

## FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

<b>Elder</b>	<b>Lillian Pitawanakwat</b>
<b>Nation</b>	<b>Ojibwe/Potawotami</b>
<b>Lesson Plan Grade Level</b>	<b>Senior (Grades 10-12)</b>
<b>Time Required</b>	<b>3 – 4 hours</b>
<b>Subject Strand Links</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language Arts</li> <li>• Religious Studies</li> </ul>
<b>Key Concepts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Medicine Wheel</li> <li>• Tradition</li> <li>• The Four Directions</li> <li>• The Centre of the Wheel</li> <li>• The Four Sacred Medicines</li> <li>• Death and Remembrance</li> <li>• The Strawberry Teaching</li> </ul>
<b>Summary</b>	<p><u>The Medicine Wheel</u></p> <p>Medicine Wheels made of stones arranged on the Earth have been found in various places throughout North America, marking places of special significance, such as places of energy, ceremony, meeting, meditation, teaching, and celebration. Some estimate that there were about 20,000 medicine wheels in North America before European contact occurred. Some Medicine Wheels on the prairies have been found to be 5,000 years old or more.</p> <p>The Medicine Wheel is, in essence, a circle divided into four parts, representing the four directions, which relate to and counterbalance one another to form a whole; this symbol is used to represent Aboriginal philosophy on the meaning of life. Medicine Wheels are not necessarily a tradition belonging to all North American Aboriginal peoples; however, many Aboriginal groups have some variation of the Wheel. Nevertheless the traditional knowledge and views of the various first peoples of North America typically share a circular model of thinking.</p> <p>As a whole, the Medicine Wheel represents the relationships between various elements of the world, both seen and unseen, and emphasizes how all parts of the world and all levels of being are interrelated and connected through a life force originating in the creation of the universe. According to the Ojibwe, there are seven teachings within each quadrant of the wheel and each has sub-teachings as well. All parts of the wheel are important, and depend on each other in the cycle of life; what affects one affects all. For this reason, the Medicine Wheel teaches that harmony, balance and respect for all parts are needed to sustain life.</p>

### Tradition

Tradition is knowledge or ways of doing things that are taught by older people - or Elders - who have worked and studied many years with Elders that came before them to understand the traditions.

### The Four Directions

Each quadrant of the Medicine Wheel represents one of four cardinal directions. The Ojibwe believe that the East represents the springtime and the beginning of all life, changing from spirit to human; the journey starts there. The journey continues to the South, the summer stage, to the West, the death stage, and then to the North, the rebirth stage. This cycle continues in a clockwise motion around the Medicine Wheel, following the rising and setting of the sun, with the Four Directions serving as primary directional, or guiding, forces.

### The Centre of the Wheel

The centre of the Medicine Wheel symbolizes the self in balance on its life journey, from the perspective of traditional Aboriginal philosophy. The central place of the Medicine Wheel is where one seeks to develop a holistic vision and understanding of creation and connection to all things.

The Ojibwe believe that the Centre of the Wheel is represented by a flame and it is our responsibility to nurture this fire by reconciling conflicts with others and making peace within ourselves. Through reflection, meditation, awareness, acceptance and *surrender*, we are able to live balanced and whole lives.

### The Four Sacred Medicines

To give thanks each day to those things that are needed to sustain life, traditional Ojibwe people take a small handful of tobacco and place it in a clean place on the earth or on the shore of a lake. In this way, the Ojibwe thank nature, Creation, for giving the breath of life. Tobacco is represented by the East on the Medicine Wheel.

Cedar is used as a traditional medicine often prepared as a tea to cleanse the body and mind and spirit of things not needed on life's journey. Cedar is represented by the South on the Medicine Wheel.

Sage is represented by the West on the Medicine Wheel and is used for cleansing as well, burnt to use the smoke as a wash over the body.

