



# DECISION-MAKING THROUGH MI'KMAW WORLDVIEWS & THE SANTE MAWIO'MI (F14)

## OVERVIEW

Employing Mi'kmaw cultural values and working with a generalized model of Mi'kmaw leadership prior to 1956, students will seek to address a pressing issue taken from oral and written historical records such as the reduced habitat for moose or caribou, growing urban centres in the 19th century, or the 20th century policy of Centralization. The activity will allow students to explore how Mi'kmaw cultural values and leadership roles are integrated into a community-based decision-making process that respects the autonomy of each Saqmaq (Chief) while at the same time seeking consensus across Mi'kmaw districts through the Santé Mawio'mi.

## LEARNERS WILL...

- ▶ Gain an understanding of the Santé Mawio'mi and its primary roles and responsibilities.
- ▶ Be challenged to respect Mi'kmaw decision-making processes based at the family and community level, while seeking consensus for all of Mi'kma'ki.
- ▶ Employ Mi'kmaw core cultural values to problem-solve a known historical dilemma.
- ▶ Grow their understanding of Mi'kmaw experiences with British colonialism
- ▶ Understand how the priority of protecting *netukulimk* during the colonial period affected many aspects of Mi'kmaw life and practice.
- ▶ Appreciate how different cultural contexts lead to different kinds of leadership and decision-making.

## FOCUS

This learning experience should be started with an introductory lesson on Mi'kmaw governance and leadership— the introduction to this session, as well as some of the additional resources we've shared here will be a great place to start. From this introductory lesson, learners will need a working understanding of the primary roles within the Santé Mawio'mi (Kji-Keptin, Keptin, Putu's) as well as a reminder that Mi'kmaw decision-making rests with the Saqmaq (Chiefs) at the community level. Families play an essential role in creating consensus at this community level. (Although Saqmaq are elected after 1956, it is still true today that ultimate decisions rest with individual Saqmaq and Band Councils, while consensus is sought through the Santé Mawio'mi and other avenues.)

Create 7 groups of learners, one for a community from each of the seven districts. Using the role-play cards that are provided in the supplementary materials, assign roles to students in each group. Roles will include the Kji-Saqmaq (Grand Chief), Kji-Keptin (Grand Captain), Keptins (Captains), and Putu's (historical recorder) as well as community members.

**PE!**

It is important that learners engaging in this theme have a clear understanding of the following:

- The Mi'kmaq as the Indigenous people of Nova Scotia and the Atlantic region.
- Mi'kma'ki as the ancestral homeland of the Mi'kmaq.
- The seven Mi'kmaw governance districts of the Santé Mawio'mi.
- Mi'kmaw core cultural values, and in particular, consensus, sharing, non-interference, humility, humour, respect for everyone and non-interference. (See learning experience F8)
- The concepts of *netukulimk* and *ms'it no'kmaq*, and *weji-sqalia'tiek*.
- The oral traditions inherent in Mi'kmaw culture and practice. (See learning experience F10.)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See the introduction to this section on page 16.

Working within their group, learners read their scenario and brainstorm a solution to the challenge presented in the scenario. Learners will need to be reminded that their task is to employ Mi'kmaw cultural values during this process—that is they need to reach consensus with humility and humour, and without demanding or being coercive. Solution should serve the entire community (not just some people), and everyone's voice should be respected in the process.

When an approach has been created for their dilemma, the students appointed to positions within the Santé Mawio'mi should be gathered in the middle of the classroom (with remaining community members observing). The Santé Mawio'mi group then needs to discuss each of the seven dilemmas and its proposed solution. Each member of the Santé Mawio'mi should 1) bring forth the solution for their dilemma given to their group and work to persuade the entire Santé Mawio'mi of its merits, and 2) deliberate on the other dilemmas brought for consideration to the Santé Mawio'mi from other districts. Those individuals who were

not assigned a Santé Mawio'mi role will act as community members, observing the discussion and noting (with humility and humour) where their representative to the Santé Mawio'mi may be straying from the group's original intention. Community members can also note when core Mi'kmaw cultural values are not being employed.

Challenge version: require the deliberation process and solution to be done orally with no written notes or other aids. Each person will need to remember their group's solution. No writing at all!

*Saqmaq,*

*This place where you are, this place where you build your house, here where you build your fortress, this place where you want to own all the land, there is exactly where I sprouted from, I, the native is where I'm from, that is my land; it is a fact that the Creator gives me my territory forever.*

*It is natural then for me to tell you what is in my heart-mind for your reflection. Far be it for the lieutenant to feel any guilt with all his construction in Halifax.*

*My king and your king both have distributed land for themselves; that is why today they have good relations. However, it is strange for me that I do not have the same relationship or have trade with your people. Where then I, a native can I live? You order me out. Where will you have me hide? You have nearly already taken all the land, the entire huge area. All I had left was Halifax. Even that you wish to withhold from me, you even wish for me to leave, which is how we know we will never cease to bicker, nor even be blood related. Your strength originates from your numbers, whereas I am few and nowhere do I acquire my courage but from the Creator. The lieutenant knows to be true that even a small insect knows his worthiness. I a native find it curious as to why I should not be thought of at least a little more highly.*

*I do not believe you will stay in Port Royal forever, because indeed it has been a long time since I had the highest respect for you. However it would now be odd of me not to speak after all you have stolen from me. Soon now I will go to see you. Perhaps truly you will appreciate all that I wish to tell you. If you like my words and I like your words, and if also you carefully consider how favorably you will speak, that is how I will know you want only harmony. So that surely our affairs will right themselves, this is all I say to you. I do not wish to badger you any further.*

*I kiss (embrace) you Chief.*

*This is written in Potlotek on the 5th day before the feast of St. Michael*



## TEACHER TIP

Teachers may need to remind learners to demonstrate respect to the Kji-Saqmaq and other leadership roles. This is not a “play” activity, but a learning one.

