

TREATY ESSENTIAL LEARNING #4

WORLDVIEWS



Understanding the First Nations peoples' traditional worldview is an integral part of understanding the treaties and the differing perspectives of the treaties. First Nations peoples believe the treaties are based upon specific understandings of the relationship between the Creator, human beings and the earth; they view the treaties as permanent, sacred agreements to be honoured forever.

These treaties are permanent, but are also dynamic in that they adapt for implementation and reflect the current realities of the newcomers and First Nations peoples.

First Nations peoples are reliant upon oral tradition to pass on their traditions and knowledge from generation to generation, and believe the Creator is a vital part of all life, including interactions with other societies. Newcomers were reliant on the written word and also had their own belief system. Therefore, interpretations of the treaties vary due to the differing worldviews of the participating nations.

At the time of treaties, the two parties had their own worldviews which shaped their understanding of the treaty relationship. Saskatchewan is made up of a variety of First Nations peoples, all with different worldviews. Perceptions about treaties differ between the parties because of worldviews. To understand how First Nations peoples perceive the treaties, one must carefully examine their worldviews, cultures and traditions, and compare these worldviews to those of the newcomers.

Keeping in mind the diversity of worldviews, it should be understood that all perspectives are not captured in the following Treaty Essential Learning. It is equally important to note that these are only brief overviews and not precise explanations.

1. THE FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES. First Nations peoples were the recognized land keepers (First Nations peoples do not believe that anyone can “own” the land) of North America.

The name “First Nations” replaced the words “Indian” and “native” during the 1970s. The First Nations who signed treaties with the Crown are known as “Treaty First Nations.” The contemporary term “Aboriginal” is used to classify three distinct and separate groups: the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; however, each group self-identifies as a separate people with their own unique heritage, language, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. The Inuit have always had their own identity, and, after newcomer contact, the Métis developed their own cultural identity. In Saskatchewan, First Nations peoples prefer not to be placed in the “Aboriginal” category; they want to preserve their distinctive identity as First Nations peoples, who, with their diversity, make up a “family of nations.”

Worldview:

A comprehensive view or philosophy of life, the world, and the universe.

It is the view of life that shapes how people interact and respond to the world around them; it influences, shapes and interprets what people experience and provides them with a sense of vision for the future.

Teaching Treaties in the Classroom p. 470.

There is a diversity of First Nations peoples in Canada. As of December 2007, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada report there are 615 First Nations (bands) across the country; the total Status Indian population is 778,050, with approximately 56% living on reserves.³⁰ Approximately 48% are under the age of 24. There are around 50 First Nations languages within 12 linguistic groups and 6 major cultural regions: Woodland, Iroquois, Plains, Plateau, Pacific Coast, Mackenzie and Yukon River. Each First Nation maintains its own unique customs, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

As of 2006, there are 74 First Nations bands in Saskatchewan, made up of 90,720 First Nations peoples, approximately 55% are under 25 years of age.³¹ There are five First Nations languages: Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota (Assiniboine), Dakota (Sioux) and Dene.

2. THE CIRCLE AND ITS COMMONALITY IN FIRST NATIONS TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEWS.

There is diversity among the many First Nations peoples in Canada, though they share commonalities that form a worldview. This view of the world is the framework for how First Nations

First Nations people believe that all things are inter-related. Everything is part of a single whole. Everything is connected, in some way, to everything else. It is only possible to understand something if we understand how it is connected to everything else.

"Four Worlds Development Project." p. 26.

peoples interpret reality, which in turn, forms ideologies and is expressed in a way of life. The diverse views are specific to particular First Nations groups, but the concept of the circle is a fundamental shared view for all First Nations peoples.

The circle concept is important because it represents the life cycle and the unity between creation and the Creator. Everything in life revolves in a clockwise circular manner. The circle represents a harmonious relationship with nature and with all living things, which are our relatives. All things are connected and "equal" because there is no beginning and no end. The First Nations peoples' common worldviews are formulated by interrelated components such as spirituality, values, knowledge, culture, oral traditions, language, technology and the natural world. These influential components comprise social, economic and belief systems.



"We have a beautiful tradition and a holistic view of the universe that makes us who we are. In our circle, we need the old and the young, the old to teach and the young to keep the tradition alive. Nothing really dies out in a circle, things might get old and wear away but they renew again, generation after generation. That is what the circle is about."

Elder Dr. Danny Musqua

COMPONENTS OF FIRST NATIONS TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEWS

<i>Spirituality</i>	The Creator is the ultimate spiritual entity and giver of all life. He created the universe and all creation has a spiritual connection.
<i>Values</i>	Natural laws are built on respect and humility and govern all relationships for balance and harmony.
<i>Knowledge</i>	A lifetime journey, knowledge is conveyed through experiential learning and oral teachings; it requires the use of mind, heart, body and spirit.
<i>Culture</i>	The First Nations' culture includes all aspects of life and is manifested through practice and customs. First Nations peoples live a life of balance and harmony with the Creator and the creation.
<i>Oral Traditions</i>	First Nations history and knowledge was orally transmitted by "keepers" who recollected the events they saw, heard or took part in.
<i>Language</i>	First Nations languages utilize traditional terms, with concepts that are difficult to translate in another language.
<i>Governance</i>	First Nations governments varied according to their particular needs as defined by their unique economic, social and environmental conditions.
<i>Natural World</i>	The Creator put the First Nations on the land and told them to care for Mother Earth. All creation is inter-dependent and equally important.

2.1. SPIRITUALITY. Elders continue using oral traditions to teach the relationship between one Creator and all creation (human beings and the natural world), which meets the First Nations spiritual and physical needs. Throughout history, First Nations peoples knew their role within creation and respected their relationship with the Creator.

