

Full Circle: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Ways of Knowing: A resource for Indigenous Approaches to Learning in Ontario, Canada

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Full Circle: First Nations, Métis¹ and Inuit² Ways of Knowing is the fifth in a series of Common Threads Resource documents produced by and for members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, OSSTF/FEESO. This education workers' union, founded in 1919, has 60,000 members across Ontario, Canada. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education. Each Common Threads project in the series tackles an important social issue that is cross-curricular in nature and compels students to examine their beliefs, choices and actions. These projects address a gap in curricular resource materials and create opportunities to form partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), international unions and other advocacy groups.

The writers of this curriculum resource self-identify as First Nations or Métis, or have extensive experience working with Aboriginal students across the province. They have created a document that is authentic in its approach to sensitive, value-laden topics, and honours traditional "Ways of Knowing" by taking a holistic approach to each topic. Over the past five years, as provincial curriculum documents have been revised, they have included a statement about the importance of using learning resources that are inclusive of

and sensitive to diverse cultures, including Aboriginal people. Despite this commitment by the Ministry of Education, there are few resources to help implement these curriculum expectations. The *Full Circle* project will assist educators in achieving the goal of integrating knowledge and understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, history and culture into a variety of courses within Ontario secondary schools.

The diversity among First Nations, Métis and Inuit people means that some teachings and symbols are not universally recognized by all Aboriginal people and the Common Threads writers acknowledge this fact. Where possible, specific names and titles have been used to describe groups of people, however, the word "Aboriginal" has been used as a collective term to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit people as the original inhabitants of North America and their descendants.

The symbol of the turtle used on the cover of this project is a reference to "Turtle Island", a term used by the Haudenosaunee⁴ to refer to North America. The turtle is also commonly used by environmentalists to indicate their solidarity with the land and its creatures. The turtle is used as a sign of longevity and the writers use it to signify the original people of Canada and their resiliency in the face of great challenges. In many cultures, the turtle represents knowledge or wisdom and in this document the turtle symbolizes "Ways of Knowing".

An important feature of every Common Threads project is an audiovisual component. In *Full Circle*, the videographers have profiled three First Nations youth, a young Métis woman and two Inuit siblings. The stories of their struggles and triumphs as they come to terms with and celebrate their

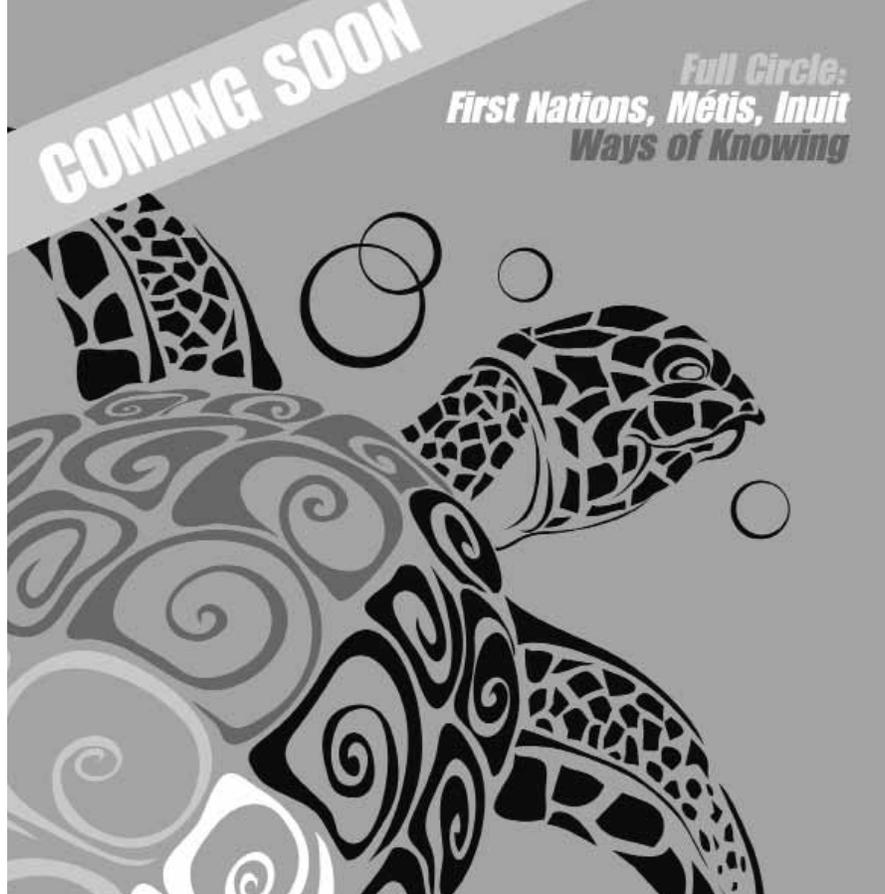
1. First Nations: In Canada, this is synonym of Indigenous or Aboriginal Peoples.

