

## Overview

This is a community history project that students conduct and carry out over a course of six months. The students will self-reflect by writing their own autobiography's and make a family tree. The students will collect stories from various members of the community such as parents, grandparents, elders, community leaders. The students will also investigate the development of the community, from past to present. They will also take tours of the various offices and take pictures of the building for the final product. Community members such as elders and various community members will visit the classroom to share stories with the students. The students will go out on cultural outing and learn some of the traditional ways of life of survival. The final product will be a collection of stories that will be compiled into two separate booklets based on the people's stories, and the other based on the development of the community.

## Context

This school is located on an Indian Reserve know as the Tataskweyak Cree Nation which is also known as Split Lake, Manitoba. There are approximately 2000 people living in this community with 50% of the population under the age of 30. There is only one school in the community which goes from Nursery/ Kindergarten to Grade 12, with a student population of approximately 750 students. Most of the students are of First Nations or Métis descent. This project will be done in a Grade 7 & 8 Transition class. The students in this transition class are repeating grade 7 or 8. Many of the students in this class are repeating due to lack of attendance, as a result some students are very weak in their reading and writing skills.

## Problem

Many of the parents and grandparents have attended residential school. There is a whole generation of people from this community that were taken away from their families by age five and only to return as young adults. Because of this experience the school system had been devalued. Residential school put a gap between parents with the children who attended residential school. The people who attended residential school were forbidden to speak their first language, as a result many of the residential school survivors did not teach their own children their first language in hopes that it would make life easier for their children. There is now a language barrier between the youth and the elders in the community. There are many social problems occurring on the reserve, such as alcohol, gambling, and drug addictions. Many children are neglected as a result of these additions. Students whom are neglected have weak social skills and often have behavioural problems once they attend school.

There are three sets of gaps occurring in the community, the children with their parents, the children with the elders in the community, and the student's parents, with the student's grandparents. With this project I am hoping to build a bridge between the gaps, so that the children will reconnect with their parents, not only that, it will connect the student's parents with their own parents.

## Objectives

- The purpose of this project is to build community in the classroom and the school.
- Students will investigate their family genealogy.
- Students will make connections with parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, elders, community members. They will do this by conducting interviews and listening to the stories that will be told.
- Students will collect stories about the history of the community and make it into a booklet.
- Students will gain cultural awareness.
- Students will share the stories with students in the younger grades.
- Students will further develop their reading, writing, and vocabulary skills.
- Students will value self and others.
- Students will build self-confidence, self-worth, and self-identity, and self-esteem.

## Rationale

This project will help the students build a positive self identity, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self- pride. The students in this class are repeating grade 7 or 8. Many of whom may be facing difficulties in reading and writing. This process of planning and implementing this project will be done by the students with guidance from the teacher. The goals will be set by the class as a whole; therefore it will foster cooperation, teamwork, communication, organizational and social skills. The students will develop responsibility and maturity. This will give the students a sense of ownership and make it more meaningful for them. They will be more determination to see the end results, which will give them a sense of pride and accomplishment.

This project is important because it will give the students an understanding of their community's history. It is important for the students to know who they are and who their family members are. The students will be engaged throughout the process. Students will gain their cultural identity, because very often they do not practice any of the traditions that many of their parents and grandparents did. Language is very often related to culture, and because many of the students do not know the language they are often alienated from the elders who can do the teaching and share the stories.

Students will make connections with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, elders and community members. Many of the elders are passing on and the stories they have need to be passed on to the generation that follow. Parents play a critical role in the success of this project. The parents are needed as interpreters between the students and the elders. Once the students have these stories they can tell them to the students in the lower elementary grades and pass on the stories. Students will go out into the community and visit various community members in their homes. This project will bring the community in the school, something that the community needs. Parents and community members need to feel that they are part of their children's education in the school system. Therefore, this project will also give the parents a sense of importance because of what they have contributed towards the student's learning.

Parents and grandparents will share the stories of the hardships they encountered in their daily lives in respect to Residential school, the stories they learn will build empathy. The stories that are shared with the students will give them an appreciation of all the changes that have occurred from generation to generation.

Community members will come into the school to share stories. It will bring community into the school. The students will learn who they are by listening to the stories of the community. The student's will gain knowledge about the past. Students will collect stories; they will compile them into a booklet. This will allow them to build reading and writing skills. They will research community members, past and present, which have made a difference in the community. With the stories the students collect they will retell these stories to students in the elementary grades. This project will build a sense of pride in their community. The students will appreciate their accomplishments and each other's accomplishments.

