

# Colonial Matters

GRADES  
4-12

## 'I am Here': we are community



This lesson introduces the complex topic of colonization and the social construction of the 'history of Canada' in a creative and emotionally engaging way that is relevant to students' lives. Students will engage in an experiential learning activity that will explore the impact of colonization and gain an understanding of the importance of community. Through an example of the experience, resilience and resistance of Indigenous people in Canada, students will also learn how history is constructed and how discriminatory laws and policies continue to affect cultural communities locally and globally.

Lesson Developed by Sherry Simon



**Estimated Time:** 2.5 hours (2-3 class periods)



## Goals

- ✓ To explore the complex topic of colonization and the social construction of the 'history of Canada' in a creative and emotionally engaging way that is relevant to students' lives.
- ✓ To develop empathy and an awareness of the impact and varied and evolving responses of Indigenous peoples to colonialism.
- ✓ To enhance emotional literacy through writing and/or art as a creative form for students to express themselves
- ✓ To write meaningful personal texts that elaborate on ideas and information to explore and express identity

# Part 1 (70 minutes)



## Prep/Materials

- Chairs set up in a semi-circle
- Board and chalk or flip chart and felts
- A variety of colourful pencil crayons, crayons, oil pastels
- Class set of 8.5 x 11 paper (preferably blank)
- Student Reflection journals



## Energizer: World Domination (10 minutes)

Ask students to imagine that they have an opportunity to take over the world.

Ask them to brainstorm in small groups all the factors that might be involved in achieving world domination.

- ☆ What strategies might be used?
- ☆ How might the systems and services in society be used (e.g. educational institutions, financial institutions, corporations etc)?
- ☆ How might laws/policies be affected?
- ☆ Who would make the decisions?
- ☆ How and where would you begin?

Provide each group with chart paper and ask them to create a brainstorm web with 'World Domination' in the centre and all the factors on how to achieve it radiating out from the centre.

Once the groups are finished, invite a speaker from each group to present the group's ideas. Record all the common factors among the groups on separate chart paper. Tell students that you will be revisiting these factors throughout the lesson.

## Activity 1: We Are Community (50 - 60 minutes)



1. While remaining in their chairs, in a semi-circle, invite students to draw and/or write about something that is important or significant to them that they personally identify with or are emotionally connected to (e.g., family/friends, favourite memories, a piece of artwork, a song, special heirlooms etc.). Provide pencil crayons, crayons, and oil pastels to enhance their sketches. Tell them that it is not necessary to edit their work and that no one else will see it unless they decide to share. Once they are finished, ask them to hold their drawings in their hands.

2. Using a blanket create a circle in the middle of the semi-circle. Explain to students that the centre blanket represents interconnectedness, cycles of life, equality, etc. Circles have significance in many cultures around the world. Ask the students for examples from their cultures.

3. Invite each student, one at a time “popcorn style” to voluntarily put their papers onto the circle. They may say a word or phrase to describe their objects or may remain silent. Please do not direct or instruct the students but enable them to volunteer at their own pace and when they are ready. If you are still waiting for students, after a bit of silent time, address the entire group with a comment such as:

- Remember that you may place your objects in the middle without saying anything.  
We will wait until all papers are in the middle.

4. For the next circle in the community, invite 1/4th of the group to represent the children of the community. Ask them to sit cross-legged on the floor and as close as possible (almost knee to knee), or evenly distributed around the middle circle (during the preparation you can place pillows or coats on the floor around the centre). Make a few points about the roles and responsibilities of the children in this community (e.g., play, care for each other, help teach younger children and siblings etc.). Keep the points positive and fun. Ask the ‘children’ a few questions, such as:

- How does it feel to be expected to be a carefree child?

5. The next circle will represent the women of this community. Ask 1/4th of the group to volunteer to position themselves and their chairs right behind the children’s circle (evenly distributed). Although the participants will represent the ‘women’ in the community, they do not have to be female. Explain the roles and responsibilities of women in this ‘traditional’ community are as leaders, healers, mothers, etc. They are seated behind the children, because the children often need to be close to their mothers for the first few years of life. You may want to add the importance of women’s life-giving roles (as mothers) in this society and that they too, have the other women in the community to rely on for support and assistance in raising their children. Ask the ‘women’ a few questions, such as:

- How does it feel to know you can count on the other women for support?

