

Bringing Métis Children's Literature to Life—Métis Dance

Purpose: This resource provides access to traditional and contemporary Métis culture that is visual, kinaesthetic, literary, and fun! We acknowledge, that for many, instructing dance may be a challenge, therefore we have created an easy to use teacher-friendly guide accompanied by pieces of literature. This unit will empower Saskatchewan teachers to integrate Métis cultural teachings in their curriculum.

Introduction: Before you begin this series of mini units, do not hesitate to identify and consult resource people in your region. You should be able to access them through your school division office. If not, contact GDI for assistance. These lessons are easy to use.

It is important to familiarize yourself with some Métis history prior to starting the unit. We have included a mini lesson with an easy to use resource to help you understand Métis culture. Please refer to *The Métis Alphabet Book/ The Métis: A Visual History—Introduction to Métis Culture* for assistance. These lessons are intended to be adapted for any grade level.

Curriculum Connections:

In all grades students will explore Métis cultural expressions to “create movements and movement patterns in response to stimuli such as stories, poems, music, or objects as starting points.” They will “create short dance phrases using the elements of dance including: actions (locomotor and nonlocomotor), body (whole and parts), dynamics (different ways of moving), relationships (explore variety) and space (awareness of pathways, levels, sizes, shapes), including “music expressions and contribute to decisions about ideas, sounds, instruments, and order.” Incorporating Métis dance into your program fulfills many Arts Education outcomes and indicators. Not only will you fulfill Arts Education outcomes, you will also fulfill some Physical Education outcomes too. Students will “explore and demonstrate rhythmical movement in response to different rhythms and dance patterns using locomotor skills and non-locomotor skills (E.g.: Métis dance).”

A Brief History of the Red River Jig

Of all the Métis songs and tunes, the “Red River Jig” is the most famous. Known as the Métis National Anthem by many, you can hear the “Call of the Fiddle” from Île-à-la-Croix to the Qu'Appelle Valley. The “Red River Jig” originated in the 1800s in the Red River area, now known as Winnipeg, Manitoba. The “Red River Jig” combines the step dancing of our French-Canadian ancestors, the jig steps of our Scottish grandfathers and pow-wow steps of our First Nations grandmothers.

The “Red River Jig” is danced in two parts. Part A is your basic jig step or resting step. Part B is your fancy steps or changes. When you hear the change in the music, this is how you know when to do your fancy steps. Traditionally, the “Red River Jig” was done in moccasins, and the footwork was kept extremely low to the ground, and there was minimal movement of the upper body. Elders tell us there were often competitions. Sometimes to end a tie (back in the days of the fur trade) a saucer/cup or a wine glass filled with wine was placed on the dancers' heads, and the dancer who had the most wine left in their glass/cup at the end was declared the winner. Traditionally, there were definite men's steps and women's steps. Many dancers could do as many as 80 changes.



The “Red River Jig” has many different styles, techniques, and movements, and steps vary from community to community. There is no right or wrong way to do it. The goal is to build community and pride in Métis culture, and most of all to have fun. We acknowledge those who continue to preserve the traditional way, but also embrace the contemporary evolution of the culture. To many, the “Red River Jig” is irresistible, and no matter what province, city, town or community you may be in, once the fiddler starts playing, you will be sure to see jiggers on the floor.

Citation: **Métis Legacy—John Arcand Fiddle Fest Program and oral knowledge passed down through learning to jig.**

Métis Dance Kit (Recommended Resource List)

- 10 men's sashes
- 10 women's sashes
- Five Spoons
- (CD) Drops of Brandy
- *Fiddle Dancer* by Anne Patton and Wilfred Burton
- *Dancing in my Bones* by Wilfred Burton and Anne Patton
- *Call of the Fiddle* by Wilfred Burton and Anne Patton
- *The Story of the Rabbit Dance* by Jeanne Pelletier (Book out-of-print, DVD version available with narration)
- Métis Flag/*Flags of the Métis* by Calvin Racette (available on www.metismuseum.ca)
- *Steps in Time 2*

The “Broom Dance” and the “Sash Dance” demonstrations are available as a video resource through the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture.

www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/02316

www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/02317

Dance Lesson #1

Resources needed:

Wooden spoons

Fiddle Dancer (book and CD) by Anne Patton and Wilfred Burton

Before Reading: Introduce the story *Fiddle Dancer*, and engage students with the following questions:

- Have students make **predictions** on what they think is going to happen to Nolin in the story— Will he learn the “Red River Jig”? Will it be easy? Will it be hard? Will he have fun doing it?
- Who has heard the sound of the fiddle? The “Red River Jig” music?
- Tell us about a time you’ve been a little nervous to learn something new? (Think/Pair/Share)

During Reading:

- Read *Fiddle Dancer* out loud to the students. As you read the story have the students listen to see if they can figure out what three steps Mooshoom is teaching Nolin and whether or not it is easy or hard to jig. Alert the students on page 39 to listen to the names of the three steps.
- Introduce new Michif/Cree vocabulary as you read. From the context of the story, stop and ask what they think these words mean (E.g.: Moushoom, Nooshishim, bannock, Koohkoom, etc.) Refer to the glossary for confirmation.



