

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Wheel Nation	Mary Lee Cree
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Senior (Grades 10-12)
Time Required	3 – 4 hours
Subject Strand Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Studies • Social Studies • Biology • Ecology
Key Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Directions • Four Aspects of Self • The Teepee
Student Summary	<p><u>Four Directions</u> The Four Directions represent the <i>interconnectedness</i> of the <i>universe</i> and all its <i>elements</i>: plants, animals, humans and the environment in which they live. The indigenous perspective views the world as a moving, changing, life force in which birth and death are natural and necessary processes. <i>Balance</i> is maintained through the <i>interdependency</i> of the life forces. The validity of this view rests on the knowledge of the fundamental relationships and patterns at play in the world. To traditional indigenous peoples, the world is sacred.</p> <p>Starting with the spirit that is created at the moment of conception, the nine-month journey towards the birth of a baby marks the beginning of entry into the <i>family</i> unit. The journey continues with each stage of life as infant, child, adolescent, adult, and elder. Development takes place spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally throughout the life journey however once you are a parent, you are a parent for life.</p> <p>However just as a baby is completely dependent on adult care for its survival, adults depend on their children for the regeneration, or continuation, of the life chain. Traditionally the <i>responsibilities</i> associated with raising a child belonged to a larger circle of all adults in the community. Today Cree grandparents often continue to act as primary caregivers of their grandchildren once they become youth to impart knowledge and <i>values</i>. In this way children view those around them as extended family, creating a strong sense of belonging and kinship.</p> <p>The life chain of plants and animals are similarly connected in the Four Directions and, with the elements, the planets, the seasons, and the four sacred medicines, provide the nourishment and the</p>

conditions to sustain life. Harmony exists when this spider web of interconnecting threads is respected and understood. Life begins in the spirit and returns to the spirit world following death.

Four Aspects of Self

The emotional, mental, spiritual and physical elements of ones' life are referred to as the *Four Aspects of Self* which, when taken together, represent the four parts of one's being. These elements are gifts from the Creator, but each aspect commands responsibility in order to maintain healthy balance of the self in all respects. Neglect of exercising any one element leads to an imbalance of the whole in the traditional indigenous view.

There is a *correlation* between the Four Aspects of Self and the Four Directions in the Medicine Wheel. The Eastern quadrant represents the beginning of a new day - a new life - and just as the sun rotates in a clockwise direction to the south, west and north, movement on the Medicine Wheel flows in the same direction. The baby is represented by the east; youth is represented by the south; adulthood is represented by the west, and *elderhood* is represented by the north. Similarly, the spiritual element of self is associated with the east. The spiritual connection to the baby in the eastern quadrant of the wheel comes from its birth from spirit. The youth's association with the physical aspect of self comes from the growth that takes place during this stage and the natural physical activity of children and adolescents. Adulthood is associated with the emotional aspect of self. Maturity brings the awareness of feelings and the confidence to express emotion. Life experience gives adults a broad perspective to better understand the world and the journey everyone walks. Adulthood provides the gift of recognizing what is important and the skill to provide what is necessary to live well and to be happy and healthy. This knowledge is what enables adults to make good parents. Elderhood is the fourth and final stage in the cycle of life and is associated with the mental aspect of self. This connection comes from the *wisdom* of age and experience. With less responsibility at this stage of life for looking after children and more time to reflect on life from a philosophical view, elders develop a superior mental awareness.

The energy shifts with each stage of life just as the knowledge and responsibilities change. Just as no one can stay a baby or a child forever, change is a natural process. The stages of life follow a natural flow of sequence, generation upon generation.

The Teepee

Values help guide behaviour through the process of growing up, changing and handling responsibilities. Personal values are what determine a person's decisions and actions. Social values are set by cultural beliefs as to what is important for a community. There are fifteen traditional Cree cultural values that serve as a guide for happy and healthy living. Each value is *honoured* in the construction of a teepee

	<p>which requires 15 poles - with each pole symbolizing one value:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obedience – accepting guidance and wisdom from others 2. Respect – for self and others 3. Humility – knowing that we are not above or below others in the circle of life 4. Happiness – showing enthusiasm to encourage others 5. Love – love of self and love of others, not things 6. Faith – belief in the spirit world 7. Kinship – relationships and bonds with parents, siblings, extended relatives, knowing one’s home community 8. Cleanliness – spiritual cleanliness 9. Thankfulness – gratitude for life and for family 10. Sharing – sharing knowledge, stories, traditions, for future generations 11. Strength – spiritual strength to do things that are difficult 12. Good Child Rearing – guidance and protection of the sacred gift of children 13. Hope – hope that the women who are the life givers and the nurturers will carry on the teachings to bring healthy spirited people into the world 14. Ultimate Protection – protection of the minds, spirit, emotions and health of the youth 15. Control flaps from winds – balance in life’s journey <p>These are the sacred values that sustain the Cree spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally. The first three are considered the foundation of the teepee because a teepee will not stand upright with only two poles, a minimum of three are needed - just as you need a child and two parents to make a family.</p> <p>A ceremony is followed when erecting a teepee, with tobacco given to Mother Earth by a woman in thanks for the use of all the materials to make the teepee, and the doorway facing east. The teepee is symbolic of the sacredness of womanhood as it stands with dignity; it provides warmth, comfort and shelter, and love and care to the family. With the control flaps up, the teepee resembles an old woman standing with her arms extended out in thanks. Women are named after the fire that is built in the centre of the teepee.</p> <p>The control flaps are used to control the release of smoke and insects from the fire. When they are positioned properly, all smoke and insects flow out through the opening at the top of the teepee. So these flaps represent balance in life’s journey.</p>
Learner Objectives	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify Cree cultural values associated with the construction of a teepee • To understand that traditional Cree practices are relevant in modern times

