

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

BIG IDEAS WITH FILM

— TEACHER'S GUIDE

Unit Title: Action for Purpose, Healing and Raising Awareness

Film: *Walking is Medicine* (5 min)

Time required: 2 lessons

Grade(s): 8-12



(Photo: The Canadian Press)

Unit Overview:

This guide is designed to shed light on the actions of Indigenous young people as they strive to bring national awareness about challenges faced by First Nations people such as marginalization, poverty, lack of clean drinking water, and inadequate housing in Canada. For them, this walk was also a way of finding healing within themselves and their communities for the wounds of the past and present. The journey followed the traditional trade routes of the Algonquin, Mohawk, and Cree and served to promote solidarity within and among the nations.

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This guide will help teachers and students to listen to views and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and see how actions of a group of young people became a catalyst and inspiration for their community and all those that they encountered on their journey. This guide also helps students to think of possible actions they can take to raise awareness about an issue that affects their wellbeing. Moreover, this resource also makes connections to Physical and Health education, as it involves healing that comes with a physical journey, and the act of walking for a greater purpose.



(Photo: Paul Seesequasis/TurtleIsland.org)

About the Film

Walking is Medicine is the story of the Nishiyuu walkers, six young Cree men who, in 2013, decided to trek 1600km from Whapmagoostui, Quebec, to Ottawa, They made the walk in the spirit of their ancestors, whose traditions were to travel long distances in the winter because the rivers and lakes are frozen. This was an effort to meet with many different nations from across the country and to be part of a new beginning. They were inspired by the Idle No More movement, a grassroots movement launched in November 2012 in opposition to Canadian Bill C-45, the government's omnibus budget bill that includes changes to land management on

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reservations. This group of young people hoped their walk would bring attention to Indigenous youth and issues like depression. By the time the group arrived in Ottawa, they had received national media attention.

Subject Matter	Curriculum Big Ideas	Inquiry questions
Social Studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exploration, expansion and colonization had varying consequences for different people 2. Historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive multicultural society 3. Indigenous Peoples are reclaiming emotional and physical and spiritual wellbeing despite the continuing effects of colonialism 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How have exploration, expansion and colonization of Canada impacted Indigenous Peoples? 2. How do historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive and multicultural society? 3. How are Indigenous Peoples reclaiming their emotional, physical and mental wellbeing?
Physical and Health Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do healthy choices influence our well-being?

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain why the youth in the film took on this strenuous journey
- Identify the challenges of their journey and the possible outcomes
- Conduct research about the circumstances of Indigenous youth living across Canada



- Analyze the Canadian Government's current policies that impact the well-being of Indigenous youth
- Assess their initial opinion about the motives of the youth

Curricular Competencies:

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
 - Ask questions about the intent of the action in the film
 - What could be Obomsawin's motive to tell this story?
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, phenomena, ideas, or developments (significance).
- Determine which causes most influenced particular decisions, actions, or events, and assess their short-and long-term consequences

Content:

- Changes in populations and living standards
- Impact of discriminatory policies on First Peoples especially the impacts of Indian Act on First Peoples past and present, including reservations and the residential school system.
- Interactions between the Europeans and First Peoples

Lessons:

Lesson 1:

Activating:



Teacher will start this lesson by showing the online map of Canada that is color-coded based on different Nations' lands, available at <https://native-land.ca>. Teacher may introduce some First Nations' territories and ask students if anyone has any background knowledge, a personal story or experience related to the topic of Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Teachers and students may familiarize themselves with the Native-Land.ca mapping tool, noting that territories of Indigenous people are connected and intertwined between nations, and limits of these lands go beyond the contemporary political and provincial borders.

Questions to consider with students:

- Interpret the diversity of names and colors you see on the map. What can you infer about the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and cultures in Canada? What about the relationship between various cultures?
- Identify Cree and Anishinaabe nations. In which parts of Canada are their traditional lands?
- Show some of the headlines from the articles or news videos that reported the actual event, so that students recognize that Obomsawin is narrating and representing a true story.

Divide students into groups of 2 or 3 and ask them to find information on the Indigenous people living around James Bay. Which nations reside in this region? Research the circumstances of some of the First Nations living in this region. Analyze the policies that lead to these situations.

Have students share their findings with a visual 1 to 2 minute story/analysis (including findings from resources and inferences).

Additional Resources:

'Nishiyuu Walkers' complete 1,600 km trek to Ottawa. March 25, 2013
<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/nishiyuu-walkers-complete-1-600-km-trek-to-ottawa-1.1209929>

Quebec Cree walkers find lasting impact in trek to Ottawa. Apr 17, 2014



<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/quebec-cree-walkers-find-lasting-impact-in-trek-to-ottawa-1.2612958>

Journey of Nishiyuu walkers' names now "etched" into history of this country
Mar 26, 2013

<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/journey-of-nishiyuu-walkers-names-now-etched-into-history-of-this-country/>

Interview about author Tanya Talaga on her book 'Seven Fallen Feathers'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tdk29lue2Q&t=321s>

Lesson 2

During this lesson, teacher will introduce Alanis Obomsawin to students and share about her biography and her purpose for making films (suggested NFB interview links below).

Students will watch the short film *Walking is Medicine* and consider the following questions first individually and then pairing up with another student to discuss and share their responses.

1. What do you think has motivated the Cree young men's journey?
2. What may have been some of their challenges along the way?
3. How do you assess the outcome of this journey for these 6 young people and for Indigenous Peoples in general?

** To conduct a discussion to respond to this question, teachers may use a version of a 4corner activity. You may use "Positive Impact", "Negative impact" and "Irrelevant" in three different sides of a class and ask students to take a side and come up with reasons and construct a debate with people with a different opinion.

Extensions:

This film can also be considered in a Physical and Health education class, as well. The approach may be focused on:

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- Healthy choices that lead to mental and physical well-being.
- Mental training and preparation for a physically strenuous task, such as marathons, competitions, or extreme walks such as this.
- Knowing one's limits and monitoring exertion levels during strenuous activities.

Additional Resources:

To view film:

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/walking-is-medicine/> or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxDfIDliAg>

Virtual Classroom Interview with Alanis Obomsawin – valuable viewing either before or after screening of her film during this unit. Her discussion focuses on the topic of social justice in Indigenous communities and the positive shifts brought about by Indigenous youth

https://www.nfb.ca/film/alanis_obomsawin_virtual_classroom/

Interview clips and biography on our BIG IDEAS with Film Director Page:

<https://www.vancouverbiennale.com/big-ideas-director/alanis-obomsawin/>

Colour-coded Map of Indigenous Territories:

<https://www.native-land.ca>

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