### Materials

Computers	scanner	printer	printer ink
digital camera	paper	voice recorder	video recorder & tripod

### The Plan

Lesson 1 – Introduce the project to the students. Students will write an autobiography. This exercise will allow students to reflect on his or her life. Letters will go home to parents informing them about the project indicating that their help will be needed throughout the process. Parents will be needed as interpreters for their children to communicate with grandparents and/or great-grandparents.

Lesson 2 – Students will make a family tree. This exercise will give students a chance to see how much they know about his or her family genealogy. The students will then have to take his or her genealogy home and ask parents, grandparents, or any relatives to help them complete it as much as possible.

Lesson 3 – Students will record his or her genealogy, on a large chart paper, that will be hung on the wall for everyone in the class to review. This will allow the students to see any distant relations they may have in the classroom, with one another. Students will discuss what they learned from this activity, what surprised them, what they already knew, and what would still like to learn. This will be an open activity in which new information can be added at different times throughout the year. Parents, staff, community members, and any visitors to the classroom will also be encouraged to add any information.

Lesson 4 – Students will come up with a list of questions that they will ask. Students will take questions home to parents and then to grandparents, and possibly to great-grandparents. "What was it like for you when you went to school"? This activity will give an opportunity for the students to connect with their parents and learn something about them they did not know before.

This will be an ongoing process and it is my goal that the students ask their parents a new question each week. Students must also visit with their grandparents, great-grandparents or an elder in the community to get their stories. A different question will be assigned each Friday, questions will include:

- What was it like for you to play?
- What chores did you have to do as a child and teenager?
- Did your family always live in Split Lake?
- What are ways you travelled around to different communities or trap lines?
- What do you remember about the “seven minutes”?
- Can you tell me about hunting?
- Can you tell me about trapping?
- What kind of work did you do as a young adult?
- What is your most important story? Why?
- Which community member has made a difference in the community? Why or How?

The objective is for the student to have one question at a time in hopes that will get more of an insight to the one topic, which may even lead to more stories or topics.

Lesson 5 – Students will brainstorm their ideas of what they want to learn about their community. For example they might want to find out when the first school was built, when the road to the community opened and how that changed life in the community, who was the first Chief and Council and the people who were in council thereafter, they might want to find out information about the businesses, organizations, nursing station, and anything they feel is relevant to the project. The students will also have the opportunity to share information about businesses that do not longer exist in the community. This will also give the students the opportunity to ask their parents about where they hung out when they were children, teenagers, and young adults.

Lesson 6 – Students will write letters to the various businesses and organizations informing them of the project and requesting information. The information that will be requested would include how long they have been in the community, what service they provide to the community, where the first office located was, and any information that is relevant to the community history project. Once the information is ready, I will make arrangements for the students to pick up the information and get a tour of the office, or business.

Lesson 7 – Students will go around the community taking pictures of the various buildings and locations of significance. For example: the Grave yard, Church site, Nursing Station, Natural Resources Office, Band Hall, Radio Station, Youth Centre, Water Treatment Plant, Northern Store, Tataskweyak Gas Bar, Elderly Person’s Home, Arena, Hotel, Split Lake Construction, Band Office, Fire Hall, Police Station, Day Care Centre, Head Start Centre, Fish Plant, School, Morris Chicken, Awasis Agency, Community Employment and Training Program, and the Training Centre.

Lesson 8 – An elder or a community member will be invited into the classroom to share stories with the students. By this time the students will have some stories from their own grandparents or great-grandparents. From this experience they will compare similarities and differences and come up with questions for the guest or may return to their own grandparents and have more questions for them. With the permission of the elder, this session will be video recorded.

Lesson 9 – Students will go to cultural education cabin and ask the elder's stories, specifically their most important story and why it is important.

Lesson 10 – Students will collect stories; make decisions of what information will be included in booklets. One booklet will include stories of the community businesses and organizations, as well as pictures of the various structures, telling the communities history. This booklet will tell the story of the community's development, from past to present.

Another booklet will focus on stories about the people, stories that were collected from parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, elders and community members.

Extension – Students may also want to share these stories in an assembly or make a power point presentation, possibly even a play or a skit.

## References

Chamberlin, J. Edward. 2003. *If This is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* Finding Common Ground. New York.: Alfred Knopf.

Sharon- Shevin, Mara. 1999. *Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide to Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.