

Bringing Métis Children's Literature to Life— Peter Fidler and the Métis

Author: Donna Lee Dumont
Illustrator: Donna Lee Dumont

Overview of Story: *Peter Fidler and the Métis* is a primer on Métis history and culture for middle years readers. The book is the personal reflection of Métis artist and author Donna Lee Dumont on her ancestor, Peter Fidler. Peter Fidler was a Hudson's Bay Company explorer and mapmaker, who often travelled with his Cree wife, Mary Mackegonne.

Themes in this book:

- Métis history
- Métis lifestyle: clothing, beadwork, medicines
- Traditional occupations
- Early transportation
- Role of women
- Fur trade

Possible Curriculum connections:

Language Arts

- Comprehend and respond
- Nonfiction

Mathematics

- Currency calculations

Science

- Seasonal changes
- Plants and animals
- Environmental impacts
- Weather and geological resources

Arts Education

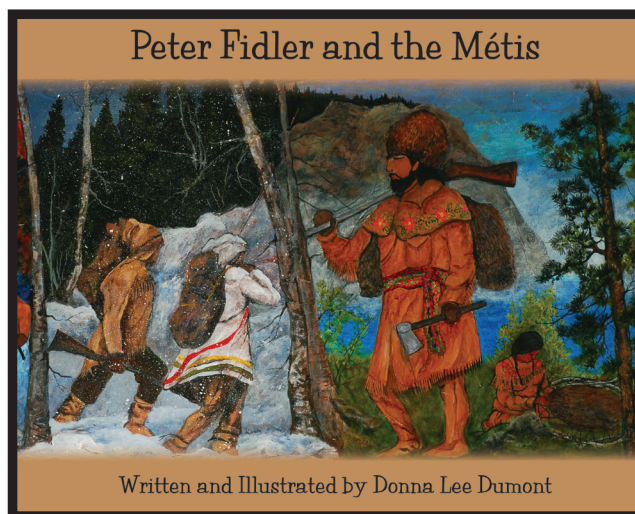
- Artist study

Health/Physical Education

- Medicines

Social Studies

- Cultural identity and traditions
- Relationship to land
- Sustainability
- Influences of Canadian identity



Before Reading: Show the students an early map of Rupert's Land (<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/01825>), and discuss what the area is presently called. Discuss the geography of the area, the climate, and the animals found in the area (focus on the beaver) and the reason for Europeans to come to Canada. Speculate on would it be like to live in the late 1700s and 1800s.

During Reading: In partners or in small groups using the jigsaw format have students read and record the "gist" or **synthesis** of each paragraph (you have assigned to them) on the sticky in two to five words (Read in chunks). Depending on the assigned "chunk" students are reading, have them focus on specific focus areas for comprehension. Here are some areas of focus: Peter Fidler, women and children, hardships of living in a new land, survival techniques, support from local First Nations, transportation, the Métis today, moss bag and decoration, medicinal plants, and food/clothing of the era.

After Reading: Bring the students together and reform groups. Ensure there is someone representing each focus in the new groups. Once groups are formed, have them share their information with their new members. In this way students are able to present what they know based on the information recorded on his/her sticky.

Additional post-reading activities for Peter Fidler:

Recruitment Poster: The Hudson's Bay Company advertised for fur traders and labourers from the United Kingdom to work in Canada. Create a poster to entice future employees to travel to York Factory for employment. What kind of poster do you think they created?

- Brainstorm ideas about the "perks" of relocating to Canada (York Factory).
- Brainstorm words that could be used to entice someone to a land new to them.
- Have students create and design a recruitment poster for the Hudson's Bay Company. (Students may need to do a bit more research)
- Share the posters

Background information to prepare the students might include some history about what was happening in England at the time (Industrial Revolution, "Clearings" in Scotland and Ireland*, improvements in transportation, colonization of new lands, and the great demand for beaver hats.)

Made Beaver Lesson: Background Information: Share with the students the creation of "Made Beaver" currency. Early in the Fur Trade era, Europeans began trading with First Nations and Inuit, and later, the Métis. They realized money was worthless to First Nations and Inuit people, who wanted trade goods such as metal knives and axes. The beaver pelt became a **currency**. Tokens were made to represent the value of a beaver pelt. The Hudson's Bay Company established a system that calculated how much one "made" **beaver pelt** was worth compared to other furs and goods. After a large beaver skin had been cleaned and stretched for trading it was known as a "Made Beaver," or 1 M.B. Trappers were given a "Made Beaver" token when he/she traded furs. Tokens were sometimes made of brass or copper, and were spent like cash at the Hudson's Bay Company posts. Company traders and Indigenous hunters and trappers would each try to get more than the standard allowed. Here are some tables showing the cost of supplies using beaver pelts as currency.

*For an introduction on the "clearings", visit: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pictou/clearncs.htm>.



The “Made Beaver” Currency

Supplies	Value of Supplies in Beaver Pelts
2.25 kg of sugar	1 beaver pelt
1 gun	12 beaver pelts
2 scissors	1 beaver pelt
20 fish hooks	1 beaver pelt
1 pair of shoes	1 beaver pelt

1 equals ...	2 foxes
1 equals ...	1 lynx
1 equals ...	1 wolf
2 equals ...	1 moose
1 equals ...	1 black bear
1 equals ...	2 deer

flour =	_____ tokens
sugar =	_____ tokens
tea =	_____ tokens
cloth =	_____ tokens
ax =	_____ tokens
pot =	_____ tokens
flint =	_____ tokens

- Have students create a supply list based on the necessities of that era.
- Have students then calculate how many “Made Beaver” or how many beaver pelts they would need to purchase their supplies (based on the table above).
- Have students switch their supply list with a partner (without the answer), then figure out what he/she would need to spend. Once done, share the correct responses.
- Discuss why the beaver is such an important Canadian symbol.

Supply, Demand, & Extinction Simulation:

- Print or copy the image of the beaver (over 100 small beaver images). Cut so you have one image per card.
- Place the beaver cards around the room. In Fishbowl format, have six of the students become the “fur trappers,” two students to be “fur traders,” and the rest of the class become observers.
- Set the stage with the group. They are fur trappers. Give the “fur trappers” 30 seconds to go out and collect as many beaver as possible. Return and have them spend their earnings on supplies by trading furs in for made beaver tokens and for essentials with the fur traders.
- Repeat this sequence several times until the beaver are all gone. However, they will need to keep buying supplies.
- Switch roles with the “viewers” and create a new scenario.
- Discuss what happens when the supply of beaver is depleted (extinction and economic survival).
- How might the students harvest beavers so they become a sustainable natural resource?



