



## First Nations Agriculture in Saskatchewan

In this lesson students will explore the close relationship First Nations people of Saskatchewan have traditionally had with the natural world. First Nations people grew plants and produced food long before the European settlers began to arrive. Students will examine some aspects of the interdependence of First Nations people with their environment.



Two  
45 minute  
classes

### Outcomes:

DR4.2 Explain the relationship of First Nation and Métis peoples with the land.

DR4.3 Analyze the implications of the Treaty relationship in Saskatchewan.

### Indicators:

DR4.2 a. Investigate the traditional worldviews of First Nations peoples prior to European contact regarding land as an animate object and sustaining life force.

DR4.2 b. Research traditional lifestyles of First Nations communities and peoples prior to European contact (e.g., hunting, gathering, movement of people to follow food sources).

DR4.2 f. Assess the impact of historic loss of land on First Nations and Métis people.

DR4.3 b Investigate conditions which precipitated Treaty negotiations in Saskatchewan.

DR4.3 c. Research Treaty provisions, including the spirit and intent of Treaties as well as material considerations.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- \* overhead or data projector
- \* art supplies
- \* magazines
- \* selected handouts

### Questions/Statements to Guide Inquiry:

1. The Medicine Wheel is an important tool for teaching people about their place in the natural world.
2. What is the difference between farming and gathering?
3. Traditional First Nations peoples were very closely connected to the land.
4. Why is it important to respect and take care of the land in which we live?

First Nations people "farmed" the Prairies collecting over 180 plant species used for foods, medicines, ceremonies, & construction materials!



## Teacher Background

First Nations groups treasured their physical and spiritual relationship with the land because from it came everything they needed - food, clothing, shelter, tools, medicine, and ceremonial objects. Dynamic, thriving nations existed in North America for thousands of years before Europeans arrived and established their own systems of governance, education, language, and culture. In terms of agriculture, Plains First Nations peoples knew a great deal about their environment - vegetation, rainfall, frost patterns, animal migration, land formations, availability of water, care of horses, knowledge of summer pasturage, and winter forage requirements. Familiarize yourself with Teacher Information Sheet 4.1, Student Handouts 4.1 and 4.2, as well as the Talking Circles Strategy (Teacher Information Sheet 4.2) before teaching this lesson.

Many of the treaties signed provided allocations of 128 acres per person to allow sufficient land for farming. However, it took many years to survey the land and because First Nations people often moved around, some did not receive the land they were promised. This meant that they did not have the land base they needed to get securely established in farming or ranching. Nevertheless, many First Nations people did become farmers, and many were successful for a time. As farming on the prairies changed, these farmers suffered under policies of the Indian Affairs Branch such as the pass and permit system that severely restricted travel. In many instances, First Nations farmers were forced to sell their implements or eat their livestock in order to survive. Under the terms of the Indian Act, their ability to get loans and to operate independently was severely restricted.

For a more detailed explanation of the history of treaty land entitlement in Saskatchewan, see [www.fnmr.gov.sk.ca/lands/tle/history/](http://www.fnmr.gov.sk.ca/lands/tle/history/). This five part resource on the Government of Saskatchewan website includes the following articles:

1. Historical Basis for Treaty Land Entitlement
2. Treaties Reconcile Two Systems
3. Treaty Land Entitlement in Saskatchewan
4. Treaty Shortfall Addressed
5. Treaty Land Entitlement: Where are We Now?

Other sources of background information to use with this lesson would include:

1. The Treaty Education Kit K-6 compiled jointly by the greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division and the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. See [www.otc.ca](http://www.otc.ca) for information on obtaining this kit.
2. The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan's entry on the history of Aboriginal agriculture and the contributions of the Aboriginal people to agriculture in the West. See [http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/aboriginal\\_reserve\\_agriculture\\_to\\_1900.html](http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/aboriginal_reserve_agriculture_to_1900.html)

*Well before the treaties of the 1870s, First Nations people had begun to raise crops and cattle in Saskatchewan. In the 1830s and 1850s, a group of Cree known to fur traders as the Magpies cultivated corn and potatoes.*

*One Earth Farms is a corporate farm that focuses on building stable long-term relationships with First Nations through its commitment to improved land management, equity participation, job opportunities, and training.*



## Before Activity

Display an image such as Student Handout 4.1 on an overhead or project an image from the internet (see [www.freewebs.com/stevedrama/MedicineWheel.jpg](http://www.freewebs.com/stevedrama/MedicineWheel.jpg)) as one example. Ask your students what they may already know about medicine wheels.