The Natural Laws

The Creator placed First Nations peoples on this land in North America and gave them natural laws to live by. The natural laws are innate, existing in the mind and imprinted in the soul from the first moment of existence, maintaining a spiritual connection to the Creator and all creation. First Nations peoples use these laws as a guide for living in harmony and balance with all of creation.

First Nations peoples were always very close to nature

"... The Creator sets out the laws that governs our relationship(s) ... sets out all the ways by which to understand who is God and what He is, and how He created the universe, and how we come from our Creator through a circle of life, and how we return there again."

Elder Dr. Danny Musqua
Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan. p. 30.

and were dependent upon the Creator and all creation. They knew the Creator protected and watched over all creation and they were always confident that, as part of creation, they were safe from harm. First Nations peoples believed the Creator's protective hand was on North American First Nations peoples throughout history, and that the Creator protected them from cultural and physical harm.

The Sacred Circle

The sacred circle is a powerful source within First Nations cultures. The life force of all existence moves in a clockwise circular manner, representing wholeness and continuity. The earth and planets, the cycle of the four seasons and the life cycle of all living forms (plants, insects, the winged and water life forms, the two- and four-legged animals, and human beings) all move in a circular motion. Human life begins in the womb, then ends and returns to the Creator; yet life continues on with the next generation.

Inter-Dependency

First Nations peoples believe all creation is inter-connected. No part of creation is independent; we need one another to survive. Though distinct and separate, all 615 First Nations in Canada are connected as one whose main objective is to nurture, protect and heal their people. When the treaties were agreed to, First Nations peoples knew they had a connection to the newcomers through dependency on one another.

First Nations peoples believe all life is sacred and that humans are spiritual beings. Relationships formed between humans are reverent. When the treaties were signed with the British Crown, First Nations peoples understood that the agreements were made with this belief, and that all parties appreciated and respected the Creator as well as each other.

Harmony and Balance

Many First Nations peoples maintain a high level of spirituality that allows them to live in harmony and balance with the Creator, with each other and with the natural world. Throughout First Nations history, there was widespread peaceful co-existence among North American First Nations peoples; at times, however, tribes did war with one another, mostly over territorial hunting grounds. The belief and attitude that all life is sacred guided First Nations peoples in their war strategies, and prevented annihilation; cultural or physical genocide was not an option. First Nations peoples also respected the earth and its provisions, only taking what was necessary from the environment without destroying it.

First Nations peoples have a spiritual conviction that continually guides them to live life with appreciation and respect. They continue to live this conviction in spite of the negative circumstances in which they find themselves. For them, the world has become a much more complex global village to live in, and, in desperation, some find themselves taking formerly unacceptable actions in order to survive. Those offenders are not in harmony and balance with life, but with training, and personal and spiritual development, they can bring themselves back into synchronization with the Creator, with society and with the natural world, and rid themselves of the fatalistic worldview they may have developed.

Ceremonies

The Creator provided a system for First Nations peoples to show their appreciation and spiritual connection. Ceremonies, which take place according to the sacred circle concept, are carried out in recognition of certain life achievements and events which have special significance. Ceremonies are a means of showing respect and gratitude to the Creator, to others, and to the natural world for what it provides.

One of the key ceremonies that embodies the spiritual beliefs of First Nations peoples on the prairies is the "pipe ceremony." The pipe ceremony is considered a very sacred ritual because it is used to address the Creator. At the time of treaty signing, the smoking of the pipe was done in recognition of the Creator, to ask for guidance and to acknowledge that the act of signing the treaties was a solemn pledge between two nations: First Nations peoples and the Crown. First Nations peoples understood the implication of raising the pipe during the treaty signing ceremonies and expected the promises would be upheld and honoured for time immemorial. The smoking of the sacred pipe was undertaken with great seriousness.

Protocol

First Nations peoples demand that rules and protocol be followed when practising certain ceremonies and customs. Protocol pertains to conduct and behaviour. Following protocol ensures that lines of communication are open, trust is established and support is cultivated by those who perform the observances. The observance of protocol ensured a proper ceremony to gain the Creator's favour, ensuring the survival and safety of the people. At treaty time, First Nations peoples followed protocol to the highest degree, which allowed them to enter into the agreement. The solemnity and seriousness of the new arrangement was witnessed by the Creator to safeguard First Nations peoples' understandings of the treaty. These protocols have been established for many centuries and were given by the Creator as a means of devotion and observance. Each First Nation has its own set of rules to follow for its particular ceremonies and events. Consultation is essential to ensure proper protocol is followed.

2.2. VALUES. First Nations peoples' traditional values are derived from the Creator's natural laws and from their own worldview. The systemic values developed over time within the communal lifestyle and continue to provide direction and guidance to their societies.

First Nations peoples' values differ from dominant societal values because they do not focus on individualism, materialism or domination. The contrast exists because First Nations peoples' values were focused on survival and existence in a natural setting where they viewed life as a positive experience.

First Nations peoples' traditional values remained intact for thousands of years before newcomer contact and provided cohesion and structure to First Nations societies. After contact, the cultural synthesis of First Nations peoples with the dominant newcomers took its toll on the continuation of First Nations peoples' traditional values and lifestyle. The acculturation process had a negative effect on First Nations peoples: they could not adjust to the assimilation policies enforced by the federal government and, as a result, the values and traditional lifestyles of First Nations peoples deteriorated. Today, there is an ardent appeal from First Nations Elders to return to the teachings and

practices of traditional values in order to restore a lifestyle of harmony and balance through consistent reinforcement by Elders and parents.

The following are universal values that First Nations peoples deem imperative for a successful and productive life. These are the values passed down through generations by Elders and teachers. They are life preparation teachings that build good character and skills needed to manage both positive and negative life experiences.

