



Revised 12/2/2024

Title: Who Are the Métis?

Grade Level: 3rd-6th grades

Subject(s): Social Studies/Montana State History

Duration: Thirty to fifty minutes

Description: This PowerPoint lesson provides an introduction to an important Montana cultural group: the Métis.

Goals: Student will be able to explain the roots of Métis culture and know that Métis people still live in Montana today.

Content Standards:

- MCSS.G.3.1. Examine maps and other representations to identify historical and contemporary political and cultural patterns in the Americas.
- MCSS.H.4.1. Understand tribes in Montana have their own unique histories.
- MCSS.H.4.1. Identify events and policies that have impacted and been influenced by tribes in Montana.
- MCSS.H.4.3. Explain how Montana has changed over time given its cultural diversity and how this history impacts the present.
- MCSS.H.5.3. Identify roles of individuals and groups and their impact on United States and tribal historical events.

Materials:

PowerPoint (which you can download from <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/MetisFinal.pptx> and script, below, starting on page 2.

Laser pointer (optional)

Laptop projector

Procedure:

Review the script (printed below and also included in the “notes” field) and PowerPoint.

Teaching Note: One technique that you may wish to incorporate to encourage analysis of select images is Visual Thinking Strategies. A great way to engage students in analyzing images, the technique uses open-ended questions and paraphrasing “to create student-driven and engaging group discussion environments” while encourage students to back up their ideas with evidence “while considering and building off the contributions and perspectives of their peers.” (vtshome.org) Brief [instructions for implementing the technique](#) can be found here.

Who Are the Métis? PowerPoint Script

Slide 1. Title slide.

Slide 2. We often hear of a group in Montana referred to as the Métis (may-tee). Let’s look at where the Métis story begins. Here we see a map showing parts of the United States and Canada. The imaginary line that separates the two countries is the 49th Parallel, also known as the Canada/U.S. Border. To the Métis and other Indigenous (native to a place) Peoples of Canada and the United States, it is sometimes known as “The Medicine Line.”

Slide 3. The Métis (may-tee) are a distinct group of people who grew out of the fur trade, when Europeans came to what’s now Canada in the 1600s. French-Canadian trappers and other European fur traders married and lived with Native women. Their descendants (children, and children’s children) developed a new culture that mixed elements of both European and indigenous (native) cultures. They became known as Métis.

Slide 4. Métis people can trace their ancestry back to First Nations (the people who were first here) and European trappers or settlers (mainly French, Scottish, and Irish). In Canada, the Métis are recognized as Aboriginal Peoples (people who lived in a land from the earliest times) under the Constitution Act of 1982, along with the First Nations and Inuit peoples. In Montana, they are sometimes also known as the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

Slide 5. As the fur trade grew, intermarriages between First Nations women and European fur trappers increased, so by the 1780s, a new cultural group emerged. Because children born to these marriages didn’t belong wholly to the culture group of either parent, they soon began to blend the two cultures together, establishing their own distinct communities, combining First Nations and European traditions.

Pause and, as a class, analyze this picture. How do you think these people are feeling? What do you see that makes you say that? What emotions is the artist, Sherry Farrell Racette, trying to communicate?

Slide 6. Known at the time as the “in-between” people, the Métis served an important role by helping to build relationships between Euro-Americans and Indian peoples. Because they spoke and understood the languages of both their mothers and fathers, they were able to provide information and help the two groups communicate with each other.

Pause and, as a class, analyze this picture. What’s going on here? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find? How do you think this relates to the Métis?

Slide 7. French-Canadian voyageurs (boatmen) and Métis were the main labor force of the fur trade. They paddled canoes and carried supplies to the fur trading companies, and became known for their distinctive style of dress. Typically, they wore a capote (coat), toque (hat), a beaded pipe bag hung from a multi-colored sash, and leather moccasins. They usually wrapped the sash around their waists like a belt, but when needed, it could be also used as a tow rope or a fastening line. It was so commonly worn by Métis men that it became known as the Métis Sash. This style of dress carried on through the Métis culture.

Slide 8. The Métis people and their communities were connected through the fur trade. Through this shared way of life, they established their own style of dress, language, music, dance, and symbols. Here you see a good example of the mixing of cultural traditions. The clothing is a combination of First Nations and European styles.

Ask: What can you find that reminds you of Native fashion? What can you find that reminds you of European fashion?

The woman on the left wears a dress with an “empire waist,” while the woman on the right wears a paisley shawl, both of which were fashionable in Europe in the early 1800s when this picture was painted. The man wears a European-style coat and hat, with leather leggings and moccasins along with the Métis sash.

Slide 9. Métis women also developed a distinctive style of beadwork that featured patterns of flowers and leaves. They used it to decorate special items of clothing and even gear for their horses. Their style was so admired that the Métis even became known as the “flower beadwork people.”

Slide 10. Besides their colorful sashes, the Métis were identifiable by the two-wheeled carts they used. They were known as Red River carts because they were invented in the Red River area of Canada. The Métis used these carts when they hunted buffalo. They sold both the hides and the meat to the fur trading posts. These carts were often drawn by oxen, but mules and horses were also used, like in this photo. Notice the fresh buffalo hide laced over the rim of the wheel. When this hide dried, it became very hard and served to hold the wheel together, giving it a longer life.

Slide 11. The Métis also developed their own language, combined from their cultural backgrounds (mostly Cree and French). It is called Michif (pronounced mi-chif). Here you see the words from common Montana animals and the names they are called in Michif.

Slide 12. Music was especially important to the Métis, especially fiddle music. Fiddles were originally European instruments.

Slide 13. Along with every culture comes dance, and the Métis have a wonderful way of combining all of their heritages into their dancing. This [video](#) will give you a history of the way their dancing came about.

Slide 14. The Métis Nation in Canada has its own flag. The flag was a gift from Alexander MacDonell of the North West Fur Trading Company in 1814 and has been used to represent the Métis ever since. The flag has a blue background and a white infinity symbol. The infinity symbol represents the mixing of the European immigrants and the First Nations peoples and symbolizes that this culture will live on forever.

Slide 15. In Montana, Métis heritage is represented in the Flag of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana. It was created by James Parker Shield in 2006. In addition to a buffalo and eagle staff, which represents the tribes' Chippewa heritage, the flag has a "fleur de lis" (the yellow symbol on the red background) representing members' French heritage, and a shamrock (green on white) representing their Scottish and Irish heritage.