

**Big Idea:** Understanding Canada's indigenous historical and contemporary contributions leads learners toward a mutually respectful relationship with Indigenous people. The sharing and teachings of Indigenous contributions in Canada is essential to the reconciliation process.

This conversation guide is designed for use by instructional leaders and learning communities or as a self-paced study.

#### References

Indspire

<http://indspire.ca/laureate/>

Early Discoveries

<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1302807151028/1302807416851>

Essential Terminology

<http://empoweringthespirit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Stepping-Stones-Terminology-PD-WT-16a.pdf>

### Consensus Model of Decision Making

Consensus decision-making has a rich history. The Iroquois Confederacy's Great Law of Peace included elements that would influence the development of democratic forms of government throughout the world. Each Nation looked after its own internal affairs, but representatives from each nation came together in a central congress to deal with topics that affected all members, such as war and peace. The representatives were appointed by clan mothers, and could be removed if people lost confidence in them (unlike the European monarchs of the time, who could not be removed even if they were insane). Involving all group members in the discussion of issues and making decisions together was a powerful process and led to high-quality decisions with strong support for follow through. The British recognized the First Nations way of consensus decision-making, and designed their treaty-making process to work within the First Nations framework.

### Matrilineal Clan System

Matrilineal clan systems are kinship formations that follow the descent of the mother's clan. There are many Indigenous communities across Alberta and greater Canada that are returning to the clan system, some call it a revitalization or a return to matrilineal/matriarchal systems. It is believed by many Indigenous groups that loss of the matriarchal system in society has caused a breakdown in the familial structure. Colonization and the many policies that followed (Indian Act, Residential Schools) worked to enforce a patrilineal system in communities.

### Contributions to European Settler Survival

Medicine in Canada began long before the arrival of European settlers. Depending on tradition and way of life, First Nations groups had appointed or gifted individuals who were able to heal using the land as medicine. Salves, lotions, oils and spiritual practices were able to cure many European settlers who were not accustomed to the Canadian climate and diet. There are diaries and documentation by early settlers, like Samuel de Champlain, who explain the unique way in which the First Nations on the east coast helped to heal early settlers in Canada.

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## Early Inventions

Each of the items shown below were invented or first discovered by First Nations and Inuit.



### Blackberry Plant

A tea made with the whole blackberry plant was used by First Nations to treat sickness such as dysentery, cholera and upset stomach.



### Petroleum Jelly

First Nations used olefin hydrocarbons and methane to make petroleum jelly, and used it to hydrate and protect animal and human skin.



### Spruce Gum

First Nations discovered the first chewing gum which was collected from spruce trees. This can also be used to treat cuts and toothaches.



### Willow Bark

The active ingredient in pain relievers such as Aspirin was known to First Nations for centuries. It is found in species of the willow tree, including pussy willow.



### Goggles

Inuit developed bone, antler and ivory goggles to prevent blinding snow glare while they hunted.



### Corn

Is a staple food that was cultivated first by First Nations for thousands of years. Today it is grown all around the world.

## Contributions During the First & Second World Wars

Approximately one third of First Nations people in Canada age 18 to 45 enlisted during the two world wars. Métis and Inuit soldiers also enlisted; however, only status Indians were officially recorded by the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Many Indigenous people distinguished themselves as talented and capable soldiers and at least 50 were awarded medals for bravery and heroism.

Aboriginal women were active on the homefront, contributing to the war efforts through fundraising and other means. After returning from service, many Indigenous veterans experienced the same unequal treatment they experienced prior to the war. Indigenous veterans were not awarded the same benefits as their non-Aboriginal counterparts.



Portrait photo of Charlotte Edith Anderson Monture, AEF  
John Moses Collection

## Henry Norwest

Henry Norwest was a Métis-Cree cowboy from Alberta who serves as a Battalion's ace sharpshooter. Also known as the "Pimple," he went to work as a counter-sniper, taking out multiple German riflemen. His work earned him the Military Medal and it was noted Norwest showed "great bravery, skill and initiative in sniping the enemy after the capture of the Pimple. By his activity he saved a great number of our men's lives."



Image source:<http://bit.ly/2qFKuuY>

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## Well Known Indigenous People

### Chief Wilton Littlechild

“Willie” is a highly respected individual, renowned for his work at the United Nations advocating for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, he spent nearly thirty years working on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. He is the first Treaty person to graduate with a law degree from the University of Alberta, he is a former Member of Parliament, the recipient of the Order of Canada, also receiving countless awards in business and sports. He recently completed a six year term on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada on the Indian Residential School era.



### Herb Belcourt

Métis entrepreneur, philanthropist, activist, and the recipient of the Order of Canada, Herb Belcourt was born in a log cabin near Lac La Biche in 1931, the oldest of 10 children. Dr. Herb Belcourt not only builds homes, he has helped build lives, combining entrepreneurial expertise and generosity, Dr. Belcourt has worked steadfastly to ensure Aboriginal Albertans have access to suitable housing and education. In 2001, the University of Alberta awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Laws degree, and in 2006, he received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award.

### Alex Janvier

Alex is an acclaimed artist from Cold Lake First Nations. He received formal art training from the Alberta Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary and graduated with honours in 1960.

In 2016, a retrospective exhibit of his work opened at the National Gallery of Canada. Also in 2016 Janvier's large mosaic "Tsa Tsa Ke K'e" (Iron Foot Place) was installed at Rogers Place in Edmonton.



