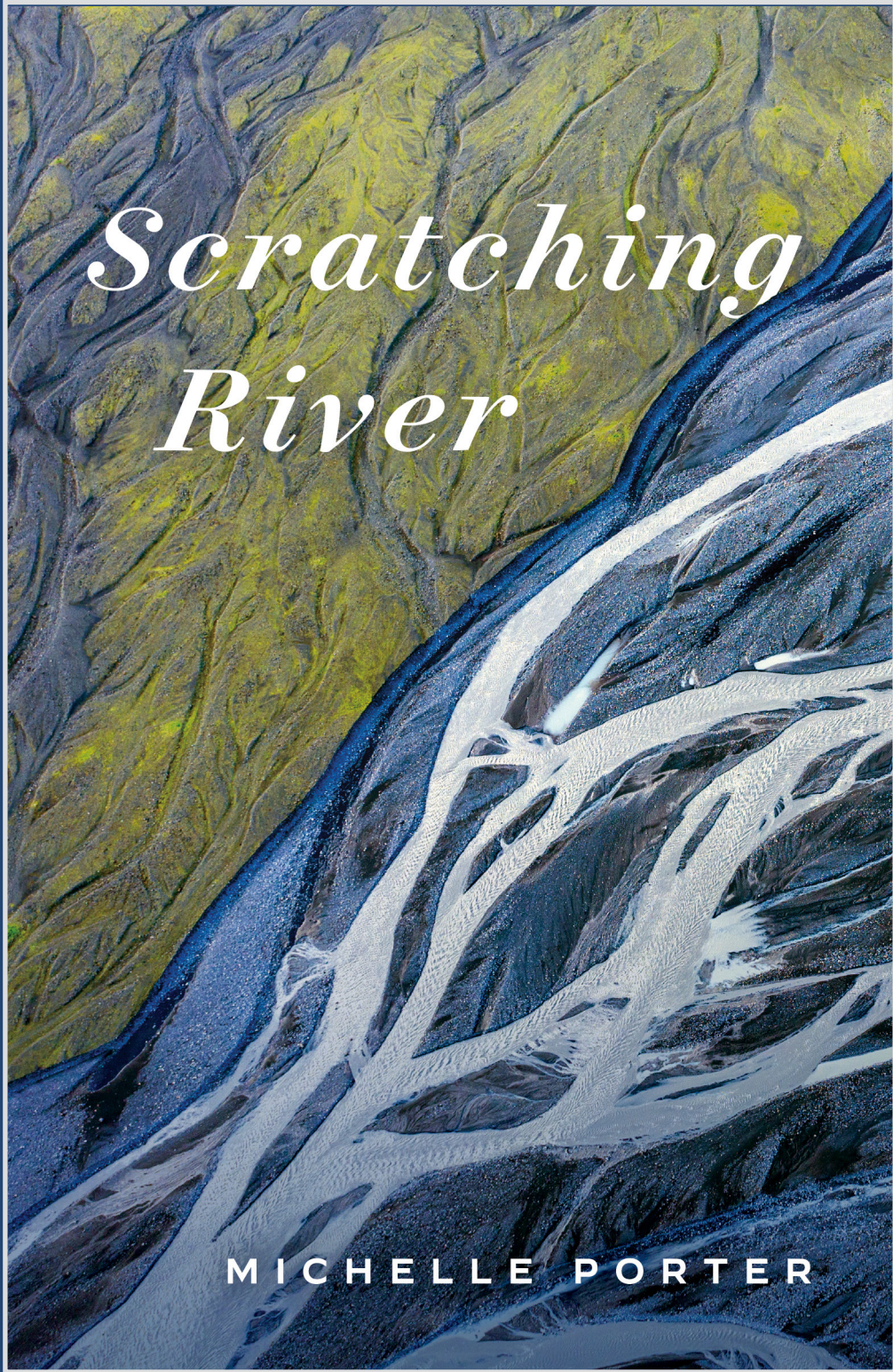


EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

*Scratching
River*

MICHELLE PORTER



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR

Scratching River

BY MICHELLE PORTER

2022

Created for Wilfrid Laurier University Press by
Mandisa Bromfield and Nastassia Subban



