

What is a Right?

Readers' Theatre

By Mercedes Peters

Educator Notes:

When we talk about Mi'kmaw rights, and the rights of Indigenous peoples in general, there are two key concepts we need to grasp. The first, is that rights and responsibilities are the same thing. The second is that for Mi'kmaw, rights always extend beyond the individual, and beyond the human.

For Mi'kmaw people, our treaty rights, and the self-determination that UNDRIP was designed to protect, exist so that we can continue the practices that allow us to uphold our responsibilities to *msit no'kmaq*, as they continue to honour their responsibilities to us. This is why Mi'kmaw *Saqmaq* worked hard to protect *msit no'kmaq*, *netukulimk* and other key cultural concepts when they signed the Peace and Friendship Treaties (See the Introduction to Treaty-Making, and LE T4: The Ratification for a refresher.) This is why UNDRIP, with its protections for Indigenous cultural practices, is so important. Our cultural knowledge teaches us what our responsibilities are to one another. This also protects our rights.

By the time learners are ready to perform "What is a Right?" they should have a foundational grasp on *msit no'kmaq* and *netukulimk* as concepts. It is important to understand that Mi'kmaw value the rights of non-human beings, and of the community around them, as much as their own rights as individual people. This value is lived not only in the times where groups of Mi'kmaw come together on large platforms to fight for rights, but in all actions, big and small. In this Readers' Theatre, learners step into the shoes of young students exploring what it means to be rights-holders rooted in everyday experiences, as they link their understanding



of Mi'kmaw rights to a situation where school administrators have decided to remove a mnumkwej (groundhog) from school property.



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Character List:

Narrator	15 lines (Some of the Narrator's lines are the longest in this Readers' Theatre)
Ancestor 1	24 lines
Ancestor 2	26 lines
Kiki	7 lines
TJ	7 lines
Meadow	23 lines
Hudson	16 lines
Adara	24 lines
Saln	18 lines
Principal Arthur	13 lines
Peter from Peter's Pest Control	10 lines
Ms. Martin	8 lines

Note: The Ancestor characters in this Readers' Theatre speak completely in Mi'kmaw. The approximate English translation of their lines is written in italics below the Mi'kmaw text. There are Mi'kmaw words in the English translation as well, and learners of all levels of familiarity with the Mi'kmaw language are encouraged to try their best to say them as they perform the Readers' Theatre. It might be useful to practice key vocabulary words with learners before they perform the Readers' Theatre. Language pronunciation support can be found in the "Additional Resources" kit for this Learning Experience. An audio recording of the Ancestor characters speaking to one another in Mi'kmaw is also available.



What is a Right?

– SCENE 1 –

A Middle School Somewhere in Mi'kma'ki

Narrator: It's a Monday morning in early June, just before school ends for the summer. The grade six students are outside for their morning science class. They have been learning about gardening by taking care of the school's community food garden. They'll help take care of it until school lets out and others in the community take over. When they come back in the fall, they'll learn about harvesting the food that grew over the summer months.

The students love the garden, which sits in the middle of a large grass field behind the school, because they get to sit, observe and learn new things about connecting with wksitqamuk (woog-sit-hah-moog) (The Earth)

Standing behind, watching the students, are two ANCESTORS in spirit. They are invisible to everyone there, but their presence is always felt.

Ancestor 1: Weli eksitpuk, nitap! Me' tawuleyn?
(Weli eg-sit-boog, nee-tap! May tah-woo-lain?)

Ancestor 2: Oh, welei, nitap! Aq ki'l?
(Oh, well-ey, nee-tap! Ahk geel?)

Ancestor 1: Welei (well-ey)!
I love watching the students work in the garden.

Ancestor 2: I agree! It makes me so happy to see how much they're learning

Ancestor 1: [Teasing] You also like eavesdropping.



Ancestor 2: Nothing wrong with being a little nele'k (nay-leg)! Let's listen in!

Kiki: TJ, I swear there were so many dandelions when I played soccer here with Meadow on Saturday! The whole field was yellow. It looked so cool.

TJ: [Skeptical] It looks pretty green to me.

Kiki: [Sadly] "No Mow May" is over, I guess.

Meadow: Ugh, I'm so sad that they mowed the field—I really liked watching the bees fly around the flowers while we were out here.

