



Artwork by George Gingras

## M is for Michif

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The Métis' ancestors were **First Nations**, Europeans, and Euro-Canadians. The Métis developed a unique culture based on **First Nations**, French Canadian, and Scottish **traditions**. During the fur trade, the Métis were often used as language translators. They could do this because they knew how to speak First Nations languages like **Cree (Nêhiyawêwin/Nihithawîwin/Nêhinawêwin)**, **Sioux (Dakota)** or **Saulteaux (Nakawē)**, as well as French, English, and Scots-Gaelic. From the Métis' ability to speak several languages, Michif emerged around 1770-1800.

**Michif** is very distinct. It consists mostly of Cree verbs and French nouns. There are two other languages that the Métis also call "Michif." The first is spoken in **Îlé-à-la Crosse** and in other communities in northwest Saskatchewan. It is made up almost entirely of Cree with some French words. The second is a dialect of French with a few Cree and Saulteaux words. It is spoken in **St. Laurent**, Manitoba and around **Batoche**, Saskatchewan. Métis people sometimes call themselves "Michif." The word "Michif" is a form of the French word "métis," which means people of mixed race.

Until recently, non-Aboriginal people made fun of the Métis for speaking Michif in the school system and in the community. This teasing led many Métis to be ashamed of their **identity**. Moving to cities also meant that most Métis lost their Michif language and culture. Today, passing on the Michif language to young people is a concern for many Métis. Michif speakers and Métis institutions are producing Michif-language books, music, and websites.

### Other Resources:

Ahenakew, Vince. *Nêhiyawêwin Masinahikan: Michif\*/Cree Dictionary*. Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. Northern Michif to Go. (Available from Google Play, Apple App Store, and online at [http://www.metismuseum.ca/northern\\_michif\\_dictionary.php](http://www.metismuseum.ca/northern_michif_dictionary.php)).

Fleury, Norman. *Michif Dictionary 2013*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. Michif to Go. (Available from Google Play, Apple App Store, and online at [http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif\\_dictionary.php](http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_dictionary.php)).

Oaks, Harriet. (Narrator). *The Story of the Crescent Lake Métis: Our Life on the Road Allowance*. Video. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2003.

*The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* ([www.metismuseum.ca/michif\\_tools.php](http://www.metismuseum.ca/michif_tools.php)).

