

Learn about Aboriginal Names

Have you ever asked about the names of Aboriginal children your own age?

Would you like to learn a few words in their language?

Did you know that there are over 50 Aboriginal languages in Canada?

Some of these languages are spoken only by Elders, while others are regularly used in the community.

First names and traditional names

Some well-known first names in English and French have Aboriginal equivalents. However, because Aboriginal languages don't use the same alphabet or the same sounds as English or French, the names can get turned around (see Activity 1). Of course, many traditional Aboriginal names can't be translated into English or French. Traditional names are commonly used in communities that cultivate their Aboriginal language.

Come and meet Elisapie and Alasie!

My name is Elisapie and I live in an Inuit community near Ungava Bay. My village has only 250 people. I'm 10 years old and I like to go to school. My best friend is Alasie. My teacher had the brainwave of organizing a cultural exchange between Inuit children from different parts of Canada. As a result, Alasie and I now write messages on the computer and communicate with Aboriginal Grade 5 students who live in other communities. With the Internet, it's a cinch! Since we're very interested in things like family, friends, community life and pastimes, we like to ask questions about these topics. We also send our new friends stories and legends, and things that we've written ourselves. Although we're far apart, it's almost like we're in the same class!



My name is Elisapie and I live in an Inuit community near Ungava Bay.



Aputik means "snow" in Inuktitut.

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Connected students

Ai! (Hi!)

We're Elisapie and Alasie, two Inuit students in Grade 5. We want to share stories and legends with you. We'd like to know more about your community and its culture. And we'd like to hear about you too! We especially want to know if you have an Aboriginal name and, if so, what it means. What language do you speak? Do you like animals? Almost everyone in our community has a dog.

Alasie has a newborn little sister. Her name is Aputik, which means "snow." People in our community speak Inuktitut. To get to the nearest village, we have to take a plane!

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Elisapie and Alasie

Read the messages that Elisapie and Alasie have received from their new-found friends

Sekon! (Hi!)

My name is Patrick. In summer, I very much like to play lacrosse, the Mohawks' traditional sport, and, in winter, I like to play hockey. I go to school in my community and I learn the Mohawk language there. My classmates call me "[Tehoronianhen](#)," which means "covered in clouds." My grandfather gave me this name. My little sister Sarah also has a Mohawk first name, like me. Her grandmother baptized her "[Katsitsanóron](#)," which means "precious flower."

Hello!

I'm Jennifer. My friends call me Jenny, but "[Isapoinhkyaki](#)" is the Siksika (Blackfoot) name my grandmother gave me. My name means "singing crow woman." I live in a community of about 4,000 people. I live in southern Alberta, where there are enormous wheat fields! In the distance, we can see the Rocky Mountains on the British Columbia border, and it takes us about an hour in the car to go to Calgary.

Hi!

My name is Tina. I live in Yali (Alert Bay), British Columbia, on an island off the Pacific Coast. The Elders in my community speak Kwak'wala. For we Kwakwaka'wakws, potlatches are very important because they are used to celebrate special occasions like weddings and funerals. It is also during the potlatch ceremonies that we receive our traditional names, but I haven't received mine yet.



We have a big dog called Mukwa, which means "bear" in Ojibway.



Aaniin! (Hello!)

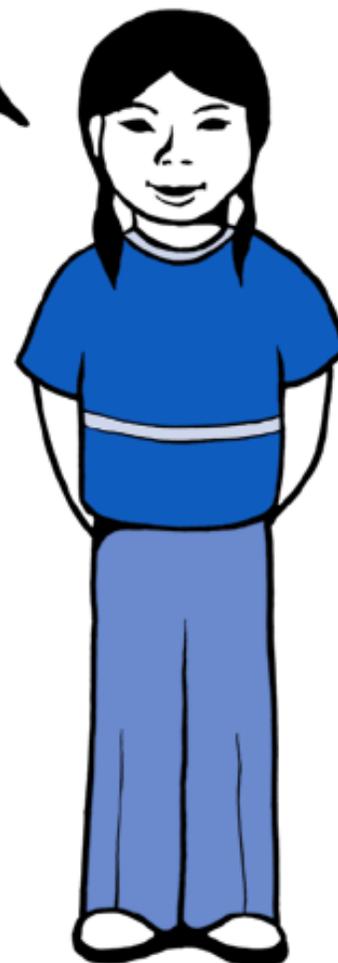
Aaniin eyaayan? (How are you?)

My name is Justin and I'm Ojibway. I live in Ontario and belong to a community near Georgian Bay. I have two younger brothers. We have a big dog called Mukwa, which means "bear" in Ojibway. We picked that name because our dog is dark brown, like a bear.

Kwé! (Hi!)

Mé talwléin? (How are you?)

I'm Mi'kmaq. The people in my village call me Anjij (Annie, in English). I live close to the sea in Nova Scotia. My big brother is called Mike. I love cats — that's why I've got two of them! I've also got a goldfish. Most of the people in my village speak Mi'kmaq.



Have fun playing these games— you can check your answers on the last page.