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ABOUT THE WRITER

NASTASSIA SUBBAN has been an elementary and secondary school teacher with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) for over thirteen years. She is currently the Assistant Curriculum Leader of Student Success, Community Partnerships and Critical Consciousness and has also held the role of a Seconded Faculty Member in York University's Faculty of Education. Nastassia completed a Master of Education degree that focused on Africentric and transformative learning and she is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Humanities at York University. She was a curriculum reviewer for the Grade 11 course **CAS 331: History of Africa and Peoples of African Descent**, and created a curriculum guide for the text *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island*. Most recently, her focus has been on creating spaces for teachers to investigate the topic of self-actualization.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

MANDISA BROMFIELD has been with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) for more than twenty years. Starting in 2022, Mandisa entered the role of a Seconded Faculty Member in York University's Faculty of Education. Previously, she worked as an Early Reading Coach and a variety of other teaching roles in both English and French. She has also developed, written, and reviewed Africentric curriculum and was a teacher at the Africentric Alternative School, the first publicly funded Africentric school in Canada. Mandisa completed an M.A. degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, for which she explored her role as a non-Indigenous person working in urban Indigenous spaces. Much of her present work involves learning through the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement at TDSB. Her primary focus is infusing English- and French-language instruction with anti-Black racism education in early years and learning how to authentically share Indigenous perspectives as she works towards reconciliation as a treaty person living on Turtle Island.

INTRODUCTION

“We continue and we thrive when we recover our ability to tell our stories from the land seven generations back, pointing them in the direction of the seven generations that are coming ahead of us all. We survive because we are always moving and we bring our stories along.”

(Porter, 142)

We see, we feel, we remember. Michelle Porter’s memoir *Scratching River* is a testimony to survival, love, and the strength of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Through this work she is able to braid together a multitude of topics which are vital and necessary for learners in Ontario to engage with. Most importantly, *Scratching River* is a reminder that Indigenous communities are alive and the culture will never die. Through her memories, Porter takes us on a journey akin to the ebb and flow of water. The journey is full of joy, wonder, disruption, beauty, pain, and what one would just call life. The journey is fragmented, as “trauma fragments memory and fragments experiences” (Porter, 140).

This curriculum guide is just that: a guide. Like rivers, curriculum guides are “always asking to roam, to go looking for new places” (Porter, 11). Do not feel relegated to following the content of this guide verbatim; “to remain still . . . that is for the pond or the lake” (Porter, 11), and this guide is for a memoir which has the personality of a river.

Scratching River aims to give learners and teachers the ability to think and feel differently about writing. Most importantly, the book uses primary sources to tell the untold stories of those who have made important contributions to Canadian history.

This guide and the excerpts from *Scratching River* are provided to help you remember. Remember who you are. Remember that you are a human being. Remember your relationships to others and most importantly your relationship to the land, to Mother Earth.

Recollect the memories. Let them flow.

THE CURRICULUM DOCUMENT

This curriculum document has been created to support the text *Scratching River*. This document is intended for, but not limited to, use in Grade 11, *Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices* (NBE3U). This course, as stated in the Ontario curriculum, emphasizes the development of literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills through the study of works in English by Indigenous writers ([Ontario Curriculum: Native Studies, 2000.](#)) Through the analysis of literary texts and media works, learners will develop an appreciation of the wealth and complexity of Indigenous writing. Learners will also conduct research and analyze the information gathered; write persuasive and literary essays; and analyze the relationship between media forms and audiences. An important focus will be the further development of learners’ understanding of English-language usage and conventions.

ONLINE LEARNING

To support teachers in light of the increased demand and interest in online learning models that may be taking place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have provided online resources that learners can utilize for productive and engaged learning experiences whether they are in physical classrooms or learning online.

