

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Elder	Lillian Pitawanakwat
Nation	Ojibwe/Potawatami
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Intermediate (Grades 7-9)
Time Required	3 – 4 hours
Subject Strand Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geography • Natural Science • Botany • Astronomy • Art
Traditional Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Medicine Wheel • Tradition • The Four Directions • The Centre of the Wheel • The Four Sacred Medicines • The Seven Stages of Life
Student Summary	<p><u>The Medicine Wheel</u></p> <p>Medicine Wheels made of stones arranged on the Earth have been found in various places throughout North America, marking places of special significance, such as places of energy, ceremony, meeting, meditation, teaching, and celebration. Some estimate that there were about 20,000 Medicine Wheels in North America before European contact occurred. Some Medicine Wheels on the prairies have been found to be 5,000 years old or more.</p> <p>The Medicine Wheel is, in essence, a circle divided into four parts, representing the Four Directions, which relate to and counterbalance one another to form a whole; this symbol is used to represent Aboriginal philosophy on the meaning of life. Medicine Wheels are not necessarily a tradition belonging to all North American Aboriginal peoples; however, many Aboriginal groups have some variation of the Wheel. Nevertheless the traditional knowledge and views of the various first peoples of North America typically share a circular model of thinking.</p> <p>As a whole, the Medicine Wheel represents the relationships between various elements of the world, both seen and unseen, and emphasizes how all parts of the world and all levels of being are interrelated and connected through a life force originating in the creation of the universe. According to the Ojibwe, there are seven teachings within each quadrant of the wheel and each has sub-teachings as well. All parts of the wheel are important, and depend on each other in the cycle of life;</p>

what affects one affects all. For this reason, the Medicine Wheel teaches that harmony, balance and respect for all parts are needed to sustain life.

Tradition

Tradition is knowledge or ways of doing things that are taught by older people - or Elders - who have worked and studied many years with Elders that came before them to understand the traditions.

The Four Directions

Each quadrant of the Medicine Wheel represents one of four cardinal directions. The Ojibwe believe that the East represents the springtime and the beginning of all life, changing from spirit to human; the journey starts there. The journey continues to the South, the summer stage, to the West, the death stage, and then to the North, the rebirth stage. This cycle continues in a clockwise motion around the Medicine Wheel, following the rising and setting of the sun, with the Four Directions serving as primary directional, or guiding, forces.

The Centre of the Wheel

From the perspective of traditional Aboriginal philosophy, the centre of the Medicine Wheel symbolizes the self in balance on its life journey. The central place of the Medicine Wheel is where one seeks to develop a holistic vision and understanding of creation and connection to all things.

The Ojibwe believe that the Centre of the Wheel is represented by a flame and it is our responsibility to nurture this fire by reconciling conflicts with others and making peace within ourselves. Through reflection, meditation, awareness, acceptance and surrender, we are able to live balanced and whole lives.

The Four Sacred Medicines

To give thanks each day to those things that are needed to sustain life, traditional Ojibwe people take a small handful of tobacco and place it in a clean place on the earth or on the shore of a lake. In this way, the Ojibwe thank nature and Creation, for giving the breath of life. Tobacco is represented by the East on the Medicine Wheel.

Cedar is used as a traditional medicine often prepared as a tea to cleanse the body and mind and spirit of things not needed on life's journey. Cedar is represented by the South on the Medicine Wheel.

Sage is represented by the West on the Medicine Wheel and is used for cleansing as well, burnt to

	<p>use the smoke as a wash over the body.</p> <p>Sweet grass is represented by the North on the Medicine Wheel and is used to invite positive energy.</p> <p><u>The Seven Stages of Life</u> Approximately every seven years of life are considered to relate to a stage in life's journey, beginning with the Good Life. At this stage the child is attended to by loving family members who provide unconditional support. The Fast Life is when the child is being prepared for their four-day vision quest, or fast, at the time of puberty. The Wandering Life is where the youth develops, questions, and continues to grow. The Truth Stage is when the youth has matured and is able to speak with knowledge of self. The Planning Stage requires the adult to work with this knowledge to lead his/her life. The Doing Stage is when one puts all his/her life knowledge into practice. In the Elder Stage one is expected to share knowledge through the teaching of younger generations.</p>
<p>Learner Objectives</p>	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the Ojibwe as an Aboriginal people with traditional beliefs • To develop awareness of the natural environment through the identification of the Four Cardinal Directions and the Four Seasons • To recognize the cyclical nature of the four seasons in relation to the earth's orbit • To identify the Four Sacred Medicines of the Medicine Wheel • To relate the Four Sacred Colours of the Medicine Wheel to the Four Cardinal Directions • To describe the meaning behind the Seven Stages of Life • To become familiar with the meanings of the terms "Medicine Wheel", "sacred", "traditional", and "interconnected" <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To appreciate the unique attributes, or gifts, of each of the four directions • To recognize that the four seasons make a whole which repeats in a cycle year after year • To recognize the Medicine Wheel as an Aboriginal symbol with an ancient history • To appreciate that the Four Directions are consistent and everlasting and that each individual has a central perspective within these directions • To relate the concept of spiritual connection as it applies to the teachings and sub-teachings of the Medicine Wheel <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To physically identify the Four Cardinal Directions • To physically demonstrate the movement of the sun • To navigate the internet with some measure of control

