

HRF30-A



Aboriginal Spirituality



Introduction

In Lesson 2, you will learn about Aboriginal people's spirituality as a religious way of life. This spirituality is connected with a concern for the earth and the interconnectedness of everything on the planet. You will learn about some of the sacred stories of North American Aboriginal peoples, and some of the practices, rituals, and festivals that Aboriginal groups observe. Although cultural impacts (such as the attempt to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into mainstream Canadian society) have buffeted Aboriginal spirituality over the years, you will be asked to consider its relevance to today's world, in this lesson's Key Question.

What You Will Learn

After completing this lesson, you will be able to

- explain the nature and role of the supernatural in Aboriginal people's lives
- describe the purpose of certain Aboriginal rituals and symbols, such as clan totems, the potlatch, the sweat lodge, and smudging
- identify and interpret the significance of oral creation stories
- describe the celebration of Aboriginal stages of life, especially the role of the vision quest and elders
- explain the connection between Aboriginal beliefs and rites of passage
- explain how a religious belief system can affect the way Canadians address issues in daily life

The following definitions will help you to understand this lesson.

Glossary	
animism	the belief that everything has a spirit; that the natural world has a parallel supernatural world of spirits
anthropologists	professionals who study human beings, especially their societies and customs
archaeologists	anthropologists who specialize in studying societies' customs through excavating and analyzing physical remains
assimilate	to absorb a minority culture into the majority culture
longhouse	Northeast Woodland and Northwest Pacific Coast cultures' concepts for lodging; a long house where several families could live in communal sharing; also the name for the Iroquois religion
Metis	a person of mixed Aboriginal and European descent; an accepted Aboriginal status
oracy	a skill that passes information along by word of mouth, rather than through print
totem	a protective spirit from the natural or ancestral world, sometimes symbolically carved into poles

Origins

The origins of Aboriginal spirituality are as ancient as North America's first peoples. **Archaeologists** estimate that people first came to Canada over the Bering Strait from Siberia during the last Ice Age, over 35 000 years ago. However, many Aboriginal people believe that they actually originated in Canada. Their creation stories illustrate that belief.

There are approximately 300 million Aboriginal people in every continent of the globe. In Canada, there are close to a million who claim Aboriginal status, being North American Indian, Inuit, or **Metis**. Increasing numbers of Aboriginal people are becoming more aware of their heritage and are applying for Aboriginal status. That fact, combined with a rising birth rate, have resulted in a marked increase in the number of Canadians who identify themselves as Aboriginal in the national census. In 2001, a total of 976 305 persons identified themselves with at least one of these Aboriginal groups. This count was 22.2% higher than the 1996 figure of 799 010.

In fact, Canada has the second-highest percentage in the world of Aboriginal peoples in its population, only 4% behind New Zealand. Saskatchewan has the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in its population, at 14%. Ontario has the greatest numbers who claim Aboriginal ancestry—about 145 000. In Canada, about 30% live on rural reserves, but approximately 50% live in urban settings (Statistics Canada, 2001). In Canada, many Aboriginal people celebrate their own national day, June 21, which was instituted in 1996. With this growing awareness, there is also a renewed interest in the various cultures' spirituality.

Do Aboriginal ways and beliefs still speak to us today? Increasingly, Canadian people and governments are recognizing the importance of Aboriginal culture and heritage. This manifests itself in many concrete ways, other than people hanging up dream catchers to protect them from bad dreams or attending powwows to observe Aboriginal dances. Because of past government actions that contributed to the weakening of

