



# ROYAL SASKATCHEWAN MUSEUM



Ministry of  
Tourism, Parks,  
Culture and Sport



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**Teacher's Guide**  
**Family Life**  
**Division One, Grades K - 1**

**Timetable**

When the class arrives, divide the students into two groups. Group One goes with the Museum instructor to the activity room. Group Two goes with the second Museum instructor to the First Nations Gallery. After 30 minutes, the groups switch. Group One goes to the Gallery, and group Two goes to the activity room.

Museum staff and/or volunteers lead the educational programs. It is the responsibility of the teacher and adult leader to maintain discipline.

**Program Concepts**

The Family Life program introduces very young students to the family life of the Plains Cree and Nakota (Assiniboin) people. The program centres around the Gallery display showing a Plains Cree and Nakota winter camp during the 1750s.

In this display, two small boys (Little Beaver and Crow Hawk) are being told a story by their grandfather. These boys are used to introduce the story told in the activity room.

There are three learning objectives in the Family Life program:

- Plains Cree and Nakota families included aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents as well as mother, father, and siblings, all of whom had to co-operate to survive.
- Plains Cree and Nakota children were often taught through stories and also learned by watching and copying adults.
- Today, although many First Nations people maintain traditional beliefs and values, they live just like everyone else - drive cars, go to work etc.

**Program Content**

**Activity Room**

In the activity room, students hear the Wisakecahk (Wee-sa-ke-chak) story, How the Bee Got its Sting. When his Grandfather tells this story, Little Beaver learns how important it is for everyone in his family to co-operate with each other.

## Gallery

### 1. Wisakecahk and Turtle Island - Gallery Introduction

The Trickster is a common character in First Nations' stories. He is known as Wisakecahk to the Cree, Nanabush to the Saulteaux, Inktome to the Nakota and Dakota, Inktomi to the Lakota, and Sagija'k to the Dene.

The Trickster is a combination of man/spirit/hero. He has been given special powers to help, teach, heal, and make peace. He could also be cunning, greedy, and foolish. Sometimes this got him into trouble and it was he who ultimately learned a lesson. Wisakecahk could also be a clown, playing tricks on people and making them laugh.

The statue represents the creation of North America. After causing a great flood, Wisakecahk must get the help of animals like beaver and muskrat to rebuild the land. Together they rebuild North America on the back of a giant turtle.

### 2. A Winter Camp

The scene depicted is a Plains Cree and Nakota camp in the Assiniboine River valley during the winter of 1751. Three families have camped here for a few weeks. A fourth has just arrived.

Winter could be both a difficult and restful time of year for First Nations families. Small groups of related families needed to camp in places that provided wood for fires, a source of clean water, and shelter from prairie storms. River valleys or upland areas such as the Moose Mountains were good winter refuges.

Winter could be difficult because the movement of bison herds was unpredictable. If the winter was difficult, bison would follow the First Nations into sheltered areas. In these years, food was plentiful. If the winter was easy, the herds might not move off the prairies and food resources became scarce. Other game was also hunted during the winter, but bison remained the mainstay.

Winter was also a restful time. Days were filled with more sedentary activities than in the summer. Women sewed or decorated special outfits with quills or beads. Sewing moccasins was an ongoing chore. Men made arrows and bow, knapped stone points, or hunted. Children played a variety of games such as ice glider or a form of marbles. Winter was special because this was the only time of year that Wisakecahk stories could be told. These were often told by the elders.

#### i) The Tipi

Tipis were perfectly suited to a nomadic lifestyle on Canada's grasslands. They can withstand heat, thunderstorms, and wind in the summer and still be made warm and snug in the winter. A tipi liner attached to the poles on the inside could be stuffed with dead grass to provide insulation. Snow drifted around the outside of the tipi also helped to insulate. The smoke flaps could be adjusted to block the wind and vent smoke.

## **ii) Storytelling**

Although storytelling was greatly enjoyed, stories were more than just entertainment. Stories told by the elders were the way that children learned about their world and how to live in it. Beliefs, traditions, and morals were often conveyed in the form of a story. Children learned how to perform tasks and activities through role playing and toys.