## During Activities

### Day One

Familiarize students with the appearance and the basic concepts of the medicine wheel. Point out there is some variation of medicine wheels among different First Nations peoples. Base the class instruction on a medicine wheel that reflects a First Nations people in the area in which you live.

Indicate the medicine wheel is at the heart of many traditional First Nations people and was part of the existing culture generations and generations before the Europeans came to the prairies. Medicine wheels taught people about their place in the universe and their relationship to all creations.

Walk students through each of the quadrants emphasizing that the medicine wheel illustrated the beliefs of many First Nations people. Discuss the concept of the wheel stressing such things as:

- First Nations people had a great respect for Mother Earth.
- First Nations people believed the richness of the earth had been provided by their Creator.
- First Nations people assumed a role of stewardship and pursued their activities guided by principles of respect and responsibility to the land and natural resources. Explore what is meant by the term, "stewardship".

Explain that each part of the wheel is associated with different aspects of nature –the different directions of north, south, east, and west; symbols; colours; traditional medicines; heavenly bodies; and seasons. Discuss the chart on the bottom of Student Handout 4.1 with students. Pause and allow ample time for student questions.

Students produce a medicine wheel using some of the information contained on the chart. They may sketch and/or use images from magazines to capture significant aspects of each quadrant. Students may choose to research websites dealing with medicine wheels. Such sites include:

- [www.freewebs.com/stevedrama/MedicineWheel.jpg](http://www.freewebs.com/stevedrama/MedicineWheel.jpg)
- <http://molisa.wordpress.com/aboutme/sacred-medicine-wheels/>
- [www.spiritualnetwork.net/native/medicine\\_wheel.htm](http://www.spiritualnetwork.net/native/medicine_wheel.htm)

*Note: Remind students there are different medicine wheels within different First Nations groups. The information provided here is based on the Cree/Algonquin/Plains wheel.*



### Day Two

Arrange the classroom in a circle, this could be on the floor or rearrange the desks. Introduce another circle associated with First Nations people—the talking circle. Introduce the concept indicating it had its roots as a traditional way for First Nations peoples to solve problems. Go through the protocols with the students.

Distribute “Foods from the Land” (Student Handout 4.2). Have students follow along as you read aloud. Pause to clarify (e.g. What are some examples of root vegetables? Who has tried pemmican?). Demonstrate whenever possible (e.g. Here is a piece of beef jerky. Take a look at this wild rice in my hand).

Once you finish reading, use the talking circle method to pose key questions like the following: Why were jerky and pemmican so important to First Nations? What do you think is the difference between farming and gathering? Why were the Chiefs interested in learning how to farm? How did the First Nations people help the Europeans? Who were the Métis? What was the Peasant Policy? Why was the Peasant Policy unfair to First Nations people? What else stopped the First Nations farmers from being as successful as the European farmers?

The talking circle allows for more equitable student participation.

*One Earth Farms is currently in discussions with more than 40 First Nations representing more than 2 million acres of land across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba*

### After Activity

Wrap up the talking circle by having students reflect on why it is important for people to share with one another.

Distribute the definition questions (Student Handout 4.3) which each student will complete and hand in.

### Assessment

#### Teacher Checklist

- ✓ Did student successfully complete definition sheets?
- ✓ Did student take part in the talking circle?
- ✓ Did student follow the protocols of the talking circle?
- ✓ Did student demonstrate an understanding of the medicine wheel concept (as determined by the illustration produced and/or questions asked)?