After Reading Lesson #1:

- When finished reading the story, tell students, just like Nolin, they are going to get to move to the fiddle music, listen to the changes and feel the beat of the music “in their bones.”
- Have students respond to the initial question of naming the three steps.
- Have students discuss whether it was easy or hard to learn to jig (think/pair/share) and to have them prove their thinking.
- Stand up and get ready to try to move to the “Red River Jig” music—tell them to move around freely and feel the rhythm of the fiddle—What does it make their feet want to do? Jump, kick, skip ... get them to try different moves.
- Encourage students to move freely to the rhythm of the music. Starting and stopping music (Freeze when music stops).
- Have students take turns playing the spoons to the music while others are dancing.

After Reading Lesson #2:

- Listen for the change in the “Red River Jig” music before dancing. This is important for the students to internalize because they will need to know when to do the fancy step and when to do the resting step. When listening, get the students to do a thumbs up when they hear the change in the music. Practice this for a bit. It will take time for everyone to hear the changes.
- Show different fancy jig steps mentioned in *Fiddle Dancer*. Start out with the bunny step. It is the easiest and everyone can have success with it. Then show them the cross step (you may have to get some to do a march step to this if they can't do it) and then try the Chi Galop. Don't belabour it, as long as the kids are having fun, no need to look for perfection or mastery in the beginning. Practice without the music first.
- Highlight the tempo changes and get the students used to the pattern: resting step, fancy step, resting step, fancy step, etc.
- Dance the “Red River Jig.” Play the music and perform the three steps taught.

Note: This is an excellent way to get the “active” students in your class up and moving. Once taught, you can take quick brain and movement breaks by putting on the music and jiggling by your desk for a couple minutes.

Dance Lesson #2

Resources needed:

Dancing In My Bones by Wilfred Burton and Anne Patton

Spoons

Steps in Time DVD (recommended) or access dancing videos on the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture

Before Reading: Introduce the story *Dancing in My Bones*. This is the second book in a series about a young Métis boy named Nolin and his Mooshum. If the students have not read *Fiddle Dancer*, please read the story beforehand or set it up at in your classroom listening centre for exposure and familiarity.

- Show students where Meadow Lake is on a map—Tell them that Nolin's family is from Meadow Lake so it is the setting of this story. Talk about places of origins with students and track where children's families are from on a map of Saskatchewan.
- Engage students with the following questions: Does anyone know someone that hunts or traps animals? What do you think they use the animals for?
- Talk about different Traditional Métis foods and the importance of family gatherings.



- Talk about the significance of the Métis sash—Pass sashes around and have students try them on, feel them, look at the colour patterns—even let them jig with them on. Background information on the sash: <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/00741>.

During Reading:

- Read the story or play the CD and have the students listen to *Dancing in My Bones*.
- Stop a few times in the story to discuss in large group or Think/Pair/Share how Nolin is feeling about showing the jig steps to the rest of his family. (Stop on the page where Nolin is staring out the window, Nolin tapping Uncle Bunny on the shoulder, Mooshoom motioning for Nolin to come and dance with everyone, and the last page of the book.)
- Discuss any new Michif/Cree vocabulary with the students in context as you read—using the definitions at the back of the book to assist with words and meanings.

After Reading:

- Once finished the reading, to generate excitement, ask them if they feel like they have dancing in their bones. For comprehension, ask to see who remembers how many steps Nolin learned. Tell the students that like Nolin they are going to learn the “Red River Jig.”
- Begin teaching the basic jig step (1, 2, 3, scuff) (1, 2, 3, scuff). If the students are having difficulty with the resting step, have them rock from side to side to the beat by first placing their weight on the right foot, then the left, alternating back and forth.
- Use the *Steps in Time* resource, which is available on the DVD or on the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture (<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/02393>). This will describe how to do the basic step—you can also connect to YouTube so the students have an idea of what the step looks like (For teachers who are new to jigging figure it out together). Don't spend too much time on the resting step as it will progress with practice. Get to the fancy steps quickly as they are the most fun.
- Review the three fancy steps from *Fiddle Dancer* (cross step, bunny step, and Chi-galop) “Chi Galop”—One foot in front of the other. Right then left—imitating a little gallop or rocking motion. Cross-step—cross over to opposite side, and the bunny step—feet together, hop forward and backward.
- Talk to the students about feeling proud of themselves when they have tried something new. Have a classroom discussion about what makes students proud and why they think Nolin's family was proud of him.

Dance Lesson #3

Resources needed:

- *Call of the Fiddle* by Wilfred Burton and Anne Patton
- Spoons
- *Steps in Time* DVD (recommended) or access to Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture

Before Reading:

- Introduce the story, *Call of the Fiddle*, and inform students that this is the third book in a series about a young Métis boy named Nolin and his Mooshum. If students have not read *Fiddle Dancer* or *Dancing in My Bones*, please read the story beforehand.
- Share that Nolin is a boy who loves to dance the “Red River Jig” and spend quality time with his Mooshum. Nolin and his family are proud of their Métis heritage and traditions. Nolin gets to show his Métis pride by entering his very first jigging competition at the annual Métis celebration at *Back To Batoche* days.



