

## **Background Knowledge Building and Resources for Teaching with *The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Métis Story* by Leah Dorion**

Introducing the Métis and Michif Language in Montana for Indian Education for All (IEFA) is a valuable educational opportunity for K-12 students. Indian Education for All aims to ensure all students receive instruction about the state's Native American tribes and their cultures, histories, and contributions.

*The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Métis Story* by Leah Dorion is a beautifully illustrated story that includes both the Michif and English language. It provides a meaningful way to introduce Métis culture. At the end of the story, there is additional information and an illustration of the “Kaayash ka ishi Pimatishiyaaak” or Métis Values and the Red River Cart Wheel Teachings used in the story. Many creative lessons could stem from teaching about the content presented here on each of the values:

- Honesty (Kwayeshchi totamik)
- Respect (Kishchiitaytamic)
- Love (Shaakihwayhk)
- Sharing (Taashkinikayen)
- Caring (Pishkaymitook)
- Courage (Kooraazh)
- Balance (Balaans)
- Patience (Pa iksitt)
- Strength (La fors)
- Kindness (Kitimakaymiwek)
- Tolerance (Aanjeurii)
- Mother Earth (Ni maamaa la tayr)

### **LESSON**

[\*\*The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Métis Story by Leah Dorion Lesson from the Métis Museum\*\*](#) – appropriate and adaptable for all K-5 grades

[Extension activity written by author Leah Dorion](#)

[Extension activities chart for grades K-12 by author Leah Dorion](#)

### **Background Knowledge**

#### **Métis People**

The Métis are one of the Indigenous groups in North America with a unique culture and history. They are of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, primarily of French and Indigenous heritage.

In Montana, Métis people have a significant historical presence, particularly in the northern part of the state and The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians from Great Falls, Montana has many Métis members.

#### **Michif Language**

Michif is the traditional language of the Métis people. It is a unique and endangered Indigenous language that developed as a result of the close interactions between European fur traders, especially French, and Indigenous peoples.



Michif combines elements of both French and various Indigenous languages, primarily Cree, Ojibwa, and Assiniboine. It is a testament to the cultural fusion that occurred in the fur trade era.

### **Cultural Significance**

Teaching about the Métis and the Michif language helps students understand the rich cultural diversity in Montana and the contributions of Métis people to the state's history and heritage.

The Métis are known for their skills in fur trapping, their vibrant arts and crafts, their unique music, and their distinctive way of life.

### **Historical Context**

The origins of the Métis date back to the late 17th century when the fur trade became a significant commercial endeavor. Before the establishment of the United States/Canada border in 1846, vast regions of the central and western parts of the continent in what are now known as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Washington were unsettled and under the chartered use of the Hudson's Bay Company (Rupert's Land). Trapping and harvesting beaver pelts and other furs for return to Europe through eastern markets required the alliance and support of the native inhabitants of the areas west of the Great Lakes. Working for Hudson's Bay Company and the competing North West Company, the trapping and trading was done largely by immigrant Irish, Scotch, and French (voyageurs) who formed liaisons with the northern tribes to trade for goods in exchange for the valuable animal pelts. Marriage "à la façon du pays" (according to local custom) was a basic part of the social interaction and liaison between the voyageurs and the local native inhabitants. Most of these unions involved Saukteaux (Ojibwa) and Cree women, although there were also many unions with the Chippewa, Blackfeet, and Sarcee, the latter two living further west. Thus, thousands of Métis or "mixed blood" people came to occupy the areas nearest the trading posts along with thousands of Chippewa and Cree. This population increased to many thousands and took root in the region of the Red River in what is now southern Manitoba and northern Minnesota. In the early 19th century, they called themselves "Metifs," "Bois-Brules," and "les gens libres" (the free people). From OPI's [Montana Indians: Their History and Location](#)

### **Contemporary Presence**

Métis communities still exist in Montana today, and they continue to celebrate their culture and traditions. In fact, the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians in Montana received federal recognition as a tribe in 2019.

Teaching about the Métis and the Little Shell helps students recognize the importance of preserving and respecting the culture and language of this group.

### **Learn More About Metis Culture from Montana's Poet Laureate Chris LaTray**

- [Who Are The Little Shell with Chris LaTray](#)
- [Interview with Chris LaTray – Métis Cultural Historian](#)

### **Additional Resources**

- [Michif Lessons – Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture](#)
- [Interview with author Leah Dorion](#)
- [Who Are The Métis? \(video\)](#)
- [4th Grade Lesson on Métis and Red River Carts from North Dakota](#)
- [Red River Carts – Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada](#)
- [Métis educator sets up tent in classroom to share his grandparents' experience with students](#) – article with video touring a Métis tent.