LEARNING NORMS

Delving into first-person texts such as memoirs and biographies can bring up many different emotions and opinions; thus, we strongly suggest setting norms within the classroom that speak to respect, kindness, understanding, and empathy. Included are some guidelines around creating these norms in learning environments through the use of circles, which can help support caring and supportive learning environments that demonstrate care and love. As bell hooks writes, “when we teach with love we are better able to respond to the unique concerns of individual students, while simultaneously integrating those concerns into the classroom community. When teachers work to affirm the emotional well-being of students, we are doing the work of love” (hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practice Wisdom*, 160). In addition, journaling can also be considered as a way to learn, collaborate, self-reflect, and build community.

Teachers could also consider the use of *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations* by Richard Wagamese as a daily reminder of the ethic of care that should live in the classroom. The teacher can read a meditation from Wagamese's book daily at the beginning of class as well as at the end of the class. As learners begin to become familiar with this routine, the teacher can incorporate thought-provoking questions in relation to the meditation for the day to see how the mediation is landing and living in the learners.

TEACHING AND LEARNING CIRCLES

Why Use a Circle?

For many Indigenous Peoples around the world, a teaching and learning circle is used to share ideas, thoughts, opinions, and reflections. As a circle is a shape that represents equality, all voices can be heard, and all faces can be seen when sharing. It is important that all members of the learning community sit in a circle so that all learners can be seen in order to represent a shared space in which all voices are heard and ultimately respected. Teaching and learning circles are communities in which everyone can learn from and work to support each other as they continuously reflect, learn, plan for action, and evaluate their individual and collaborative work.

Circles for Community Building

Circles can be extremely powerful for fostering relationships in a group. It is therefore necessary that listening to the speaker is set as a group norm. When we listen to each other, we can learn from each other and feel connected. Circles need to be established as safe, inclusive spaces where everyone belongs. In addition, as everyone is seen as equal in the circle, there can be great growth as learners can learn from the educators and the educators can also learn from learners. This also has the potential to increase social capital.

Circles as a Check In / Check Out

A teaching and learning circle can be a great place to start learning and building intention around themes but also a place for reflection. If there is a great amount of learning done during a particular session or class, a circle can be used to build upon and check in for emotional well-being, to solidify learning, and/or for consolation/closure.

Circles for Healing and as Restorative Practice

Circles can also be used to restore peace if conflict arises. Restorative justice circles and emotional emancipation circles are a key practice for Indigenous Peoples globally. As some of the topics and issues explored can be heavy, highly personal, and emotional, there is the potential for challenging and/or difficult discussions among learners and educators. Circles can be used for healing and to restore peace and well-being as well as for meaningful dialogue, reflection, and growth. Potential questions that can be asked include:

- What was your part in the situation?
- What can we do to make sure this doesn't happen again?
- What was it in that paragraph or chapter that made you feel this way?

It is critical to use open-ended questions when facilitating circles, and it is essential to build a sense of community in the classroom. Throughout this guide, circles and icebreakers are used to foster community in the learning environment.

Sources

International Institute for Restorative Practices, *Restorative Circles in Schools: A Practical Guide for Educators*, Second Edition, 2019.

International Institute for Restorative Practices, *International Institute for Restorative Practices, The Restorative Practices Handbook: for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators*, Second Edition, 2019.

Community Healing Network Inc., [Emotional Emancipation Circles](#), 2020.

TEACHER RESOURCES FOR SCRATCHING RIVER

Michelle Porter's text is written in a unique way. One might find that the style is not conventional or predictable. Below are some teacher resources to help readers become familiar with Michelle Porter's writing style. In the podcasts included, where Porter discusses her inspiration and process behind the novel, she shares her idea of writing and "telling it all crooked."

Podcast Episodes with Michelle Porter

[The Authority File: Episode 249](#)

[The Authority File: Episode 251](#)

Question-and-Answer Sessions with Michelle Porter

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

Crooked Tunes

[YouTube: Crooked Tunes: What are they, and why do they survive?](#)

Guest Speakers and Indigenous Resources

[Native Canadian Centre of Toronto](#)

[Their Voices Will Guide Us: Student and Youth Engagement Guide](#)

STRANDS

This curriculum guide focuses on the four strands present in the [Ontario Curriculum: Native Studies, 2000](#), as well as a writing strand from the related English courses:

Identity

A concept created in response to the question “Who am I?”