	<p>Sweet grass is represented by the North on the Medicine Wheel and is used to invite positive energy.</p> <p><u>Death and Remembrance</u>  Among other things, the north direction of the Medicine Wheel is representative of the winter season, the elder stage of life, and the colour white. Just as plants transform themselves through the changing of the seasons to end life in winter, the stages of life proceed from infancy through to adulthood and death. Traditional Ojibwe people believe, however, that death is but one stage of the cycle of life, as it is not the end; there is no end. The life force is continuous beyond the moment to death through <i>transformation</i> into spirit. The white of the snow is kin to the white of the death spirit and the death of the physical body is kin to the birth of the spirit. Veneration of the spirits is important to maintain awareness of one's place in the cycle of life and to experience the fullness of self; this is done through various ceremonial practices.</p> <p><u>The Strawberry Teaching</u>  In the Strawberry Teaching two brothers mischievously play at wrestling, against their parents' wishes. Following the accidental death of one of the boys, the survivor is overcome with grief and ashamed to admit his role in his brother's death. After years of grief and anger, the surviving brother is surprised to discover a strawberry plant growing on his brother's grave. As the fruit matures it transforms from a tiny white bud to a beautiful red, luscious fruit, shaped like a heart. Eating this fruit restored his joy in life again and allowed him to release his guilt and shame. Change and healing took place not from the head, but from the heart following <i>acceptance</i> of his brother's death.</p>
<p><b>Learner Objectives</b></p>	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify the Ojibwe as an Aboriginal people with traditional beliefs</li> <li>• To develop awareness of the natural environment through the identification of the Four Cardinal Directions</li> <li>• To identify the Centre of the Medicine Wheel as symbolic of balance and harmony</li> <li>• To relate the continuum of life, growth, death and rebirth to the Medicine Wheel</li> <li>• To relate the practice of remembrance of the dead as significant to honoring all the stages of life along with their gifts and teachings</li> <li>• To become familiar with the meanings of the terms "Medicine Wheel", "sacred", "traditional", "direction", and "veneration."</li> </ul> <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To recognize the Medicine Wheel as an Aboriginal symbol with an ancient history</li> <li>• To appreciate that the four directions are consistent and everlasting and that each individual has a central perspective to these directions</li> <li>• To relate the concept of spiritual connection as it applies to the Medicine Wheel</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To relate the associations between the final stage of life (and death), mindfulness and remembrance with the North direction of the Medicine Wheel</li> </ul> <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To verbally communicate the symbolism behind the Medicine Wheel and each of four directions</li> <li>• To navigate the internet with control</li> <li>• To produce a Medicine Wheel graphically or physically</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bring in a plate of strawberries for the class to enjoy. Generate a discussion on the fruit and where it comes from, where it grows, its season, and its byproducts. What does the strawberry symbolize in cultural folklore? How has this fruit figured in literature?</li> <li>2. Introduce Ms. Lillian Pitawanakwat as an Ojibwe elder from Manitoulin Island, Ontario, who will share traditional teachings on the strawberry and what it represents to the Ojibwe.</li> <li>3. Visit <a href="http://www.fourdirectionteachings.com">www.fourdirectionteachings.com</a> to hear the Strawberry Teaching as told by the elder.</li> <li>4. Discuss the teaching. How does the process of grieving for the lost brother change following the introduction of the strawberry? What responsibility does the surviving brother have to himself in his healing? What role does self-<i>forgiveness</i> play in healing? How would this story help one through the grieving process? What happens when one focuses on <i>grief</i> and nothing else?</li> <li>5. Introduce the concept of the <i>Medicine Wheel</i>. What is medicine? We use medicine to heal us; it is good for us; it keeps us strong and healthy. The Medicine Wheel has been a symbol for generations to remember and respect the Four Directions and the good things that the sun and the seasons bring us every day. It looks like a wheel because it is round and each part is the same size. Aboriginal people originally placed rocks in a formation on the ground to mark places of special spiritual significance and to use for prayer. The Medicine Wheel represents all that is interconnected.</li> <li>6. Read the summary above.</li> <li>7. Explain that Aboriginal people have <i>traditional</i> teachings that have been passed down from generation to generation and those that follow these teachings share a close, spiritual, relationship with nature, having depended on it for physical survival. It was (and in some places is still) important to know the seasons to know when to hunt, to trap, to grow plants, to make shelters, etc. Different times of the year pose different challenges. Traditional Aboriginal people have very highly developed knowledge about the forces of nature and how we are all connected through nature. Aboriginal elders teach that the four seasons are very special and very important and not just to them but to everyone because all of us share these same four seasons - at least in Canada. The seasons do not change. So traditional Aboriginal people believe the four seasons are <i>sacred</i>, or blessed, because each season has a spirit and gives us special gifts. The seasons are <i>interconnected</i>. So they believe that we must always <i>respect</i> the four</li> </ol>

	<p>seasons. What are the gifts of the seasons? What are the challenges of the seasons?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. The Centre of the Wheel is where the four directions come together, where the four seasons meet, where the four elements meet, where all of life is in balance and harmony, within each of us. This is where, traditional Ojibwe people believe, one nurtures oneself, feeds one's fire.</li> <li>9. Visit <a href="http://www.fourdirectionteachings.com">www.fourdirectionteachings.com</a> again to hear the teachings of the East, the South, the West, and the North.</li> <li>10. Discuss the teachings and the practice the elder mentioned of feeding the spirits. What is the premise of this practice? How does feeding the spirits of the dead relate to maintaining our own fires? How does this practice help us to relate to each other and appreciate each other's gifts?</li> <li>11. Wrap up the lesson with a selection of discussion topics and optional exercises below.</li> </ol> <p>Discussion Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how the Four Directions, Four Sacred Medicines, Four Colours, and Four Seasons relate to the Medicine Wheel as a <i>continuum</i>.</li> <li>• "We still go back to our original teachings, because that's where our food for life comes from, to nurture that spirit that is forever searching in life's journey." What does "food for life" refer to in this quote by Ms. Pitawanakwat? What do our spirits seek in life's journey? How does following traditional teachings help in this regard?</li> <li>• Joy and sadness are ever present in life and death. The elder explains that beauty itself resides within the balance of the whole circle, the whole cycle of life and death and rejuvenation. Discuss how maintenance of the Centre of the Wheel contributes to this beauty.</li> </ul> <p>Optional Exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a journal entry on the power of death to transform one's life.</li> <li>• Brainstorm thoughts about death and what it means, the impact it has on us, what we learn from it, and why we fear it. Use the ideas that come forth to write a poem from the class. Take everyone's thoughts and work them into one poem on death. Produce for the class.</li> <li>• Research spiritual practices for <i>venerating</i> the dead from various cultures and religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism. Include visits to cemeteries, temples, and shrines to meet with religious leaders to learn how these ceremonies are conducted and what they represent.</li> <li>• Visit a strawberry field for a strawberry picking excursion in June. Collect baskets of strawberries and produce desserts for the class to enjoy: strawberries and cream; strawberry shortcake; strawberry jam; strawberry and apple pie.</li> <li>• Investigate the spiritual and physical healing power of plants.</li> </ul>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sacred</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional</li> <li>• Surrender</li> <li>• Medicine Wheel</li> <li>• Transformation</li> <li>• Acceptance</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Veneration</li> <li>• Grief</li> <li>• Forgiveness</li> <li>• Continuum</li> </ul>
<b>Materials Required</b>	
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher evaluation of student participation</li> </ul>

# Diagram for OJIBWE Curriculum