### Heather Kashman

Growing up in Alberta, Heather was always a natural on the ice. In 2010, Kashman captained the Calgary Cowboys Native Provincial team and won the provincial championship. In 2011, Kashman captained her Midget AAA team and led the Edmonton Thunder to an undefeated regular season as well as a silver medal in Nationals. Also in 2011, Heather was chosen for Team Alberta to compete in the Canada Winter Games. She was one of the top scorers on the team that beat Team Ontario twice, to win the Canadian championship gold. Finally, in 2011 she was voted the most valuable female hockey player in Alberta. Heather has a Master's degree in Community Development, Policy & Practice, and a Bachelor's Degree in Business. While in school, she worked to develop and implement the Flying Eagle Program in Alberta, an initiative put in place to educate children and youth about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit culture.

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## Doreen Spence

Born in the Cree Nation of Saddle Lake in Northern Alberta, Doreen Spence was raised by two Traditional Cree Elders, her grandparents. Their teachings of love, kindness, humanity, language, and ethics shaped her childhood. Doreen was instrumental in the development of the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, a grassroots organization providing a foundation for the city to discuss human rights issues facing the Indigenous community and to investigate possible solutions. Doreen Spence is an internationally-respected traditional Cree Elder. Her teachings and traditional healing practice have led her around the world, in places like Germany, Austria, Vienna, Slovakia, Poland, Switzerland, South Africa, Australia, England, and the United States. Elder Doreen Spence has also been a strong advocate for human rights. She was invited to sit as a committee member on the working group that developed the draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

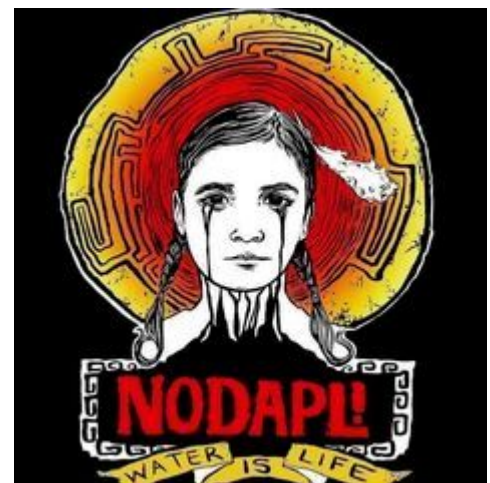


## Activism



The **Idle No More** movement was initiated by activists Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon. Idle No More calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution to honour Indigenous sovereignty and to protect the land and water. The movement continues to pressure government and industry to protect the environment. The goal is to build allies in order to reframe the nation to nation relationship, this will be done by including grassroots perspectives, issues, and concern. The movement draws in millions of people via their website and Twitter. It has brought together a number of solidarity groups and allies that all work together for the betterment and advancement of Indigenous people in Canada.

**NODAPL** (No Dakota Access Pipeline) are Tribal Nations and grassroots Indigenous communities rising to the call set forth by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to defend their inherent rights to protect Unci Maka and the water: Mni Wiconi. The Standing Rock movement is bigger than one tribe. It has evolved into a powerful global phenomenon highlighting the necessity to respect Indigenous Nations and their right to protect their homelands, environment and future generations. Native relatives from across Turtle Island have joined the movement, bringing in peaceful protesters from across Canada with nations from Alberta joining in solidarity.



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## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

**Question:** After reading this Conversation Guide, what resonated with you? Perhaps it was something that surprised you, or something you were unaware of? Perhaps it was something that you agree or disagree with? Take turns sharing your thoughts and building on each others' ideas.

### Indigenous Medicine

Indigenous people across Canada continue to use their traditional knowledge of the land to heal the “whole self” (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual self). More and more, non-indigenous people have turned to holistic forms of medicine to cure a variety of human ailments.

**Question:** Think of this shift in your own life, what forms of “natural” remedies do you use in your household? How difficult would it be to obtain those on your own and why?

### Leaders In Your Community

Name an indigenous leader in your community? Which indigenous people in your city/town have inspired and influenced you to learn more?

### Answering the Call

The Calls to Action, from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are created to “advance us all in the process of reconciliation.” Call to Action 63 (iii) calls on us educators, to “build capacity for understanding, empathy and mutual respect.”

**Question:** How does knowing and understanding the historical and contemporary contributions of Indigenous people of Canada help us advance in reconciliation?

## For More Information

Idle No More

<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>

NODAPL

<http://www.nodapl.life/>

Notable Indigenous Individuals

<http://indspire.ca/laureate/>

The Inherent Rights of Self Governance by

Rosemarie Kuptana

<https://youtu.be/1eCBsGxD8AI>

Tommy Prince

<https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/tommy-prince-0>

Henry Norwest

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/henry-norwest-metis-marksman-1.4044782>

Indigenous Soldiers

[https://www.veterans.gc.ca/public/pages/remembrance/those-who-served/aboriginal-veterans/native-soldiers/natives\\_e.pdf](https://www.veterans.gc.ca/public/pages/remembrance/those-who-served/aboriginal-veterans/native-soldiers/natives_e.pdf)

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/historical-sheets/aborigin>

Political Activism

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-people-political-organization-and-activism/>

Alex Janvier

<http://www.alexjanvier.com/>

Literacy

<https://www.amazon.ca/Native-American-Thought-Invention-s-Innovations/dp/1554511542>

<https://www.amazon.ca/Inuit-Thought-Amazing-Arctic-Innovations/dp/1554510872>

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