
3. On [this page](#) of the Web site of the *Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec* you will find a downloadable map in small or large format, showing the locations of the nine settlements; the site also gives information on each community.
http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/rerelations_autochtones/profils_nations/algonquins_en.htm
4. Depending on your group, you can choose to keep only one angle of analysis (by chapter or by problem), and ask them to note down their observations on a single worksheet.
5. Dazibao, as defined by Wikipedia, are “handwritten, wall-mounted posters using large-sized Chinese characters, used as a means of protest, propaganda, and popular communication in public places.” A sort of ancient blog...

Webography

- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/qc/aqc/nat_f.html

- Indigenous Peoples' Center for Documentation, Research and Information (by region and topic)

<http://www.docip.org/Catalogue-de-liens.71.0.html?&L=1>

- Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council

http://www.anishinabenation.ca/eng/home_en.htm

and History [of the] Algonquin Nation http://www.anishinabenation.ca/eng/alg_history_en.htm

- First Nations Web site: excellent site for contemporary issues, culture, links, maps, etc.

http://www.cepn-fnec.com/index_e.aspx

http://www.cepn-fnec.com/p_abt/p_com/index_e.html

- The Aboriginal nations of Quebec. You will find detailed maps and economic, demographic, and cultural information, etc. for each of Quebec's Aboriginal nations.

<http://www.indianamarketing.com/anglais/nations/nations.html>

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>

- Abitibi-Témiscamingue : La toponymie en Abitibi : une histoire à trois voix (in French)
<http://www.encyclobec.ca/main.php?docid=532>
- A comprehensive portrait of the history and settlement of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, from prehistoric times to the present. Features direct links to excellent encyclopedia Web sites.
<http://culture-at.org/patrimoine/english/index.html>
- Portail du Témiscamingue (in French only). This site features a short text by archeologist Marc Côté about the Algonquin of this region, from the first settlement to today
<http://www.temiscamingue.net/decouvrir/historique/algonquin.html>
- Aboriginal people: history of discriminatory laws
<http://dsp-psd.tpsgc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp175-e.htm>
- Royal Proclamation of 1763, Université Laval
http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/PreConfederation/rp_1763.html (in English)
- [Quebec - Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife](#) See the map *The Natives of Quebec* This interactive map enables viewers to see the geographic location of the Aboriginal settlements in Quebec.
<http://www.mrn.gouv.qc.ca/autochtones/english/index.htm> (in English)
- *Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec*, map showing the nine Algonquin reserves
http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/rerelations_autochtones/profils_nations/algonquins_en.htm (in English)
- Société Radio-Canada. Reportage Autochtones, des communautés désemparées, Kitcisakik
http://www.radio-canada.ca/actualite/desautels/2007/01/19/001-autochtones_kitcisakik.asp (in French)
- CBC reports on Aboriginal communities in distress such as Kitcisakik
http://www.cbc.ca/national/blog/video/aboriginal_issues/
- Google search results for Kitcisakik lists various articles and television interviews about the problems facing the Algonquin settlement today.
http://search.cbc.ca/search?ie=UTF-8&site=CBC&output=xml_no_dtd&client=CBC&lr=&getfields=description&proxystylesheet=CBC&oe=UTF-8&searchWeb=cbc&q=Kitcisakik
- L'Encyclopédie de l'histoire du Québec / The Quebec History Encyclopedia "Algonquian (sic) Family of Indians:" Web site featuring a report originally written in 1907 by the Bureau of American Ethnology, with direct links to current information in several encyclopedias and specific language and genealogy sites.
<http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/encyclopedia/Algonquinfamily.htm>
- Canadian Encyclopedia: Algonquin history, past and present, as well as direct links to cultural Web sites
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0000140>
- Territoires et sociétés algonquiennes vers 1500: this Web site is in French only, but the detailed information and the colour photos/illustrations are interesting.
http://www2.uqtr.ca/hee/site_1/index.php?no_fiche=1920
- Algonquin History in New World Encyclopedia
<http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:BHXONqiTyMUJ:www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Algonquin+Algonquin+territory+around+1500&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3>

Annex I
Presentation of two Algonquin communities

	Name of community	Name of community
Territory		
Geographic location		
Area		
Population		
Main languages spoken		
Band council		
Economic activities (if published)		
Education		
Medical services		
Water supply		

Using these data, what main similarities and differences can you observe between these two communities with regard to:

1. The location and size of the territory:

2. Languages spoken:

3. Access to education, medical services and water:

Other observations:

Annex II

Observation checklist for one of the problems raised by the documentary

Problems (for example, loss of cultural identity)		
	Answers	Examples taken from excerpts of the documentary
What main problem is raised by the directors?		
How do the directors help you to visualize or understand this problem?		
People interviewed who talked about this problem, and their function	Problem raised	Person's point of view
Name		
Name		
Name		
Images, music and sound	Description	What do you think might be the possible effect on the viewer?
Image		
Music		
Sound		
Narration and script	Examples taken from excerpts of the documentary	What do you think might be the possible effect on the viewer?
Writing style		
Tone of the narration		
Image support		
Musical support		

Suggested questions to stimulate discussion

Problems	Questions to stimulate discussion
Settlement on reserves	Which events forced the Algonquins to settle on reserves? What were the consequences on their way of life? What happened to those who refused to settle there? What are the main similarities and differences between the reserves of the various communities?
Loss of cultural identity	What languages do Algonquins speak today? How can the elders communicate with their grandchildren? What happened to their way of life, songs and dances, also their means of subsistence (hunting, fishing)?