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To acknowledge that stereotyping is a major concern for many First Nations people • To understand the correlation between values and social culture • To recognize the importance of the role of women in the family unit • To gain insight as to the perpetual nature of the circle of life • To identify the Cree as an Aboriginal people with traditional beliefs • To recognize change as a natural process <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand that needs, wants, values, and goals are interrelated • To recognize the impact of values on social behaviour • To identify the Four Aspects of Self as spiritual, physical, emotional and mental elements of one's being <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To associate decisions with values identification • To symbolize, describe, and classify family roles and responsibilities • To recognize cultural stereotypes and generalizations • To navigate the internet with control
<p>Teaching Strategies</p>	<p><u>Ice-breaker activities:</u></p> <p>1. The Human Knot:</p> <p>This activity can be done either indoors or outside. Have the students make a circle and ask them to grasp the hands of the students on either side of them. The students can be very creative by placing their arms behind their back, between their legs, etc. Once everyone is connected, the students must untie their knot without letting go and breaking the circle.</p> <p>2. Missing Link:</p> <p>This activity can be done either indoors or outside. Make sure furniture such as desks and tables are pushed away from where the activity will take place. The students will form a large, perfect circle. Everyone will hold hands and face the inside of the circle. Have the students move in tightly so that students are touching each other, shoulder to shoulder. The students will now turn to their right and put both hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. Give the signal for everyone to sit down on the lap of the person behind them. Everyone's body will become a chair. Try to ease into the position in about three to four seconds. The circle should be strong and the students will not fall down. Ask the students what would happen if one person decided to leave the circle. Have someone leave the circle. The 'missing link' will cause the circle to collapse. The message of connectedness should be</p>

introduced to the students after the laughing stops. Remind the students about this activity again later in the context of the Cree tipi teachings.

The Web of Life:

Note: this activity requires at least a dozen players and works best with twenty to forty players. This activity will help to demonstrate the complexity and interrelatedness of all of the elements in nature. It may be preferable to perform this activity outdoors to appreciate nature directly. Have the students research the species that are found in your bio-region by using the library and the internet. Divide the task amongst the students and have specific groups search for fish, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects, plants and trees. Have the students write the common name of the animals, insects and plants on index cards and include a picture, if possible.

When the research is done, have everyone sit close together in a circle and give each student one prepared species card. The instructor will announce who the players are as the cards are handed out e.g. "you're a salmon" Give the students some tape to fix their card to the front of their body. The students' hands should be free for the next steps.

The instructor will use a long spool of string such as a spool used for kite-flying. A student should volunteer to begin the activity. The initial student will announce their creature e.g. mouse. The instructor will ask "Who eats a mouse, or what does a mouse eat?" A student whose creature eats mice should answer and the instructor will unwind the string to connect the mouse/student to the other creature/student. The responding student's creature will be the next one to connect with. The string will be connecting all of the creatures who depend on each other to survive. The students will eventually be holding on to several portions of the string and the pattern will look like a spider web.

When the web becomes too thick, complicated or the string runs out, the instructor can begin pointing out what occurs when things begin to affect one species. For example, if someone is a fish, have the students explain what could happen to the web if pollution kills off one type of fish. Have that students pull on their strings. The other students should be able to feel the effects directly, which is similar to what could occur in nature.

For other excellent activities, see the resources section for the book *Rediscovery: Ancient Pathways New Directions*.

Major in-class activities:

