

Unit 8: The Spirit of Celebration

Grade 3



Overview

Ceremonies and celebrations are integral to all cultures, include First Peoples. This unit looks at the traditions associated with wide range of personal and community celebrations.

This unit can be developed over the course of the whole school year, particularly if the final celebration has an end-of-year focus. Alternatively, the unit can be the primary focus of study for a period of one to three months.

Key Big Ideas

Grade 3	
English Language Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves, our families, and our communities.
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning about Indigenous peoples nurtures multicultural awareness and respect for diversity.• Indigenous knowledge is passed down through oral history, traditions, and collective memory.• Indigenous societies throughout the world value the well-being of the self, the land, spirits, and ancestors.
Arts Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dance, drama, music, and visual arts are each unique languages for creating and communicating.
Physical Education and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Movement skills and strategies help us learn how to participate in different types of physical activity.

Key Curricular Competencies

Grade 3	
English Language Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use developmentally appropriate reading, listening, and viewing strategies to make meaning• Engage actively as listeners, viewers, and readers, as appropriate to develop understanding of self, identity, and community• Show awareness of how story in First Peoples cultures connects people to family and community
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain why people, events, or places are significant to various individuals and groups
Arts Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences• Explore relationships among cultures, communities, and the arts
Physical Education and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and apply a variety of fundamental movement skills in a variety of physical activities and environments

Learning Goals

- Strengthen their understanding of First Peoples family structures and cultural traditions by learning about a variety of First Peoples ceremonies; who hosts them, why they are conducted, who participates in them, and their cultural significance.

- Develop the ability to compare and contrast their own family structures, traditions, and ceremonies with First Peoples family structures, traditions, and ceremonies. Understanding family structures, traditions, and ceremonies can strengthen their understanding of their own identity and the identities of First Peoples.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will use reading, listening, and speaking skills to discuss, make connections to, and understand First Peoples family structures, ceremonies, and cultural traditions.
- Students will communicate their ideas, reflections, and understandings of First Peoples family structures, ceremonies and cultural traditions through writing, oral language, dance, and visual arts.
- Students will organize and participate in a class or school celebration that incorporates aspects of First Peoples cultural traditions and ceremonies, specifically gift giving and dancing.

Themes Addressed

- family, house group, clan
- ceremony, feast, potlatch
- traditions
- protocols
- gift giving
- performance (song, dance, drama, etc.)
- rites of passage

Lesson Plans in this Unit

- Family, House Groups, and Clans
- Comparing Ceremonies
- Inviting People to Our Celebration
- Gift Giving
- Dance and Music
- Bringing it All Together

Assessment

This unit requires participation. The activities are mostly group based and there is one individual poster project that can be used as a summative assessment. Formative assessment can be completed in the form of “I can” statements.

An assessment tool for the poster activity is also provided at the end of this unit.

Approximate time required

6-8 hours

Authentic Texts

- *The Secret of the Dance* by Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow
- *The Powwow*, from “Set B” by Lorraine Adams
- *My Elders Tell Me* by Marion (Roze) Wright
- *Raven Tales – The Games* (film)
- *I Like Who I Am* by Tara White

- Celebrations – Gitxsan Gweey’ya (provided at the end of this unit)
- additional local texts depicting ceremonies and celebrations

Materials and Resources

- materials for making posters (poster paper, pens/paint, etc.)
- materials for making gifts (see the Gift Giving lesson)
- optional: food and drinks for the feast



Suggested Instruction and Assessment Approach

Family, House Groups, and Clans

Background

In many First Peoples societies, celebrations are often interconnected with family, House group, or clan structures as well as the spiritual, social, legal, political and economic systems.

The family is the foundation of the society for many First Peoples. It includes multiple generations of relatives, including parents and children, aunts and uncles, grandparents and great grandparents.

In the past, a family had a leader who may have inherited the position or may have been chosen through consensus by the rest of the family.

Usually the family lived together, often in one large house. On the Northwest Coast, as many as 100 related people may have lived in one longhouse or bighouse during the winter. In the Interior Plateau, smaller groups of families lived together in the winter in pit houses or kekuli. Families in some Nations are called house groups in English, though each First Nation has proper words in their own language.

In these societies, stewardship of the land and its resources was often the responsibility of families which had their own particular territories for harvesting different resources throughout the wider territories of their people.

Families moved from site to site over the seasons to harvest and process resources as they became available. Families depended on their lands to provide food and other necessities, and also as sources of economic wealth. Families could build wealth and power through hard work and the benefits of resource-rich lands.