### Cross Curricular Connections

#### Science

This lesson’s reflection on stewardship addresses outcome HC 4.3 which looks at the effects of human activities on communities.



## Further Investigation

Invite an Elder to visit and discuss the importance of the Medicine Wheel. Agriculture and/or the gathering of medicines could be topics as well.

Investigate one or both of the following sites with students:

-  <http://www.shannonthunderbird.com> has information and many animated visuals of widespread Aboriginal symbols including those associated with the medicine wheel.
-  [www.saskstories.ca](http://www.saskstories.ca) has narratives which explore Aboriginal history and culture.

Visit the Western Development Museum (Saskatoon), the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (Regina), or arrange for a visit to Wanuskewin Heritage Park.

Invite students to complete First Nations Word Search (Student Handout 4.4). The answer key is included.

For background on the relationship between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Farmers go to: <http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/De/saskatchewan100/researchpapers/Gabrial%20Dumont%20-%20SICC%20Papers/FNAgriculture.pdf>

*In 1890, the first prize for wheat was won by reserve farms, both at Prince Albert and Regina.*



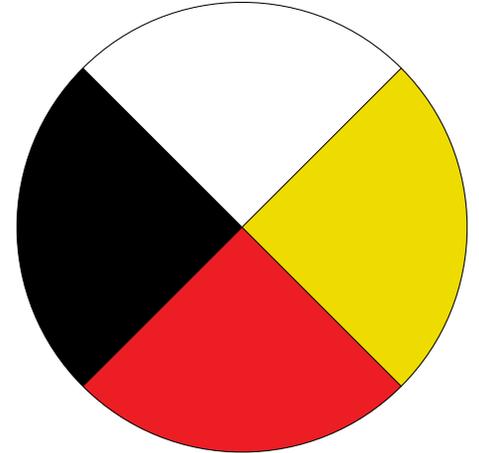
## The Medicine Wheel

The medicine wheel illustrates the First Nations spiritual philosophy and is considered a major symbol of peaceful interaction among all living beings on Earth. The ancient First Nations people recognized they were influenced by the natural rhythms of Mother Earth and the cycles of life. They lived their lives according to those rhythms. They honoured all the life cycles such as birth and death; planting and reaping; death and rebirth. "Medicine" concerned restoring balance and harmony with those cycles.

Working to create a balance is a personal journey. Each area requires attention, some more than others, and one must try not to focus too much in any one area, or a person's life balance is in jeopardy. Working on maintaining a balanced wheel is a life long journey. The rounder your wheel, the better, as this illustrates a balanced life. The medicine wheel teaches us that human beings have four aspects to their natures: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. Each of these areas must be developed equally in a healthy, well-adjusted person.

The four directions of the medicine wheel are gifts given by the Creator. The wheel is a circle of hope and of healing containing many stories and much traditional wisdom. The medicine wheel represents the four seasons, the four original races of humanity, and four principles to live by.

Historic photos accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission. Medicine wheel photo courtesy Saskatoon Public Library, Local History Room.





## The Talking Circle

The talking circle, properly employed, encourages people to speak from the heart in a safe place. This strategy is a gentle and respectful way for people to be genuinely heard in a way that sometimes our society does not readily allow. The power of the talking circle comes from the respect and safety experienced by the participants. The process and protocols of the circle develop and enhance this respect and safety permitting people to speak and to listen deeply. It can work very well in a classroom setting where all too often a minority of children vie for all the air time and some children's ideas are never heard.

### The Process

The symbol (stick, feather, rock, or other significant object) is placed in the centre of the circle. This is the signal to participants it is time to focus their attention.

The first person who feels ready to speak will pick up the object and begin. The teacher may need to lead by example.

After the first person speaks, the object is passed to the person to his or her left. The object moves clockwise around the circle. The teacher may point out this is in keeping with the medicine wheel.

*Circles are found throughout First Nations' cultures!*



*Sacred drum circle*



*Tipi at wanuskewin*





Each person chooses to speak or pass the object silently, as he or she wishes.