Saln: Hey, Meadow, I like your rainbow bracelet—where did you get it?

Meadow: I got a whole bunch from home. My cousin was making them for Pride month! Do you want one?

Saln: Yes, are you serious?!

Narrator: Meadow slides her rainbow bracelet off and gives it to Saln.

Meadow: Perfect!

Saln: I love it! Wela'lin, Meadow!

Meadow: Mukk wi'tmu!

Hudson: Kekka! Somebody ripped up all the cabbage sprouts!

TJ: What the..?!

Adara: Woah—over here too! It looks like someone mowed the tops off all the pea shoots!

Kiki: [Grumbling] Probably mowed the garden when they mowed all the dandelions.

Meadow: Well, whatever it was, it was hungry

TJ: I'm hungry.

Hudson: I have carrot sticks!

[EVERYONE groans]



Ancestor 2: I wonder what happened?

Ancestor 1: Well, we're about to find out—Principal Arthur is talking to Ms. Martin.

Ancestor 2: Who's that guy with them? Never seen him before.

Narrator: There is a man standing with PRINCIPAL ARTHUR and MS. MARTIN. He's wearing a thick pair of blue coveralls, and a ball cap with a logo on it.

Ancestor 1: [Squinting] What's his hat say?

Ancestor 2: [Also squinting] Peter's....Pest Control! Huh!

Ancestor 1: Must be coming for you, nitap (nee-tap). [Ancestor 1 elbows Ancestor 2, laughing]

Ancestor 2: [Also laughs—these two ancestors love each other. They also love teasing!] Aho!

Narrator: The students watch as PRINCIPAL ARTHUR, the pest control officer, and MS. MARTIN, stand in a circle and speak to one another out of earshot. They all wander over to listen.

Adara: [Calling out] What's going on?

Ms. Martin: The garden had a visitor over the weekend. Some of the plants have been eaten.

Meadow: What kind of visitor?

Kiki: [Under his breath] The Great North American Lawn Mower, probably

Peter: To me, it looks like a groundhog visited you.

Adara: Oh, like Shubenacadie Sam?

Peter: That's right!

Adara: A mnumkwej (muh-num-kwej) ate the garden.

TJ: But he just said a groundhog ate it.



Adara: Mnumkwej is the Mi'kmaw word for groundhog. And then when you have more than one you say Mnumkwejk. (Muh-num-kwej-k)

TJ: Huh! Cool! Thanks Adara! I mean, wela'lin! (Well-aah-lin)

Hudson: Oh yeah! I see that mnumkwej all the time when I come through the field on my way to school.

Meadow: Kiki and I saw him on Saturday! He's so cute!

Adara: She.

Meadow: Huh?

Adara: Mnumkwejk usually has her kits in the middle of spring. They should be getting ready to come out of their burrow soon. If you see a mnumkwej around now, she's probably a mother.

TJ: Wow! How do you know all that?

Adara: [Proud] My uncle works for the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. Taught me all about them.

Peter: Well, there you go. We have a groundhog. Er—a muh..num...kwej. Did I say that right?

Adara: You did! Good job!

Principal Arthur: Peter is here to get rid of the groundhog and protect our garden. That food is for you, not the animals.

Ancestor 1: [To ANCESTOR 2, snickering] Looks like you're safe...for now.

Ancestor 2: [snorts] If you don't quit that, I'll feed you to the mnumkwej.

Kiki: [confused] You're getting rid of the mnumkwej because she's eating vegetables?

Saln: We're gonna be eating the vegetables, are you gonna get rid of us too?

Hudson: Someone should tell that to my mother before she packs me carrot sticks again.

Peter: [Chuckling] This is a little bit different.



Meadow: How is it different?

Peter: The groundhog has her own food to eat.

Adara: Mnumkwejk like to eat clover and...oh no...dandelions.

Hudson: So she doesn't have her own food to eat—you mowed all the dandelions!

Adara: I don't blame her for eating our vegetables—Mnumkwejk need to fatten up for winter!

Peter: It's June, winter is a long way away.

Adara: Mnumkwejk lose a lot of their body fat over the winter so they have to stock up all year round.

Peter: Not to worry, kids. We'll move the groundhog and her kits to a place with lots of dandelions. A new, better home.

Meadow: But this is her home.

Hudson: Yeah! And her name is Tupsi!