2. Métis: a distinct culture that arose from the children of French fur traders and aboriginal women in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and are now recognized a distinct aboriginal group in Canada.

3. Inuit: Inhabitants of the Far North of Canada and Quebec that see themselves as distinct from southern First Nations. Once known as "Eskimos" in North America and Europe.

4. Member of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation- OSSTF.

5. Haudenosaunee: A confederation of six indigenous nations in Ontario, Quebec and Northeastern US states. Sometimes called "Iroquois" by non- Haudenosaunee.



cultures and heritage illustrate the universal themes of teenage angst in a quest for identity. All students will recognize a part of themselves within these young people as they ask the quintessential questions of identity: who am I and why am I here? This is the common thread that runs through each of the lessons.

The title *Full Circle* is meaningful to the writers and many First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. While it is recognized that not all Aboriginal people identify with the Medicine Wheel, the symbol of the circle or medicine wheel is used throughout the document as an organizational tool and provides a holistic and balanced approach to these sensitive topics. The circle is a common symbol used in many cultures to denote wholeness, inclusion, femaleness (womb), and eternity. For many First Nations and Inuit people, the circle has a spiritual connotation as the symbol of the moon and the sun. The Métis infinity symbol, the joining of two circles, illustrates the joining of two cultures and the unending existence of a people. The title *Full Circle* also refers to the unending journey that many Aboriginal people find themselves on as they claim and re-claim their culture, their land, and their identity.

For some, the circle is seen as whole and never ending. It can be balanced or unbalanced, depending upon what is placed on or in it. In this resource, the writers have attempted to balance the lessons in all four quadrants using four thematic areas: identity, health, residential schools and land. Each of these themes has up to ten lessons within it. The lessons in the Land unit ask students to consider the unique relationship that Aboriginal people share with the land, as well as the topics of treaty rights and unresolved land claims. The Residential School unit tackles the philosophical under-

pinnings of the residential school system; looks at the legacy of physical, emotional and sexual abuse suffered by the children and the ongoing impacts of that system on Aboriginal people today. Many of those long-lasting effects are studied in the health unit, where students will learn about the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal people in Canada as they face poverty, isolation, and reduced resources for health and education. Finally, the Identity unit speaks to the hope and resiliency of the Aboriginal people of Canada as they reclaim their history and embrace their diverse culture, sharing their gifts and knowledge with the people of this nation.

OSSTF/FEESO has continued its tradition of creating socially based curriculum resources that tackle the difficult issues of politics, social responsibility and social justice. Each lesson uses interactive and differentiated instructional strategies that match overall course expectations and provide opportunities for assessment as learning, of learning and for learning.

Full Circle: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Ways of Knowing is a high quality, educator-ready resource that will be welcomed by educators who are committed to helping students achieve a higher level of understanding of Aboriginal people and their important place in Canadian society. The project is to be released in the fall of 2012. Electronic copies will be available on the OSSTF/FEESO website along with the four previous Common Threads projects.

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