

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Elder Nation	Reg Crowshoe, Geoff Crow Eagle, Maria Crowshoe
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Blackfoot
Time Required	Intermediate (Grades 7 -9)
Subject Strands	1 – 2 hours
Traditional Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Science • Law • Architecture
Student Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tipi • The Circle Model • Governance
	<p><u>The Tipi</u> A Blackfoot tipi is deceptively sophisticated in terms of its <i>architecture</i> design and applications. The tipi features a circular <i>structure</i>, with a fire in the centre and an opening at the top. Tipis have no solid flooring, furniture or ceilings and there is but one entrance. Poles serve as the supports to the covering made of animal hides – buffalo and deer in the case of the Blackfoot. The circular shape, combined with the opening at the top, allows for the emission of smoke during fire use as well as encouraging healthy air <i>circulation</i> within the living space. Tipis were used as <i>dwellings</i> from <i>construction</i> materials that could be disassembled and moved quite easily, leaving but a trace behind. They continue to be used today for special ceremonial purposes.</p> <p><u>The Circle Model</u> In terms of cultural values and practicality, the tipi illustrates a design that perfectly meets the needs of traditional Blackfoot society. The circular shape is conducive to face to face communication by promoting a sense of equity and participation, <i>consensus</i>, in discussions and decision-making. There is nowhere to hide in a circle. The circle represents all things connected in the universe, the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements, the four sacred medicines, and so on. The opening at the top of the tipi also allows for constant visual contact with the sky world as well, heaven, and the Creator of all living things. The fire serves as a source of heat and comfort as much as for cooking, easily shared by anyone in the tipi. The fire represents the essence of being, the life force, and the connecting link between the worlds above and below the earth’s surface. The sole entrance can be opened or closed, allowing for light or privacy as required. The placement of the tipi is planned prior to construction with the entrance facing East in honour of the natural environment that provides everything needed for one’s sustenance, again reflecting a consciousness of connection and active</p>

relationship with nature. Sitting in the tipi directly on the earth provides a definite *grounding* effect through the close contact with Mother Earth, again emphasizing kinship between man and nature.

Governance

The House of Commons is where parliamentary procedure takes place in the federal government of Canada (in Ottawa). The Parliament buildings are imposing stone structures. Parliamentary sessions open and close with the ceremonial entrance of the mace brought through the Hall of Honour to the Commons Chamber by the Sergeant-at-Arms. The mace, originating from a weapon of long ago, is a long, gold staff that represents the authority of the House of Commons and is placed on the table central to the Commons Chamber. Today, gavels are used much the same way in courts and board meetings to imply authority. There is assigned seating of the elected members of Parliament, party in power on one side and Opposition Party on the other side, and the Speaker of the House in the middle. The Chamber is rectangular in shape with seats rising on either side as in an auditorium.

In terms of process, Question Period serves as an opportunity for government representatives, usually members of the Opposition, to ask questions of the government in power - to challenge their decision making. All must address the Speaker of the House when speaking. Question Period is usually lively and animated, occasionally becoming antagonistic and aggressive and difficult to follow when several people speak or shout at once, requiring the Speaker of the House to halt the debates, name calling, and so on. Decisions are legalized after voting and bill passage processes are completed.

In terms of *gender* equity, there are significantly more males than females in Canadian government at present, but that number is changing as more women enter politics. The Senate is where many of the senior government representatives work to establish government policy.

Similarly, traditional Blackfoot decision-making discussions open and close with ceremonial smudging and presentation of a bundle of sacred objects and assigned seating of those community members deemed able and qualified to participate, males on one side and females on the other. The smudge altar is central, representing the place of highest honour. Decision making processes involve discussions, singing and dancing.

