

Who Are the Métis?



Series 1: Who are the Métis?

Welcome

Let's learn more about Métis culture and history together!

The Métis Nation of Alberta's Children and Family Services Department is delighted to present a series of children's culture cards! We hope it will inspire you and your family to have meaningful conversations about the past, present, and future of the Métis Nation.

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Glossary Terms

Ancestor

A person you came from who lived many generations ago, the opposite of descendent. E.g. Your great-great-grandfather.

Animal Hide

An animal's skin prepared for use as clothing, shelter, tools, and more.

Bannock

A type of bread made of wheat flour that many North American Indigenous communities adapted from early Scottish fur traders. Bannock is cooked over a fire, baked, or fried in oil.

Buffalo Hunt

Many Métis communities organized buffalo hunts to feed and clothe their families, fur traders, and even settler families. Métis buffalo hunts were one of the important ways Métis communities exercised self-government before Canada existed.



Glossary Terms

Cree (language)

A language with several dialects spoken by Indigenous peoples in what is now called Canada. The Métis language of Michif was influenced by Cree and includes Cree words.

Finger weaving

Braiding or weaving wool, silk, or yarn using only the fingers.

Fur Trade

The buying and selling of animal skins and pelts in what is now called North America in the 1500s to 1800s. Canada was built on the fur trade and many Métis worked for one of the two major fur trade companies: Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company.

Guide

European traders and explorers relied on the knowledge of Indigenous guides and interpreters, especially as the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies expanded into new lands. The Métis were useful guides since they knew the lands, how to survive in the wild, and often spoke both European and Indigenous languages.

Glossary Terms

Indigenous

A word to refer to the original inhabitants of Canada. Canada recognizes three distinct Indigenous groups: Inuit, First Nations, and Métis.

Interpreter

Interpreters were necessary to barter and communicate between Indigenous and European groups during the fur trade. The Métis often knew many languages and understood both European and Indigenous cultures, which made them excellent interpreters.

Kitchen Party

A Métis party where Métis families and friends gather together, usually for days, with food, music, and dance competitions.

Pemmican

A very important food for fur traders made from dried wild meat, animal fat, and dried berries. Pemmican was healthy, easy to carry, and gave fur traders the energy they needed.

Glossary Terms

Sinew

A harvested animal's tendon used for rope or thread. It is very strong and has many uses.

Traditional Territory

A geographic area where Indigenous peoples lived and have historic community connections to.

Tumpline

A strap that goes across the forehead to carry heavy items on your back.

Victory of Frog Plain (1816)

Known to Canadians as the Battle of Seven Oaks, this victory is significant because it was the first time the Métis Nation rose the Métis flag and united to defend Métis rights against colonial powers restricting the trade of pemmican.

York Boat

A boat that the Métis invented for fur trading that was bigger and sturdier than a canoe.

Who Are the Métis?



Métis People

Who are the Métis? Let's find out! The Métis are one of the three recognized **Indigenous** groups in Canada. The first Métis people were the children and grandchildren of marriages between European fur traders and First Nations women in the 1700s.

These families lived close to one another and had many things in common. They took parts of First Nations and European cultures and put them together to make a new way of life, and a brand-new culture – the Métis. The Métis lived within the Métis Homeland and shared the same culture, language, and traditions.

Even though the word “Métis” comes from a French word meaning “mixed”, not everyone who is both European and First Nations is Métis. Being Métis today means that you are a descendant of the Métis families of the past.

- ∞ Are you Métis? How do you know?
- ∞ The word “**family**” in Northern Michif is “**piyak oskân**” (pe-yak os-kan) and “**faamii**” (Fah-MEE) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code to get the MNA Family Tree workbook and see how you connect to the Métis of the past!



What Did Métis People Do in the Fur Trade?



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Métis in the Fur Trade

The Métis are sometimes called “Children of the **Fur Trade**” because the **fur trade** connected First Nations and European people, creating the first Métis families.

