

Big Idea: Alberta's Métis people have endured and prevailed throughout history, maintaining their identity and culture, despite discrimination, marginalization and government policies.

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

### References

The Métis Nation of Alberta  
<http://albertametis.com/culture/>

Métis Nation  
<http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis>

### Essential Terminology

<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Terminology%20%20%28PD-WT-16a%29.pdf>

## Early Métis History

The Métis emerged as a distinct people or nation the Northwest during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Distinct Métis communities developed along the routes of the fur trade and across the Northwest within the Métis Nation Homeland. This Homeland includes the three Prairie provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta), as well as parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the Northern United States (Métis National Council). The fur trade and colonial development drew French voyageurs, *coureurs de bois*, and Hudson Bay Company employees to the west. Many French traders took “country wives” to build relationships with First Nation communities. Samuel de Champlain famously said in 1634, “our young men will marry your daughters, and we will be one people.” This reflected the French policy of making use of established Aboriginal trading practices, including establishing family connections which enabled settlers to better adapt to life in a foreign land.

## Emerging Métis Identity

The term *Métis* refers to a collective of cultures and ethnic identities that resulted from unions between Aboriginal and European people in what is now Canada. *Métis* stems from the Latin verb *miscēre*, “to mix”. The word initially referred to the children of these relationships, but over generations it came to refer to the distinct cultural identities these communities developed. Métis communities grew along fur trade routes and became separate First Nation and European communities across the prairies. Over time a unique culture emerged and developed, which included the recognizable Métis sashes, intricate beadwork, the Red River jig, and moose hair tufting. The Métis also developed their own Michif language, which originally was a combination of Cree and French. The dialects and sounds of the language may vary from province to province and may be more prevalent in other communities. The Cree word used to describe the Métis is *otipemisiwak* meaning “the people who own or govern themselves” or the “people who are their own bosses.”



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## Timeline of Métis in Canadian History

**1857:** *Gradual Civilization Act* passed by the 5<sup>th</sup> Parliament of the Province of Canada required all male “Indians” and Métis over the age of 21 to read, write and speak either French or English and to choose an approved surname.

**1869-1970:** *Red River Resistance* (Manitoba) in the Red River Colony was sparked by the transfer of the vast territory of Rupert's Land to the new nation of Canada. The colony of farmers and hunters, many of them Métis, occupied a corner of Rupert's Land and feared for their culture and land rights under Canadian control. The Métis mounted a rebellion and declared a provisional government to negotiate terms for entering Confederation. The uprising led to the creation of the province of Manitoba, and the emergence of Métis leader Louis Riel — a hero to his people and many in Quebec, but an outlaw in the eyes of the Canadian government.



**1870:** *Manitoba Act* -The Canadian Parliament passed the Manitoba Act creating Canada's fifth province. It's name, Manitoba, is an Assiniboine word meaning "water of the prairie" because of all the lakes and rivers in the area. It included only a small square of land - about 35000 sq. km around the Red River Valley and Portage La Prairie. The rest of Rupert's Land became the Northwest Territories. The Manitoba Act stated that Métis lands would be protected but all other lands were the property of the Dominion of Canada. The Métis could not get legal title to their lands until Dominion surveyors had finished sectioning the land - a job which took three years. After that, the Métis were issued with scrip. For more detailed information about scrip see *Métis in Alberta (Part 2): Governance and Settlements*.

**1885:** *The North-West Rebellion Resistance* was a violent, five-month insurgency against the Canadian government, fought mainly by Métis militants and their Aboriginal allies in what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta. It was caused by rising fear among the Métis and Aboriginal peoples in the west. A series of battles and other outbreaks of violence in 1885 left hundreds of people dead. The Métis were defeated by federal troops and the result was the permanent enforcement of Canadian law in the West and the conviction and hanging of Métis leader Louis Riel.