Activity 1: Equivalents

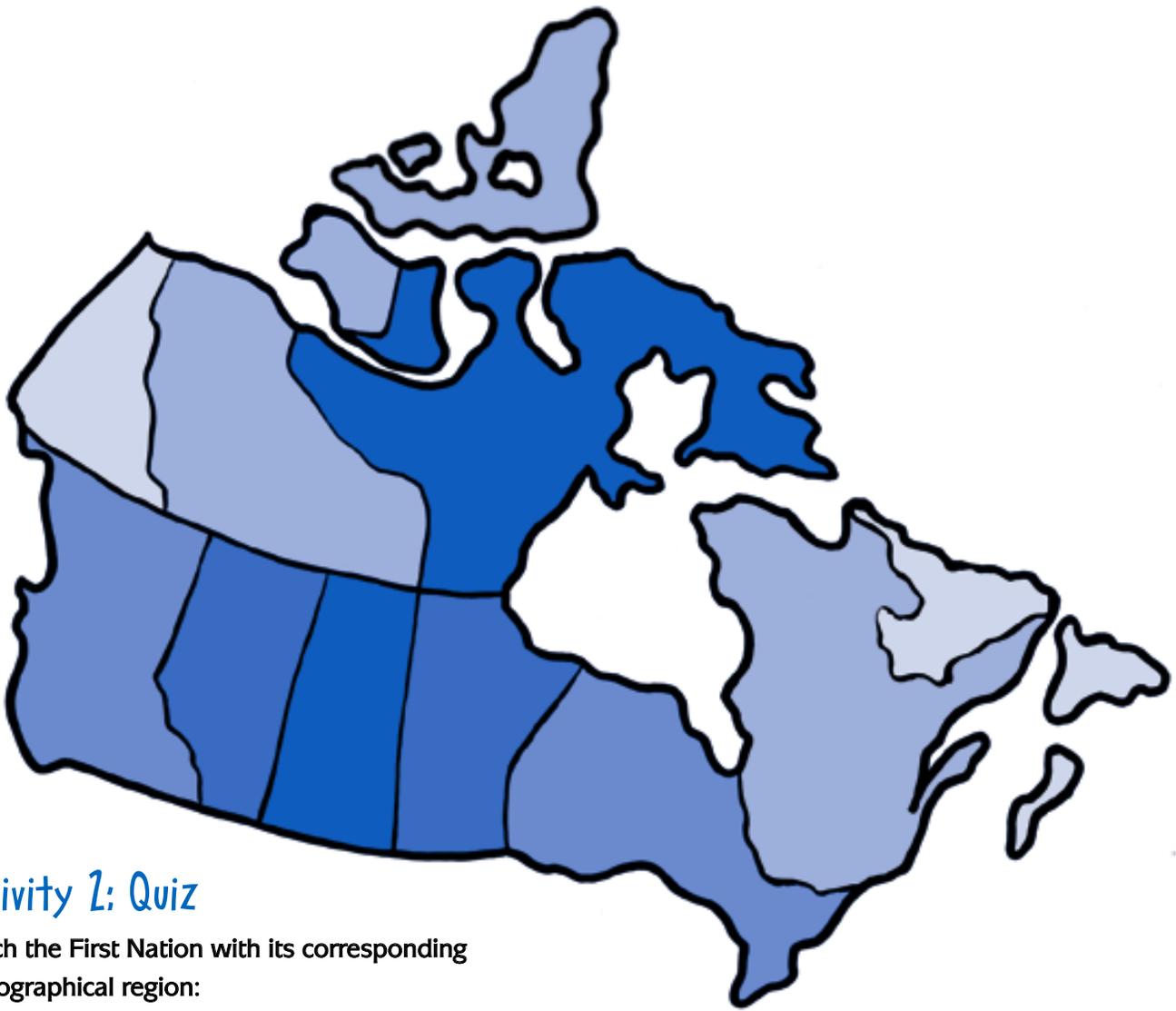
Match each name with its Aboriginal-language equivalent:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| 1) Alice | a) Elisapie (in Inuktitut) |
| 2) Elizabeth | b) Pilip (in Mi'kmaq) |
| 3) Joseph | c) Alasie (in Inuktitut) |
| 4) Philip | d) Sosê (in Mohawk) |

How do we say...?

- | | |
|--|------------|
| <i>bear</i> in Mohawk | — okwari |
| <i>slippers</i> or <i>moccasins</i> in Ojibway | — makazin |
| <i>caribou</i> in Mi'kmaq | — qalipu |
| <i>little boy</i> in Kwak'wala | — babagwam |
| <i>snow</i> in Inuktitut | — aputik |

Two of the above English words come from an Aboriginal language. Can you identify which ones?



Activity 2: Quiz

Match the First Nation with its corresponding geographical region:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Mi'kmaq | a) The Pacific Coast |
| 2) Siksika | b) Southern Ontario and Quebec |
| 3) Inuit | c) The Prairies |
| 4) Mohawk | d) The Arctic |
| 5) Kwakwaka'wakw | e) The Maritimes |
| 6) Ojibway | f) Manitoba and central Ontario |

Activity 3: Test what you know

a) Which First Nation thinks potlatches are very important?

b) What is the traditional sport of the Mohawks?

Answers

Activity 1: 1c, 2a, 3d, 4b

"Moccasin" and "caribou," Ojibway and Mi'kmaq belong to the same family of Algonquian languages.

Activity 3 :

a) The Kwakwaka'wakw

b) Lacrosse

Activity 2 :

1e, 2c, 3d, 4b, 5a, 6f

This information is also available through the Internet at www.inac.gc.ca



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