

Background Information

Teacher note: The purpose of this excerpt is to provide background information to support *Examining Cross-cultural Observations* MT. It is intended for use within the context of the *Modelling the Tools* resource only. Terminology found in the excerpt must be considered within the context of the historical time period.

The following excerpt is intended to help students recognize that anthropological accounts are culturally sensitive and, as such, may reflect elements of cultural superiority, ethnocentrism and stereotyping. This account offers a European point of view of First Nations people's physical attributes by citing the work of Pierre d'Avite (in italics), written in 1637.

Beauty of Form and Temperament

Europeans often admired the physique and intelligence of First Nations women and men. The following passage details Pierre d'Avite's observations of First Nations people.

Moreover, they are as handsome young men and beautiful young women as may be seen in France. They are great runners and swimmers, and the women too have a marvelous disposition. They are usually more slim and nimbler than we and one finds none who are paunchy, hunchback, deformed, niggardly, gouty or stony among them. The majority of them are not at all malicious, but liberal, have a good mind and clear one so far as discerning common and sensible matters, deducing their reasons with gracefulness, always employing some pleasing comparison. They have a very good memory for material matters, such as having seen you, the qualities of a place where they have been, or what one did in their presence some twenty or thirty years ago.

Pierre d'Avite, *Description Générale d'Amérique, troisième partie du Monde* (Paris, 1637), pp. 30–31.

Adapted from Ruth Sandwell et al. *Early Contact and Settlement in New France* (Vancouver, BC: The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2002), pp. 33–60. Permission granted by The Critical Thinking Consortium for use by Alberta teachers.