1. Conduct an exercise to help students identify their similarities and differences in terms of their families. Have the students stand while you ask them a series of questions. Each time the answer is yes for them, they will sit down and remain seated. Questions are as follows:
 - a) Does your grandmother live with you?
 - b) Do you have a baby brother?
 - c) Are you a twin?
 - d) Do you have a baby sister?
 - e) Do you have more than 20 cousins?
 - f) Do you have an aunt who likes to travel?
 - g) Do you have an uncle who drives a truck?
 - h) Do you have a pet fish?
 - i) Does your family go hunting?
 - j) Have you eaten deer meat?
 - k) Have you ever slept in a tipi?
 - l) Does your mother ride a snowmobile?
 - m) Does your father cook you breakfast?
 - n) Do you have a teenage sister who talks on the phone a lot?
 - o) Do you have a teenage brother who has a girlfriend?
 - p) Does your family practice some form of spirituality or religion?
 - q) Does your family speak more than one language?
2. Once everyone is seated, discuss the results of the exercise. Who was surprised by the results? What do they show us about each other? What happens if we assume everyone else's family is like ours?
3. Introduce the concept of the family unit and how it differs from family to family. Explain that each person of the family is unique as well. What are the common elements in family? Explain that the things that are important to us make up our values, such as spending time with friends, making dinner for the family, or going to church, etc.
4. Discuss how our values change as we grow older and develop new responsibilities e.g. the values and responsibilities of a child vs. a parent.
5. Introduce Cree elder Mary Lee to share traditional teachings on the Four Directions and the Four Aspects of Self: roles and responsibilities that people have as they grow through the stages of life and the importance of looking after one's body, one's mind, one's feelings; and one's spirit.

6. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com to hear the traditional teachings.
 - a) Go to "Introduction" for a brief introduction to the Four Directions and the Medicine Wheel
 - b) Go to "Teepee Teachings" and "Fire (Centre)" to learn about the symbolism of the teepee
 - c) Go to "Teepee Ceremony (Earth)" to learn more about how teepees are erected
 - d) Go to "Teepee Structure" to learn about the values associated with the teepee
 - e) Go to "Poles – 15 poles" to learn the value associations of each teepee pole
7. Arrange the class in a circle to lead a Talking Circle on the teepee teachings. Use a suitable object of some sort (feather, stone, etc.) to be held by the speaker and passed on to the next speaker. Going in a clockwise motion begin the exercise by explaining that there is only one rule for the speaker and one rule for the listeners – to speak honestly and to listen without judgment or interruption. What is said in the circle stays in the circle. Each person will have the opportunity to speak in sequence and can pass if preferred. The point of discussion for each person (including the teacher at the outset) will be what the 15 poles mean to you.
8. Return to www.fourdirectionteachings.com to learn about the Four Directions.
 - a) Go to "Four Directions" and "East" to learn about the eastern quadrant of the Medicine Wheel
 - b) Go to "Four Directions" and "South" to learn about the southern quadrant of the Medicine Wheel
 - c) Go to "Four Directions" and "West" to learn about the western quadrant of the Medicine Wheel
 - d) Go to "Four Directions" and "North" to learn about the northern quadrant of the Medicine Wheel
9. Individually, draw a Medicine Wheel to illustrate your Four Aspects of Self and how you honour them by using symbols.
10. Wrap up the lesson with a guided reading of the summary above and select from optional exercises below.

Optional Exercises:

- Write a journal entry on the Four Aspects of Self. To what extent do you exercise your mind? Your body? Your spirit? Your emotions? Is there any area that you exercise more than the others? Why? How do you feel when you spend too much time thinking and not enough time playing? What happens when you have feelings locked inside that you can't express? What can you do to balance your four aspects?
- Have a discussion about what the class knows about teepees. Do all First Nations build them? Where did the student first see one? e.g. movie, television, etc. Are teepees still used regularly? Introduce the concept of *stereotyping* and its definition. Does everyone stereotype to some degree? How do the students think stereotyping affects the daily lives of First Nations

	<p>people? How is the teepee directly important to the culture of many Cree people? The students can research stereotypical imagery of First Nations people and the teepee. The students should present their findings in short two to three minute presentations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a Venn Diagram to illustrate the similarities and differences between the 15 teepee teachings and the values you honour in your life. • Write an essay on the how the teepee teachings could apply to your life. Explain how you could adopt these values to achieve better balance in life. • Conduct a school exchange with a Cree community. See link below for a program that funds exchanges. • Invite an Aboriginal elder or someone else knowledgeable in the construction of teepees to the school to erect one for the class. Identify the values honoured in the construction process. Study the process of the setup. Use the teepee to sit and have a discussion on family values with an elder.
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values • Responsibilities • Family • Aspects • Self • Honoured • Interconnectedness • Universe • Elements • Interdependency • Correlation • Balance • Elderhood
Materials Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feather • Stone
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher evaluation of essay 2. Self-evaluation of talking circle experience 3. Rubric for short stereotyping research project

STUDENT SUMMARY

Four Directions

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However just as a baby is completely dependent on adult care for its survival, adults depend on their children for the regeneration, or continuation, of the life chain. Traditionally the *responsibilities* associated with raising a child belonged to a larger circle of all adults in the community. Today Cree grandparents often continue to act as primary caregivers of their grandchildren once they become youth to impart knowledge and *values*. In this way children view those around them as extended family, creating a strong sense of belonging and kinship.

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26. Strength – spiritual strength to do things that are difficult
27. Good Child Rearing – guidance and protection of the sacred gift of children
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29. Ultimate Protection – protection of the minds, spirit, emotions and health of the youth
30. Control flaps from winds – balance in life's journey

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Diagram for CREE Curriculum