In contrast to Parliament, however, traditional Blackfoot discussions are held with great respect and integrity for all speakers, in honour of the Creator and the gifts of knowledge and wisdom bestowed to the decision makers. This practice encourages gender equity and promotes the *transmission* of knowledge through the generations from grandfather to father to son and from grandmother to mother to daughter. The transmission of knowledge from old to young is highly regarded and elders' views

	<p>are given the greatest of consideration. Respect for the Creator is of supreme importance as all power is understood to be given by the Creator, not by humans. And the bundle is not a symbol of war but instead made up of a mixture of objects such as feathers, plant leaves, animal bones, etc.; these items are symbolic of life and human kinship to the animal world and the plant world. There is training provided to the bundle custodian as to how to take care of the bundle. Finally, decisions are “legalized” in the tipi only after prayer for guidance and wisdom and acceptance/witnessing by all.</p>
<p>Learner Objectives</p>	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To relate features of traditional Blackfoot communications methods to traditional Blackfoot cultural values • To understand the structure and components of the traditional Blackfoot governance model in comparison to those of the federal Canadian government • To demonstrate an understanding of the significance of the symbols representing Canadian Parliament and Blackfoot society • To identify the circle model as central to Blackfoot ideology • To identify the structure, components and symbolism of the Blackfoot tipi <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify similarities and differences between Blackfoot tipi and Parliamentary decision-making processes • To assess the nature of discussions held in a circle model space versus a rectangular model with various levels of seating • To relate Venue, Action, Language and Song as components of a traditional Piikani Blackfoot process <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop presentation and group communication skills • To illustrate conceptual understanding of similarity and difference through the drawing of a Venn Diagram
<p>Strategy</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. View Question Period in the House of Commons – this takes place every day that the House sits and is televised and/or available online through CPAC – see additional resources. 2. Discuss the nature of the communications in Parliament. How do speakers behave? How do they express themselves? What is the nature of their questions? Which cultural values do they represent in their exchanges? How are the discussions finalized? 3. Now introduce Reg Crowshoe, Geoff Crow Eagle and Maria Crowshoe as elders of the Blackfoot nation and teachers of Blackfoot culture online. They have traditional teachings to share on their traditional governance model which is based on the circle, originating from the Blackfoot tipi.

4. Read the summary above and discuss.
5. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com to hear the teachings.
 - a) Go to the Blackfoot teachings, under “Introduction” to learn about the Piikani Nation and the Tipi Circle Structure.
 - b) Go to “Elder/Ceremonial Grandparent (East)” to learn about Blackfoot leadership and authority.
 - c) Go to “Ceremonialist (West)” to learn about the transfer of knowledge.
6. Discuss the elements of authority acquired by traditional Blackfoot: Venue, Action, Language and Song. Venue refers to the place of discussion. How is that important? Action refers to the dancing and mimicking of animals to convey their spirit and teachings. Why would dancing have any impact on one’s ability to communicate and be an effective decision-maker? Language refers to knowing how to speak Blackfoot. Why would that make a difference in terms of how one expresses himself or herself? Song refers to knowing how to sing the traditional songs. Of what importance is singing in terms of leadership?
7. In groups, draw a Venn Diagram of Parliamentary Procedure and Traditional Blackfoot Governance, identifying similarities and differences.
8. Wrap up the lesson with a selection of various discussion topics and optional exercises below.

Discussion Topics:

- “So in that circle structure, there had to be respect, and that’s what we’re missing today; we don’t give respect to information. We’re so busy rushing through out tasks that we don’t take time to make sure that understanding happens with respect. With the circle model, we conduct business with respect and integrity, as well as focusing on the task at hand – so that understanding and learning is a lot deeper than it is if we just take it as a task.” Discuss this quote by the elder. How does this traditional approach to conducting business compare to that of modern society? To proceedings in the House of Commons? Which cultural values are respected through the Blackfoot process of communication?
- How does the physical structure of business conducted in a circular model compare to that of the rectangular House of Commons, elevated seating arrangement? What impact does the physical space have on the discussions, if any?
- Authority to participate in the decision making process differs greatly between traditional Blackfoot society and that of modern society. Explain how Canadian government representatives are selected and on what basis. How do these qualifications compare to the Venue, Action, Language and Song of the Blackfoot?

Optional Exercises:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize a mock Question Period based on issues of importance to the school • Visit Parliament in Ottawa
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture • Structure • Dwelling • Construction • Circulation • Grounding • Gender • Transmission • Consensus • Governance
Materials Required	
Evaluation	Teacher evaluation of Venn Diagrams

STUDENT SUMMARY

The Tipi

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They continue to be used today for special ceremonial purposes.

The Circle Model

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Diagram for **BLACKFOOT Curriculum**