6. The next circle will represent the men of the community. Ask 1/4th of the group to volunteer to position themselves by standing right behind but slightly in-between the women’s circle (evenly distributed). Although they will represent the ‘men’ of the community, they do not have to be male. Explain the roles and responsibilities of the men in this ‘traditional’ community are as leaders, healers, fathers, etc. They are seated behind the women but they are still fathers, grandfathers, uncles, caregivers etc. to the children. The men have each other to rely on for support and assistance. The men and women have responsibilities to each other and feel they can rely on each other in this community. Ask the ‘men’ a few questions, such as:

- How does it feel to be responsible for all these people in front of you?

7. The remaining students are going to represent the elders of the community. They may stand or sit in the men or women’s circle. Explain their roles and responsibilities as teachers, guides, counsellors, leaders, etc. Ask the ‘elders’ a few questions, such as:

- How does it feel to be needed for your expertise?

8. Explain that in this traditional society, both men and women are seen as caregivers and leaders. Ask students:

- How do you think our society views the roles of men and women?

Invite any students who want to move to change positions (e.g., a woman to stand and a man to sit).

9. Now that the community is represented, ask the group some questions such as:

- How does it feel to be so close to everyone in your community?
- What are some of the benefits of being part of a community such as this?
- What is a community?

10. The next part is to introduce the impacts of colonization. Using some of the examples from the 'world domination' discussion, begin to physically break apart the community. (For example, the idea that there is a dominant culture and it erases the importance of diversity). When you introduce an idea from the board, move some of the students by instructing them to leave the community and stand by themselves against the walls. Have some of them turn away from everyone. Depending on the size of the group and the room, give about 2-4 examples until you have approximately half of the group separated or obvious gaps in the community. Also remove some of their written pieces from the centre circle. Ask the remaining community members questions, such as:

- How does it feel to see the changes in your community?
- How might these changes affect your everyday life?

Ask the outsider students:

- How do you feel?
- What words describe your experience?

11. Include a statement about the breakdown of community, such as:

- Every person in the community is interconnected and equally important

or:

- When we believe that world domination is justified, we believe that one culture, people, etc is superior and can be separate from another or Individualism is an example of one of the Western ways of thinking that promotes separateness but it is not a universal belief amongst the various cultures of the world



**NOTE:** Explain to students that this is not a 'traditional' society (meaning ancient or in the past), this kind of community can and does exist today. Whether we know it or feel it, we are all part of a community and in the larger scale of the earth we are all interconnected.

12. To bring the community back together, ask questions such as:

- How do you identify with your community?
- Describe what it feels like to belong to a community.
- How do you contribute to your community?
- What do you value most about being part of a community?

Tell students that the purpose of this activity was to help create a classroom community where all of them feel safe, valued and included. Stand on the outside of the circle and when a student shares his/her thoughts, invite them to stand beside you and (if it feels appropriate) join hands. Once all the students are back in a circle thank them for their participation.

13. Bring your chairs back into a circle for the debrief questions.



## Debrief Questions:

- How did you feel while participating in this activity?
- What aspect of this experience impacted you the most?
- What were you surprised by?
- What did you learn about community?
- How might aspects of this activity relate to Canadian history?
- How might this experience relate to our current culture/society?
- How might this activity relate to the 'World Domination' activity?



"World Domination" Energizer and "We are Community" Activity

developed by Sherry Simon, Consulting & Community Training [www.byanydreamsnecessary.com](http://www.byanydreamsnecessary.com)



## Wrap Up: (10 minutes)

☆ Invite students to respond to the following questions in their reflection journals:

- How is the community that you identify with similar or different from the one that is represented in this activity (tell students that they may use a Venn diagram or a T-chart to list the similarities/differences).
- What would you like to learn more about?
- At the beginning of the lesson we brainstormed the characteristics of 'world domination'. Now let's go in the opposite direction: What are some of the things we can do to tackle the effects of colonization and begin the de-colonization process?

# Part 2



## Prep/Materials

- DVD player or Laptop/LCD projector to screen the video "I am Here"
- Student Reflection Journals



## Energizer: Definition Jeopardy (10 - 15 minutes)



Write the following terms on the board: Racism, Colonization, Genocide, Oppression, De-colonization, Ally, Unceded territory (see attached definition sheet at the end of lesson)

- ☆ Divide the class into teams of 3 or 4 people.
- ☆ Give students time to discuss the terms on the glossary in their teams.
- ☆ Before reading the first definition, specify that they can't yell out terms until the definition explanation has been read out in its entirety. After the definition is read, all members of a team must raise their hands to be the first to respond to the statement.
- ☆ Remind students that since this is 'Jeopardy', they must form their answer as a question (e.g. "What is colonization?")
- ☆ Begin reading out the definition/explanation for each term
- ☆ Acknowledge the team that answered first and then ask the whole class to brainstorm examples of each term to deepen their understanding.
- ☆ After you have gone through each term, hand out the glossary of terms and discuss any areas not covered through the game.
- ☆ Ask students if they have any further questions or comments about any of the terms.