When the last one who speaks passes the object to the next person, that person places the object back in the centre of the circle. This ends the circle. The circle may start again with the introduction of a new issue or question.

### **Protocols of the Talking Circle**

If you have nothing to say when the object comes to you, you may pass it on.

Each person receives the circle's full attention when he/she is speaking. There are no comments, questions, interruptions, or other conversations going on.



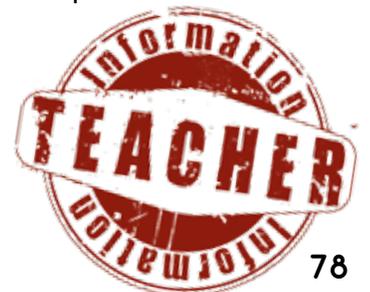
## Foods From The Land Answer Key

Definitions: Match each of the words from the list below to its best definition.

**Word list:**

bison	nomadic	cultivate	pass system
First Nations	European	treaty	development
reserve	Peasant Policy	non-aboriginal	Indian Agent

1. First Nations A term that refers to the Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are neither Inuit nor Métis.
2. Pass system A policy put in place for First Nations people to get permission before doing something.
3. Nomadic Communities of people who move from one place to another.
4. European The people of Europe.
5. Bison The main source of food for many Plains First Nations.
6. Cultivate Work the land for crops.
7. Reserve An area of land that has been set apart by the government for the use and benefit of a band.
8. Peasant Policy A policy that did not allow First Nations farmers to sell their crops.
9. Indian Agent A person who was in charge of making decisions for First Nations people's daily lives.
10. Development An act of improving by expanding.
11. Non-aboriginal A person who is not First Nations, Inuit, nor Métis.
12. Treaty An agreement signed between the First Nations People and the Government of Canada.