- **LOVE:** One of the most important and underlying traditional values is love, which has sub-values such as self-respect, respect for others and creation, caring, sharing, kindness, patience, and forgiveness. Since time immemorial, First Nations peoples have shared their love with their families, with their children and with others because it promoted happiness, cooperation, security, good relationships and, ultimately, a rewarding continuity of life. First Nations peoples placed much worth on the value of love because it eliminated strife, hatred, selfishness and jealousy.
- **CONNECTION TO THE PAST:** An underlying criterion to the First Nations peoples' beliefs and way of life is the value placed on connecting to the past as they look to the future. Tradition is important to First Nations peoples, and although they cannot completely return to their traditional lifestyle, knowledge of their history and culture offers clarification of their identity, and continues to provide a sense of security and pride.
- **WISDOM:** Because of their life experience, Elders are revered as wise teachers and advisors. Respect is given to the Elders, who have much knowledge and insight concerning their histories, families, songs, customs, practices, prayers and religion. Today, traditionally-trained Elders provide the strongest ancestral connection to a traditional way of life.
- **RESPECT:** The virtue of respect is highly regarded because First Nations peoples realize that life is precious and that all creation must be shown high regard and treated with reverence. The Creator provided creation as a means of enjoyment and sustenance, and created humans to be companions to each other. Societal stability and environmental well-being depend on positive relationships and mutual respect.
- **SOCIAL EQUALITY:** The Creator made every person in the world equal; no group is more important than another. Historical First Nations societies existed in a communal setting where the group's needs were paramount to the individual's needs. Individual members realized the needs of others were just as important as their own; selfishness was not acceptable because of the need for social interaction and communal sharing. The environment was harsh, therefore daily chores and responsibilities were performed by all members of the group. Everyone's role was of equal importance because it added to the efforts of survival.
- **FAMILY:** Family has always been an integral part of First Nations society. First Nations peoples keep their families close and honour their family members even beyond death. Members of families help one another and young people need to realize that their family

members will assist them in times of need; they should always honour and respect them, even in spite of personality conflicts. The family institution is a place to share acceptance and security, and learn cooperation.

- **PRIDE:** First Nations Elders have stressed that young people be proud of who they are. The Creator made diverse peoples and interconnected them within creation; without the diversity of cultures, the world would be ordinary and unappealing.

First Nations are proud and recognize one another. Today, First Nations peoples still have strong ties to each other and to their communities. The strength of these ties on their character does not allow them, for the most part, to be comfortable outside of their setting and social context. Their seemingly isolated nature may be a reaction to the subtle ethnocentrism of the dominant society.

- **NATIONALISTIC PRIDE:** The First Nations maintain a nationalistic pride as members of distinct First Nations and have unequivocally maintained their identity, culture, language and all aspects of their society in spite of the external obstacles colonialism imposed. This nationalistic pride has been deeply rooted in their character because for centuries they lived and survived in a harsh environment and conquered obstacles that may have threatened their existence. In Saskatchewan, First Nations peoples are made up of four distinct nations: Cree, Saulteaux, Dene and Ojéti Sakowin (Dakota, Lakota and Nakota) .
- **CULTURAL APPRECIATION:** First Nations peoples place great value on their cultural distinctiveness and artistic expressions. For centuries, First Nations peoples gathered together to show appreciation for their cultural practices through a socialization process, including events like pow-wows and other social activities.
- **ALTRUISM:** The traditional First Nations outlook on life was one of unselfishness and concern for others. They believed it was honourable and necessary to sacrifice their own needs and desires, even their lives, to enable the next generation to either benefit or survive to carry on their culture and traditions. They placed other people's needs before their own. The First Nations still practise this sacrificial character today, as shown by their devotion to family and relatives.
- **BRAVERY:** First Nations men regarded personal bravery as a highly honoured part of their character. Bravery was required in all aspects of life because of the men's role within the community as providers, hunters and warriors. Bravery was an esteemed goal desired by all men within the tribe. Not only was bravery a highly respected quality, but the harsh environment demanded courageous people to fulfill their roles and responsibilities to their respective tribes.
- **HONOUR:** Children were encouraged to develop good listening skills and were taught to respect, honour and obey parents and Elders. Obedience, placidity, patience and the ability to remain quiet are considered good qualities which will help children develop into responsible, mature adults. Men were concerned about social status; a main goal was to

become a member of a warrior society because it was the most prestigious of the various men's associations. To be eligible, men had to earn status through demonstrations of fighting and hunting prowess.

- **SHARING AND COOPERATION:** The traditional First Nations concept of sharing was greatly practised because of the communal setting of tribes. People needed each other to survive. Sharing material possessions, knowledge and survival skills displayed an honourable character because it gave a person a sense of pride and self-worth to assist those who were in need for various reasons. The First Nations believe the Creator supplied the necessary resources, talents and gifts to live on this earth and were happy to share with others; they felt the Creator gave them an obligation to conduct themselves in this manner. Today, most First Nations still carry out this attitude of sharing, though they have only limited material possessions. They believe those who do not share with others are not living in harmony with the wishes of the Creator, and may end up unhappily self-centered. Ultimately, the First Nations shared the land, which was a major part of their existence and survival, because they thought the newcomers possessed the same attitude of sharing.
- **PEACE-MAKING:** First Nations peoples believe that peace means caring for people, animals and the environment, and also means realizing that certain actions have an effect on all living things. This is one of the main objectives of living a lifestyle of harmony and balance.
- **HUMILITY:** The traditional character of First Nations peoples has been one of humility coming from a life of modesty. Primarily, they do not think themselves better or more important than others; a conceited and flamboyant character was almost nonexistent because humility was more honourable. Humility is a quality derived from the concept of egalitarianism and equality; the socialization process of First Nations promoted this type of character. From early childhood, First Nations peoples are taught that negative experiences and occurrences are not to be made public but with an attitude of humility, they should "hold it within."
- **LEADERSHIP:** First Nations chiefs and leaders were an integral part of society; they were given positions of leadership because of their wisdom and good character. When the treaties were signed, the First Nations viewed their leaders as courageous individuals who were making important, practical decisions for the future of all people in Canada.