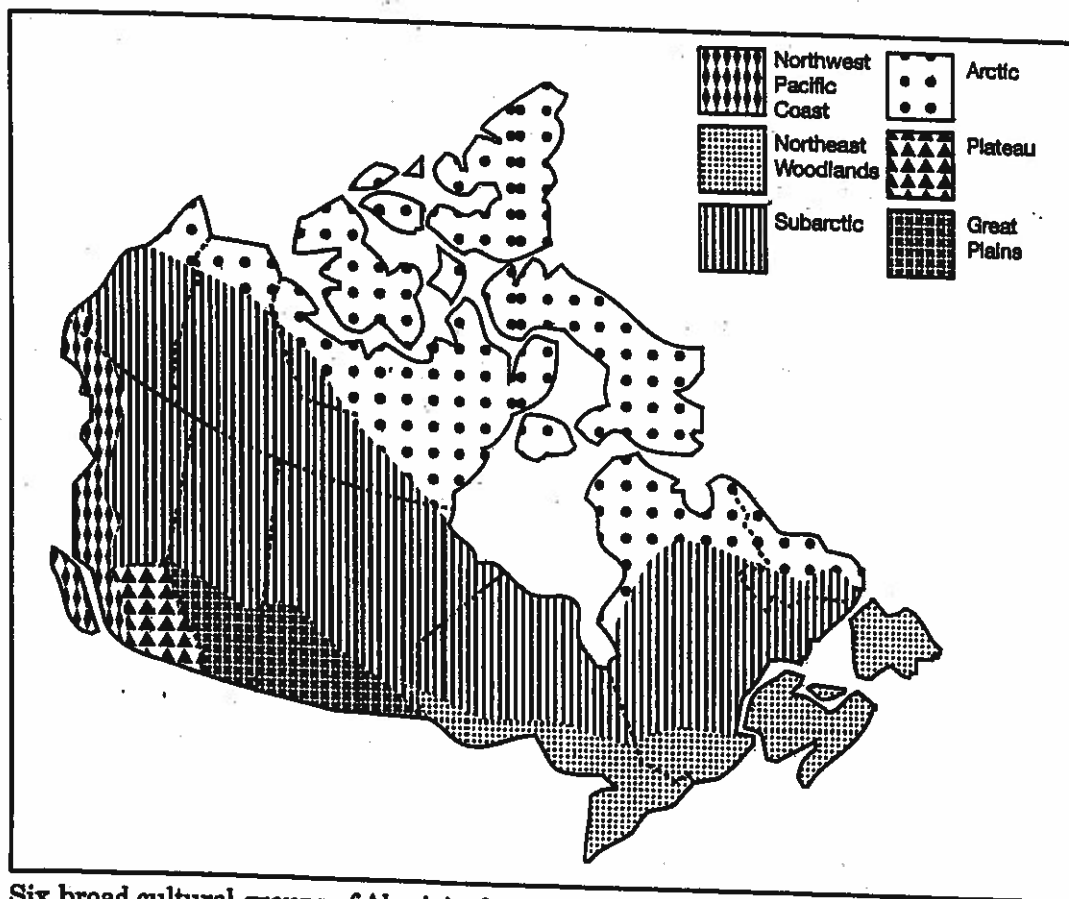
Aboriginal societies, many people are turning to their traditional religious and cultural practices as a way to heal themselves and maintain their heritage. In doing so, their spirituality is becoming more evident.

At one time, the Canadian government's policy was to **assimilate** Aboriginal peoples into mainstream Canadian society and culture. One aspect of that policy was the creation of residential boarding schools, Christian-run institutions where Aboriginal children were forced to live, away from their families and reserves. These schools began in about 1895 and lasted until 1996, when the last school closed in Saskatchewan. The federal government financed these boarding schools to help indigenous children integrate into society, but in the process, those same children were not allowed to speak their native languages or practise their religions. It is estimated that there are 80 000 people alive today who attended the residential schools and who are still suffering the effects today. For these people and others, rediscovering their spirituality has helped them with their recovery.

There are many tribes or nations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, each with different cultures, languages, and spiritual systems. Archaeologists and anthropologists have grouped them into six broad cultural groups, depending mainly on the way in which they adapted to geographical settings. Some of these geographical settings are, for instance:

- The Northeast Woodlands that extend from the Maritimes to the Great Lakes region. Some of the tribal nations of this group are the Mi'kmaq, the Ojibwa, the Iroquois, and the Cree. They hunted and farmed for their livelihood and still practise those skills today. (Note that some tribes have maintained their early skills, such as hunting, while others have not.)
- The Great Plains stretching along the Prairies from southern Manitoba to Alberta. Some of the tribal nations here are the Sioux, the Sarcee, and the Blackfoot. Originally, they were hunters—mainly of buffalo—and lived in teepees.
- The foothills and Rocky Mountain ranges of the Plateau. Some of the tribal nations living here are the Lillooet and the Kutenai (which became place names in British Columbia). Originally, they hunted bear and elk.

- The Subarctic region, which spans all of Canada, its upper forests, and the Canadian Shield. Some tribal nations in this region are the Innu, the Montagnais, and the James Bay Cree, originally caribou hunters.
- The Arctic region, which also extends across all of Canada above the tree line. This area is covered in snow and ice for most of the year and was a very harsh climate to adapt to. Aboriginals living here are the Inuit, which means "the people."
- The Northwest Pacific Coast. People in this region live on the islands and in the rain forest, along the coast of British Columbia. Their culture is closely connected to the sea and forests. They hunt whales, fish for salmon, and live in cedar longhouses. People living here are the Haida, the Tlingit, the Salish, and the Nisga'a, and are well known for their **totems**—poles decorated with the ancestral animal symbols of their clan.



Six broad cultural groups of Aboriginal peoples in Canada

Beliefs

Although each cultural group's expression of its spiritual beliefs takes different forms, these forms have many common attributes. This lesson will deal with three:

1. A belief in animism
2. The supporting role of animal clans and totems
3. Variations on common creation stories

Most Aboriginal cultures believed in an overriding spirit of creation, an all-powerful one or Great Spirit. The Iroquois believed it was the good twin, the holder of the heavens, named *Teharonhiawakon*, who went about creating everything on earth. The Sioux of the Great Plains referred to a supreme being—perhaps the sun—called *Wakantanka*. More importantly, all of these cultures believed in the harmony of a universe of living things.