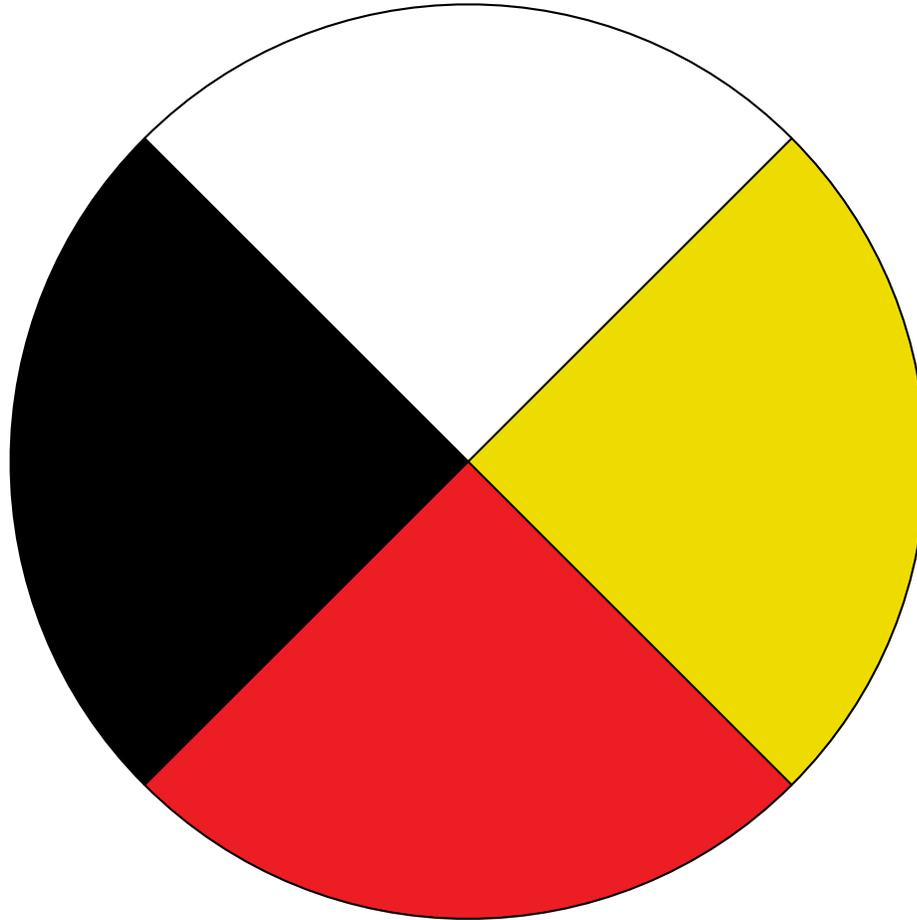
# First Nations Word Search Answer Key

C	E	D	A	R													C			
													B	U	F	F	A	L	O	
							M												Y	
					S	W	E	E	T	G	R	A	S	S					O	
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P			E				I			E		T	O	B	A	C	C	O		
E			T				N			S				G					B	
M	U		I				E			E				L					E	
M		R	S				W			R				E					A	
I			O				H			V									R	
C				P			E	T	R	E	A	T	Y							
A					E		E			S										
N						A	L			M	O	T	H	E	R	E	A	R	T	H
C	R	E	A	T	O	R	N									S	A	G	E	
							F	I	R	S	T	N	A	T	I	O	N	S		





## The Cree Medicine Wheel



	<b>Life Stages</b>	<b>Time of Day</b>	<b>Medicine</b>	<b>Seasons</b>	<b>Colour</b>
<b>East</b>	Childhood	Sunrise	Sage	Spring	Yellow
<b>South</b>	Adolescence	Noon	Cedar	Summer	Red
<b>West</b>	Adult	Sunset	Tobacco	Fall	Black
<b>North</b>	Elder	Night	Sweetgrass	Winter	White



Each of the four quadrants has a direction, a season, a colour, and animal and a time of day associated with it.

### **Medicine Wheel - East**

East is the direction of the sunrise. It is the beginning of a new day. It is the direction for seeking illumination and clarity regarding life's path. The quadrant associated with East is associated with spring, a time for regeneration. The quadrant is represented by the colour yellow-the colour of the rising sun in the eastern sky.

### **Medicine Wheel - South**

South is associated with summer, which follows spring in the seasons as well as on the wheel. Summer is a time of warmth. It is symbolized by the colour red. The South teaches the qualities of trust and humility.

### **Medicine Wheel - West**

The West portion of the quadrant is the home of the bear. The West is fall and is represented with dark colours, including black. The West instructs people to be introspective and seek self knowledge.

### **Medicine Wheel - North**

The Northern section of the wheel is symbolized by the colour white. This is a place for sharing wisdom. This is a time to demonstrate gratitude for the creator's gifts. The North's season is winter.



The eagle represents the East.



The wolf represents the South.



The brown medicine bear represents the West.



The white buffalo represents the North.



## Foods from the Land

First Nations people lived on the plains of Saskatchewan thousands of years before European settlers arrived. Some of these plains **First Nations** were farmers who stayed in one location and grew crops such as corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and pumpkins. Other nations were strictly hunters and followed the migrating animals for food. These **nomadic** people also collected wild berries and root vegetables wherever they could. Sometimes hunters would visit farming villages and would trade buffalo meat for vegetables.

The main source of food for many Plains First Nations was **bison** meat. After a bison hunt, the people would eat as much as they could in celebration of their hunt. However, there were no refrigerators to store left over meat so they dried the meat over a fire and made the meat into jerky, which was later eaten. Jerky meat would last for months.

A favourite meal in a plains camp was a stew made of vegetables and bison meat. Some meat was made into pemmican, which lasted a long time. **Pemmican** was made by drying bison meat and then pounding it with stone into a paste that was mixed with fat and berries. People could survive for weeks on jerky and pemmican alone.