2.3. KNOWLEDGE. Knowledge has been orally transmitted through generations of First Nations peoples for thousands of years. The process of education is a lifelong quest requiring patience, introspection, mistakes, sacrifices and spirituality. The acquisition of knowledge starts during childhood and continues until death; it is conveyed through experiential learning and oral teachings. Family members are involved in passing on skills and wisdom; however, it is the Elders who generally serve as the primary instructors of life's necessary lessons.

The traditional education process within the First Nations culture has always focused on human experience as the best teacher. The learning process is a personal journey requiring the use of the

heart, mind, body and spirit. Behaviour, attitudes and worldview are best learned through the observation of others and nature and the instilling of values essential to developing into successful, productive members of society.

Traditional Teaching Styles - Passing Along the Knowledge

As mentioned earlier, First Nations peoples are diverse across the country. Each particular tribes has its own worldview, which also means they have their own teaching styles. Knowledge is passed on from generation to generation using various teaching methods.

Traditionally, the First Nations practised teaching methods that allowed young children to learn from family and Elders. Because of the various cultural-linguistic groups, the style of teaching varied according to each tribal and family custom; however, a universal process resulted and was carried out through various stages. Historically, legends and stories were passed down through generations, thus promoting the values and skills of one generation to the next. These stories, rich in symbolism and metaphor, provided different meanings and lessons at different stages of life.

It is important to note that some of the teachings outlined below are contemporary teachings and are not traditional as such.

Circle of Life (The Medicine Wheel teachings)

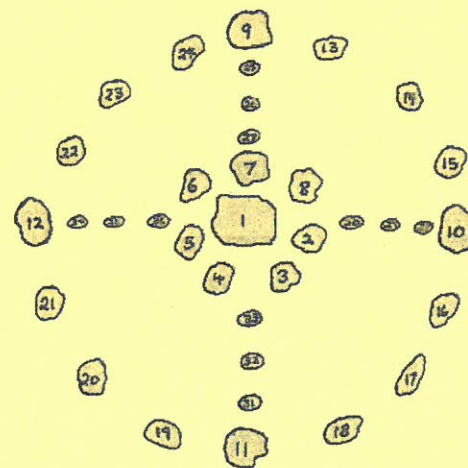
The Circle of Life is a journey. The journey begins at birth and moves on to childhood, adulthood, parenthood and from there becoming a grandparent and perhaps an Elder. There is no beginning and no end to the spirit, only to the body that has been loaned to us from Mother Earth.

The Circle of Life (Medicine Wheel) is represented by stones placed in a large circle with more stones placed inside the circle, making lines that represent the four directions while other spokes in the wheel represent stories of life and creation. The Circle of Life (Medicine Wheel) teachings included all the knowledge and teachings that humans need to live and exist in creation, and are some of the oldest teachings known among the First Nations. The teachings create a holistic foundation for human behaviour and interaction, and are used to teach a lifestyle of peace and harmony by promoting healthy minds, bodies, spirits and emotions. These teachings are comparable to Western European thought in the areas of psychology and human development because they address the same concepts

"We were very careful, we had our own teachings, our own education system — teaching children that way of life was taught by the grandparents and extended families; they were taught how to view and respect the land and everything in creation. Through that, the young people were taught how to live, what the Creator's laws were, what the natural laws were, what the First Nations' laws were... the teachings revolved around a way of life that was based on their values..

Elder Pete Wakaha
Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan. p. 6.

The Medicine Wheel
Saulteaux (Ojibway)



of philosophy. Traditional teachings state that the Creator of all humans created different peoples and placed them on different lands around the world (Mother Earth).

“Good Relations”

Since all humans are children of the Creator, we are all related. Respect and kindness nurture good relationships, and people must observe and listen to one another in order to gain a better understanding of the other person. This leads to a more respectful relationship. Treaties were meant to create good relations among all people. In the First Nations’ beliefs system, everything and everyone is connected and inter-connected within the Circle of Life. Through treaty, the First Nations included the Crown and the newcomers into this Circle. “...the Circle has been widened to accept the Crown.”³²

The Teachings on Successful Living - Saulteaux (J. Ironeagle, O. Brass)

Each First Nation had a theory of how to obtain skills for a successful life. The Plains Ojibway (the Saulteaux) taught a concept that included four dimensions: spirituality, knowledge, friendship and growth. The spiritual dimension covers areas pertaining to personal existence and the necessities for physical survival. The knowledge dimension covers life skills and the natural world through formal and informal learning. The friendship dimension covers personal social development. The growth dimension refers to the development of a person’s potential, much like Abraham Maslow’s model of self-actualization.

The Seven Disciplines – Saulteaux (Elder Dr. Danny Musqua)

The First Nations use seven disciplines to facilitate learning:

1. *Prayer* Praying helps develop and nurture the link to the spirit, the primary source of knowledge and survival.
2. *Meditation* Meditation allows one to become aware of knowledge as it exists in its purest form, such as the interpretation of dreams and visions. Distractions can hinder introspection.
3. *Fasting* Fasting is necessary for learning, healing and personal development. Fasting reawakens the spirit through denial and ritual, which is a process of suffering that brings personal development.
4. *Benevolence* The practice of kindness, sharing and cooperation is essential for survival. The sharing of food, shelter, knowledge and survival skills facilitates a better life.
5. *Parenting* Parenting is a great responsibility because as a role model, parents impart knowledge and skills to the next generation. Parenting skills come from the “seven fires.”
6. *Learning* This refers to the lifelong process of growth and development. In order to learn, one must pay attention and garner as much information about the world through relationships with others, especially with old people. Learning involves

observation, evaluation, analysis and query. The First Nations use tools such as ceremonies, rituals and knowledge. Language is important because it contains the history of origins and way of life; without knowing the language, meanings are lost.