<p>Strategy</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post a very large sheet labeled “Spring” on the eastern wall of the classroom. Post a sheet labeled “Summer” on the southern wall of the classroom, a sheet for “Fall” on the western wall of the classroom, and one for “Winter” on the northern wall of the classroom. As the students arrive for class, ask them to move to the side of the room representing the season that is their favourite. Generate a discussion based on which season is most popular among the class. Why is this your favourite season? What do you like to do at that time? What do you not like about the other seasons? Why? 2. Each group can work as a team to decorate the sign that is on their wall, drawing symbols to identify what the group likes best about the season they chose. Then have them add the months of the year for their seasons respectively. 3. Explain that Aboriginal people have <i>traditional</i> teachings to share, given to them thousands of years ago and passed down through the generations. Aboriginal people have always had a close, <i>spiritual</i>, relationship to nature, having depended on it for survival. It was (and in some places is still) important to know the seasons to know when to hunt, to trap, to grow plants, to make shelters, etc. Different times of the year pose different challenges. Aboriginal people have very highly developed knowledge about the forces of nature and how we are all connected through nature. Aboriginal Elders teach that the four seasons are very special and very important and not just to them but to everyone because all of us share these same four seasons (at least in Canada). The seasons do not change. So traditional Aboriginal people believe that the four seasons are <i>sacred</i>, or blessed, because each season has a spirit and gives us special gifts. The seasons are <i>interconnected</i>. They believe that we must always respect the four seasons. What are the gifts of the seasons? What are the challenges of the seasons? 4. Explain that in addition to the seasons, the Ojibwe people have traditional teachings about the sacredness of the four directions, as they recognize the value of the sun for physical survival. Why? What are the gifts of the sun? To keep warm, to have light, to grow food. So the Ojibwe respect the sun which rises each day - in which direction? It travels across the sky in which direction? It sets in which direction? And the cycle repeats the next day. And the next day after that. So the Four Directions are considered to be forces that provide guidance. The directions are interconnected. Where does the sun rise? Everybody point in that direction. Ask the spring group to add “East” to their poster. Now ask which direction does the sun travel? Everybody point in that direction. Ask the summer group to add “South” to their poster. Now ask which direction does the sun set each night? Everybody point in that direction. Ask the fall group to add “West” to their poster. Finally ask which direction does the sun return to start the cycle again? Everybody point north. Ask the winter group to add “North” to their poster. Four directions make the sun’s cycle complete,
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balanced.

5. Face East again, as the cycle is complete. Did we change our position? No, we stayed in the centre, because we are always in the centre. Even if we move left or right, we are always in the middle of the Four Directions. So this is important to remember according to traditional teachings because it reminds us that we are spiritually connected to the Four Directions. We cannot escape them. They are part of us and we are part of them. That means everything around us is connected to us, and we are connected to everything around us and to each other. Post the four signs where they were before and have the students tour the room like in an art gallery to look at the other posters up close.
6. Returning to the original seasons groups, explain that Ms. Lillian Pitawanakwat is an Ojibwe Elder who has traditional teachings to share with the class about the Four Directions and the four seasons. She wants to teach the *Medicine Wheel* to the class from the internet. What is medicine? We use medicine to heal us; it is good for us; it keeps us strong and healthy. This looks like a wheel because it is round and each part is the same size. Aboriginal people originally placed rocks in a formation on the ground to mark places of special spiritual significance and to use for prayer. The Medicine Wheel has been a symbol for generations to remember and respect the Four Directions and the good things that the sun and the seasons bring us every day. The Medicine Wheel represents all that is interconnected.
7. Read the summary above.
8. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com together as a class to read the Elder's biography. Who can pronounce the elder's name? Ms. Pitawanakwat comes from Manitoulin Island in Ontario. Does anyone know where that is? Has anyone ever been there?
9. Individually or in pairs have students listen to the Elder's teachings, "The East – Waubunong," "The South – Zhawanong," "The West – Epingishmook," "The North – Kiiwedining," and "The Centre of the Wheel."
10. Discuss the teachings and the colour associations with each direction. Colour the posters appropriately: East (Yellow); South (Red); West (Black); and North (White). Why might these colours be used to represent these directions?
11. Now have the students move to the side of the room representing their favourite colour. The Elder had another teaching to share about the Medicine Wheel. There are four plants that Aboriginal people consider sacred, spiritual, and they burn them in ceremonies following ancient practices. Start with the Yellow group. What did she say about their sacred plant? Add "Tobacco" to the yellow poster. Continue to the Red group. Add "Cedar" to the red poster. Continue to the Black group. Add "Sage" to the black poster. Continue to the White group. Add "Sweet grass" to the white poster. Why are these plants considered to be medicinal?

12. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com together as a class to hear the Elder's teachings on the seven stages of life. Discuss the names of the stages and how they relate to the time periods in question.

13. Wrap up lesson with a selection of discussion topics and optional exercises below.

Discussion Topics:

- Paying respect to the Four Directions is done through a gift of tobacco, in the traditional Aboriginal custom. Why do traditional Ojibwe people consider this to be an act of humility? Why do they consider tobacco to be a medicine? How does this compare to modern society's view of tobacco?
- Aboriginal people have traditionally recognized humanity's dependency on nature but modern society has a different view of the importance of the natural elements. What happens when we lose respect for nature? What are the effects of polluting our water systems and the air we breathe? What happens when people work together all around the world to preserve nature?
- Ms. Pitawanakwat refers to the Seven Stages of Life that are found on the Medicine Wheel. When the Ojibwe say that each of us was gifted with seven stages of life, what does that mean? Is this ancient theory meant to be taken literally? How do these stages relate to the Medicine Wheel as a *continuum*?

Optional Exercises:

- Draw a Medicine Wheel which captures all of the teachings above in brief. Start with a circle, then the four quadrants. Relate in writing the relationships between the rings of the Medicine Wheel.
- Choose the part of the Medicine Wheel most interesting (e.g. the four seasons, the four directions, the four colours, or the four sacred medicines) and, in a journal, summarize the teaching. What was surprising about this information? Was it confusing?
- Bring in potted plants of cedar, tobacco (or a package of pipe tobacco), sage, and sweet grass (or a sweet grass braid) to view in class or visit a garden centre together. Examine the differences between the plants in size, shape, colour, feel and smell. Grow these plants in class or plant outside in a special garden marked "Four Sacred Medicines."
- Research the vocabulary words in a dictionary and study the meanings.
- Create Medicine Wheel models using leather, paints, yarn, etc.
- Invite an Aboriginal Elder to the class to discuss the Medicine Wheel from his/her perspective – see Teacher Resource Kit for information on protocol.
- Listen to Vivaldi's concerto "Four Seasons". Ask students to describe the differences in the

	<p>sounds in each season in a poem. Type the poems and create a class book, "The Four Seasons". Make a copy for each student.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a walk in a conservation area, park, wetland, etc. Collect samples of earth and water to do an in-class study of microscopic life forms. • Do an internet search of literary/poetic quotes pertaining to the elements. Print them out with the poets' names and post them on the respective walls of the classroom with art design illustrating the respective elements. • Execute a different seasonal exercise each month highlighting natural materials such as food products in season or leaves (see links below). • Visit related websites that explain the solar system and the changing of the seasons from a scientific perspective (see links below).
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine Wheel • Sacred • Traditional • Spiritual • Interconnected • Continuum
Materials Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very large sheets of paper, tape, markers or crayons. • Other arts and crafts materials.
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self evaluation of participation by students. Did I share ideas with my groups? Did I listen to others? Did I make the effort to understand the Elder? Did I give others a chance to speak? Did I complete the reading? 2. Teacher evaluation of poems. Did the student identify four related Medicine Wheel elements? Did the poem capture the essence of the teaching? Was the spelling correct? 3. Parent evaluation of journal writing. Did the parent understand the teaching based on the student's summary? Was the summary clear? Which part did the parent find interesting?

Diagram for OJIBWE Curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