Many societies also have a clan system that organizes people into larger groups based on certain family lines or kinship. Each First Peoples has its own words to describe their clans, and its own understanding of the role of the clan in their society.

Clans are almost always given names from the natural world; commonly they are named for animals, but a few are named for plants or features of the sky. Each family, clan, and village has a history passed down through the oral tradition of the

Nation. Most trace the origins of the group to the time of transformations, when animals could take human form, or when the land as we know it was created. Dances, regalia, and ceremonial items usually connect back to the clan's origin stories.

In some First Peoples communities, house groups are a form of social organization in which large extended families are connected by shared territories, oral traditions, and inherited names.

For many First Peoples today, families, house groups, and clans continue to hold a lot of responsibility within their societies, especially when it comes to the governance of the land and its resources.

For more information about the type(s) of family, house groups, or clan structures found within the First Peoples of your community or territory contact your district's Indigenous contact.

Procedure

Write the word "Family" on the board. Ask students:

- What does family mean to you?
- Who are the people in your family?
- Who can be a member of a family?

Brainstorm and discuss what "family" means to students. Then ask students if they have heard of the term "house group." If students have heard this term before invite them to share what they know about house groups. Repeat with the term Clan.

Using a map of the area highlight the First Peoples traditional territory or territories the community and school is situated in. Share any information you have about the family, house group, or clan structures of the First Peoples from your community with the class.

Create a class definition of "family" that include the local First Peoples understandings of the concept. If the First Peoples from your community have a house group or clan structure, create a class definition of them as well. Post the definition(s) on the wall for students to refer to during the unit.

Interview

Provide students with questions to ask their parents, grandparents, or other older family members about what kinds of celebrations they had when they were young. For example:

- What was your favourite celebration when you were my age?
- When did this celebration take place?
- What was the reason for this celebration?
- Was there any special food for this celebration?
- Were there any special dances or music for this celebration?
- Were there any special stories told at this celebration?
- Do you still have this celebration today?

Based on the earlier brainstorm and the results of the interviews, create a class list of ceremonies. For example:

- birthdays
- religious holidays
- community holidays (e.g., Halloween, Earth Day, Remembrance Day, Canada Day)
- rites of passage (e.g., births, naming ceremonies, weddings, walking out)

Comparing Ceremonies

Materials and Resources

- *The Powwow*
- *I Like Who I Am*
- *Secret of the Dance*
- “Potlatch Ceremony” from *My Elders Tell Me*
- *Raven Tales – The Games* – first part (up to 12:28, “...and the two villages came together in friendship.”)
- Celebrations – Gitxsan Gweey’ya (provided at the end of this unit)
- additional local texts depicting ceremonies and celebrations

Background

When settlers first came to what we now call British Columbia they often only saw the surface of First Peoples ceremonies. They had little understanding of the protocols nor empathy for the deep cultural meaning. They interpreted the ceremonies through their own worldview, which saw the gift giving as an extravagant waste and the performances as pagan rituals. The Canadian government made these important institutions illegal through the *Indian Act*. The ban on these ceremonies was only repealed in 1951.

Despite being banned, and in some cases people being sent to prison, feasts and potlatches have endured. In some communities they were conducted in secret, or disguised as other types of community gatherings.

Today ceremonies like feasts, potlatches, and public witnessing have largely returned to prominence as key cultural institutions.

First Peoples have words in their own language to describe ceremonies or public gatherings, often called feasts in English. The words used to name them depends on their purpose. For example, it could be a wedding feast, a naming feast, a memorial feast, or a settlement feast.

Feasts were, and still are, public institutions that connect First Peoples spiritual lives, governance, economy, politics, land management, and family or clan history through ceremony, oratory and public witness.

In some First Peoples cultures, certain feasts are called potlatches. This is a well-known aspect of many coastal First Peoples cultures.

Feasts and potlatches all are built around cultural protocols, sometimes called “laws of the feast house.” Each First Nation has its own laws and customs that are important for passing on its identity.

Generally, the laws of the feast house express who the people are, their stories that connect them to their ancestors, and acknowledge their lands and resources.

Most feasts and potlatches include the important feature of food, gifts and witnesses. Guests to the feast house are served with bountiful amounts of food. Often the food has been harvested from the territories of the host family or clan. The hosts announce publicly the source of the food served to the guests.

Part of the proceedings includes the passing out of gifts from the host family or clan to its guests. Depending on the nature of the potlatch, these gifts can have great value.