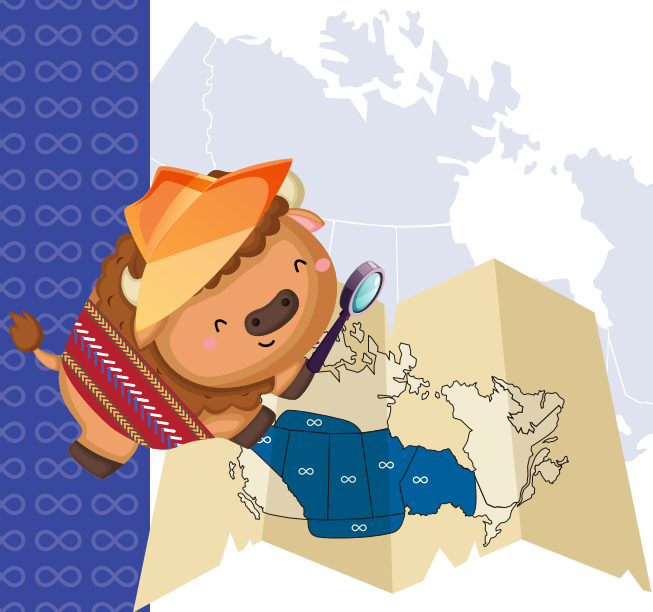
During the 1700s and 1800s, Métis people were important to the **fur trade**. They knew First Nations and European languages, making them great fur traders, **guides**, and **interpreters**. The Métis were also skilled hunters and trappers. Many worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company or the North West Company and travelled for months by Red River cart or **York boat** between **fur trade** posts to transport furs and other trade items.

Life in the **fur trade** was not easy. Fur traders had to be strong and healthy to travel through all types of weather carrying many heavy items.

- ∞ Why do you think Métis people made great **guides** and **interpreters**?
- ∞ The word “**fur**” in Northern Michif is “**ahtayak**” (ah-te-yak) and “**li pwel daanimaal**” (lee pwel daa-nee-MAAL) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan this QR code to learn more about what Métis people traded during the **Fur Trade**.



Where is the Métis Homeland?



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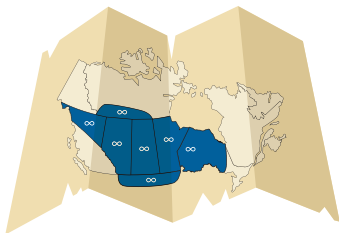
Métis Homeland

Look! The map shows the Métis Homeland where Métis people came from and many still live today! The Homeland is the **traditional territory** of the Métis Nation, with many historic Métis communities especially along rivers.

Can you find Alberta on the map? Alberta is part of the Métis Homeland, as well as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, parts of British Columbia, Ontario, the Northwest Territories, and the northern United States.

Métis people today came from the Métis families who lived in the Homeland many years ago.

- ∞ Do you live in the Métis Homeland?
- ∞ The phrase “**my home**” in Northern Michif is “**nîki**” (ne-ki) and “**niikinaahk**” (nee-kin-AAK) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code to follow a Métis fur trader’s journey through the Homeland!



What is the Métis Language?

TÂN'SI
KEYA?

TAANISHI
KIIYA?



HELLO, HOW
ARE YOU?

BONJOUR,
ÇA VA?



Métis Language

Did you know Métis people have their own language?

The earliest Métis families spoke a mix of **Cree**, Ojibwe, and French. By using parts of each, Métis people created their own brand-new language and called it Michif.

Métis families spoke Michif a bit differently depending on where they lived in the Homeland. Some used more French words (called “Heritage Michif”) while others used more **Cree** words (“Northern Michif”).

- ∞ The phrase, “**Hello, how are you?**” in Northern Michif is, “**Tân’si keya?**” (tan-si-kêya) and “**Taanishi kiiya?**” (tan-SHEE kee-YA) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Download the free “Northern Michif to Go” and “Michif to Go” apps to learn more Michif words.
- ∞ Scan the QR code for a fun activity that will help you learn more Michif words!