7. Teaching Teaching means to transmit or express knowledge of survival through the understanding and respect of relationships in all aspects of nature.

The Seven Levels of Life [forms] - Saulteaux (Elder Dr. Danny Musqua)

Some First Nations believe that the Creator has created seven levels of life so there is a balance in life. The Creator is present in all the levels and people are taught to revere all living things because they are intertwined and make up life as one whole existence. The seven levels are:

1. the fish kingdom: all water life
2. the plant kingdom: all life is dependent on plants
3. the four-legged and two-legged creatures
4. the crawling creatures
5. the insect world
6. the bird kingdom
7. kingdom of man.

Tipi Teaching (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre)

The tipi is a portable shelter. Traditionally, First Nations families dwelt in these structures fabricated from 15 long poles, whose base was set in a circle and tied at the top. The poles were covered with animal hides sewn together and pegged to the ground. They are symbolic of the traditional values that helped formulate the First Nations' worldview, and provide teachings for behaviour and a positive character. Storytellers used each pole to teach the following values:

1. Obedience: We learn by listening to traditional stories; by listening to our parents or guardians, our fellow students and our teachers. We learn by their behaviours and their reminders, so that we know what is right and what is wrong.

2. Respect: We must give honour to our Elders and fellow students and the strangers who come to visit our community. We must honour other peoples' basic rights.

3. Humility: We are not above or below others in the circle of life. We feel humbled when we understand our relationship with creation. We are so small compared to the majestic expanse of creation. "We are just a strand in a web of life," and we respect and value life.

4. Happiness: We must show some enthusiasm to encourage others at social functions. Our actions will make our ancestors happy in the next world.

5. Love: If we are to live in harmony, we must accept one another as we are and to accept others who are not in our circle. Love means to be kind and good to one another.

6. Faith: We must learn to believe and trust others, to believe in a power greater than ourselves, whom we worship and who gives us strength to be a worthy member of the human race.

7. Kinship: Our family is important to us. This includes our parents, our brothers and sisters who love us and give us roots, the roots that tie us to the lifeblood of the earth. It also includes extended family, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and their in-laws and children. These are also our brothers and sisters and they give us a sense of belonging to the community.

8. Cleanliness: We must learn not to inflict ills on others, for we do it to ourselves. Clean thoughts come from a clean mind and this comes from Indian spirituality. Good health habits also reflect a clean mind.

9. Thankfulness: We learn to give thanks for all the kind things others do for us and for the Creator's bounty, that we are privileged to share with others in the spirit of love.

10. Sharing: We learn to be a part of the family by helping in providing food or satisfying other basic needs. This is sharing responsibilities in order to enjoy them.

11. Strength: We must learn to be patient in times of trouble and not to complain but to endure and show understanding. We must accept difficulties and tragedies so that we may give others strength to accept their own difficulties and tragedies.

12. Good Child Rearing: Children are unique and blessed with the gift of life; we are responsible for their well-being, spirituality, emotionally, physically and for their intellectual development. They represent the continuity of our circle of life which we perceive to be the Creator's will.

13. Hope: We must hope for better things to make life easier for us, our families and the community, both materially and spiritually.

14. Ultimate Protection: The ultimate responsibility is "health for a balanced caring of the body, mind, emotions and spirit of the individual, the family, the community and the nation."

15. Control Flaps: We are all connected by relationships and we depend on each other. This controls and creates harmony in the circle of life.

Twelve Principles of Indian Philosophy in *The Sacred Tree, Student Book*. Four Worlds Development Press. Reprinted with permission.

1. Wholeness. All things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is a part of a single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else. It is therefore possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else.

2. All of creation is in a state of constant change. Nothing stays the same except the presence of cycle upon cycle of change. One season falls upon the other. Human beings are born, live their lives, die and enter the spirit world. All things change. There are two kinds of change. The coming together of things (development) and the coming apart of

things (disintegration); both of these kinds of change are necessary and are always connected to each other.

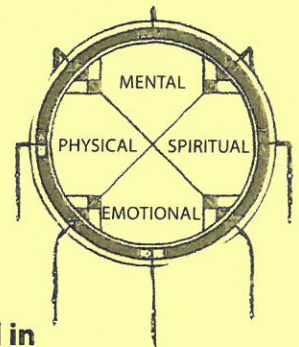
3. Changes occur in cycles or patterns. They are not random or accidental. Sometimes it is difficult to see how a particular change is connected to everything else. This usually means that our standpoint (the situation from which we are viewing the change) is limiting our ability to see clearly.

4. The seen and the unseen. The physical world is real. The spiritual world is real. These two are aspects of one reality. Yet there are separate laws which govern each of them. Violation of spiritual laws can affect the physical world. Violation of physical laws can affect the spiritual world. A balanced life is one that honours the laws of both dimensions of reality.

5. Human beings are spiritual as well as physical.

6. Human beings can always acquire new gifts, but they must struggle to do so. The timid may become courageous, the weak may become bold and strong, the insensitive may learn to care for the feelings of others and the materialistic person can acquire the capacity to look within and to listen to their inner voice. The process human beings use to develop new qualities may be called "true learning."

7. There are four dimensions of "true learning." Four aspects of every person's nature are reflected in the four cardinal points of the medicine wheel. The four aspects of our being are developed through the use of our volition. It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of their being have been involved in the process.



8. The spiritual dimension of human development may be understood in terms of four related capacities. First, the capacity to have and to respond to realities that exist in a non-material way, such as dreams, visions, ideals, spiritual teachings, goals and theories. Second, the capacity to accept those realities as a reflection (in the form of symbolic representation) of unknown or unrealized potential to do or be something more or different. Third, the capacity to express these non-material realities using symbols such as speech, art or mathematics. Fourth, the capacity to use this symbolic expression to guide future action — action directed toward making what was only seen as a possibility into a living reality.