Kiki: How do you know that's what her name is?

Hudson: Because I named her.

Kiki: What if she already has a name?

TJ: Groundhogs—I mean—mnumkwejk— don't have names.

Hudson: You don't know that. Did you ask her?

Saln: Did *you*?

Principal Arthur: Okay, msit (mm-sit), jenita'q! (Jenny-taahk)
Let's stop the silliness. Mnumkwejk don't talk.

Saln: They don't talk like we talk, you mean. Just because we don't understand their language doesn't mean they don't have one.

Ancestor 2: Good point, Saln! If you listen and observe long enough, you can see that everyone talks to one another in their own unique way!



Ancestor 1: We can learn a lot from our animal relatives when we stop and listen to them!

Principal Arthur: [Sighs] Well, everyone, she's a mnumkwej. Mnumkwejk can live anywhere.

Adara: They can't just live anywhere! Tupsi picked here for a reason. Her burrow took a really long time to make. It's not just a hole in the ground. It's all these tunnels with rooms and stuff.

Peter: Kids, what your principal is saying is that groundhogs are resilient.

Meadow: What if they don't want to leave?

Principal Arthur: They don't know what's good for them.

Saln: You don't know what's good for them if you haven't even thought about what they want.

Adara: I don't think they will want to leave. This place has soft grass, big rocks to lay on, and lots of plants. It has everything a mnumkwej would need!

Hudson: It *had* everything a mnumkwej would need until you cut all the dandelions.

Kiki: You know what? Our garden was fine before the school mowed the lawn.

Meadow: Yeah! There was a lot of yellow in the field when we were here on Saturday, and a lot of green in the garden.

Ancestor 1: Great observation, tu's (doose). Wellukwen! (Well-oo-gwen)

Ancestor 2: They're really getting the hang of this!

Narrator: All the students start talking at once, realizing that perhaps cutting the dandelions is the reason Tupsi went to eat from the garden.

Ms. Martin: Okay, msit (mm-sit)! Jiks+tuik! (Jig-sit-oo-eek) I know you're worried right now. I don't want us to stop talking about Tupsi. We just have to have it inside, because Science class is almost



over. Maybe if you have questions we can write them down and send them to Principal Arthur at the end of the day.

Adara: Please don't send her away, Principal Arthur.

Principal Arthur: We have to. She's on our property and messing with our garden. That hurts *your* education. My job is to look out for you, and that's just what I'm going to do. Let's find that burrow!

Peter: Have a great day, kids. Don't worry about Tupsi. She and her kits will be safe.

Ancestor 2: I don't know if anyone in the class believes that.

Ancestor 1: Me either. Look at how sad they are walking back into the building. Let's go check on them.

– SCENE 2 –

Ancestor 1: Hmm, what class are they in again? Ah, yes. Social Studies!

Ancestor 2: Oh, yeah! They've been learning about Treaty Denial in that class! And Treaty Renewal. Oh! and then the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of—

Ancestor 1: Breathe, nitap (nee-tap)!

Ancestor 2: [Takes a deep breath and lets it out]—Indigenous Peoples! Phew! Meskay (mess-gay), that's a long title.

Ancestor 1: Most of us just call it UNDRIP. You really do talk too much.

Ancestor 2: I just like being *specific*, okay? Let's listen. Ms. Martin is teaching.

Ms. Martin: So, like we talked about last week, one of the ways our rights as Indigenous people as a group is protected is through UNDRIP. Indigenous people from around the world fought for decades to make it happen.



Hudson: I remember my dad said that his Uncle Alex [Pronounced: Alec] helped with that when he was Kji-Keptin! The Sante' Mawio'mi (san-tay mah-wee-oh-mee) went all the way to Switzerland!

Ms. Martin: That's right! Many of our Mi'kmaw leaders helped write UNDRIP. In fact, they shared so much about our treaties in Mi'kma'kik that it influenced how UNDRIP was written! And then they helped to make it law in Canada.

Kiki: My cousin Sipu (sih-boo) was a part of that! They were on a youth caucus!

Ms. Martin: I think you mean caucus, Kiki. It's a fancy word for a group of people who come together to stand up for important issues!

Kiki: Oh, right. Wela'lin. Ms. Martin. Sipu (sih-boo) was on a youth caucus about UNDRIP.