Animism

There is abundant cultural evidence to show that these Aboriginal people practised **animism**, a belief that there are spirits involved in every aspect of the environment, human and non-human; that spiritual power exists in everything, living and non-living; and that everything living is closely connected and has an impact on every other thing, whether human, animal, plant, the afterlife, or even the weather. This belief in an interconnectedness and need for harmony forms the core of animism, and is a holistic belief. Traditional Aboriginal belief states that we all have a spirituality about us—an energy for good and evil. It also maintains that natural and supernatural powers exist, and that we should pay attention to such powers.

That is why an Aboriginal hunter will pay homage to the spirit of an animal he has just killed. He gives thanks to the spirit for letting him track and kill the animal so that he and his family can eat and survive. For instance, the Inuit would offer a drink

of water to the seal that they had just killed, so that its spirit could re-enter the sea. This is also why the Iroquois farmers would pray or dance to the sun and the rain: to be on good terms with these life-giving forces. Ronald Wright, an archaeologist, contends that "The greatest occasion was the Green Corn Dance, when the first maize had ripened" (Wright, 1992). Harmony was very important. Black Elk, a spiritual leader of the Sioux nation who lived from 1863–1950, once said that we are all related and are at one with the heavens and the earth, whether four-legged, two-legged, winged, or standing (for example, plants).

Clans and Totems

Some of the most harmonious examples of animism are those where tribes and people believe that certain animal spirits protect them. For instance, members of the Iroquois Six Nations are represented by animals such as the bear, turtle, and deer. People within those nations belonged to clans whose ancestors were represented by the wolf, the eel, the hawk, the heron, the snipe, and the beaver. "The clan system helped maintain peace, since members of a clan were like brothers and sisters, and family members were not allowed to fight each other" (Zabol, 2000). Also, traditionally, members of the same clan are not allowed to marry each other, a practice that also deepens interrelations and a sense of community among clan members.

The raven on the Pacific Coast is believed to be a powerful force. Its raucous caw was meant to make one pause and rethink things. The eagle was a common symbol to many Aboriginal peoples, too. Because it flew higher than the other birds, it was believed to have special closeness to the Creator. When the eagle is present, all is well, because it is taking care of Mother Earth. For this reason, the Iroquois have an eagle perched on top of the great Tree of Peace, a symbol of their Longhouse religion and of peace among their nations. Therefore the concept of spirits being everywhere, and the harmonious interconnectedness of life are also evident in creation beliefs and teachings.

Support Questions
(do not send in for evaluation)

9. If you could have any animal to act as your protector, explain which one it would be.

10. Recount two examples in your life that showed the need for harmony and interconnectedness among two-legged, four-legged, winged, or standing creatures. You may remember a special bond you had with a pet; a gardening event; or a relationship issue.

There are Suggested Answers to Support Questions at the end of this unit.

Creation Stories

The Aboriginal creation stories, which function like the biblical stories of Adam and Eve or Noah and the Flood, give us several insights into Aboriginal beliefs and spirituality. Three in particular—"Turtle Island," "The Raven," and "The White Buffalo Calf Woman"—illustrate Aboriginal concepts of how the world began.

Turtle Island

This Iroquois creation story begins with the Sky World.

In the middle there was a Great Tree of Light. One day a woman who was pregnant asked her husband to dig around the roots of the tree for some new tasty food. But when she looked into the hole she could see a whole other world of water. Curious for a better view, she slipped and grabbed some of the plants from around the Tree of Light as she began falling out of the Sky World. The birds first noticed her predicament. The geese slowed her fall with their wings while other birds flew to ask the turtle to act as a soft landing. The turtle agreed to carry the woman, her unborn child and the plants on its back. Knowing that the plants needed soil to survive, several animals began diving to the bottom of the sea. The muskrat brought up some mud clutched in his paws and placed it on the turtle's back. Magically, as the Sky Woman walked around the mud on the turtle's shell, it grew and grew. Eventually she gave birth to a girl and the two of them tended the trees and the plants on the 'island'. Later, the West Wind fell in love with the daughter who gave birth to twin boys, one good, and the other mischievous. Unfortunately she died giving birth and from her grave grew the Three Sisters—corn, beans, and squash. The good and the bad twins constantly fought. When the good one made something beautiful like the rose, the evil one placed thorns around it. (Zabol, 2000)

And so the world was filled with a duality of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and strong and weak.

The Raven

The raven is an important figure in the Northwest Pacific Coast cultures. He shows up in several variations that explain how the world developed.

The Tlingit of the Northwest Pacific Coast tell the following story of the Raven (Gwa'wina) and Creation.