9. Human beings must be active participants in the unfolding of their own potentials.

10. The doorway through which all must pass if they wish to become more or different than they are now is the doorway to the will (volition). A person must decide to take the journey. The path has infinite patience; it will always be there for those who decide to travel it.

11. Anyone who sets out on a journey of self-development (i.e. makes a commitment and then acts on that commitment) will be aided. There will be guides and teachers who will appear, and spiritual protectors to watch over the traveler. No test will be given that the traveler does not already have strength to meet.

12. The only source of failure on a journey will be the traveler's own failure to follow the teachings of the Sacred Tree.

2.4. CULTURE. The term "culture" is an inclusive term because it takes into account a group's linguistic, political, social, economic, psychological, religious, national, racial and other differences. It engages certain practices based on certain beliefs or ways of understanding the world, and is a way of thinking, feeling and believing manifested through practices and customs. Culture is also the way a group's knowledge is stored up for societal continuance.

The First Nations cultural design is a plan in which their societies adapted to their physical and social environment. The physical environment includes food production, technological knowledge and skill; the social environment includes political and family systems.

According to some social scientists, all global cultural societies display three basic characteristics of their culture:

- 1) culture is "learned"
- 2) culture is a "shared system" held in common by the society
- 3) culture is an "integrated whole" in which all parts affect each other and contribute to the group.

First Nations cultures express their own practices, products, and knowledge and beliefs that people must live in a respectful, harmonious relationship with the Creator, with nature, with one another and with themselves. These relationships are governed by certain laws, which are gifts from the Creator and are fundamentally spiritual in nature, filling all aspects of life.

There are four First Nations groups within Saskatchewan; Cree, Dene, Saulteaux and Dakota, Lakota and Nakota. Each contains diversity within. Each has its own culture, language, history and traditions. All First Nations cultures share a deep respect for the land and for nature. Local traditional systems need to be respected, accepted and celebrated.

Cultural Celebrations

A pow-wow is a social gathering; it is a celebration of singing, drumming and dancing open to all people, including non-First Nations. Elders teach that there is more to pow-wows than just dancing; dancers have to live a good life based on spirituality and traditions, and must realize that being good people and good leaders is more important than how they dance. If the dancers listen to the teachings, they will dance well because they are taught to take pride in themselves.

The Role of Elders

Elders are described as people with a lot of energy from life experiences, having the will and power to share their knowledge with others. Elders are a source of history and wisdom in accordance to

their First Nation's perspectives, which are central to cultural learning. Those who strive for balance in a relationship with the Creator, the natural world and others seek the guidance of the Elders. The Elders' roles and functions include being spiritual advisors, mentors and role models to everyone.

All First Nations possess rich sources of oral history and information pertaining to their peoples and the lands...the Elders [are] the custodians of that knowledge and pass it on.

Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan. p. 24.

The Role of Women in Relation to the Treaties

In the traditional Plains First Nations societies, women and men had equal status but performed different roles. Women's primary roles included managing the home and raising children. Women were hard workers and were the source of strength in the transition from the traditional lifestyle to the post-treaty lifestyle — they provided family cohesiveness.

Women also have a spiritual connection to Mother Earth because of their common ability to bear life. It was because of this spiritual connection that women were respected and honoured. At the time of treaty-making, women were asked to share this strength in the treaty-making process and were honoured for their contributions. They were not asked to speak but rather to give their support to the process as they were viewed as the strength of the community. Women did not sign the treaties; this did not mean they were not equal to men. It was understood within First Nations society that men and women were equal.

Children as Sacred Gifts from the Creator

A gift is something that is free. The Creator gave children to parents to raise and nurture until they grow up and can care for themselves. In the traditional First Nations family structure, babies and children are special because they guarantee security for the future. The family, including the extended family and community members, nurture and teach children important values to ensure the child grows up to have a satisfying childhood and live a long life. Children are taught that they are special human beings to help them develop their potential. Children must feel valued and respected in order to become accomplished, dynamic individuals and contribute towards a meaningful existence.

The Buffalo

At the time treaties were being signed, the primary concern for the First Nations leaders was the existence and survival of their people. The signing of the treaties occurred during a time of starvation for First Nations peoples, making them physically, emotionally and spiritually weak. They knew they were facing death and extinction. In fact, thousands of First Nations peoples across the prairies were perishing because of starvation and disease.

The plains bison were a major resource that sustained life amongst the Plains First Nations. At the time of treaty signing, a main concern for First Nations peoples was the declining number of buffalo herds, their main source of food, clothing and lodging. Without the buffalo, the First Nations knew their entire tribes would perish. The chiefs, representing their First Nations, brought this concern to the Crown representatives. The chiefs asked the Crown for a plan to preserve the buffalo; Lieutenant Morris agreed and said the Crown would "examine the feasibility of legislating a law to help preserve the buffalo." Morris' statement enticed three additional chiefs and headmen to sign treaty. An

important chief within Treaty 6 refused to sign the treaty because he said his people were being "lured into a trap." He thought the First Nations should have more control over the land and resources than what was being negotiated in the treaties. This chief urged other First Nations peoples and the Crown to establish emergency measures for preserving the remaining bison herds. Shortly thereafter, the buffalo herds were almost completely annihilated from the prairies.

2.5. LANGUAGE. Language and culture are significantly intertwined and cannot be separated. Language is vital to understanding unique cultural perspectives because culture is so embedded within the language. Without the use of the language, meanings and significance are not correctly depicted or articulated. During treaty signing, certain implications and intentions were misunderstood because of both language and cultural barriers.

2.6. ORAL TRADITIONS. Throughout history, different groups have used different methods to record their histories and major events according to their resources and their environment. First Nations peoples used oral traditions through stories to pass on their way of life.

"Stories, you see, are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships, and attitudes of a people. Stories [are] how a people, a culture, thinks."