### Gabriel Dumont (Resistance fighter)

Gabriel Dumont was a man of great chivalry and military skill, superbly adapted to the presettlement prairie life.  
(courtesy Glenbow Archives)

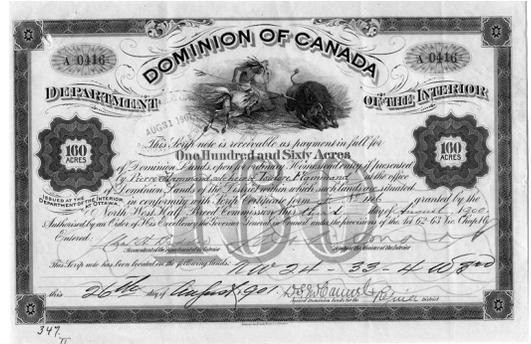


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**1885-1889:** *Métis Scrip* was designed to extinguish Métis title, much as treaties did for First Nations. However, the Métis were dealt with on an individual basis, as opposed to the collective extinguishment of title pursued through the treaty process. Much like the numbered treaties, scrip commissioners travelled to Métis communities and held sittings at various locations where Métis gathered to fill out applications for their entitlement. Scrip was implemented over several decades in three phases: in Manitoba in the 1870s; in the North-West in the 1880s; and in conjunction with Treaties 8 and 10 in the northern part of the province. The policy continued to be the only means of extinguishing Métis Aboriginal title in Canada well into the 1920s. Similar to First Nations and numbered treaties, the Métis people had no experience with written laws, deeds or money. Many Métis people did not understand the value of the scrip and were easily cheated out of the land which should have been theirs.



### **The Métis Flag and the Infinity Symbol**

The Métis Nation flag has evolved over time. The current flag has a blue background with a white infinity symbol that has two meanings: the joining of two cultures and the existence of a people forever. The blue infinity flag is a Métis national flag and represents the political and military force of the Metis as early as 1816.

There are two versions of the Metis flag; the blue one which is the official flag of the Métis Nation of Canada, and a red one which is the provincial ensign for the Métis Nation of Alberta. The Métis flag is the oldest Canadian patriotic flag indigenous to Canada.

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## Question for Reflection and Discussion

1. 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.

2. Based on what you read in this conversation starter, who are the first “Canadians”?

3. Why do you think the Cree describe Métis as “the people who own or govern themselves”?

3. How does the Métis flag or the infinity symbol relate to reconciliation?

5. Visit the link below: *Manitoba Métis Federation vs. Attorney General of Canada*  
<http://www.usask.ca/nativelaw/factums/view.php?id=178>

Read John A. Macdonald’s quote on the top of page 238.

6. What is the dilemma for the Métis being described in this way? What discrepancy does it create for the Métis community if they are considered “Indians?” What discrepancy does it create if they are defined as “white.”

## For More Information:

Musée Heritage Museum (St. Albert)  
<http://museeheritage.ca/>

Gabriel Dumont Institute Virtual Museum  
<http://www.metismuseum.ca/>

The Métis Nation of Alberta  
<http://albertametis.com/culture/>

The Canadian Encyclopedia  
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/browse/people/aboriginal-peoples-4/#Métis/>

Métis Nation  
<http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis>

Learn Michif  
<http://www.learnmichif.com/>

Kikino: Our History  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLo7V7va5RE>

Métis Cards in Alberta: Registry & Genealogy.  
<http://albertametis.com/registry/>

Rupertsland Institute for Métis Excellence  
[www.rupertsland.org](http://www.rupertsland.org)

The Mountain Métis  
<http://traditionalresearch.com/>

The Forgotten Métis  
<http://forgottenmetis.ca/en>

Walking Together: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum.  
<http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/>

Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners.  
<https://education.alberta.ca/media/563982/our-words-our-ways.pdf>

Our Way is a Valid Way.  
[http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/pdf/13-14/our\\_way\\_resource.pdf](http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/pdf/13-14/our_way_resource.pdf)

ATA Stepping Stone on Metis  
<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Metis%20%28PD-WT-16b%29.pdf>

Education is Our Buffalo  
[https://www.teachers.ab.ca/sitecollectiondocuments/ata/publications/human-rights-issues/education%20is%20our%20buffalo%20\(pd-80-7\).pdf](https://www.teachers.ab.ca/sitecollectiondocuments/ata/publications/human-rights-issues/education%20is%20our%20buffalo%20(pd-80-7).pdf)

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