The world was kept in darkness, only having the starlight at night. The Raven, who had white feathers at the time,

was tired of the world being dark. He heard that a chief had the sun and moon in a box in his longhouse. So he flew to the chief's longhouse and perched in a tree above it. He noticed the chief had a beautiful daughter so he tricked the daughter who became pregnant with the Raven. The chief, his grandfather now, loved the Raven and spoiled him. The Raven kept pestering his grandfather to let him know what was in the box. Finally the grandfather opened the box and the Raven snatched the sun and moon and flew up the chimney hole. There was so much smoke there that it turned the Raven's feathers black. Raven then put the sun in the morning sky. (Traditional story)

Among the Haida, another Northwest Pacific Coast nation presently living along the coast of British Columbia, the Raven is the Bringer of Light. They also have a story explaining how people came to be.

While on a secluded part of a beach, the Raven was lonely and stumbled upon a half-open clamshell. Peering into the shell, the Raven saw tiny people inside. The sacred bird shouted for the people to "Come out," for he was in need of companionship. The tiny humans squeezed out of the shell and onto the sandy beach. (Traditional story)



The Raven and the First Men.
Bill Reid, a renowned Canadian native artist sculpted this scene. It is on display at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology.

The White Buffalo Calf Woman

The Great Plains culture has a story that explains how their people were taught to pay homage to the Great Spirit using a sacred pipe.

There are many versions of this story in circulation. Some believe that this particular ancient legend has been around for 2000 years. What is known is that it is central to the spiritual practices of several Native American peoples. A well-known Sioux (Lakota) version of this sacred story is "The White Buffalo Calf Woman." The following is a paraphrase of several renditions of this story.

It was a time of hunger. Two young men, searching for game, saw a beautiful young woman approaching from the horizon, her feet not touching the ground. She was wrapped in a white buffalo skin and carried something in her hands.

One young man recognized her as a holy person and thought good thoughts, but the other saw only a beautiful young woman and thought to do her harm. As she approached, he reached out to grab her, but instead he became covered by a cloud. When the cloud left, the young man was nothing but a skeleton.

The White Buffalo Calf Woman told the other young man to return to his people to prepare for her coming. "Tell your people that it is a good thing I am bringing. I am bringing a holy thing to your nation, a message for the Buffalo People."

The young man returned. His people prepared for the holy thing which would be coming by building a medicine lodge and making all things ready. In four days the White Buffalo Calf Woman came to the people, carrying a wrapped bundle and a bunch of sacred sage. She was made welcome and honored by the people.

Then she unwrapped the bundle and showed them what she had brought—the Sacred Pipe. She told them what each part represented: the red bowl representing the flesh and blood of the Buffalo People and all people; the wooden stem—all green and growing things; the smoke—the sacred wind that carries prayers. She showed them how to offer the Pipe to Earth

and Sky and the four Sacred Directions. She told them many mysteries.

"I am going to leave," she said, "but you will see me again." As she walked toward the setting sun, she stopped and rolled on the Earth. When she stood up she was a black buffalo. Then she went further and rolled again. This time when she stood up she was a brown buffalo. The third time she was a red buffalo. The fourth and final time, she became a white buffalo calf and disappeared.

As soon as the White Buffalo Calf Woman had disappeared, herds of buffalo appeared all around the camp. The people gave thanks with the Sacred Pipe for all of the blessings they had received. As long as they followed the lessons they had been taught—that all things are connected as parts of the pipe—they lived happily and well. (Traditional story)



Bear totem situated across from the Legislature in Victoria

Stories like this show the belief systems of Aboriginal peoples, in which animals are intricately involved in explaining how the world developed. These stories would be told to children and were the themes of dances and ceremonies. Because the Aboriginal peoples did not have a written language, the stories had to be told and re-enacted by word of mouth. This tradition was called **oracy**, the skill of relying on memory and speech to relay heritage. By continuing the skill of oracy, the past is still alive and meaningful today. In Aboriginal cultures, there is still a strong tradition of asking respected society members to help out with others in their midst. These older and wiser people are called *elders*. The role of elders ensures that Aboriginal spirituality will be passed on to future generations.

Support Questions

(do not send in for evaluation)

11. Explain three ways in which the creation stories of "Turtle Island" and "The Raven" are examples of animism.

12. Do you find that the creation stories help or hinder your appreciation of Aboriginal spirituality? Explain, giving two reasons.

13. In your own words, describe what lessons or values the White Buffalo Calf Woman taught.

Sacred Writings and Oral History

Aboriginal peoples had great oral skill. They could remember hours of text and recount it during ceremonies using memory aids, called *mnemonics* (pronounced *ne-mon-iks*). Mnemonics are sometimes used to remember lists or formulas; for example, using "Every good baboon deserves fun," to remember the names of the musical lines, E, G, B, D, F. Aboriginal people also used *wampums*, belts of coloured beads, to help the storyteller remember an event or treaty.