L. Keeshig-Tobias.
Stop Stealing Native Stories. p. 71.

The First Nations' history and knowledge were orally transmitted based on the experiences of the person speaking, and usually were recollections of events which they saw, heard of or took part in. "Keepers" (storytellers) were responsible for protecting the oral history of their First Nation. They passed their knowledge to other individuals and retold each account exactly as it was received from its original keeper.

Although First Nations peoples now use the written word to record events, oral traditions and oral histories remain strong and continue to be used in First Nations communities. Elders are cautious in what they share because in the past, their beliefs and stories have been misrepresented by the written word and videos. They are also concerned about copyright issues because they say no one can own oral histories and stories. However, Elders do share their oral history to bring about good relations between their people and others.

Characteristics of Oral Tradition³³

Oral tradition transmits the First Nations' worldviews, including the values, beliefs and the "essence" of the nations.

Oral tradition requires the ability to listen and understand.

Oral traditions are repetitious so teachings can be understood and will not be lost.

Oral traditions encompass values, customs, beliefs, traditions, songs, ceremonies, history and information about events.

Oral traditions are still practised today by Elders who pass on important wisdom and knowledge that are invaluable to the culture, language and spirituality of their people.

Elders acknowledge the source of oral history.

Oral traditions were shared only if they imparted accurate information.

Oral traditions follow strict laws of respect.

2.7. GOVERNANCE.³⁴ First Nations peoples originally had certain areas of traditional authority over their own people that the chiefs and headmen retained at the time of treaty-making. Responsibility for children and for the well-being of families was vested in chiefs and headmen and retained by the First Nations. Similarly, Treaty First Nations retained responsibility for the education of their own people in all areas, except those where the newcomers could contribute special skills and knowledge. Treaty First Nations expected to retain responsibility for the transmission to future generations of their forms of social and cultural organization, their spiritual beliefs, and their skills and knowledge related to hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering, among other matters. The First Nations expected to retain both the authority and the capacity to govern their own people according to their laws and their systems of justice. They would respect the laws of the Crown and, in return, the Crown would respect the authority of the First Nations in matters of governance over their own lands and people.

The First Nations had been practising their own forms of government for thousands of years prior to the arrival of newcomers to Canada. Their governments varied according to their particular needs, as defined by their own economic, social and geographical conditions (i.e. culture, spiritual beliefs and ancestral lands).

The political structure for the First Nations was formed because of strong kinship connections that influenced social and economic interaction. Their world consisted of "small scale" societies, usually close family and relatives, which had a strong influence on a person's position within society. Political leaders were expected to be wise, charitable and egalitarian rulers. The leadership position was somewhat flexible because members followed a leader who was better suited to lead them in the task at hand. Usually the "situational leader" was a married Elder who was a superior hunter, a generous man, a skilled orator or a good negotiator.

In First Nations societies, a chief and an informal council of Elders—chosen for their leadership abilities—oversaw the affairs of the summer and winter camps. When several groups gathered in the summer, the oldest and most respected winter leader acted as spokesman for the combined group. As in other regions, decision-making by consensus prevailed, and persuasion rather than coercion was the preferred way for leaders and elders to implement their individual and collective wills.

Diplomacy and trade were intertwined. Gift-giving was the cement of inter-nation diplomacy. Leaders of unrelated nations met and presented gifts of equal value to each other as symbolic gestures of good will. Often the exchange was a lengthy affair, which involved feasting, speech making and the ritual smoking of the pipestem. Exchanges of this type were an integral part of inter-nation trade because they served to create or renew peaceful relations between groups as a prerequisite for regular commerce.

Colonial governments gradually weakened the First Nations' government structures and their authority over their own communities through the establishment of discriminating laws and coercive policies aimed at assimilating the First Nations peoples into the dominant, non-First Nations society. First Nations societies and cultures have changed over several generations as a result of European contact. Eurocentric, individualistic philosophies have affected First Nations communities as well as individuals; there is, therefore, a constant struggle to re-learn the old ways and philosophies in many areas.

2.8. NATURAL WORLD. The traditional teachings of the First Nations peoples of the prairies state that they are one part of a "family of nations" within the created world. All human beings are children of the Creator because it was the Creator who created different people and placed them on different lands on Mother Earth.

Mother Earth

The Saskatchewan First Nations each have a special word in their respective languages that means "Mother Earth." The earth has a special place within their beliefs because it is the source of all life. As First Nations peoples pray, they thank Mother Earth because she is the bearer of all life; they give great reverence to the earth and to the wonders of life coming from her. Other life forms such as animals, birds and plants are considered "brothers" to human beings. According to the First Nations' beliefs, the four elements: the sun, rain, wind and air, are interdependent of all things.

3. THE TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEWS OF SASKATCHEWAN FIRST NATIONS.

3.1. CREE HISTORICAL WORLDVIEW³⁵

Spiritual Beliefs: Creation is the beginning point of all things, and everything is related and connected to the Creator. A person's spirituality, or inner soul, is connected to creation. The Creator gave the nations their spirituality and a way to pray. The following guiding principles are important ingredients to a good life: respect, gentleness, kindness, honesty, fairness and cleanliness.

Political Beliefs: The Creator gave humans laws and various forms of governments, according to their cultures, to provide guidance for them and for their environments. The duties and responsibilities of leadership are formulated from the natural laws, ceremonies and traditions, which guide all life and relationships. Through positive spiritual leadership, strong and vibrant societies are protected, nurtured and maintained. Unity, security and good relations are stressed among one another; harmony and peace should guide nations in their decision-making.

Economic Beliefs: The Creator, through the land, supplies all the needs of people. Sharing is important and everyone has a role in the survival of a nation. Hard work and motivation are important to success.

3.2. DENE HISTORICAL WORLDVIEW³⁶

Spiritual Beliefs: Survival is one of the most important factors of the First Nations' way of life because they still respect and live off the land. In order to survive, people must have respectful relationships with: the Creator, each other, the land, animals and the spirit world. All things are connected; one element cannot survive without the other. The Creator provided the land and water

to use respectfully; the Dene express thanks to creation for its provision. The wolf is their spiritual animal.