Social problems (drugs, suicide, family violence)	What leads some young people and adults to take drugs or commit suicide? How can the family violence experienced by some women and children be explained? Why is it said that some Algonquins are turning the violence against themselves?
Assimilation (residential schools)	How did the Oblates try to assimilate the Algonquins? What abuse did some residential school children suffer by some Oblates? What do some of the victims say about the abuse they suffered? What values did the Oblates try to instil in them?
Difficult access to education	What access to education do young Algonquins have? What are the consequences for their community of having no schools on the reserve? How much of their education at school is devoted to their language? Their culture?
Difficult living conditions	What are the living conditions in some communities? How can this be explained? What differences can you see between the different communities?
Lack of jobs	What access to employment do Algonquins seem to have? How can this be explained? What are the consequences of this lack of jobs? What choices are available to them? Particularly for young people?
Land claims	What are the claims of some Algonquin communities? How are they making their claims known? How do Whites see these claims?
Consanguineous marriage	What is the explanation for marriage between persons who are related? What are the possible long-term consequences of these marriages? How can such situations be prevented?

Annex III

Observation checklist for a chapter of the documentary *The Invisible Nation*

Title of chapter studied (for example: “Dismembering”)		
	Answers	Examples taken from excerpts of the documentary
What topic is raised in this chapter?		
How do the directors help you to visualize or understand this topic?		
Which community is shown in this part of the film?		
Where do its members live?		
Name one problem raised in this chapter.		
People interviewed, and their function	Problem raised (identified)	Person’s point of view
Name		
Name		
Name		
Images, music and sound	Description	What do you think might be the possible effect on the viewer?
Image		
Music		
Sound		
Narration and script	Examples taken from excerpts of the documentary	What do you think might be the possible effect on the viewer?
Writing style		
Tone of the narration		
Image support		
Musical support		

Suggested questions to stimulate discussion

Documentary chapters	
Dismembering	Where does the rodeo of Notre-Dame-du-Nord take place? Who were the original owners of this territory? What are the claims of the Algonquins regarding the land surrenders? At that time, what pressure tactics did the federal government and the Church apply to force the Algonquins to surrender these territories? Who are the inhabitants of Nedelec and how many still live in the village today? What prejudices do the White inhabitants of this region hold about the Algonquins?

Your Cheating Heart	Why did the directors choose to show the images of the Country and Western festival? What made the Algonquins of Winneway-Longue adopt the country-and-western style instead of keeping their traditional dances and songs? What is the significance of the hydroelectric power plant for the region's Algonquins? Whose territory are they leasing?
The Last Nomads	Who are the inhabitants of Kitcisakik-Dozois? What is their way of life? Why did they choose this way of life? What are their living conditions? What must they do to have access to water? What prejudices does the White population hold about them? What environmental problems do these Algonquins face? What do archeologists say about this region?
Treaty No 9	What is Treaty No 9? Who implemented the treaty? Why? How did the Government of Ontario react with regard to this treaty? The Government of Quebec? What was the impact of this treaty on the Algonquins? How did the governments present this treaty to the Algonquins? What pressure tactics did they employ to force them to accept it? What were the consequences of the arrival of logging companies on the Algonquins' way of life?
The Invasion	What are the impacts of logging on the Algonquins' way of life? Of the construction of the Laurentian highway connecting Mont-Laurier and Val-d'Or? Why were Algonquin children taken away from their families? What abuse did some of them suffer at the hands of the Oblates?
The Scars	What are the repercussions of attempted assimilation of the Algonquins by the governments and the Church? What can explain the family violence of some Algonquins against their wives and children? How does this violence manifest itself? How did the women react and how did they defend themselves? How can consanguineous marriage be explained? What are the possible consequences for the families?
Young People	For the young people of Lac Simon, what are the consequences of their sedentary way of life and their life on the reserve? How do the young people deal with the inactivity? What type of distress do they seem to feel? How is it that these young people are often related? What is the way of life of the Algonquins who settled at Kitigan Zibi? What has enabled this community to have made a better life than other Algonquin communities?
Specific Claims	What is the way of life of the Algonquins who settled at Kitigan Zibi? In what year was this community established? What role does the community's size play in their sense of well-being when compared to that of other Algonquin communities? How did the Oblates behave when they arrived in their territory? What are the main claims of the Algonquins of this reserve with regard to the town of Maniwaki?
The Third Power	What does "third power" mean in this documentary? Who exercises this third power, why and to whose detriment? What role do women play in empowerment? What are the Algonquins' living conditions on the Rapid Lake reserve? What is the physical state of the schools and how can this be explained? How do young people see education? Why?