*Though their technology has changed, many First Nations people still live close to the land.*

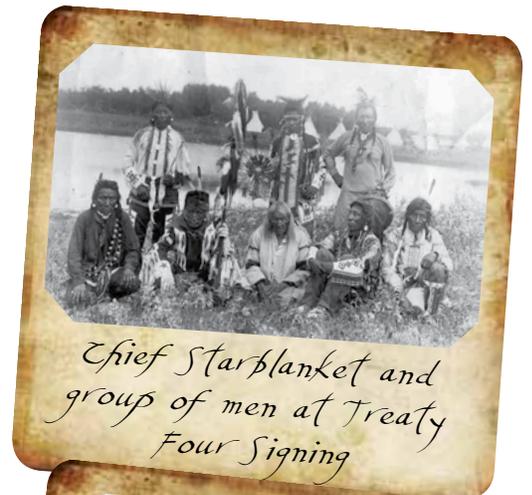




Wild rice has long been a staple food for First Nations people. Several First Nations cultures, such as the Ojibwa, consider wild rice to be a sacred component in their culture.

The fur trade provided the first contact between **European** and First Nations people. First Nations people were influenced by the fur traders and the traders were influenced by First Nations people. First Nations people provided very important knowledge about crops, weather patterns, and water locations. They also shared information about the healing properties of local plants, roots, and herbs. This information helped the newcomers from far away to survive. The marriages of European or French Canadian traders to First Nations women eventually gave rise to a new group of people called the Métis. The word "Métis" comes from a French word meaning mixed.

By the 1870s, First Nations traditional way of life on the prairies had changed due to the killing off of the bison and the purchase of a large amount of land by the government of Canada. First Nations chiefs became worried. How could their people adapt to the changes that were coming? The chiefs wanted to make a deal with the government. The government and the First Nations people would sign treaties. These treaties would be a way to share the land with these European newcomers. **Treaty** 4 and 6 were negotiated and many First Nations ended up on





**reserves** of land. With the bison all but gone, First Nations chiefs recognized that their people needed to learn other ways to survive. Many First Nations bands were interested in learning how to farm because their traditional way of life was no longer able to support them. They asked the government for agricultural instruction, implements, and other farming supplies in the Treaties.

First Nations leaders wanted their people to be successful farmers so that they could sell their crops and feed their families. In the beginning they had some success. But often the government failed to deliver the agricultural supplies promised in the Treaties. In 1889, the government officer introduced the **Peasant Policy**. It did not want First Nations people to compete with **non-Aboriginal** farmers. Instead, First Nations people would produce only enough for their families. First Nations people were to work the land with just hand tools and only **cultivate** a single acre of wheat. They were also to plant part of another acre for root crops and vegetables and raise a cow or two. The policy stated they did not need machinery, for they were not growing grain or raising livestock to sell to other people like non-Aboriginal farmers were. This policy was in place until 1897, and held back the **development** of First Nations agriculture.



*Aboriginal Farm Houses*



*Aboriginal Group photo*

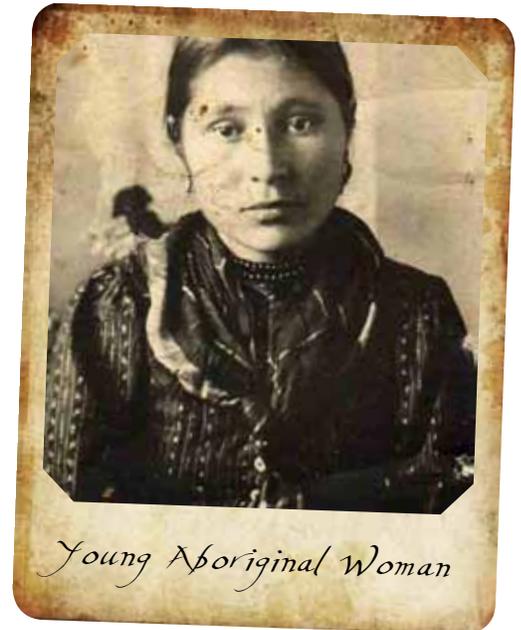
Historic photos accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission. Image of man by buffalo bones courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library Local History Room.