Elders have played an important role in passing on the sacred beliefs orally. An elder is a person, male or female, who is respected for his or her age and wisdom. Elders are recognized by their community as such. The renowned Northwest Pacific Coast Salish elder, Dan George, often advised that if the old would remember, the young would listen. Another Salish elder, Mourning Dove, who lived from 1888–1936, spoke of the elder's role in helping children. She said that a common practice was for elders to encourage children to develop strict discipline and a high regard for sharing. When a girl picked her first berries and dug her first roots, they were given away to an elder so that all future successes would be shared. When a child carried water for the home, an elder would give compliments, pretending to taste meat or water carried by a boy, or berries carried by a girl.

Elders would also admonish children not to be lazy and to grow straight, like a sapling.

Increasingly, elders are playing significant roles in using a renewal of spirituality to assist in everyday Aboriginal life. For instance, they are asked to advise Aboriginal governing councils, and act as counsellors for troubled youths. They often impart traditional knowledge to others, such as the creation stories, information about herbal medicines, or traditional skills in hunting, weaving, food preparation, and sports. One such group, the False Face, or Medicine Mask Society of the Iroquois, is knowledgeable about medicine and prayers. This group practises holistic medicine and also tells the following story of the Creator.

A stranger, Hadui, challenged the Creator, or Good Twin, to a contest to see who had the greater power. Each one was to turn their back to the mountains and try to move them forward towards the contestants. Hadui used his power to make the mountains rumble and move a bit. The Creator, however, had greater power and moved the mountains with a great noise. Hadui turned around at the sound and smacked his face into the rocks, breaking his nose. The masks to Hadui usually have a crooked nose to commemorate the contest and Hadui's substantial power to help cure humans. (Zabol, 2000)

As you can see, storytelling is an essential part of life for indigenous peoples. It is used as soon as a child is able to sit and listen. The storytellers are parents, adult relatives, or community elders. As individuals begin to mature, they are told more of the history and culture of their people. Those who have patiently listened to, and memorized the stories have a huge responsibility when they tell them to others, as some of these stories have been retold over thousands of years.

Support Questions
(do not send in for evaluation)

14. Create a mnemonic (memory aid) to help you remember at least three things that you believe in, spiritually.

15. Consider how you would view a cup of coffee from the perspective that everything is connected.

Practices, Rituals, and Festivals

Often, anthropologists can analyze human values through observing the customs and rituals of the society they are studying. If an anthropologist tried to analyze North American values and society based on the events taking place during the Christmas season, he or she would obtain many clues from the practices observed. Can you list some? Examples are the story of the birth of Jesus, as well as the belief in Santa Claus, and in receiving rewards for good behaviour. You might even comment that the seasonal act of gift-giving has lost its meaning as a result of rampant consumerism. Aboriginal peoples have several practices, rituals, and festivals that shed light on their spiritual values, too. Some of their practices were even banned by Canadian governments for a while. The potlatch and the Sun Dance were two such "illegal" spiritual rituals. However, other spiritual activities, such as sweat lodges and smudging, persisted throughout the years and became vehicles for reconnecting Aboriginal peoples to their spiritual beliefs.

The Potlatch

The *potlatch* is a traditional Northwest Pacific Coast First Nations ceremony. It commemorates occasions like marriage, the naming of a Chief, or honouring the dead. It used to last for days, and consisted of speeches, songs, dances, feasting, and wealth distribution. The more gifts the host Chief gave away, the more honour and status came to him and his family. Silver bracelets, Hudson Bay blankets, and even sewing machines were given away at these gatherings. Families sometimes prepare for a potlatch for a whole year.

In the past, this sharing of goods and "partying" for days seemed idle and unproductive to those following western European ways. The Canadian government wanted to encourage Aboriginal peoples to relinquish their values and culture in favour of what the government saw as superior European values, so they banned this "backward and wasteful" gathering of the tribes,

from 1884 until 1951. The government issued a directive to this effect in 1921: "You should suppress any dances which cause waste of time, interfere with the occupations of the Indians, unsettle them for serious work, injure their health, or encourage them in sloth and idleness" (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

On December 15, 1953, after the ban was lifted, the first legal potlatch was hosted by Chief Mungo Martin in Victoria, B.C., adjacent to the B.C. Parliament Buildings. Today, the sharing among tribes in potlatches is still evident. The host tribe provides food and gifts for all of the guests. In return, the guests are obligated to remember and pass on all information about the business conducted at the potlatch.

The relationship with the ancestors is also respected through a ceremonial feeding of the dead. Over the last 15 years, more and more potlatches are being held, sometimes with over a thousand guests (U'mista Cultural Society).



An owl mask used for dancing at the potlatch

The Sun Dance

The *Sun Dance* was a Great Plains ceremony. It was banned in the United States from 1904 until 1934, partly because the ritual involved self-torture. Canada banned it in 1885. The Sun Dance was a gathering of several tribes in late June/early July.