## Activity 1: Screen the video, "I Am Here" (20 minutes)

Invite the students to write down facts that stand out and observations, or questions they have while watching the video.



## Debrief Questions:

- How did this video make you feel?
- What aspect(s) of this video impacted you the most?
- How did you feel about the statistics that were highlighted in the video? Which of these statistics did you learn in school?
- How does the video connect to the 'We Are Community' and/or 'World Domination' activity?
- Did you learn anything new about Canadian history?
- How does this video relate to our current culture/society?

## Activity 2: Where We Stand (20 minutes)

This activity will bring core myths and students' beliefs regarding Contact and Colonization to the surface so they can be witnessed and discussed within the class.

1. Move the desks against walls to clear a large space in the middle of the classroom  
Tell students that one side of the room will represent "Strongly agree" and the opposite side "Strongly disagree". The middle of the room represents the 'in between' part of the continuum.
2. Explain that you will be reading out a series of statements and that they will be asked to move to the side of the room that best reflects their belief or understanding of the statement. Challenge students not to follow their friends or try to influence others' opinions and to move to their positions in silence. Let the students know that they are welcome to move from their original position to a new one if they feel that their opinions begin to change during the discussions.
3. After reading out each statement (and once the students have settled into their positions) ask a sampling of students from each 'section' to explain why they chose to stand where they are standing.



**NOTE:** If a student says something particularly provocative, or offensive, try to draw out the opinions, life experiences and knowledge in the room and keep the conversations between the students rather than responding directly to the student. Use probing phrases such as: "What does everyone think of that comment?" or "How do other people feel about that?" or "Does that ring true for others?" "Would anyone like to respond to that comment?" If this approach does not do justice to the subject matter, it is a good idea to inquire further with the student who first spoke from their place of ignorance/privilege/anger. Questions such as, "Are there exceptions to that?" "Where do you think you might have developed that opinion?" or other questions that acknowledge and honour the students' voices and lead into a deeper discussion are often helpful.



### Statements:

- "In my school we have learned a lot about First Nations history"
- "In my school we have really explored colonization and its effects on First Nations Peoples"
- "Equality is important to me"
- "Colonization is over"
- "The effects of colonization continue to create social and systemic inequalities."
- "It is important to know that Canada was built on the attempted and in some cases successful genocide of the First Peoples."
- "Addressing the past is necessary before 'moving on' to the future."
- "It is up to all of us to tackle the effects of colonization"



## Wrap Up/Debrief:



☆ The film opens with a quote from Louis Riel.

- How many people know who Louis Riel is?

**Quick explanation:** Louis Riel was a founder of the province of Manitoba and the leader of the Métis people of the Canadian prairies in the late 1800's. Riel sought to preserve Métis rights and culture and led two resistance movements against the Canadian government. Though considered a hero by many then, and a Canadian folk hero today, he was charged with 'high treason' and executed in 1885. (encourage students to research Riel to learn more about him)

☆ "My people will sleep for 100 years and when they awaken it will be the artists who give them their spirits back"

- What does this quote mean to you?

Tell students that the arts have a powerful capacity to effect social change and that poetry has a profound ability to 'speak TRUTH to POWER' and synthesize emotions and information. Explain that they will now have an opportunity to speak their truths through a writing process.

Explain to students that they will be doing a warm up 'free write', a 'stream of consciousness' style of writing that helps stimulate thinking. Tell them to brainstorm 3 random words and to write anything that comes to mind that relates to those words without worrying about spelling or grammar. Tell them to keep their pens moving and not to edit if they are repeating the same word.

Now that they have warmed up, tell students that they will now brainstorm words that connect to the content of the lesson. Ask the following questions and write all of the responses on the board.

☆ What are some words that come to mind when you . . .

- think about the video I am here?
- think about Colonization
- hear the word racism?

☆ think of what we can do as allies to challenge colonization.

- What emotions/feelings come to mind?
- What colours, tastes and landscapes come to mind?

Ask students to pick 6-8 of the words from the board and write them on the top of their page.

Tell them they have 3-5 minutes to do another 'free-write' and remind them that this is 'stream of consciousness' writing—which means no editing or self-censoring.

After the free-write, give the students 3 minutes to edit their writing.

Regroup and invite students to share their pieces. Ensure that everyone receives a round of applause at the end of their piece.

