

# WALKING TOGETHER

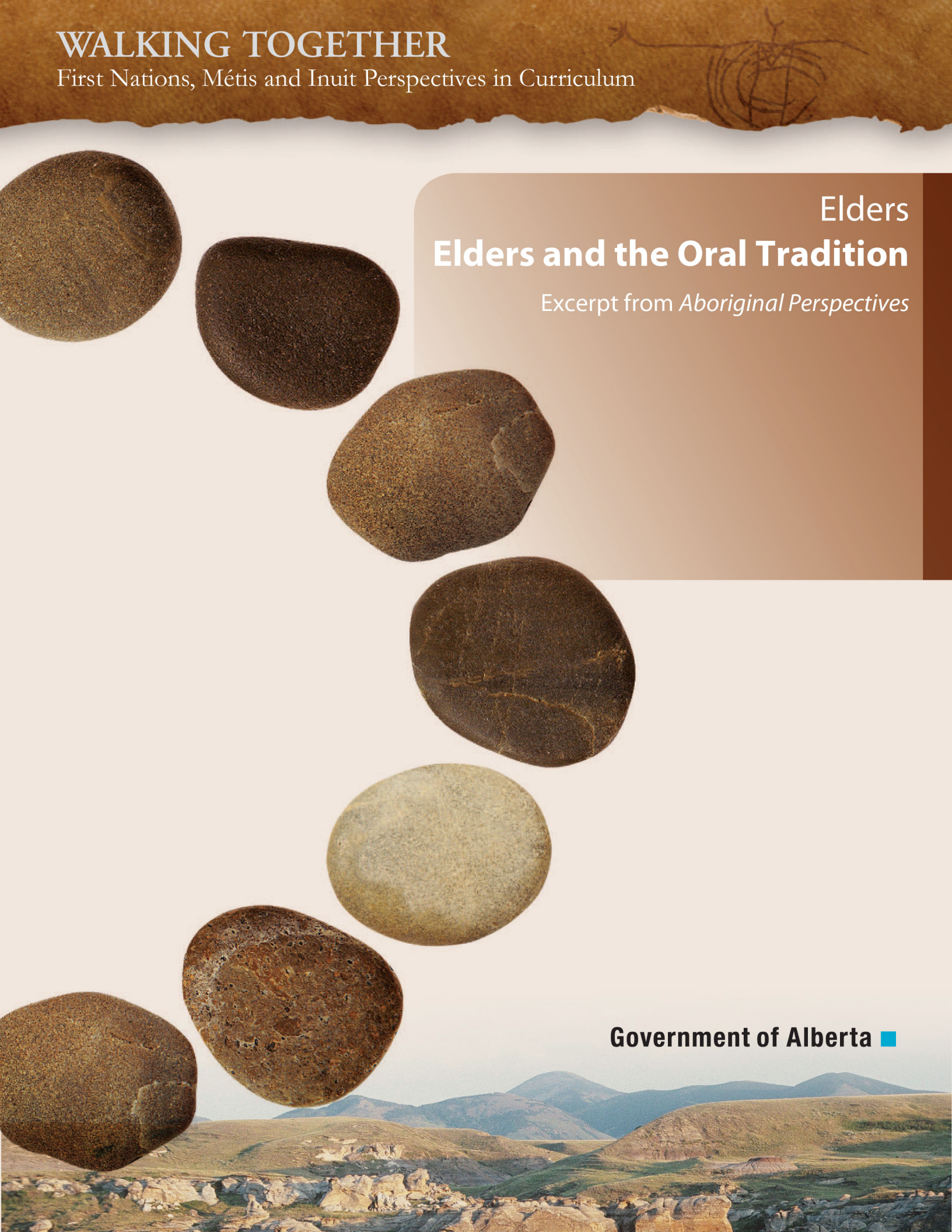
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Elders

## Elders and the Oral Tradition

Excerpt from *Aboriginal Perspectives*

Government of Alberta ■





## **ELDERS AND THE ORAL TRADITION**

Excerpt from *Aboriginal Perspectives*

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### **ELDERS AND THE ORAL TRADITION**

Those responsible for passing on the stories and keeping the oral tradition alive are the Elders. In Blackfoot, they are *Omahkitapii*, in Cree *Kihteyaya*, in Dené Tha' *Detjye*, and in Nakoda *Ishaween*. In all Aboriginal cultures, Elders are those who are sought after for their spiritual and cultural leadership. They have learned the traditional ways and have been asked by the community to teach this knowledge. An Elder does not have to be old or elderly. Sometimes relatively young people are recognized as cultural advisors because of their special knowledge, gifts, or experience.

The Anishinabé say someone is speaking the truth with the term *w'daebawae*. This means they are telling the truth as far as their words and experience can take them. Elders' experiences make them people who know the truth in this sense of the word. It does not mean they know the one truth and that all others are incorrect.

Elders are the living memory of their community. Past generations depend upon Elders to pass along their stories, and future generations depend on the young to learn and remember the Elders' knowledge. Each generation is like a link in a chain that connects past to future.

Elders are called upon to conduct and oversee important rituals such as healing ceremonies, spiritual quests, Sweat Lodges, and Sundances. They are the people who know, remember, and live the teachings that were handed down to them from previous generations.

They also mediate or resolve differences between individuals, communities, and organizations using their knowledge of traditional customs. This means they help restore balance and harmony within communities. Elders are able to counsel people and help them see their place in the community. They reinforce the importance of keeping harmony in one's own life, with the community, and with the environment. Yet their teachings are often indirect and metaphoric, rather than direct forms of advice. Listeners have a personal responsibility to think about the stories and form their own decisions and plans of action.

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