

Who Are the Métis?

Lesson 1

Guiding Question for the Lesson

- How does the history of the Métis help explain their dress, music, and language?

Standards

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

EU 1 There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

EU 5 There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people and continue to shape who they are today. Many of these policies conflicted with one another. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods.

Social Studies Standards

SS.E.6-8.2 Analyze examples of how groups and individuals have considered profit and personal values in making economic choices in the past and/or present.

SS.G.6-8.2 Identify the location of places and regions in the world and understand their physical, political, and cultural characteristics.

SS.G.6-8.5 Explain the role and impact of spatial patterns of settlement and movement in shaping societies and cultures, including Indigenous cultures.

SS.G.6-8.6 Identify how the historical and contemporary movement of people, goods, and ideas from one area can impact change, conflict, and cooperation in other areas.

Materials

[Flags of the Montana Tribal Nations](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2023.

[History of the Métis Jig Dance](#), Docus to Watch, c. 2018.

[Métis Nation of Alberta](#)

[Who Are the Métis? PowerPoint](#), Montana Historical Society, 2019.

[Who Are the Métis \(PowerPoint notes for teachers\)](#), Montana Historical Society, 2019.

Length

One class period



Steps

Step One

- Ask students to consider what might happen if you take two different cultural groups, with different musical styles, languages, foods, clothing, and so on, and mix them together. What might the descendants of the groups be like, culturally?

Step Two

- Project the PowerPoint slides from the Montana Historical Society. Use the teacher notes to guide the information you provide. Suggested progression:
 - The goal of slides 1-5 is singular, to help students understand where/from whom the Métis originated, and how they are officially recognized today. Stop at slide 5 and ask students what they notice about this image. How does it help them understand who the Métis are? The slide notes also have other questions to ask students. Alternatively, you might have students jot down the answers to these questions in a journal or your preferred notes form.
 - Slide 6: Before providing information, ask students to carefully analyze this image. If they can spend a few minutes doing this silently first, they may notice more details. Then open the conversation to the whole group. What do they notice? What details stand out? And then, what do they think is going on in this image and why do they think so? Then share the teacher notes provided.
 - Slides 7-9: The theme of these slides is dress. Show the three slides (perhaps two-three times) and ask students to pay attention to the details. Then conduct a conversation about what they see. Follow up with the teacher notes as explanation. Alternatively, print these three pictures out and share with groups of three-four students, so each group has just one of the images on their table. Ask each group to characterize the fashion they see in the images. What details do they notice? What do they make of it?
 - Slide 10: There is a separate lesson on Red River Carts in this unit. Primarily, students need to know (from the teacher notes) that these were for travel and trade, specifically related to buffalo.
 - Slides 11-13 touch on language, music, and dance, three areas commonly associated with culture. The five-minute video on the History of the Metis Jig Dance helps explain the role of music and dance in Métis culture.
 - Slides 14-16 relate to the flags, both the Métis flag and the flag of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. You may need to explain the concept of “infinity” for the Métis flag to make sense. The Montana OPI has a resource on tribal flags. Here is the explanation of the Little Shell flag, from page 4 of that resource:

Little Shell Chippewa Tribal Nation

Flag and Seal: The seal and flag of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe was designed in 2006 by then Tribal Vice-Chairman James Parker Shield. He had four different versions for tribal members to vote on.



The buffalo was central to the survival and economy of the Pembina

Chippewa (from whom the Little Shell are descended) and the Métis people. The buffalo image faces west to symbolize the migration of the Little Shell Chippewa and Métis from the Great Lakes region in Minnesota to what is now North Dakota and Montana.

Years ago, tribal spiritual leader Henry Anderson was presented with a single eagle feather by a Chippewa man from Wisconsin. The eagle feather is incredibly old and now hangs from the “crook” in the eagle staff that is behind the buffalo (made by Henry Anderson and presented to the tribe). The eagle staff represents the full-blood, traditional heritage of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe. The crook is carried by a tribal leader or veteran, leading the Grand Entry at the Little Shell Chippewa Powwow each year.

The red and white background colors of the “Assiniboia” flag used by the Métis people represent the mixed blood heritage of the tribe. The yellow “fleur-de-lis” represents the French heritage of the mixed blood Chippewa while the green shamrock represents the Scots/Irish heritage. The yellow background on the Little Shell flag depicts the color of the sun.

Assessment

- Ask students to answer the guiding question from the beginning of the lesson: How does the history of the Métis help explain their dress, music, and language? Students can do this simply, on an index card for example, or perhaps each student in a group writes an answer, then groupmates work together to select the best answer from the group responses. Or ask them to write an answer together in pairs. Or ask them to write an answer, then collect all the answers and pass them out to other people to read out loud anonymously. The more times students hear variations on the same response, the better it will stick with them.

Extension Options

- Alternate version of this lesson: Before projecting the slide deck and going through any material on the Métis, print the slides and share thematic collections (slides 4-6, slides 7-9, slides 12-13, slides 14-15) with groups of three-four students, so each group has just one of the themes. Ask each group to make sense of the images they see. What details do they notice? What do they make of it? How does their collection or pair of images seem to go together? Have them share with the group, everyone knowing they do not really know about this topic yet.

- Conduct a more in-depth investigation with students into Michif language. You can find dictionaries online. There are also activities resources at the Rupertland Institute website.
 - [Michif Dictionary](#), Algonquian Dictionaries Project.
 - [Michif Language Resources](#), Rupertsland Institute.
 - [Michif Phrases Dictionary](#), Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture
- Ask students to conduct a short research project on one aspect of Métis culture (Métis sash, music and jigging, the flag, beadwork, and the Red River cart). A great starting place is the Métis Nation of Alberta website.