Relationships

Ties that Indigenous Peoples have developed and maintained with the natural environment – the land and its life-sustaining resources.

Sovereignty

Based on a spiritual understanding that the Creator gives human beings responsibility for governing themselves and taking care of the land—basic to the needs of all human beings.

Challenges

Among the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples today in defining their collective place in Canadian life is the need to reclaim, reassert, and further develop the distinct identities, relationships, and sovereignty they have always held.

Writing

Select and use appropriate writing forms for intended purposes and audiences, focusing on essays, narratives, or poems.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

“I believe that the most important thing for us as Michif people is land. If we have land, then we have a place to nurture our future generations ... I think it says a lot about our people that we still have a strong sense of culture and that our language is alive. I have never been in a Michif community where the culture is dying. Ever.”

—Maria Campbell’s words on a plaque in a museum in Winnipeg

Just as the memoir *Scratching River* demonstrates fluidity and unstructured flow of text, **stream of consciousness** writing has been used throughout this document as a metaphor for the river, water, and, as Porter describes, “telling it all crooked.” This allows for a free flow of thought and also illustrates a capacity for healing.

LEARNING GOAL:

To understand water as a metaphor and the concept of river morphology

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Gather	<p>Consider and journal on the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What does water mean to you?2. What does it feel like, sound like, and taste like?3. Are there instances in your life that can be compared to water? How do you know? <p>Listen to the two following songs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patrick Droney - Like the Water (Live Performance) Vevo• Lauryn Hill - Just Like Water <p>While listening to the above songs, consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do Patrick Droney and Lauryn Hill feel about water?2. Why do they use water to describe what they are talking about?3. What are the similarities and differences between each of the songs?

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Synthesize	<p>Watch this video on the meaning of river morphology and answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is river morphology? 2. How does it relate to ourselves? <p>Examine the front cover of <i>Scratching River</i> and do some stream of consciousness writing with regards to what you see. You can consider the following questions as you are writing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the cover relate to river morphology? 2. Can the cover be seen as a metaphor for your life? Consider your relationships with others. 3. How does the style you are currently writing in (stream of consciousness) relate to river morphology? 4. What does river morphology say about the power of water? How does this relate to the power of Mother Earth?
Transfer	<p>Share your stream of consciousness writing with a partner or with a small group in a circle. Consider the following questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does this process make you feel? 2. Is this form of writing effective or ineffective for you? Why? <p>Create a verse/meditation as a class in honour of water. Consider questions as a class such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is water important? 2. What does it do for me as a human and for other living things? 3. How can it be healing? 4. How can it be destructive?

LEARNING GOAL:

To look at water as a holder of memory and understand how Crooked Tunes are designed

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Gather	<p>Begin with the verse/meditation that the class created on water to start the class. Have a discussion to revisit how and why the words were selected for this verse. Consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does water hold memory? If no, explain. If yes, how do you know? 2. What memories do you hold? Where do you hold them: in your mind or body? Can you hold them in both? How do you know? <p>Writing in stream of consciousness for six minutes, write down everything you remember about your first day of high school. Once complete, read what you have written.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does it flow? Is everything in chronological, sequential order, or is it fragmented, with details missing or in unexpected order?
Synthesize	<p>In <i>The Authority File</i> podcast, Episode 251, author Michelle Porter speaks about her memoir as “telling it all crooked.” This lesson will examine what she means by way of discussion about crooked tunes seen in Métis fiddling.</p> <p>In preparation for this section, the teacher should review the video Crooked Tunes and explain to learners what they are. Some or all learners may already be familiar with crooked tunes so ask them what they know about them.</p> <p>Have learners listen to these two versions of the same song:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Red River Jig” by John Arcand • “Red River Jig” by Reg Bouvette <p>After listening, consider the questions below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What stands out to you in these songs? 2. What is different? What is similar? 3. How might this genre of music relate to memory? Consider your memories and how you remember them.
Transfer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher will read aloud the afterword from <i>Scratching River</i>. 2. Learners can write about what they might expect the text to be about and how it might flow in relation to river morphology and crooked tunes. 3. Read pages 1–32 of <i>Scratching River</i> for homework.