- Purpose for listening: What jig steps does Nolin perform? Does Nolin win the competition? What are the sights and sounds of Batoche?

During Reading:

- Read or play audio of the story *Call of The Fiddle*.
- The setting changes in this story. As you listen to the story, visualize the area where *Back to Batoche* days is held. While listening to the story, draw the setting on your paper. Listen carefully. Stop from time to time to hear what students have been drawing (big tents, roads, campers, church, river, etc.). At the end of story, discuss and have them add important features that were forgotten.
- Stop in the middle of the story and discuss, "It wasn't a good time for our people ..."
- On the last page of the story stop and discuss respectful behaviours demonstrated by Mooshoom and Nolin in the story. Before reading the last page, talk about what one does when others have won and you haven't. What respectful behaviour would you demonstrate?

After Reading:

- Review a basic jig step (1, 2, 3, scuff) (1, 2, 3, scuff) Recommendation—Have a video and a "resource person." To describe the basic step, connect to YouTube so students have an idea of what the step looks like. (For teachers who are new to jigging, explore inquiry-based learning with students "Let's learn this and figure it out together.") Free access for teachers on YouTube.
- Review the "Bannock Jig" from *Fiddle Dancer* and *Dancing in My Bones*—"Chi Galop"—One foot in front of the other. Right then left—imitating a little gallop. Cross-step—cross feet over to the opposite side. Bunny step—hop forward and back.
- Learn three new steps in *Call of the Fiddle*: back cross, heel toe, and inside kick. (Pg. 34).
- Have a "Red River Jig" competition—Give each other constructive feedback on each other's "Red River Jig" moves—two positives and one constructive suggestion to work on. To ensure full class participation have those students who do not want to jig (because they feel uncomfortable competing), play the spoons, or be the "fiddle" player—controlling the sound system and of course be the judges.

Dance Lesson #4

Make Up Your Own Jig Step Lesson:

There are many different jig steps and combinations of jig steps. Once the students know some basic steps practiced in the previous four lessons, they can then create their own.

- Have students choose their own groups.
- Give them a few minutes to practice the introductory jig steps they've just learned.
- Sit everyone down and discuss how people create their own steps or combine steps to create new ones. You may want to show YouTube videos or videos of jiggers from the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture.
- In their small groups have them come up with a sequence of steps (a routine) to show others. Encourage them to create some of their own steps.
- Give time for practice
- Have the students demonstrate their steps to the rest of the groups.
- Have the audience give positive feedback to the group.

Jigging is for fun and can be done by anyone.



Extensions:

1. Practice eight different jig steps over time and then perform them at an assembly.
2. Create a Jigging Club that meets a half hour every week. Teach new fancy jig steps and have them create combinations of jig steps.
3. Have a “Jig-Off” where two people compete to see who can do the most changes.
4. Teach another class how to do different jig steps (match one-on-one).

Contemporary Dances—The “Sash Dance”/The “Broom Dance”

Bag of Sashes—Classroom Set (20) 10 men's 10 women's

Have students review the basic jig step—1, 2, 3, scuff ... Video Resource—Link: The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture—<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/02392>.

The “Sash Dance”

Video Resource—The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture

Link: <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/02317>

- In groups of two or individually, have the students place two sashes on the floor in a cross formation. They will then dance the basic step (to the “Red River Jig” music) in a circle around the two sashes on the floor.
- When the tempo changes, the dancers will do fancy steps in each quadrant.
- As soon as the tempo changes the dancer repeats dancing in a circular fashion around the sashes. Repeat the pattern of basic step around the sashes and fancy steps in the quadrants of the sashes.

The “Broom Dance”

Video Resource—The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture

Link: <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/02316>

The “Broom Dance” can be done in various ways. Here are two of the common ways in which to perform the “Broom Dance.”

Option #1:

- In groups of two or individually, have the students dance (to the “Red River Jig” music) in a circle using the basic step, and at the same time swish the broom, mimicking the sweeping of the floor.
- When the tempo changes, the students will stand in one spot and hold the broom in one hand, kick over the broom with one leg, quickly switching the broom to the other hand and kick with the other leg. This is a weaving motion of the infinity symbol. In other words, the student hops over the broom with one leg and then the other, switching hands on the broomhandle, until the tempo changes.
- Continue the pattern of the basic step, then when the tempo changes hop over the broom. Do the basic step then hop over broom until the music stops.

Option #2:

- In groups of two or individually, have the students dance (to the “Red River Jig” music) the basic step in a circle swishing the broom (mimicking the sweeping of the floor).
- When the tempo changes, drop the broom on the floor and dance back and forth over the broom using a fancy jig step, one step on one side of the broom, and then another step on the other side of the broom.
- When the tempo changes dance in a circle around the broom until the tempo changes again, then repeat a fancy step, alternating sides of the broom.

Métis dancing information: <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/06729>.