It was a huge renewal ceremony involving a buffalo skull placed at its centre. Since the Plains people depended on the buffalo, they danced and sang to ensure the buffalo spirit's goodwill. They also erected a central pole to honour the sun, and the

circle they formed around it paid homage to the sun's life-giving powers. This festival of dance, drumming, singing, and feasting often lasted a week or two. One of the dances involved some self-torture. In order to renew good fortune, some men would dance around the central pole while being connected to it with skewers and leather thongs, which were threaded through the skin on their chests or backs. They would dance and sing and try to pull themselves free from the thongs attached to the ropes on the sun pole. The suffering was meant to be an offering on behalf of their fellow tribespeople. The scars were testaments to their bravery, self-sacrifice, and faith. This annual celebration of renewal and reconnection with the universe is once again practised today.

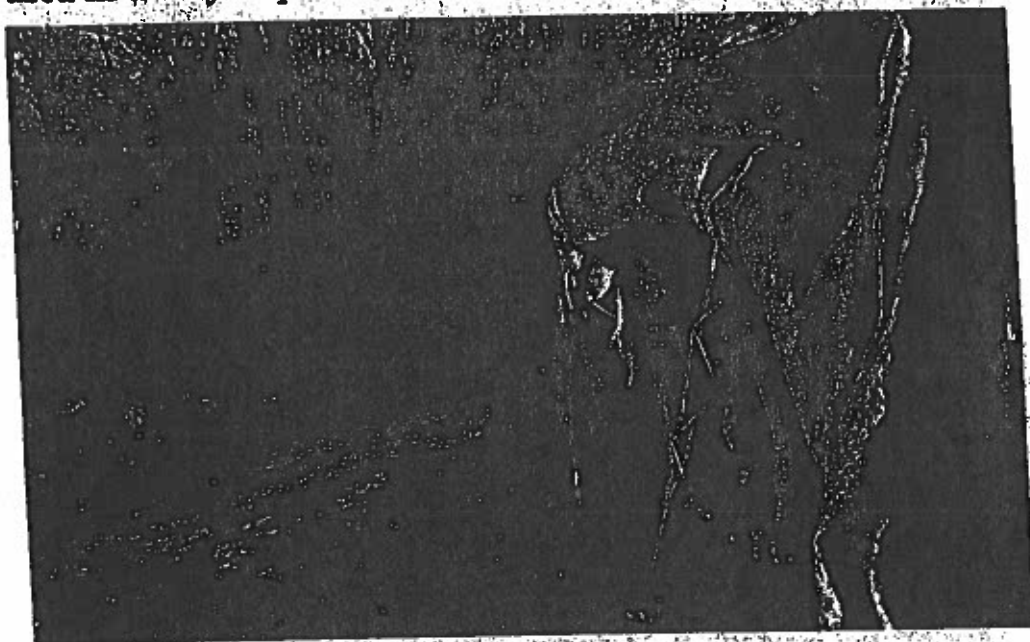
The Sweat Lodge and Smudging

The *sweat lodge* and *smudging*, on the other hand, have always been used by Aboriginal peoples. A sweat lodge acts like a sauna. It is a dome made of saplings, covered with animal skins or cedar bark, so that it is dark inside. Heated stones are placed in the centre and water is sprinkled over them, so that the interior is hot and steamy. The participants cleanse their bodies by sweating profusely. They are also cleansed spiritually through prayers, in order to shed bad thoughts and ways.

Like the sweat lodge, a smudging ceremony is a purification right and an act of bonding. Sweet grass and tobacco is burned in a smudge pot and passed around. Tobacco, sweet grass, and other herbs like sage are considered sacred plants. The smoke is aromatic and is believed to clear thoughts, wash away impurities, and give a new focus to one's endeavours. People use their hands, or sometimes an eagle feather, to move the smoke over their heads and faces, inhaling it, and then moving it over their arms and torsos.

The symbolic and spiritual belief is that the spirits of the plants will give the person clean thoughts and a pure heart, so that they will speak and do good things. It is used to put the participants in the right frame of mind, giving them good thoughts and pure feelings, and helping them to feel connected to their co-smudgers.

Sweat lodges and smudging, as practices for purifying, are also used in a very important Aboriginal milestone, the vision quest.



Eleven-year-old boy gets a breath of air during a sweat lodge ceremony that is part of his "Coming of Age" ritual.

Support Questions
(do not send in for evaluation)

16. Of the two banned ceremonies, which would you prefer to participate in? Explain your choice.

17. Of the two non-banned ceremonies, which do you feel would have more value to you? Explain why.

Milestones

A rite of passage that is very important to Aboriginal spirituality is called the *vision quest*. A vision quest is a process whereby a person comes of age. They must first be purified and then go off to a sacred place, where they pray and fast for as long as it takes to have a vision or abandon the quest and try again at a later time. Having to endure the elements and abstain from food and water may contribute to a person's readiness to see and hear a vision and message from a guardian spirit, which can appear as an animal or an ancestor, or in another natural form. John Fire Lane Deer, a Lakota Sioux and respected elder, recounted his vision quest. After the cleansing and lightheadedness of the sweat lodge, he went to a hilltop where he waited for four days and nights:

...Suddenly I became aware of a huge bird flying around me, I could hear its cries and feel its feathers. All at once I was up in the sky with the bird. I heard a voice say, "We are the fowl people, the winged ones, the eagles and the owls. You shall be our brother... You will learn about herbs and roots and heal people. A man's life is short. Make yours a worthy one."