LEARNING GOAL:

To consider what is “crooked” about the text and how the text connects to nature

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Gather	<p>Start with a quote from the book, “rivers are always asking to roam, to go looking for new places” (Porter, 11).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Humans can also be like rivers and go roaming and looking for new places. Take a 10-minute nature walk in silence and invite learners to pay close attention to one to three living beings that they encounter (e.g., rocks, minerals, trees, grass, birds, flowers, weeds, etc.). 2. Return to the learning space and have learners consider the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) How did it feel to roam and possibly find a new place? b) What role do you play in the lives of the living beings that you found? What role do they play in your life?
Synthesize	<p>Once grounded, have learners turn to the first three chapters of the book and invite the learners to consider the following questions in groups of three in relation to the structure of the text:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is this book “telling it all crooked” thus far? 2. What are you noticing about the structure of the text? 3. Identify three metaphors in the chapters. 4. What connections to nature and other living beings are you noticing through the text? 5. How does the book make you feel thus far? 6. How does this text relate to your own life? What memories are coming up for you from your life?
Transfer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have learners journal for 10 minutes about which part of the first three chapters stands out to them the most. Invite learners to think and write about how these chapters relate to the land, themselves, and Indigenous history in Canada. 2. Read pages 33–70 for homework.

LEARNING GOAL:

To understand who the Métis are

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Gather	<p>“The Métis diaspora, we are a braided river channel . . . they wanted us to recede, to dry up, to go underground. People wanted the Métis to stop flowing. But we didn’t” (Porter, 45).</p> <p>Consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does this quote mean in relation to rivers? 2. Can you relate to the Métis people? How does this quote relate to your life and your experiences? <p>* This may be an opportunity to discuss who the Métis are. Here are some resources to support this discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Métis Nation of Canada • Métis National Council • Métis Nation of Alberta • Métis Nation of Ontario • Métis Nation - Government of Canada
Synthesize	<p>Invite learners to write about a time when they were faced with a challenge and consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the challenge you have faced. 2. How old were you when you faced it? 3. How did you approach this challenge? 4. Were you successful in overcoming the challenge? What did success look like in this situation? 5. Would you change aspects of how you faced this challenge? Why or why not?
Transfer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read pages 71–106 for homework.

LEARNING GOAL:

To understand the use of repetition and redaction in the text

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Gather	<p>“Children begin by finding a tune on the fiddle, a tune that’s been there for generations, and then move on by finding that tune in their feet, finding the dance their ancestors placed there, and then pointing their feet in the direction they’re going” (Porter, 89).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the above quote out loud to the learners. Invite two or three learners to also read the quote out loud to the class. 2. Invite learners to then begin a stream of consciousness writing piece for 10 minutes based on the quote. 3. Invite a few learners to share what they have written with the class.
Synthesize	<p>In preparation for this section, the teacher should review the term ancestor with learners. Some or all learners may already be familiar with a definition and understanding.</p> <p>“There Were Things Going on We Knew Nothing About”</p> <p>Consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why do you think the author has chosen to repeat this statement throughout the text? 2. What is her purpose for the use of redaction in many of these sections? What is she trying to do? What is she trying to convey to the reader? 3. Can you think about and name three things you know about your ancestors?
Transfer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write about the three things you know about your ancestors. How have you come to know them? 2. How have these three things supported you or hindered you on your life journey thus far? 3. Read pages 107–38 for homework.