First Nations farmers were not permitted to sell their farm products without first getting permission from a person called an **Indian Agent**. This was a government employee on their reserve. Any person from off the reserve who wanted to trade with the First Nations farmers had to have written permission. First Nations farmers did not have the freedom to make their own decisions on what to buy and sell.

Another policy that held back development and freedom was the **pass system**, which lasted well into the 20th century. First Nations people had to have written permission from an Indian Agent when they wanted to leave the reserve even if it was to pick berries. Each time a person asked for a pass, there needed to be a description of why, when, and for how long he/she would be gone.

Today, agriculture training for First Nations peoples is supported by the government. First Nations peoples are encouraged to attend agricultural programs at institutions such as the University of Saskatchewan and SIAST (the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology).



Historic photos accessed at <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, used with permission.



## Foods From The Land

Definitions: Match each of the words from the list below to its best definition.

**Word list:**

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First Nations	European	treaty	development
reserve	Peasant Policy	non-aboriginal	Indian Agent

- \_\_\_\_\_ A term that refers to the Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are neither Inuit nor Métis.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A policy put in place for First Nations people to get permission before doing something.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Communities of people who move from one place to another.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The people of Europe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The main source of food for many Plains First Nations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work the land for crops.
- \_\_\_\_\_ An area of land that has been set apart by the government for the use and benefit of a band.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A policy that did not allow First Nations farmers to sell their crops.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A person who was in charge of making decisions for First Nations people's daily lives.
- \_\_\_\_\_ An act of improving by expanding.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A person who is not First Nations, Inuit, nor Métis.
- \_\_\_\_\_ An agreement signed between the First Nations People and the Government of Canada.



# First Nations Word Search

Find these words:

- BUFFALO                      EAGLE                      BEAR                      COYOTE
- MOTHER EARTH              CREATOR                      PEMMICAN                  FIRST NATIONS
- EUROPEAN                      METIS                      TREATY                      RESERVES
- CEDAR                          SAGE                          TOBACCO                      SWEETGRASS
- MEDICINE WHEEL

C	E	D	A	R	W	E	X	C	Z	Z	A	Q	X	Z	L	F	F	D	C
E	B	Q	A	Q	Q	R	Z	V	X	X	S	W	B	U	F	F	A	L	O
F	N	W	Z	W	Z	T	M	B	C	C	D	E	C	Z	K	A	H	S	Y
G	M	E	X	E	S	W	E	E	T	G	R	A	S	S	K	L	J	A	O
H	L	R	C	R	X	Y	D	N	V	V	F	R	B	Q	J	R	K	Q	T
K	K	T	V	T	C	U	I	M	B	B	G	T	N	W	H	F	L	W	E
L	J	Y	M	Y	V	I	C	P	N	R	H	Y	M	E	E	D	M	E	X
P	H	U	E	U	B	O	I	O	M	E	J	T	O	B	A	C	C	O	Z
E	G	I	T	I	N	P	N	I	L	S	K	U	L	E	G	D	M	R	B
M	U	O	I	O	M	L	E	U	K	E	L	I	K	R	L	F	M	T	E
M	F	R	S	P	L	K	W	Y	J	R	M	O	J	T	E	G	N	Y	A
I	D	P	O	L	K	J	H	T	H	V	N	P	H	Y	H	H	B	U	R
C	S	A	B	P	J	H	E	T	R	E	A	T	Y	U	G	J	V	I	A
A	A	S	N	J	E	G	E	R	G	S	B	L	G	I	F	K	C	O	S
N	Z	D	M	H	H	A	L	E	M	O	T	H	E	R	E	A	R	T	H
C	R	E	A	T	O	R	N	W	G	N	V	K	F	O	F	S	A	G	E
C	H	F	M	F	G	F	S	Q	F	M	C	J	D	P	D	L	C	P	D
T	E	G	L	D	F	D	S	A	D	L	X	H	S	L	S	A	X	L	F
E	R	H	K	S	D	S	A	A	S	K	Z	G	A	K	A	Q	Z	K	G
A	F	J	J	A	S	F	I	R	S	T	N	A	T	I	O	N	S	J	H