Douglas Cardinal, a Metis architect, told of his experience in the Royal Report on Aboriginal Peoples. His vision quest lasted five days. He recounted how he suffered discomforts and complaints from fasting on the first day; awakened to his surroundings on the second day, where he communicated with ants and butterflies; received renewed strength from the trees, sun, and clouds on the third day; and then felt his strength ebbing away on the fourth day, as he seemed to move from his body. All of a sudden, his life experiences so far, his relationships, and his mistakes passed before him and he was enveloped in bright light. He had a dialogue with a very positive person who countered his own negativity and arrogance. He then felt powerless and powerful at the same time, and felt totally connected with the universe. It was a very empowering vision quest (Cardinal, 1996).

Vision quests would often connect a person with a guiding spirit for different phases of their life. Vision quests influence Aboriginals in a positive way and sustain them through other cultural impacts that affect their way of life.

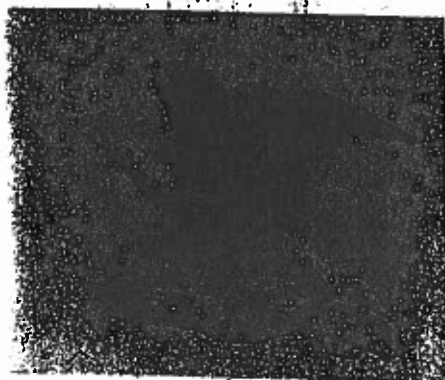
Support Questions
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18. Analyze at least two reasons why purification is so important to a vision quest.

19. What would be the most negative and the most positive parts of a vision quest for you? Explain.

Cultural Impacts

Benjamin Franklin, one of the founders of the American Constitution, once commented on the influence of Iroquois spiritual symbolism and democratic principles on America's fledgling democracy. He noticed that the system of checks and balances, of peace among brothers and sisters, and the idea of consensus and compromise would suit a federal style of democracy. This Iroquois confederate system was established by two allies, Hiawatha and the Peacemaker. They set up a Confederacy among the Five (later Six) Nations. Hiawatha and the Peacemaker planted a tall Tree of Peace, whose four roots spread across the land in each direction. The Confederacy members tossed their weapons among the roots as the tree was planted. Each nation gave the Peacemaker an arrow, which he bundled together and gave to the eagle to hold, as it watched from atop the Tree of Peace. No nation could go to war with each other as long as the eagle held the arrows. Today, the symbol of the eagle holding the bundle of arrows is an American one, originating from the Confederacy.



The eagle is an important American symbol

Nowadays, powwows, or seasonal gatherings of Aboriginal peoples who celebrate by dancing, drumming, chanting, and displaying arts and crafts, are a way in which non-Aboriginals have become more aware of Aboriginal spirituality. At powwows, people can learn about dream catchers, for example. A dream catcher is a circle with weaving in the centre, which should be hung where the morning light can shine on it. It is believed that a person's dreams all try to pass through the holes in the dream

catcher, but that only the good ones can pass. The other dreams get caught in the webbing and are destroyed in the first rays of the morning light. Aboriginal spirituality continues to offer many people insights and comfort, to this day.

Support Questions

(do not send in for evaluation)

20. Do you have any spiritual symbols in your life? If so, what are they and why are they a part of your life? If you don't have any spiritual symbols, why not?

21. List three specific things about Aboriginal spirituality that you could apply to your own life, and explain why.



Research Skills

Conducting On-line Research

To answer this lesson's Key Question, you will need to conduct additional secondary research, using the Internet. Because of the enormous number of documents on the World Wide Web, one of the challenges of conducting on-line research is knowing how to use a search engine effectively. The following article, written by an experienced researcher, will provide you with some tips on entering the right words for your search, so that your results will suit your needs.

One Search Engine

Use one search engine and learn it well. Every search engine uses different rules and techniques. Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser software varies the search engine, giving you a different engine for each search. This is confusing and not conducive to good searching. So pick one search engine and stick with it.

My favorite search engine is Google at www.google.com. It almost always comes through to help me find exactly what I need. With a few pointers, it can do the same for you. Here are my Google tips. While some of these tips (like the first two) are useful in any search engine, others will be Google-specific.