The role of the guests is to act as witnesses to the important events that take place, and therefore guests are key players in oral traditions. By accepting the gifts, guests acknowledge, recognize, and remember the events. For example, they acknowledge the host’s rights to manage their resources and territories. As well, the gifts are seen as an investment. There is an expectation that they will be returned to the hosts in the future.

Through feasts and potlatches, family and clan histories are kept alive. Sacred stories linking ancestors and territories are performed in dance and song for the guests. Artists create masks and regalia that dancers wear to create the dramatic performances.

Preparation

Research what ceremonies are held in your community by the local First Peoples. Find out their purposes, who hosts them, what protocols are associated with them, what traditions they include, and if witnesses are involved. Consult your district’s Indigenous contact for support in finding this information. Alternatively, connect with the local First Peoples directly. Refer to *How do I make connections with the local First Nation communities?* on page 18.

Procedure

Begin by showing students the book *The Powwow*. Walk through the pictures as a class. Ask students to predict what might be happening in the story.

Read the book as a class, or have students read the book in small groups.

Follow the same format for other books and stories (listed at the beginning of this activity).

Help students locate the various nations from the stories on a map of Canada. Share information on the types of ceremonies held by the local First Nations from your community.

“Wherever there are people, there are stories.”
– *Raven Tales – The Games*

Compare the various ceremonies:

- What's the same? What's different?
- What is the purpose of the ceremonies?
- Who were the hosts of the ceremonies?
- Were there any witnesses?
- What cultural traditions were shared during the ceremonies?
- How are adults and children expected to behave in First Peoples ceremonies?
- Have you ever attended a First Peoples ceremony?
- What about the ceremonies you do with your families? (e.g., baby naming ceremony, walking out ceremony, birthday, blessing of a new building, wedding, family reunion) What's the same? What's different?
- How are you expected to behave at these ceremonies? Is it different for children than it is for adults?

Optional Activities

Set up pen pals or key pals with students in another part of the province to talk about their celebrations.

Connect with a local First Nation band or tribal council to find out if there are any First Peoples ceremonies happening in the community. Explain the significance of the ceremony and the protocols linked associated with it to the class. Check with the First Nation to see if the class can attend or participate in any of the upcoming ceremonies.

Invite a local First Peoples community member to the class to share information on the types of ceremonies held throughout the year. Refer to *What protocols should I follow when inviting First Peoples guest speakers into the classroom?* on page 18.

Inviting People to Our Celebration

Explain that the class is going to work together to plan and hold a celebration later in the year. Determine the focus and purpose of the celebration (e.g., mid-winter feast, beginning of spring, recognizing a school or community milestone or anniversary).

Ask: Who do we want to invite to our celebration? Discuss the protocols for who should be invited.

Have students work individually or in groups to create a poster to advertise the celebration. As a class, brainstorm the information that needs to be on the poster.

Assessment

Use criteria such as those outlined in the Poster assessment tool (provided at the end of this unit) to assess students' work.

Gift Giving

Materials and Resources

- materials for making gifts (e.g., thank-you cards, artwork, calendars, woven cedar items)

Procedure

Explain that an important part of many First Peoples celebrations is the giving of gifts. Bring in an Elder or knowledge-keeper from the local First Peoples community member to talk about the relationship between gifts and celebrations, the significance of giving a gift, and the protocols associated with gift giving (e.g., thanking the participant for witnessing the ceremony, and passing on the responsibility for remembering and respecting the ceremony).

As a class, decide what gifts students will make as part of their celebration (e.g., thank-you cards, woven cedar items, artwork, calendars marked with the local First Peoples events and languages, cards describing something they learned during the unit). Discuss the significance and purpose of the particular gift, as applicable.

Dance and Music

Invite a guest (e.g., district cultural teacher – consult your district Indigenous contact for support) to teach a local dance or song to the students. (Note: Guest instructors should choose a dance that is allowed to be shared and danced by the students – i.e., not owned by a particular individual or group.)

Assessment

Assess students on their

- willingness to participate
- ability to move in time to the rhythm and metre
- ability to accurately perform rhythmic patterns

Bringing It All Together

Hold the celebration, incorporating the elements you have prepared (e.g., welcoming invited guests, gift-giving ceremonies, performance of the song or dance). Depending on the time you wish to dedicate to the activity, you may also include elements such as traditional foods, music or dance by local First Peoples performance groups, etc.