How Did Métis People Travel?



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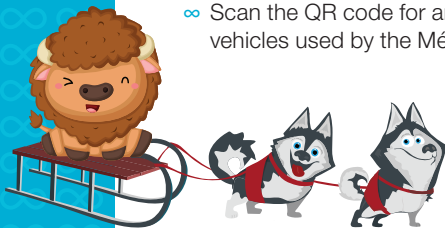
Métis Transportation

During the **fur trade**, Métis people needed to move heavy animal furs across the Métis Homeland. They didn't have cars back then, so they invented the Red River cart from wood tied together with **sinew**. The carts made trails between **fur trade** posts, some becoming roads we still use today!

Métis people also invented **York boats** to travel on rivers and lakes because they were bigger, sturdier, and could carry more furs than canoes.

In the winter, Métis people used teams of dogs to pull sleds made of wood and **animal hide**, and often decorated the sled dogs with beaded or embroidered blankets.

- ∞ Did you know there are roads today that used to be Red River cart trails in Alberta? Can you name one?
- ∞ The word “**traveller**” in Northern Michif is “**opapâmacihos**” (o-pa-pa-ma-chi-hos) and “**aen traveller**” (en CHRAV-lur) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code for an activity about vehicles used by the Métis of the past!



How Did Métis People Live With One Another?



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Métis Communities

Many Métis families lived together in communities along **fur trade** routes, often dividing land near riverbanks into long, narrow strips called river lots. This way, every family had access to the river to fish and trade, as well as land to garden, hunt, and gather plants. Homes were close together so Métis families could easily visit one another because gathering is an important part of Métis culture.

Present-day Edmonton, St. Albert, Métis Crossing, and Winnipeg are a few examples of historic Métis communities that existed near rivers. In some of these places, you can still see the shapes of the old river lots on maps!

- ∞ Why do you think river lots were good places to live?
- ∞ The word “**village**” in Northern Michif is “**ocînâs**” (o-te-nas) and is “**aen villaazh**” (en vill-AAZH) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan this QR code for a map of Métis communities in Alberta you can visit with your family and a scavenger hunt to do on the way!



What Does Traditional Métis Clothing Look Like?



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Métis Clothing

Métis people of the past had their own style of clothing.

Métis men wore leggings, moccasins, and long hooded coats called capotes, usually tied closed with a Métis sash. Sashes were handmade by **finger weaving** strands of wool or silk, and often took more than 300 hours to make! The Métis sash was very important during the **fur trade**, because it could be used as a towel, belt, scarf, emergency sewing kit, and a **tumpline**.

Métis women usually wore long dresses, shawls, and moccasins, and often wore their hair neatly tied back.

Métis people decorated their clothing, with brightly-coloured glass beads and embroidered flowers.

- ∞ How is Métis clothing of the past different from what you wear now?
- ∞ The word “**jacket**” in Northern Michif is “**kapô**” (ka-pot) and “**aen zhilay**” (en ZHILL-ay) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan this QR code to design your very own pair of Métis moccasins!



Who Are the Flower Beadwork People?



Métis Beadwork

Long ago, Métis people became famous for decorating their clothing with glass beads they sewed in the shapes of flowers, leaves, and other living things found in nature.

The Métis were so good at beading they even had the nickname, The Flower Beadwork People. They decorated jackets, bags, leggings, mittens, moccasins, and dog sleds with their fancy and colourful flower beadwork. Today, many Métis people bead the same designs their Métis **ancestors** did hundreds of years ago!

- ∞ Have you ever seen Métis-style beadwork?
- ∞ The word “**bead**” in Northern Michif is “**mîikis**” (me-kis) and “**enn rasaad**” (en ra-SAAD) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Try doing what many Métis people have done for a long time. Scan the QR code to create your own virtual floral design!