## **iii) Background Information**

The program takes place in 1751. This was a time of change for the Plains Nations of Saskatchewan. Fur traders were making more European goods such as guns, kettles, knives, and cloth available to the people. The Plains Cree and Nakota were starting to acquire horses from nations to the south.

The Plains Cree and the Nakota had formed a long-standing alliance. The Nakota broke away from their Siouan speaking relatives (the Santee, Yankton, and Teton Sioux) and they and their Plains Cree allies supported each other in trade and warfare.

## **iv) Family Life**

The family was the most fundamental social unit for the Plains Cree and Nakota. Families included more than mother, father, and siblings. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were all important members of the family.

Each member had responsibilities and tasks to perform and was respected for his/her work. Co-operation was necessary in order for the family and the community to survive. Mothers and fathers provided food and shelter for the family. Men hunted large animals, and women trapped and snared the small game that often kept the family fed when larger animals were scarce. A substantial part of the diet consisted of the plants that women gathered during the warm months.

Women were responsible for cooking and preserving food and for making the clothing. They also made the tipi, which they owned.

Older children were responsible for looking after their younger siblings. The toys and games the children played prepared them for the roles that they would take on in later life.

Grandparents were teachers. They provided the link between the generations, ensuring that the knowledge of the past was preserved. They did this through storytelling. Children learned about nature and the important plants and animals through stories. Grandparents also used stories to teach values such as patience, proper behaviour, and respect. As well as teaching, stories also entertained.

People told stories only in the winter. They were so interesting that if they were told year-round, no work would ever get done.

### 3. The Yearly Circle

The Plains Cree and Nakota spent the winter in sheltered river valleys, uplands such as the Moose Mountains, or in the parklands. They lived in small camps made up of a few families. They spent much of their time teaching and storytelling. Men hunted whatever big game was accessible, while women might set snares for rabbits and other small game.

In spring, people gathered at fishing camps to take advantage of the spring spawn. Later in the summer, they moved onto the prairies to hunt bison. Summer encampments could be very large, often over 5,000 people. Large communal bison hunts and important ceremonies took place during the summer.

Fall was a time when the Nakota often went south to trade with the Mandan who lived in the Upper Missouri country. They traded for corn, beans, squash, and flint. When the fur trade companies moved into the interior of the plains in the early 1800s, the Nakota and Plains Cree traded at the posts in late fall, before setting up their winter camps.

#### Suggested Classroom Activities

1. Introduce related vocabulary and concepts:

Plains Cree	siblings	tipi
Nakota	pre-contact	co-operation

2. Create your own winter tipi camp diorama. This guide includes a tipi pattern on p. 8. Women made and owned the tipi. Men might paint the tipis with symbols or scenes that were important to them, but they had to get permission from the women. Women did not paint the tipis.
3. Introduce the Trickster.  
The Trickster is a common character in First Nations' stories. (See Gallery, section 1, p. 2)
4. Tell the story of Wisakecahk and the Ducks (included below).
5. Students can role play the various characters from the story.
6. Students can paint murals to tell the story of Wisakecahk and the Ducks before the visit and How the Bee got its Sting after the visit.

#### Wisakecahk and the Ducks

One day Wisakecahk was walking along, carrying a big bag and taking care of the world as usual. He was wondering how he could catch some ducks to eat, for he was very hungry. He had not yet devised a plan that would work. Every time he approached the ducks and geese, they ran away from him.

"Get away! As usual our older brother is up to something. Go far from shore! Run away!" they warned each other. And so it was he'd not had much luck.

"Okay, so how am I going to trick my younger siblings?" thought Wisakecahk? Finally, he thought of a plan that just might work.

He began to gather up moss to put into his bag. After the bag was full, he bundled it up and put it over his shoulder and continued walking.

"Ho! Our older brother has something. What is our older brother carrying?" wondered the ducks and geese. "Let's ask him. Hey older brother! What are you carrying?"

"Hey younger siblings, what I'm carrying is the Shut Eye Dance," answered Wisakecahk, putting his plan into action.

"All right! Please show us how it's done."

"Okay, but you must wait a while. I have work to do first."

Then and there Wisakecahk made a make-shift tipi. It wasn't a very good one, but that didn't matter because he would need it only for a short time. When he finished the tipi he called the ducks and geese.