Mi'kmaw Saqmaq sent this letter to the British Governor Edward Cornwallis in the fall of 1749. It conveys Mi'kmaw perspectives of land, leadership and British presence in Mi'kma'ki. Versions for classroom use can be found in the supplementary materials.

*Deciphered, translated and transliterated by  
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# MI'KMAW DECISION-MAKING

It is the spring of A.D. 1758. You are living with your large extended family some distance from the coast in a winter camping area. It is time for the plamu (salmon) and alanj (herring) to return to Mi'kma'ki. You, and all of your sukwiskw (aunties) and klamuksiskw (uncles) and many nikma'j (cousins) are returning to the lower part of the river to fish. This is the area where each year your village welcomes the spring in Siwkewiku's (maple sugar time).

The treaty relationship is not as strong as it once was, and you have heard your Elders and family talking of fighting and violence between the Mi'kmaq and the British. Across Mi'kma'ki, the Mi'kmaq are concerned having seen the deportation of the Acadians.



When your village arrives at the bend in the river of your spring village site, you find that a group of English-speaking people have recently cut a large area of trees and plants to build their homes. The medicines, wood, and food of the area have been removed. They have planned their houses on top of the wikuoml locations your community has used for generations.

*Within your groups, you must decide how you are going to respond to these newcomers.*

*Use Mi'kmaw values as you make decisions: work together to reach a decision, honour humility, respect each other and include everyone. Remember that in Mi'kmaw worldview, decisions consider all living beings and the land, not just people.*



Districts are the next level of decision-making. The Santé Mawio'mi, or Grand Council, governs this level with a Putu's, District Keptins, a Kji-Keptin and a Kji-Saqmaw.

Community or village is the next circle of decision-making. Saqmaw are the sovereign leaders of the community. This is still true today.

Extended family is at the centre of decision-making.

## **Roles**

### **Family Members**

Families are large extended kin groups that share a matrilineal clan or totem. They form the core of decision-making. Decisions grow from the involvement of families.

### **Saqmaw/Saqmaq (pl)**

The Saqmaw is the leader of the families that comprise a community or village. Their leadership is the line of sovereignty, today and in the past. This is why there are so many signatories to the treaties and why today the Nation has to work together to respect the sovereignty of each Mi'kmaw community.

### **Putu's**

The Putu's is the recorder of the Nation, through Mi'kmaw oral history and using wampum to record and to communicate important decisions. They have to be keen listeners with amazing memory.

### **District Keptins**

Keptins are selected by the Saqmaq from their district. They carry the messages from their districts to the other districts represented at the Santé Mawio'mi. They work together to achieve consensus, but have to bring back any decisions to each Saqmaw, who is the only sovereign for their community.

### **Kji-Keptin**

The Kji-Keptin (Grand Keptin) supports the Kji-Saqmaw (Grand Chief) with leadership of the Santé Mawio'mi. They often speak on behalf of the Santé Mawio'mi and also carry messages to all the communities regarding issues of the day. They are excellent listeners as well as being gifted in the art of compromise and communication.

### **Kji-Saqmaw**

The Kji-Saqmaw is the Grand Chief of the Nation and carries forth the messages and decision of the Nation both inside and outside of Mi'kma'ki. They guide the Nation in decision-making ensuring the long-view of past experiences is considered and always holding Mi'kmaw values central to decision-making.





## Historical Notes

This scenario is built on real historical experiences of the disruption of Mi'kmaw seasonal mobility after the arrival of the British as well as other newcomers. English-speaking populations were encouraged throughout Mi'kma'ki as an intentional colonial policy to use population growth as a means of land confiscation and disruption.

### How did the Mi'kmaq respond?

The experience of land loss and mobility disruption is one of the most consequential of European contact and colonialism. Different families and communities responded differently.

- Some families avoided newcomers and used their deep knowledge of Mi'kma'ki to keep families and communities together without significant violence. Among other dangers, newcomers brought illness and avoidance was one way of keeping communities safer. One proposal called Belcher's Proclamation set aside a territory within Mi'kma'ki that was only for indigenous people. This "Indian Territory" was never realized, but it was response to encroachment.
- In a number of instances, Mi'kmaw warriors confronted people who disrupted Mi'kmaw lives with violence. The clearing of land damaged the plants, animals and land of Mi'kma'ki from Mi'kmaw perspectives and taking resources out of Mi'kma'ki without sharing other resources freely was seen as an act of aggression. Sharing freely without expectation of anything in return is central to Mi'kmaw culture.
- Lastly, within a couple of years of this story the treaty relationship was renewed through the Treaty of 1761, which was ratified until 1763 by a large number of Mi'kmaw Saqmaq. This Treaty did reduce conflict across Mi'kma'ki, although the British soon "forgot" the treaty relationship. The Treaty of 1761 has been affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada numerous times and is foundational to the treaty relationship.