Meadow: That's right! Didn't they represent Mi'kma'kik at the United Nations in New York City?

Kiki: Yeah, and they were only in high school! They also went to Ottawa a lot to talk about how important UNDRIP was for youth. I was just little, but I remember how proud everyone was of them!

TJ: Man... I'd love to go to Ottawa someday.

Meadow: My auntie said UNDRIP was important because it was going to help keep us safe from being moved from home.

Adara: Oh, that's definitely important. When we learned about Centralization last month, I went home and talked to my kiju. She said Indian Agents made her family move to Sipekne'katik from Newville Lake when she was a little girl and it was really hard.

Ms. Martin: That's true. Governments moving Indigenous people away from their homes when they didn't want to go happened all over the world. Sometimes it still happens. That's why our adult and youth leaders knew it was important that we had something like UNDRIP. We have a right to live in our homelands, and that needs to be protected.

Saln: Ugh, that makes me feel even worse about that mnumkwej and her kits getting moved.



Hudson: Tupsi (Dup-see)

Saln: Right, Tupsi (dup-see). Anyway, the field is her home. If we have a right to stay in our home, I don't want to tell someone they don't have a right to their home.

Meadow: Yeah, Tupsi (dup-see) has a right to stay too!

TJ: What do you mean? I thought those rights were about humans. It's right in the name. Indigenous peoples. Tupsi (dup-see) isn't a people.

Adara: But we don't just share the world with people. There's animals...plants...water...

Ancestor 2: *ahem* Spirits

Ancestor 1: Shhh!

Saln: That's right! All living things are our relatives! Msit no'kmaq, remember? My tata taught me that!

Meadow: My auntie also told me that because we are all connected with one another, whatever we do to the world impacts us too. We have to take care of all living things, not just people.

Hudson: Oh man, so when they mowed all the dandelions, they took Tupsi's food away.

Saln: And that's why she started eating the garden.

TJ: And now they want to send her away... oh no.

Saln: But why can't we share our garden with her? It's a community garden...Tupsi is part of our community!

Kiki: Oh yeah—there's a word for that! I learned it during Mi'kmaw History Month! Duh...Duh...

Adara: T'pitnewey! (Duh-beed-ne-way)

Kiki: That's it! T'pitnewey! (Duh-beed-ne-way) Sharing is so important, because then everyone gets what they need.



Meadow: We can't let them send her away.

TJ: How are we going to stop them? Principal Arthur said this is school property. My dad says you have a right to do you want with your property. Doesn't the school have a right to send her away?

Adara: Hold on. We have rights too. Our treaty rights. And now there's UNDRIP too. If all of those rights protect our culture...

Saln: And if our culture honours msit no'kmaq...

Meadow: This isn't just about our rights...it's about our responsibility!

Adara: It's about everyone's responsibility. The school has a responsibility too. I think they just forgot.

Saln: So we can do something about it.

Hudson: Just like Uncle Alex!

Kiki: And my cousin Sipu, and all the other youth leaders!

TJ: Man, if all these rights make people forget their responsibilities...are rights bad?

Ms. Martin: No, rights aren't bad. Rights are important—they make sure we all get to live happy healthy lives.

TJ: So then, maybe it's like if I only pay attention to just my rights, I can hurt others by forgetting they have rights too?

Meadow: Yeah, that makes sense. That's where the responsibility comes in.

TJ: We have rights and we have responsibilities.

Saln: My tata taught me that they're actually the same thing. Like our rights are responsibilities.

Meadow: My auntie said something like that too. She said that when we are all responsible to each other, our rights are protected, because everyone has what they need to live their best life.

TJ: Oh! Like netukulimk!

Saln: E'e!



Hudson: Man, it's so cool to think that when our Mi'kmaw rights are protected, more people than just us are taken care of!

Adara: And not just people!

Kiki: Fam, I have a plan. I think we need our own caucus.

Narrator: The students gather together and whisper.

Ancestor 2: Ugh, I can't hear them anymore!

Ancestor 1: [Teasing] Always so nele'k (nay-leg), this one. We'll find out soon enough.

Ancestor 2: I know, I'm just so excited.

Ancestor 1: You know, we could just fast-forward to see how this plays out...



– SCENE 3 –

Narrator: Suddenly, the two ANCESTORS are standing back outside on the field.

