

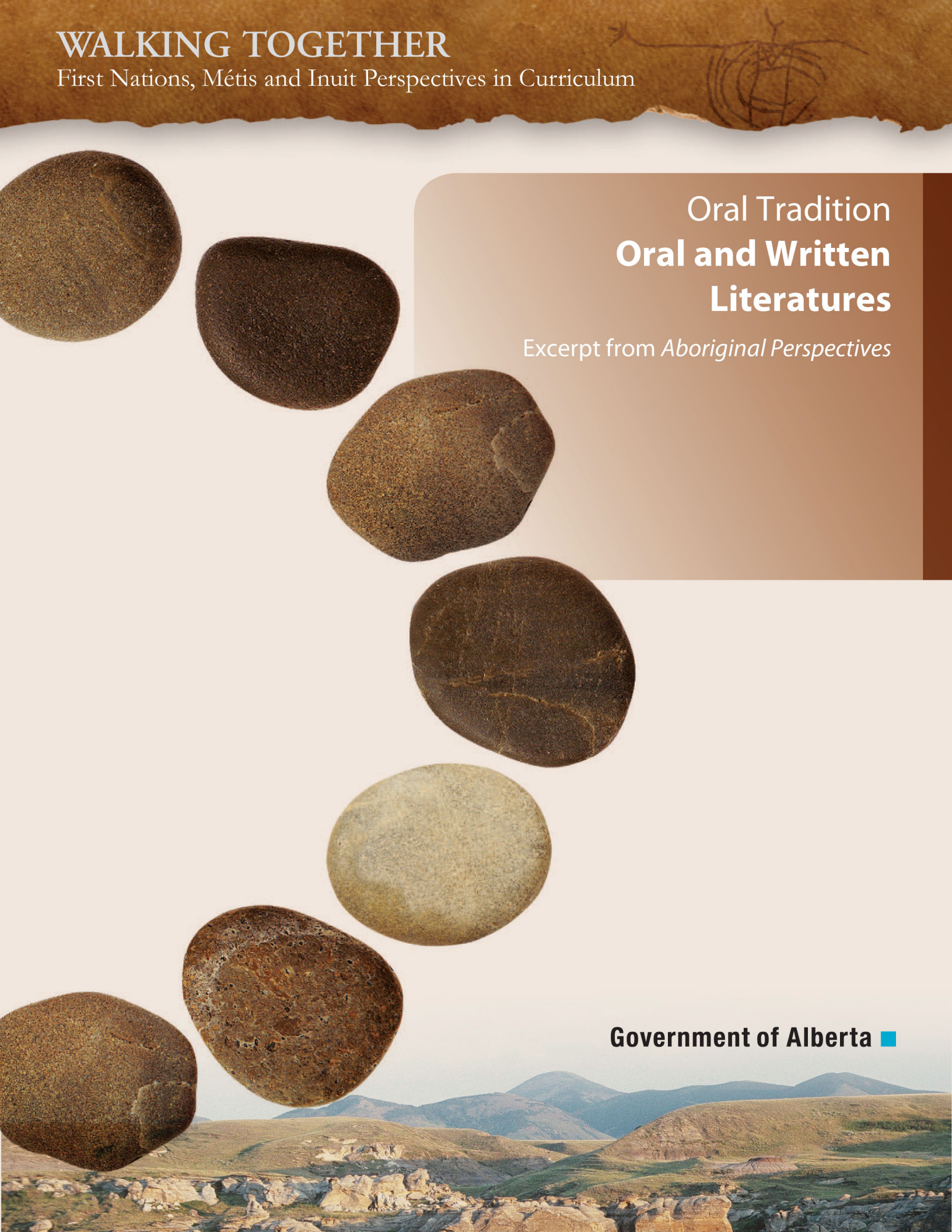
WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Oral Tradition Oral and Written Literatures

Excerpt from *Aboriginal Perspectives*

Government of Alberta ■





ORAL AND WRITTEN LITERATURES

Excerpt from *Aboriginal Perspectives*

ORAL AND WRITTEN LITERATURES

Although all cultures have stories, only oral cultures consistently use them as their primary tool for education and socialization, which is a lifelong process by which individuals absorb the culture of their society. European legends and folk tales once served similar functions of education and socialization, but today are viewed as entertainment for children, rather than integral parts of culture.

Cultures that primarily transmit information through the written word tend to emphasize authors as creators of original works. Written works are seen as a form of self-expression and are greatly respected. Authors legally own the works they create and have certain rights with respect to how their works are used.

Oral cultures have different ideas about literary creation. Stories of a particular culture are seen as the inheritance of a community, not a specific individual. An individual storyteller might be admired for his or her skill in telling a story, but the stories themselves are a part of the community. The ultimate goal of sharing a story is to bring people together in a sense of belonging.

The Métis Origin Story

Many First Nations and Inuit peoples believe that their ancestors originated in North America and the Creator made the land and its inhabitants, including humans, to exist in a delicate state of balance. These beliefs are based on sacred oral teachings that have been passed down for generations.

The Métis Nation, like First Nations and Inuit peoples, also originated in this land, although their story of origin is different from those of other Aboriginal peoples. One difference is that Métis people may trace their history through written records. In contrast, First Nations and Inuit peoples trace their history primarily through oral records, with relatively recent written documentation (over the last four hundred years). Although some Métis people identify with parts of the oral history of their First Nations ancestors, the origin of their own culture took place after European contact.

Publishing Oral Stories

Today many stories from First Nations and Inuit oral traditions can be read online or in books. Even stories about spiritual matters exist in written form. Some people believe sacred stories should not be written or shared outside traditional circles.

This excerpt on oral and written literatures ©Nelson Education Ltd. *Aboriginal Perspectives*, Toronto, ON, 2004, pp. 56–59.

One of the problems is that not all published versions are authentic. Some stories have been used by people of other cultures in ways that do not respect the stories' origins and purposes. Many First Nations and Inuit peoples object to this use of their stories as much as they would object to someone taking a sacred object and using it inappropriately.

Other people believe that publishing stories from oral traditions widens the circle of people who can learn from the teachings they contain. Many believe that sharing traditional wisdom helps non-aboriginal people from other cultures appreciate and understand First Nations and Inuit cultures.

In addition, many Aboriginal people now live in urban centres or other areas where they might not have opportunities to hear stories told in traditional ways. Some fear that oral traditions stories will be lost if they are not written down. These people believe that preserving them in any format should be the priority. Though much has changed in the world, the stories lessons on peace, harmony, balance, environmental responsibility, acceptance of differences, cooperation, respect for nature, and the importance of living an honourable life remain relevant to many contemporary problems.