

Commemorate Canada - Native species in Williams Treaty territory



Overview

Students will explore the territory of the Williams Treaties, discuss the importance of honouring treaties, and learn about native species in the region.

Time required

75 minutes (can be divided)

Grades

6-8

Subjects

Geography, history, biodiversity, native species

Learning goals

Students will be able to:

- Understand the significance of treaties to First Nations.
- Identify a selection of native species found within the territory of the Williams Treaties.
- Explain the importance of native species to ecosystems.
- Create an infographic to illustrate their knowledge of native species.

Materials

- SMARTBoard or projector
- Devices with internet access for research
- Art materials necessary to create infographic
- Infographic layout sheet
- Writing utensils

Lesson implementation

Minds on

Note: If needed, please review with students the definition of a treaty. More information [can be found here](#). Teachers can also play for students the first episode of the “Treaty Promises” series from the David Suzuki Foundation: “Treaty Making.”

Terminology note: Historic treaties, such as the 1923 Williams Treaties, involve First Nations. Modern treaties (comprehensive land claim agreements) involve Indigenous groups. When referring to Indigenous groups involved in the Williams Treaties, the term “First Nations” is used. When referring to treaties and agreements in general, the term “Indigenous Peoples” is used.

Ask students to think about what they ate for breakfast or lunch today. Students should think about the individual ingredients used to make up the meal, as well as any food that came in a package. Ask students where their families got this food from. Was it a grocery store, farmer’s market, garden, or restaurant? Now, ask students to consider what their lives would be like if stores, markets, restaurants, and gardens suddenly vanished. Where would they get their food and water?

Before European settlers came to what is now known as North America, Indigenous Peoples had lived, hunted, fished, and gathered on the land to sustain their communities. Explain that the land upon which we live and depend is sacred to Indigenous Peoples. The land provides us with all that we need to live — air, food, water, medicine, shelter, and so much more. This is why many Indigenous Peoples have names for the land that translate to “Mother Earth” or a similar term. Not only does she provide all that humans need to live a good life, she provides for all our relations — human and beyond — to live in a good way on the Earth. Mother Earth even offers us a place to rest, relax, and recharge, as well as providing a place for gathering and celebration.

When Europeans began to settle, take land, and make treaties with First Nations, it forced Indigenous Peoples off of their traditional territories and made it nearly impossible to sustain their traditional ways of living. Many were persecuted for hunting, gathering, and fishing on their traditional territories, such as the First Nations of the Williams Treaties.

Today, students will learn about the importance of honouring treaties with Indigenous Peoples and the native species found in the Williams Treaties territory.

Action

Play for students the *Canadian Geographic* [GeoMinute on the Williams Treaties](#) to help students begin to think about the significance of treaties not only as historical documents, but texts that are relevant to present-day Indigenous nations.

Explain that it is not simply treaties themselves that are important but the honouring of these treaties from all parties involved is equally as important. Divide students into pairs and ask them to brainstorm a short paragraph or list of why they believe treaties with Indigenous Peoples are important for both Canada and the nations involved in the treaty. Project or display a [map of the 1923 Williams Treaties](#)

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Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Spatial significance
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Formulate questions
- Gather and organize
- Communicate
- evaluate and draw conclusions

so that students can understand the land, water, and current cities within the boundaries of a treaty. Here are some questions to help prompt reflection:

- Why is it important to reexamine historic treaties? *It is important to understand whether the Canadian government has upheld its legal obligations to First Nations. For example, in 2018, the Canadian government [apologized](#) to the Williams Treaties First Nations, stating that “these treaties created continuing injustices — insufficient compensation, inadequate reserve lands, and the inability to freely exercise harvesting rights.” The government acknowledged that they had not respected the treaty rights of the First Nations involved in the Williams Treaties.*
- Why is it important to examine new territories for treaties and agreements? *There have been many cases where existing treaties only contain a small percentage of the historical territory of an Indigenous group. New treaties can help Indigenous Peoples continue to sustain themselves off of the land while remaining stewards of the land. Treaties can help protect the land from practices such as development, forestry, and mining and can help conserve important cultural and archeological sites for Indigenous groups.*
- Why are treaties important for Indigenous Peoples? *Treaties provide a legal basis for Indigenous Peoples to exercise their rights to hunt, fish and gather on their territory. Treaties can also help to protect the land from activities that threaten their use of the land, such as development (such as in the Greenbelt found in Williams Treaties territory), forestry, and mining. A lot of land holds significant cultural and spiritual value to Indigenous Peoples and is considered sacred. The land is interconnected with the identity of Indigenous Peoples.*

Now that students understand the importance of treaties for protecting Indigenous Peoples’ rights to use the land for their self-sufficiency, they will now explore species native to the Williams Treaties territory and how these species are connected to the ecosystem (including humans). Explain that each pair will be assigned a species native to this territory. If needed, review with students the definition of a native species. Students will be responsible for researching their species, using the **Infographic layout sheet** to help guide their research. Then, students will display this information in a visually interesting infographic.

Review with students what an infographic is: An eye-catching poster that provides short facts about a topic, using minimal text, while incorporating images like photos, illustrations, and graphs (usually infographics consist of only one page). [Here are some examples](#) from Canadian Geographic Education. Discuss with students the importance of using images which they have permission to use (i.e., images that allow for use with attribution or images in the public domain that aren’t “All rights reserved.”)

The following species are native to the Williams Treaty territory. Students also have the option to choose their own native species.

- Sugar maple
- Eastern white pine
- Yellow perch
- Walleye
- White-tailed deer
- Red fox

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- Coyote
- Porcupine
- Monarch butterfly
- Beaver
- Moose
- Spicebush
- Wild strawberry
- Goldenrod
- Wild rice
- Canada goose
- Mallard duck

Have students present their infographics to their classmates.

Conclusion and consolidation

Give each student a piece of paper and ask them to answer the question: How are all of the species we learned about today (including humans) connected? Students can hand in these exit slips for assessment.

Extend your geographical thinking

- Students can learn about Indigenous stewardship of the land.
- Students can learn about Indigenous Peoples' connection to the land with the StoryMap [Learning from the Land](#).
- Students can research the history of treaties in their community and any modern legal disputes.
- Students can investigate how to protect native species in their community.
- Students can plot the habitat range of their species on a class map.

Modifications

- Teachers can increase or decrease the amount of information required to be included in the infographic.
- Teachers can adjust how the infographic is created for students' needs (e.g., paper vs. computer).

Assessment opportunities

- Teachers can assess students' final infographics.
- Teachers and peers can assess infographic layouts and provide feedback.
- Teachers can use exit slips to assess next steps in teaching.

Additional resources

- *Canadian Geographic* [GeoMinute: The Williams Treaties](#)
- [Statement of Apology for the Impacts of the 1923 Williams Treaties](#)
- The Great Lakes Research Alliance: [The Williams Treaties](#)
- [The importance of native plants across Canada](#)
- [Treaty Research Report, The Williams Treaties \(1923\)](#)

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Infographic layout

Instructions: Use this sheet to help guide your research into your native species and to help you decide how to organize your information on your infographic. Once you have completed your research, decide how you would like to present it on your infographic (i.e., what images you would like to include and how you can condense your information to fit onto the infographic). Then, decide how you would like to create your infographic, for example, using art supplies or on a computer.

Species:

Habitat:

Food:

Species' role in the ecosystem:

Connection to humans:

Other interesting facts:

Infographic checklist (to be completed after your project is complete):

- There are no spelling or grammar mistakes.
- Our visual aids are not infringing on copyright (i.e., the images are allowed to be used and are credited where necessary).
- Our visual aids are thoughtful and relevant to the information presented in our infographic.
- Our information is accurate, important, and to the point.
- Our project is interesting and eye-catching.