Ancestor 2: [Feeling sick] I wish you would warn me before you do that.

Ancestor 1: Meskay (mess-gay), I forget you get motion sick.

Ancestor 2: Hold on...the sun should be in the middle of the sky right now, but it's shining from the east again...is it morning?

Ancestor 1: Great observation, nitap!

Ancestor 2: Ahh, I see what you did. It's saponuk nike'!

Ancestor 1: That's right—it's time to see how this ends. Kekka! The students are here.

Narrator: The students are standing at the edge of the field near the school tool shed. A small red flag marking the opening to a groundhog burrow waves from the ground at their feet. MS. MARTIN stands nearby, watching them and smiling.

Ancestor 2: Oh no, here comes Principal Arthur with Peter the Pest Guy. I can't look!

Narrator: All the students hold hands and begin to shout together as the adults walk toward them.

Students: Let her stay! Let her stay! Let her stay!

Principal Arthur: What's all this?

Narrator: MEADOW steps forward. She stands tall. She speaks from her heart.

Meadow: Principal Arthur, Mr. Peter, we have been taking care of this garden all spring. We have watched it grow. We have learned so much about all of the bugs and animals that live around here too. Some of them even help our garden grow.

Narrator: ADARA steps forward to join Meadow. She also stands tall and speaks from the heart.



Adara: We are responsible for the garden, together. And yesterday we all did some more learning. Did you know groundhogs' favourite foods are clover and dandelions?

Narrator: KIKI steps forward now. He too stands tall and speaks from the heart.

Kiki: Part of taking care of this garden was learning how to observe what we see around us, comparing what we know now to what we saw earlier. We observed that when the school mowed the dandelions, Tupsi came to eat the garden.

Principal Arthur: But we had to mow the Dandelions. They are weeds. They could hurt the garden.

Narrator: SALN steps forward.

Saln: I learned something different from my Tata, Principal Arthur. Dandelions are medicine. And if they are also food for mnumkwejk, they are important. Mnumkwejk are important. They are our relatives.

Adara: No wonder Tupsi came to eat from the garden. We took her food away. We took her kits' food away.

Narrator: HUDSON steps forward.

Hudson: And now we're taking her home away too. That isn't how we are taught to treat our relatives. We have to be responsible to them.

Ancestor 1: [Proudly] He sounds just like his Uncle Alex.

Ancestor 2: The newest generation is already stepping up.

Narrator: Now TJ steps up.

TJ: Tupsi has a right to stay. This is just as much her place as it is ours.

Principal Arthur: I see, but if we are talking about rights, I should say that you kids have a right to an education. How are you supposed to learn if this groundhog—

All students: Tupsi!

Principal Arthur: If Tupsi eats the garden you need to learn from.



Meadow: That's what we're trying to tell you. When we only think about our rights, and forget about others' rights, we can hurt ourselves.

Hudson: And we are still learning, especially now. We're learning to take care of the world around us.

Saln: And we're getting to practice netukulimk!

TJ: And I learned that we don't really have rights if we don't think about our responsibilities.

Ancestor 2: Right on, kwis.

Ancestor 1: Couldn't have said it better myself.

Principal Arthur: Okay, okay, you know what? I hear what you're saying, and I see what you mean. But we do still have to think about how to keep Tupsi from eating the rest of the garden. You do have to have something to harvest in the fall.

Adara: What if we planted some clover in the garden, or in the field so that Tupsi has what she needs?

Kiki: And until we do, we can just let her eat the plants.

Meadow: We have so many plants here. We want to share.

Principal Arthur: [Sighs] Okay, okay, Tupsi can stay.

[EVERYONE cheers]

Principal Arthur: You know, I'm so proud of all of you. You have learned so much and then worked together to bring your lessons to life. You also stood up for what was important and taught me something too. Wela'liog!

Ms. Martin: What a great way to connect what you're learning in all different places. Great work, msit!

Ancestor 1: Sniffles

Ancestor 2: Are you crying?

Ancestor 1: I love a happy ending, okay? I'm so proud of them.



Ancestor 2: Me too. I'm always proud of them.

Principal Arthur: [Speaking to PETER] You wouldn't happen to know anyone who could plant a bunch of clover in a short amount of time, do you?

Peter: I think I know a guy.

Ancestor 1 AND Ancestor 2:
[Together] Ta ho!

