



Stepping Stones

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Planning your learning journey

What are the most appropriate terms to use when referring to First Nations, Métis and Inuit?

FIRST STEPS



There are many terms that are used to describe First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada. At times, the variety of terms can be confusing. The use of any of these terms has historical, legal and situational contexts that should be taken into consideration. Preferred terms, however, will continue to change as conventions evolve over time. Many Indigenous people prefer terms based on their specific community and traditional names for identification, for example, *Dene Tha* or *Saddle Lake Cree Nation*. Knowing the differences between terms and which is appropriate for each situation is important to prevent misunderstandings. If you are uncertain which term is appropriate, ask the local community for their preference.

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Many Indigenous people prefer terms based on their specific community and traditional names for identification.

Aboriginal Peoples of Canada

- The first peoples in Canada and their descendants
- Includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit
- Each group is distinct and has its own history, culture, protocols, traditions and languages.
- Usually used as a term in government policy
- In November 2015, the Canadian government renamed Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development.

Bill C-31 Indian

- A person who gained or regained Indian status because of the *Act to Amend the Indian Act*, 1985
- Prior to Bill C-31, status Indian women lost their status, band membership and all associated rights when they married non-status men.

Ceremonialist

- A highly respected member of a First Nations or Métis community
- Recognized and identified by members of the community as being knowledgeable about spirituality and spiritual practices
(*Guiding Voices*
www.learnalberta.ca/content/fnmigv/index.html)

Elder

- A highly respected member of a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community
- Recognized and identified by members of the community as carrying important wisdom, oral traditions and knowledge of their culture

- An elder shares his/her understandings through teachings, ceremonies, stories and/or songs.
- Individual elders hold different gifts or talents.
- The role of an elder and the appropriate protocols for approaching an elder vary from community to community.
- An elder does not have to be a senior citizen; the carrying of knowledge and the recognition by the community are the key factors in determining who is an elder.
(*Guiding Voices*
www.learnalberta.ca/content/fnmigv/index.html)

Eskimo

- *Eskimo* is derived from the Cree word *Askipowak* meaning raw meat eaters. This term, however, is offensive to Inuit in Canada because it is viewed as derogatory and discriminatory.
- *Eskimo* is the commonly used acceptable term for Indigenous people of Alaska and is defined in American policy and legislation.

First Nations

- *First Nations* refers to status and non-status Indian peoples in Canada.
- Not a legal term; the Canadian constitution and legislation still use the term *Indian*
- Term used by the Assembly of First Nations (www.afn.ca/en/about-afn/description-of-the-afn)
- Refers to the over 617 distinct Indigenous groups in Canada
- Each Indigenous group has its own distinct culture, language, traditions and protocols.
- First Nation is also used to replace *band* when referring to communities.

FNMI

- An acronym for First Nations, Métis and Inuit used in many Alberta educational publications
- This acronym should not be used to refer to First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit peoples as it is considered offensive by many and often misunderstood.

Indigenous Peoples

- Term used globally to refer to the original inhabitants of any region
- Includes the three groups of Indigenous people in Canada: First Nations, Métis and Inuit

Inuit

- “The people” in Inuktitut language
- Inuit is plural and the singular form is Inuk.
- The Indigenous people in Northern Canada who live in Nunavut, the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador. Specifically, Inuit originated in the central and eastern Arctic and Inuvialuit originated in the western Arctic.

Knowledge Keeper

- A member of a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community
- Recognized and identified by elders of the community as being knowledgeable about cultural practices, products or world views (*Guiding Voices* www.learnalberta.ca/content/fnmigv/index.html)

Métis

- The Métis are one of three distinct Indigenous peoples in Canada recognized under the 1982 Canadian constitution and have a culture, language and traditions distinct from First Nations and Inuit.
- The historical term used to describe children born to First Nations women and European men; it has become the accepted term to describe all children born of First Nations women and European men.
- The Supreme Court of Canada identified three broad factors in determining who is Métis: self-identification, ancestral connection to the historic Métis community and community acceptance (<http://albertametis.com/metis-rights/who-is-metis/>).

Non-status Indian

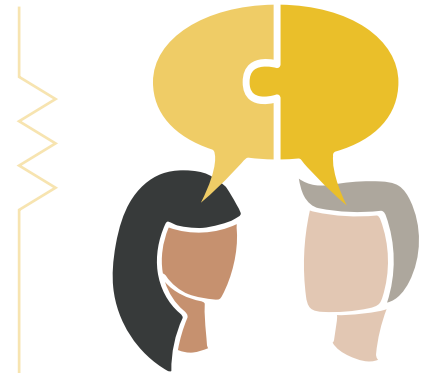
- A First Nations person who is not registered or who has lost their status under the *Indian Act*

Status/Registered Indian

- A First Nations person who meets the requirements and is registered with the Canadian government under the *Indian Act*

Treaty Indian

- A status Indian whose ancestors signed a treaty (legal document between nations) with the Crown



NEXT STEPS



Educators always want to be respectful in their conversations and working relationships with people of a different culture. This includes using the culturally appropriate terminology when working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

The terms defined in this fact sheet are general guidelines, and best practice is to confirm with the individual beforehand how they wish to be addressed. For example, one should not assume that an individual can be introduced as First Nation as they may prefer to be introduced using their band name.

Continuing Your Learning Journey

a) *Why there are a variety of terms for Indigenous peoples in Canada?*

b) *How does terminology and naming of Indigenous peoples factor into their feelings of identity?*

c) *As a teacher, why it is important to know the difference between an elder, a knowledge keeper and a ceremonialist?*

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Alberta Education. 2005. *Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners*. Edmonton, AB: Aboriginal Services Branch and Learning and Teaching Resources. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/563982/our-words-our-ways.pdf>.

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Stepping Stones is a publication of the Alberta Teachers' Association **Walking Together Project** intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to meet the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Foundational Knowledge competency in the Teaching Quality Standard.

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For additional resources and information on Walking Together visit www.teachers.ab.ca.

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