Search Words

Carefully consider your search words. For instance, you want to learn more about the movie Jaws. If you go to a search engine and enter the word jaws, you will get some information about the movie, but you also may get information on Jaws, a screen-reading program for the blind, and JAWS, a Women's Journalism group. To restrict your search results, enter jaws movie. This will give you only Web sites that have both the word jaws and the word movie.

Google ignores common words like "of," "for," "a," and "the." So, you could also enter jaws the movie with the same results. Don't worry about capitalization; Google does not differentiate between upper and lower case letters.

Double Quotation Marks

Use double quotation marks for phrases and names. This instructs the search engine to treat multiple words as a single term. It will return only Web pages where the words inside the quotes are used together in the order given.

Narrow the Search

Narrow your search by using additional terms. When you enter search terms, Google looks for any Web page that has all of the words you enter. To limit the search, just add more pertinent words. For instance, a search for the word George will yield 21,200,000 results. If you search for George Washington, you will get 2,320,000 results. A search for George Washington Carver will turn up 88,400 links. Add what you learned in the last tip and search for "George Washington Carver," and you have narrowed the results to 28,700. That still sounds like a lot of pages, doesn't it? So enter more words that indicate exactly what you are searching [for]. If what you really want to know is where George Washington Carver grew up, a search for "George Washington Carver" childhood home will give you just what you need.

Minus Sign

Use the minus sign to exclude words. When you want all relevant result pages, except those containing a certain word, prefix your query word with a minus sign. Google will then ignore all pages containing that word. For instance, enter Washington -George to get information about other people, places, and

things named Washington, but not George. Enter George -Washington to get information about others named George, but not Washington. Be sure to put a space before the minus sign but no space after it. The correct entry is George (space) -Washington, not George-Washington.

Advanced Options

Use the advanced options. Google has an easy-to-fill-in form for advanced searches. Just click on Advanced Search from the Google home page and you can fill in a form that spells out the basis of the results. You can choose to look at only recently updated Web pages, Web pages written only in your choice of languages, only pages that have the search words in the title, or pages where the search words are found only in the URL. Many of these options have shortcuts, but the advanced options page is great, if you are new to searching.

This is just the start. To become an expert Googler, go to the Google Web site and look at the options. Read their instructions and try a few searches. Before you know it, you will be able to find that needle in the Internet haystack.

Conclusion

In Lesson 2, you took a brief look at Aboriginal spirituality. You studied its origins, as well as its beliefs, practices, and rituals. You also learned the importance of sacred stories and had the opportunity to read several. In the next lesson, you will examine the practices and beliefs of a very early religion that may be new to you, called *Zoroastrianism*.

Key Question

Save your answers to the Key Questions in your Course Journal or e-Journal.

2. There has been a "boil water" order issued in your area because of increased runoff involving fertilizer nitrates from surrounding farms. It seems that it has contaminated well water and hence, your drinking water. You are upset with the situation and want an explanation.

Write a 250-word report in which you first complain about the situation, and then give an explanation that an elder might offer for this problem in your natural surroundings. Include

- one paragraph on why you are frustrated with the situation. To back up your views, you will need to do some research on some of the examples of contaminated water that have recently occurred in the news. If you are conducting your research on-line, try doing a Google search on "contaminated water" Ontario
- one or two paragraphs on how you imagine an elder, drawing on his or her spirituality, might lead you to a new perspective, or a positive way to go forward. Consider what you have learned in this lesson about Aboriginal beliefs, rituals, and practices. (25 marks)

The following Marking Guide will be used to evaluate your answer.

Marking Guide for Key Question 2 (25 marks)

Evaluation criteria	Marks
• Facts related to the issue of water contamination are well researched and clearly presented.	5
• Concepts, ideas, and facts related to Aboriginal spirituality are accurately, clearly, and adequately presented.	10
• Effective connections are made between Aboriginal spirituality and the problem.	10

References

Page 3 Statistics Canada, *Canada Year Book* (2001) 89, 107.

Page 7 Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents* (Viking, 1992) 121.

Page 7 Myron Zabol, *People of the Dancing Sky* (Stoddart, 2000) 11.

Page 9 Zabol, *People of the Dancing Sky*, 6–7.

Pages 9–10 “The Raven” (Tlingit). Traditional story.

Page 10 “The Raven” (Haida). Traditional story.

Pages 11–12 “The White Buffalo Calf Woman” (Sioux). Traditional story.

Page 15 Myron Zabol, *People of the Dancing Sky* (Stoddart, 2000) 8–9.

Page 18 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1—Looking Forward Looking Back, Part One: The Relationship in Historical Perspective, Chapter 6—Stage Three: Displacement and Assimilation, 1996.

Page 18 U'mista Cultural Society, “Potlatch Then and Now,” <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/potlatch/>

Page 21 Donald Cardinal, “Rekindling the Fire,” Royal Report on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) 35.

Now go on to Lesson 3. Remember, you do not send your journal to the Independent Learning Centre until you have completed Unit 1 (Lessons 1 to 5).