Celebrations – Gitxsan Gweey'ya

Gweey'ya. pronounced
GWAY-ee-ah

Within the feast system of the Gitxsan is an event called the Gweey'ya. A Gweey'ya is a lighthearted song used by the Gitxsan to solicit extra funds from the spouses of the hosting clan. The song is sung by the host clan, “Poor, poor me, I am greedy, I want more money, so I remember, and they insert the name of the spouse.” The spouse dances up wearing a costume and presents their donation in a creative way. This portion of the feast was modified and used as a fundraiser for BC Children’s Hospital.

The Gweey'ya song was rewritten and modified for the occasion. The Ksan Performers came with their drums and singers. The Gitxsan children were listed under their clans, Frog (Lax See'l), Fireweed (Giskaast) and Wolf (Lax Gibuu). All the non-Gitxsan staff and children were divided equally among the three clans.

The theme of the first Gweey'ya was “Children are the Flowers of the Gitxsan.” Flower seeds were donated by seed stores and packages of flower seeds were mailed out with the invitations to the local businesses and other schools.

Each class had to decide a name incorporating the theme. The children decided on a costume and made a huge cheque that the entire class had to dance up with and present. The huge building was decorated with flowers that the children had made.

Since the Lax Gibuu was hosting the Gweey'ya feast, the children belonging to the clan had to bring juice and bannock and serve the seated Giskaast and Lax See'l.

This event opened the doors for the Gitxsan culture to be acted out in the school system. It has always been my belief that the Gitxsan children’s culture be accepted and recognized in the schools, in order to motivate the Gitxsan learners. Children must first know who they are and be established in their identity before they can fully appreciate and desire to learn about others.

The Gweey'ya creates the reality of the feast. The Gweey'ya brings the abstract teaching about the culture alive and allows the children to witness and be a part of the real thing. The Gweey'ya also empowers students who have participated in a traditional feast that was held for such reasons as death, name giving, pole raising, and gravestone raising. At the Gweey'ya these students are recognized for their knowledge of the proper way that events should be directed.

The Gweey'ya teaches all about the value of giving to those who are less fortunate. It has made our students aware that they must go beyond their community and help others. The students have watched their community give, and from this they will learn to help others who are in need, even if they themselves are in need. For this is the true nature of giving. At the Gweey'ya the education of the students went beyond the classroom, as they were given the opportunities to learn and value cooperation, caring, empathy, generosity and concern for others. All the students, Gitxsan and non-Gitxsan were given the opportunity to participate in an afternoon of cultural immersion. The students were a part of an event that showed them that anything is possible.

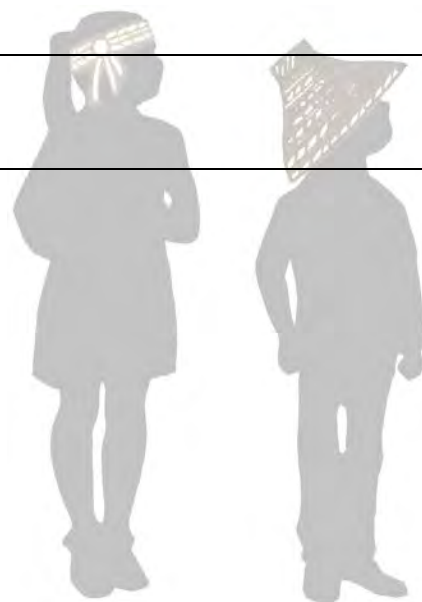
By undertaking the Gweey'ya, the children are allowed to incorporate their culture into their education. The Gweey'ya takes a portion of the Gitksan feast and allows the learners to experience a sense of identity, the importance of culture and the knowledge that we are all connected. In order that the students learn effectively they must be participants and not only spectators. The Gweey'ya connects the Gitksan curriculum to the school lives of children. The opportunity to make a contribution to BC Children's Hospital helps the children to practice meaningful involvement with the world around them.

The Gweey'ya is an event that has enhanced the education at our school. The idea that was born to comfort the friends of Matthew has been of great benefit to BC Children's Hospital and the learners at our school. In paying a tribute to Matthew's memory, our school recognized the educational value in accepting the Gitksan children as learners and teachers.

Poster

Proficiency Scale: 1: Emerging 2: Developing 3: Proficient 4: Extending

Rating (1-4)	Criteria – To what extent do students:	Comments
	Include complete and accurate information about the ceremony	
	Use writing that is neat and legible, with well-formed and properly spaced letters	
	Use correct sentence structures and conventions	
	Make effective use of elements of design (line, colour, and, shape)	
	Provide detailed information and answers peer’s questions about their work	
	Offer constructive comments and feedback about peers’ work	
Date:		Name:





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