WALKING TOGETHER
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Culture and Language
Aboriginal Place Names

Excerpts from *Aboriginal Perspectives*

& Aboriginal Perspectives

Teacher Resource

Government of Alberta

ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES
Excerpt from *Aboriginal Perspectives Teacher Resource* and *Aboriginal Perspectives*

ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

Place names reveal Aboriginal people's contributions. Place names are never just meaningless sounds. They give valuable insights into history and provide clues about the country's cultural and social development. A study of place names reveals the diversity and depth of Aboriginal peoples' contributions to the names of provinces, cities, rivers, lakes, and other landforms in contemporary Canada.

Canada and the Provinces

The name of Canada itself, and the names of some provinces and territories, come from place names in Aboriginal languages.

- Canada — from *Kanata*, Ouendat (Huron), "settlement" or "village"
- Saskatchewan — from *Kisiskatchewani Sipi*, Cree, "swift-flowing river" (the Saskatchewan River)
- Manitoba — from *maniot-wapow*, Cree, "the strait of the spirit or manitobau," referring to the roaring sound produced by pebbles on a beach on Manitoba Island in Lake Manitoba; or from *mini* and *tobow*, Assiniboine, "Lake of the Prairie."
- Ontario — from *onitariio*, Ouendat (Huron), "beautiful lake"
- Quebec — from *kebek*, Algonquin, "narrow passage"
- Yukon — from *LoYu-kun-ah*, Loucheux, "great river"
- Nunavut — from *Nunavut*, Inuktitut, "our land"

Other Place Names across Canada

- Chilliwack (British Columbia) — from the name of the local tribe, *ch,ihl-KWAY-uhk*, "going back up" the river
- Coquitlam (British Columbia) — from *Kawayquitlam*, Salish, "small red salmon"
- Kamloops (British Columbia) — from *kahm-o-loops*, Shushwap, "the meeting of waters"
- Penticton (British Columbia) — Okanagan, "the always place"
- Qu'Appelle (Saskatchewan) — from *kab-tep-was*, Cree, "the river that calls"
- Saskatoon (Saskatchewan) — from *mis-sask-guah-too-min*, Cree, an edible red berry native to the area
- The Pas (Manitoba) — from *opa*, Cree, "a narrow place," or opaskweow, "narrows between high banks"
- Winnipeg (Manitoba) — from *win-nipi*, Cree, "dirty water"

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- Etobicoke (Ontario) — *wah-do-be-kaung*, Ojibway, "the place where the alders grow"
- Kapuskasing (Ontario) — Cree, "the place where the river bends"
- Mississauga (Ontario) — from the Mississauga First Nation
- Oshawa (Ontario) — Seneca, "crossing of a stream" or "carrying place"
- Ottawa (Ontario) — from *adawe*, Algonquin, "to trade"
- Chibougamau (Quebec) — Cree, "where the water is shut in"
- Chicoutimi (Quebec) — from *shkoutimeou*, Montagnais, "the end of the deep water"
- Rimouski (Quebec) — from Mi'kmaq or Maliseet, "land of moose"
- Musquodobit (Nova Scotia) — from *mooskudoboogwek*, Mi'kmaq, "rolling out in foam"
- Shubenacadie (Nova Scotia) — from *segubunakadik*, Mi'kmaq, "the place where groundnuts (Indian potatoes) grow"
- Tuktoyuktuk (Northwest Territories) — from *tuktu*, "caribou," and *yaktuk*, "looks like," Inuktitut, "reindeer that look like caribou"

Some Place Names in Alberta
- Amisk — Cree, "beaver"
- Athabasca — Cree, "where there are reeds"
- Carcajou — Algonkian, "wolverine"
- Etzikom — Blackfoot, "valley"
- Fort Assiniboine — from the name of the Nakoda people
- Fort Chipewyan — from the Chipewyan people, alternate name for Dene Suliné. Chipewyan is from Cree words meaning "pointed skis." Dene Suliné call Fort Chipewyan Kai Tale, meaning "land of willows"
- Kananaskis — Cree, the name Kananaskis
- Keoma — Blackfoot, "far away"
- Kinuso — Cree, "fish"
- Meanook — Cree, "good camping place"
- Michichi — Cree, "hand, little hand"
- Namaka — Blackfoot, "Bow River"
- Namao — Cree, "sturgeon"
- Nestow — Cree, "brother-in-law"
- Nisku — Cree, "goose"
- Okotoks — Cree, "good or lush meadow"
- Ponoka — from *ponokaii*, Blackfoot, "elk"
- Seebe — from *si pi*, Cree, "Bow River"
- Tawatinaw — Cree, "river which divides the hills"
- Wabamun — Cree, "mirror"
- Wabasca-Desmarais — from *wapuskau,* Cree, "body of water with whitecaps"
- Waskatenau — Cree, "opening in the banks"
- Watino — Cree, "valley"
- Wetaskiwin — from *wi-ta-ski-winik* or *witaskioochakatinow*, Cree, "place of peace"

HONOURING CANADA'S ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Toronto, Lake Athabasca, and Canada have names that reflect this country's Aboriginal heritage. Yet many place names in Aboriginal communities are commonly known, but do not appear on maps. For example, a creek known by people living on the Kainai Reserve as Pomiipisskaan was recently labelled Layton Creek by signs on the highway that runs through the reserve.

Some communities are now documenting their heritage by naming or renaming places. For example, Frobisher Bay residents voted to change their name to lqaluit, the Inuktitut word for "place of fish." A lake in northern Alberta has been named Atihk Sakahikun, which means "Elk Lake" in Cree.

Individuals or organizations can suggest names by contacting the Geographical Names Board of Canada. Your class might wish to nominate a local landmark to be named or renamed in a way that reflects its Aboriginal heritage. You might need to ask community members for information about local places that could be named. If you decide to take on this project, you can download procedures from the Geographical Board of Canada Web site at *www.geonames.NRCan.gc.ca*

What do place names reveal about the naming culture's worldview?

1. Look at a map of Alberta or Canada.
2. Identify place names that you think have an Aboriginal origin.
3. Using the library or Internet, research the history of the place name you selected to try to identify its origin and meaning.
4. Many times, the spelling of Aboriginal names is anglicized. If you can, locate the original spelling.
5. Research the place to identify why the name was chosen. For example, the name might reflect the geography of the area, or an important event.
6. What does the name reveal about the naming culture's worldview and language? Discuss your ideas as a class.