LEARNING GOAL:

Return to the afterword for a final understanding of crookedness

TASK	SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Gather	<p>Teacher will read aloud the afterword for <i>Scratching River</i>. After that, learners will consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now that you have completed the book, how does the afterword land for you? 2. Did reading the afterword prior to reading the novel help your understanding of the flow of the book?
Synthesize	<p>Invite learners in groups of three to consider the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was your favourite part of the book? Why? 2. What themes were present in the book? 3. Was the book easy to follow? Why or why not? 4. How did you feel about its crookedness in the end?
Transfer	<p>Have two or three students each read a part of this quote.</p> <p>“The act of writing one’s story is incredibly powerful; it is like being swept up in a strong current. I am not the same person I was. There is a purity in the fragmented nature of this manuscript that I can’t return to. It was written as I was uncovering the shards. I hadn’t begun piecing any of it together. I didn’t have any story for the teenage rage and grief that shook me to my core. This manuscript is honest and jagged. Now, when I try to return to edit or tinker with the manuscript, I bring the healing I’ve worked for as well as the broad understanding of the fuller narrative in which my stories and my brother’s stories live. And because I now bring all this with me, I can’t return to those months when my memories of this time knocked me over as I was writing them. I can’t tell it like it was then because it is no longer like that” (Porter, 144).</p> <p>Invite learners to engage in stream of consciousness writing based on the above quote by considering the following questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What emotions are evoked when reading this quote? 2. What memories might this quote bring up for you? What “shards” might it be uncovering in your own life? 3. Do you believe that “this manuscript is honest and jagged?” Why or why not? 4. How might you write your own memoir of a specific time and place in your life?

CULMINATING TASK

POSSIBLE IDEAS FOR A CULMINATING TASK

- Create a body of water timeline of a memory when you were 14 years old.
- Create a visual art piece that demonstrates what water represents to you. Consider how water reflects a memory.
- Create a spoken-word piece that illustrates a pivotal moment from when you were 14 years old.
- Create a short story about a pivotal moment from when you were 14 years old. Examples may include: Learning a new skill, a break-up with a friend or partner, loss of a friend or family member, winning an important game, winning a championship, getting into an argument or conflict with someone close to you.

POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS:

Read *Brother* by David Chariandy and do a comparison/contrast as it is a Canadian novel which also has a close connection to the land. Build on the relationship strand in the curriculum by looking at relationships to land, family as well as relationships and connections with the Black Canadian diaspora.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations refer to learning strategies, tools, supports, and/or services that are required in order for a learner to access the curriculum and demonstrate learning. *Instructional Accommodations* refer to changes in learning and teaching strategies that allow learners to access the curriculum. *Environmental Accommodations* refer to changes that are required to the classroom and/or school environment so that learners can learn in a safe and inclusive environment. *Assessment Accommodations* refer to changes and flexibility in assessment strategies that are required in order for learners to demonstrate learning.

Additional Considerations for Program Planning in Native Studies can be found on pages 80–81 in the *Ontario Curriculum: Native Studies, 2000*.

EXAMPLES OF ACCOMMODATIONS

Instructional Accommodations

- Buddy/peer tutoring
- Note-taking assistance
- Duplicated notes
- Contracts
- Reinforcement incentives
- High structure
- Partnering
- Ability grouping
- Augmentative and Alternative Communications Systems
- Assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software
- Graphic organizers
- Non-verbal signals
- Organization coaching
- Time management aids
- Mind maps
- Increased breaks
- Concrete/hands-on material
- Manipulatives
- Tactile tracing strategies
- Gesture cues
- Dramatizing information
- Visual cueing
- Large size font
- Tracking sheets
- Colour cues
- Reduced/uncluttered format
- Computer options
- Spatially cued formats
- Repeat information
- Reword/rephrase information
- Allow processing time
- Word retrieval prompts
- Recorded texts

Environmental Accommodations

- Alternative workspace
- Strategic seating
- Instructor proximity
- Reduced audio/visual stimuli
- Study carrel
- Minimize background noise
- Quiet setting
- Use of headphones
- Special lighting
- Assistive devices or adaptive equipment
- Extended time limits
- Verbatim scribing
- Oral responses, including audio files
- Alternative settings
- Increased breaks
- Prompts to return attention to task

Assessment Accommodations

- Augmentative and Alternative Communications Systems
- Assistive technology, such as speech-to-text software
- Large size font
- Colour cues
- Reduced/uncluttered format
- Computer options
- Processing time allowed



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