Activity developed by Rup Sidhu (<http://byanydreamsnecessary.com/Rup.html>)



## Assessment & Evaluation

- ✓ Assess that students have honoured the Class Community Agreements during the lesson discussions and activities (\*You may also invite students to do self and peer assessments)

Look for evidence that student reflection journal responses:

- ✓ are insightful, personal and thoughtful
- ✓ demonstrate a detailed and thorough awareness and knowledge of the ideas/concepts addressed in class
- ✓ combine previous experience and learning with frequent references to class activities and discussions.

Look for evidence that reflection journal responses demonstrate students' understanding of:

- ✓ the impact of Contact and Colonialism on Indigenous communities
- ✓ the main messages from the video I am here
- ✓ our individual and collective responsibility to tackle the effects of colonization and begin the de-colonization process.
- ✓ Observe student engagement and assess how cooperatively students are working together during the small group activities. Look for evidence of active listening, participation and cooperation (\*You may also invite students to do self and peer assessments)



\*You may use the following rubric scale to evaluate the above assessments: Powerful=5; Confident=4; Developing=3; Beginning=2; Not yet meeting expectations=1



## Follow Up: Creating an Interactive Time-line (Indigenous Perspective)



☆ Option 1: Create a visual time line wall display to illustrate the effects of Contact and Colonization by highlighting some major events in history that have affected and continue to affect indigenous communities (e.g., smallpox epidemic, residential schools, Indian act, ban of spiritual practice, Bill C-31, the right to vote, etc.). The students may use photography, digital design, art, written words etc. to create a collage.

☆ Option 2: Highlight the major events in history that have affected and continue to affect Indigenous communities (as mentioned in Option 1.) on large cue cards or poster boards with colourful paper, images, words, collage art etc. You may want to add a few notes on the back of the cards to provide some information about each event. Using masking tape and markers to label the time line (e.g., 25, 50, 120, 200, 300 years ago) on the floor or the wall, instruct the students to put the cards on the timeline. Ask students to share the events on their cue cards with the class, and invite the class to add additional facts and to decide collectively where they think they might be positioned on the time line.

☆ When they have completed either option 1 or 2, walk through the time line and provide additional information about each event. Part of the impact of this activity is that it helps students understand that these events are very recent. It's helpful and meaningful, for students to put this time line in a story and in the context of their own lives. For example, ask students to write about what part of the timeline occurred during their parents' or grandparents' generation.



**NOTE:** It is essential to discuss the resiliency, resources, and resistance of the Indigenous people in response to these major events. For example, when there was a ban on the potlatch or other spiritual practices, a strong underground movement was created for people to continue to gather and practice their traditions. Another example is how residential school survivors have reclaimed their indigenous identity, spiritual practices and continue to speak and teach their traditional language.



## Debrief Questions:

- How do you feel about creating this time line?
- What did you learn that surprised you?
- How does it compare to the 'Canadian' history we might have been taught (e.g. in schools, in books)?
- Who writes history? Why is it important that we know who creates history?
- Knowledge is power. What might this phrase mean?

 Activity developed by Sherry Simon, Consulting & Community Training [www.byanydreamsnecessary.com](http://www.byanydreamsnecessary.com)



## Criteria for evaluating a timeline:

- Recognizes sequence and chronology in personal experiences
- Shows evidence of important changes and accuracy of dates
- Completes order of events/changes
- Separates an event from the present in arithmetical terms

# I AM HERE DEFINITIONS

## **Racism**

The use of institutional power to deny or grant individuals or groups their rights, respect, resources and representation based on their external features such as the colour of their skin or hair texture.

## **Colonization**

The process whereby one group or nation uses power to conquer and dominate another group or nation in order to obtain access to their human, natural and other resources. This power can be exercised militarily, politically, socially, economically and intellectually. Example: The imposition of a Western education system upon Aboriginal students constitutes intellectual colonization of Aboriginal youth.

## **Genocide**

The deliberate and systematic attempt to destroy a national, racial, political, or cultural group.

## **Oppression**

An action or system where people are `kept down` or kept from gaining or using power by unjust use of force or authority. It may be deliberate or an unintended outcome of social arrangements. (e.g. Racism, Homophobia/Heterosexism, Sexism, Classism, Ableism, etc. are examples of different forms of Oppression)

## **De-colonization**

The act or process of eliminating colonialism or becoming free from colonial status and seeking independent status.

## **Ally**

A person who recognizes the unearned privilege they receive by being a member of a dominant group and supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of those groups. Examples could be men who work to end sexism, white people who work to end racism, heterosexual people who work to end heterosexism, able-bodied people who work to end ableism, and so on.

## **Unceded territory**

To "not to yield or formally surrender to another". Using this phrase acknowledges that this land was never legally surrendered by the First Peoples of this region.