They all came slowly and timidly towards the shore.

"Come ashore! Come ashore!" he encouraged them.

"Let's see. All of you look the same! All of you are white! Let's wait while I paint your faces. You will be so beautiful that you will be fit for these grounds where we are going to do this dance."

Then and there Wisakecahk painted all the waterfowl's faces. When he had finished he checked them all over carefully. The ducks and geese sure were beautiful.

"All right younger siblings. Look at yourselves."

"It sure is nice that Wisakecahk has painted us so beautifully. We are very beautiful!"

"Okay, younger siblings, it is time to tell you about this dance. This is what you must do. First, the geese go, then the ducks will follow, according to size, from biggest to smallest. You'll dance into the tipi. You must do as I say because there are strict rules to this dance," he told them.

After the ducks and geese were all lined up, from largest to smallest, he spoke to them again.

"Okay, I'll go inside first. Dance past the fire in the centre, then begin to dance around it. I will sit by the far wall and watch you. Remember, this is the Shut Eye Dance, so as soon as you begin dancing, you must close your eyes. Okay! Begin the dance!"

The ducks and geese all began to dance with their eyes shut as they entered the tipi. Wisakecahk began to sing, "I bring to you the Shut Eye Dance. I bring to you the Shut Eye Dance."

The ducks and the geese loved it. They were so carried away by Wisakecahk's tune that they sang along. They all sang and danced in front of Wisakecahk.

Wisakecahk had carefully chosen the ones he wanted. He hit them on the head, then flung them into his bag. Wisakecahk was very happy that his trick was working so well.

As it happened, there was one small duck who had been pushed aside against the doorway. This was the little water-hen. The water-hen began to wonder why the sounds of singing were quickly diminishing.

“What’s happening?” he wondered. “Why is the singing dying down?”

He decided to peek. Slowly opening one eye, he was horrified to see what Wisakecahk was up to. Wisakecahk was hitting the birds over the head, then throwing them into his bag.

“Ha!” cried the water-hen. “Get away! Get away! Wisakecahk is destroying us all! Hurry! Open your eyes!”

The little water-hen had spoiled Wisakecahk’s plans. All sorts of ducks and geese ran away from the tipi. They were saved by the water-hen.

Wisakecahk was very angry at the water-hen for spoiling his plan. He began to chase him out of the tipi and towards the lake. Closer, closer, Wisakecahk ran to the water-hen. Just as the water-hen reached the lake, Wisakecahk gave him a hard kick. He crippled the water-hen, so the water-hen had to limp into the lake. Once in the water, the water-hen dove right in, away from the danger.

“Okay my younger sibling!” Wisakecahk exclaimed. “First there will be people, all sorts of people, and all these people will call you water-hen. You will be crippled, yes crippled, and you will be very small forever.”

So that is how Wisakecahk tricked the ducks and geese and why the water-hen is so small and why he is crippled.

# Pattern for a Paper Tipi

Pattern for a Paper Tipi

Door Flap



## Recommended Resources

1. **First Nations Gallery Guide**  
Royal Saskatchewan Museum  
2445 Albert Street  
Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 4W7
2. **Dene Stories**  
Reynolds, Margaret  
Curriculum Studies and Research Department, 1979  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College  
Box 3085,  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K 3S9
3. **Nanabush and the Geese  
Saulteaux Legend**  
Pelly, Linda  
Curriculum Studies and Research Department, 1976  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College  
Box 3085  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K 3S9
4. **Tales of Wesakechak  
A Teacher Activity Guide for Divisions 1 and 2**  
Campbell, Maria and Dufour, Maria  
Saskatchewan Education, 1984
5. **Houses of Hide and Earth**  
Shemie, Bonnie  
Tundra Books, 1991  
Montreal, Quebec, H3Z 2N2
6. **Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na:  
Games of the Plains Cree**  
Atimoyoo, Pat, ed.  
Curriculum Studies and Research Department, 1980  
Saskatchewan Indian and Cultural College  
Box 3085  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K 3S9
7. **Ki-Ihkin  
Colouring Book**  
Curriculum Studies and Research Department, 1980  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College  
Box 3085,  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K 3S9