Political Beliefs: The Dene believe their culture is unique because the Creator gave them a unique language. Their spiritual practices shape their survival skills, which in turn, grant strength and meaning to their existence and enable them to live off the land. Unity is a very important concept regarding the survival of the Dene nation; they believe that uniting with other First Nations in sharing and exchanging skills will allow them to hold on to their lands and preserve their culture.

"Land is what we need to survive, water to quench our thirst, and good clean air to breath and plants to nourish our poisoned bodies. Do not destroy the land for economic greed!"

E. Hay.
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. 2002.

Economic Beliefs: The Creator gave the Dene a vast territory (the northern part of Canada) to protect and the land for provisions for life. They live day-by-day as the caribou does; they do not plan for the future. The concept of sharing builds a strong nation, but waste and exploitation are believed to bring bad luck and are not tolerated. They respect hardworking people.

3.3. SAULTEAUX HISTORICAL WORLDVIEW³⁷

Spiritual Beliefs: The Creator, "Kitsi-manito" (Great Spirit) created all things, which are all inter-related and depend on one another for survival. One of Kitsi-manito's laws states that all living things have a "spirit" such as trees, animals and even rocks; these objects should be treated with respect and not be corrected by man.

Political Beliefs: Kitsi-manito is greater than all governments. The ability to lead is a gift given by Kitsi-manito to help people govern themselves. He provides gifts and laws which allow the Sauteaux people to live in peace and harmony with nature and with other tribes.

"Survival itself is a direct result of the gifts that Kitsi-manito and Mother Earth provide for the children (people) of the land."

A. PeeAce. Yellowquill First Nation.
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Economic Beliefs: Mother Earth gives people (her children) everything they need to exist. Everyone is responsible for contributing to the survival of their nation. One of the Kitsi-manito's 12 philosophies is "sharing" to ensure that everyone is provided with the necessities for existence. Laziness and idleness are disapproved of because they threaten prosperity and harmony.

3.4. DAKOTA, LAKOTA AND NAKOTA HISTORICAL WORLDVIEW³⁸

Spiritual Beliefs: All life begins with and exist because of Wakan Tanka (the Great Spirit). He is a great mystery, comprised of many aspects. All things on earth are connected because they have a common ancestor. Mitakuye Oyasin "we are all related" or "all of my relations" is the foundation of the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota worldview. To maintain survival, a goal is for everyone to be good relatives and look after the earth and one another. The sacred pipe and ceremonies were given by the Great Spirit and are important for communication with Him.

"Those who would give generously and not count the cost were respected among the Ojéti Sakowin [Dakota, Lakota and Nakota peoples]. To be called 'stingy' was the worst insult. Human relationships were more highly regarded than material things."

D. Speidel.
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Political Beliefs: The Great Spirit created many nations and gave each a territory, a language, a way of life and a way to govern itself. All nations are equal; no nation has a right to exert control over another. Each camp had their own chief who facilitated consensual decision-making within the council of men that was made up of all heads of households within the camp. A leader was perceived to be like a father, and was judged by his generosity and his ability to give good council and influence fair decision-making.

Economic Beliefs: The earth and the buffalo should be treated with respect because of the dependency they had on them; man should live in harmony with the earth and with each other. They believed in individual ownership and respected individual property rights: women were the owners of the tipi, household items and dogs; men owned horses, weapons and tools. Only Wakan Tanka could assign territories, no one had the right to declare ownership of the land. A person's status was not judged by the number of possessions they owned but by his acts of bravery and generosity, such as "give-aways" and service to others. Those who were generous were publicly honoured and were sometimes assigned leadership positions.

4. BRITISH (WESTERN) WORLDVIEWS.³⁹ Within man's human development, he has always searched for a higher power to fill a spiritual void. In this search, man began formulating various religious beliefs and rituals that resulted in the major religions currently existing in the world.

Spiritual Beliefs: In the 1800s when the First Nations signed treaties with Great Britain, Great Britain held to a form of Christianity. The British believed God was the ultimate spiritual entity, who created the universe and all life on earth. They believe there are God-given laws, written in the Holy Bible, which are rules to live by. They practise ceremonies and rituals to celebrate important events such as baptism, confirmation, marriage and death, as well as Christian holy days such as Christmas and Easter.

Political Beliefs: The British believed that God is greater than all governments and practised a form of monarchy in which there was no separation of church and state. They believed that Kings and Queens, as heads of state, were both political and spiritual rulers.

Their form of government, under their monarchy, consisted of an elite society, usually male-dominated, who were the governing officials. An elected assembly (parliament) imposed laws for an orderly society to protect the rights of individuals and to provide them with freedom within the limits of the law.

Economic Beliefs: In the 1800s, the world powers were extending their dominion over smaller, weaker nations under a policy of colonization. Some of these nations were at war with one another because they were in pursuit of new lands and territories that would benefit their mother nation's economy. A major motive for pursuing additional land was the influence of a culture of wealth and status of aristocracy in Britain. At the time, British classism was the norm. The monarchy (Queen

Victoria) held political power into the early 1900s and, at the time of treaty-signing with the First Nations, the monarchy, or the Crown, was the official government of the day.

Since European contact, some First Nations peoples have made Christianity their primary source of spirituality. With the rise of Christianity among First Nations, there has been a fundamental change in the overall way many First Nations think, and view the world and life as a whole.

The divine right of kings is a European political and religious doctrine of absolutism. It states that a monarch owes his rule to the will of God, not to the will of his subjects, parliament, the aristocracy or any other competing authority. This doctrine continued with the claim that any attempt to depose a monarch or to restrict his powers ran contrary to the will of God.

Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/main_page
Accessed July 19, 2008.