What Does Métis Music Sound Like?



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Métis Music and Dance

Do you like music and dancing? Métis people do!

When Métis people have **kitchen parties**, they want to have fun! They created their own music style using fiddles, guitars, spoons, and other household items. Their First Nations and European **ancestors** had very different music, so they took a bit of each, mixed them up, and created something totally new! People who did not have an instrument stomped their feet or clapped their hands to the beat.

The Red River jig is the most popular Métis dance. The best jiggers move only their legs, keeping the rest of their body still. Sometimes Métis people have competitions to see who can dance the fanciest.

- ∞ Why do you think Métis music and dance is so important to Métis people?
- ∞ The word “**music**” in Northern Michif is “**kitohcikêwin**” (kih-toh-chi-ke-win) and “**meuzeuk**” (meh-ZEHK) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code to learn about Métis music and how to do the Red River Jig!



What Are Traditional Métis Foods?



Métis Foods

Before grocery stores, Métis people ate food from the land, and were expert hunters, gardeners, and fishers. They ate wild meat from buffalo, deer, rabbit, moose, and fish, and used many parts of the animal for clothing and tools – almost no part of the animal was wasted. Families planted vegetable gardens, picked wild berries, gathered maple syrup, and even used wild plants as medicines!

Métis families also knew how to keep food and medicines safe for a long time so it would last through the cold winter months.

Food has always been an important part of culture, and many Métis families still enjoy eating traditional Métis foods today including **bannock**, **pemmican**, rice pudding, and raisin pies!

- ∞ Why do you think Métis families ate food from the land?
- ∞ The word “**meal**” in Northern Michif is “**mîcisôwin**” (me-chi-so-win) and “**aen ripaa**” (en re-PAH) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code for a recipe to make your own **bannock** at home!



What is the Métis Flag?



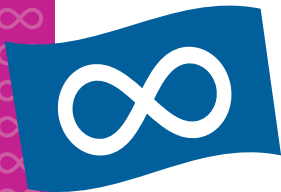
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Métis Flag

The Métis flag is special to Métis people as a reminder they are their own Nation. The Métis flag is the oldest flag indigenous to Canada and is more than 150 years older than the Canadian flag. It was flown by Métis hero Cuthbert Grant during the famous **Victory at Frog Plain in 1816**, one of the first times the Métis fought in a battle as a Nation.

The Métis flag can have either a blue or red background with a white infinity symbol in the centre, which looks like the number 8 on its side. When Métis people fly the Métis flag, they do it with honour, showing others they are proud to be Métis!

- ∞ What does the infinity symbol on the Métis flag mean to you?
- ∞ The word “**flag**” in Northern Michif is “**akotâson**” (a-koh-ta-son) and “**paviiyoon**” (pa-vee-OH) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code for an activity where you can show the reasons you are proud to be Métis!



Métis Government in Alberta



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Métis Government

Otipemisiwak (*Oh-teh-pim-swak*) means “the people who own themselves” in **Cree**. The Métis have always had their own government. They choose who leads them and the laws they should follow. The Métis **buffalo hunts** are one example of Métis government that existed before Canada was a country. Today, every province in the Métis Homeland has a Métis government. The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), the government for the Métis people in Alberta since 1928, is the oldest.

MNA Citizens can vote on leaders and laws, attend cultural and community events, and take part in MNA programs. Most importantly, becoming a Citizen shows you are proud to be part of the mighty Métis Nation!

- ∞ To be an MNA Citizen, you must have **ancestors** from the historic Métis Nation. Do you have a Métis **ancestor**?
- ∞ The word “**government**” in Northern Michif is “**kihci okimâninahk**” (Kih-chi oh-ki-ma-ne-nahk) and “**li goovarnimaan**” (lee goo-VAR-nee-MAA) in Heritage Michif.
- ∞ Scan the QR code for buffalo-themed learning activities for early learners!

