

# information

## First Nations People of Canada



Who are the  
First Nations people of Canada?

**First Nations people are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada who lived here for many thousands of years before explorers arrived from Europe.**



### canadian fast facts

First Nations people of Canada are the people who used to be called “Indians,” but this term is now considered incorrect by some. Early explorers thought they were in India when they landed in North America, so they called the original inhabitants “Indians.” Many people who were misnamed “Indians” now prefer to be called First Nations. First Nations people identify themselves as Mohawk, Cree, Oneida, and so on, according to the tribe to which they belong.

“Aboriginal” is a term you will often hear. This term includes First Nations; Inuit, who were formerly called “Eskimos”; and the Métis, who are descendants of European fur traders and settlers who married First Nations women in the early days

of our rich Canadian history. When the census was taken in 2001, 1,319,890 people in Canada reported having Aboriginal ancestry, which is 4.5 percent of the Canadian population.

### How many First Nations people are there in Canada?

There are 704,851 First Nations people in Canada. Most First Nations people – 403,369 (57%) – live in First Nations communities which are also called “reserves.” The other 301,514 (43%) live mainly in the larger cities.

### How many First Nations communities are there?

*(Read carefully – a quiz is coming!)*

There are 614 First Nations communities. Here are the numbers of communities in each province and territory:





## canadian place names

Canada has many towns and cities that were named by the original inhabitants. These names help to define Canada as a land of diversity, beauty, abundance and cultural richness. Here are some of the ancient names:

### Coquitlam

(British Columbia) comes from the Salish tribal name *Kawayquitlam*, which can be translated as "small red salmon." The name refers to sockeye salmon common to the area.

### Wetaskiwin (Alberta)

is an adaptation of the Cree word *wi-ta-ski-oo-cha-ka-tin-ow*, which can be translated as "place of peace" or "hill of peace."

### Saskatoon (Saskatchewan)

the name comes from an edible red berry native to the area, which the Cree called *mis-sask-guah-too-min*.

### The Pas (Manitoba)

originated with the Cree word *opa* meaning "a narrow place" or *opaskweow*, "narrow between high banks."

### Oshawa (Ontario)

is a Seneca word that means "crossing of a stream" or "carrying place," that describes an old portage in the area.

### Rimouski (Quebec)

is a word of Mi'kmaq or Maliseet origin, which has been translated as "land of moose" or "retreat of dogs," referring to its fine hunting grounds.

### Oromocto (New Brunswick)

is derived from the Maliseet word *welamooktook*, meaning "good river."

### Musquodobit (Nova Scotia)

comes from the Mi'kmaq *mooskudoboogwek*, which can be translated as "rolling out in foam" or "suddenly widening out after a narrow entrance at its mouth."

### Tuktoyaktuk (Northwest Territories)

is an Inuit name that can be translated as *tuktu*, "caribou," *yaktuk*, "looks like," or "reindeer that looks like caribou."

Newfoundland	3
Nova Scotia	13
Prince Edward Island	2
New Brunswick	15
Quebec	39
Ontario	126
Manitoba	62
Saskatchewan	70
Alberta	44
British Columbia	198
Yukon	16
Northwest Territories	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>614</b>

How many other First Nations place names can you find on a map of your province or territory?  
(Another quiz is coming about the place names listed here. Be prepared!)

## storytelling time

Storytelling is a traditional way of transmitting information among First Nations people.



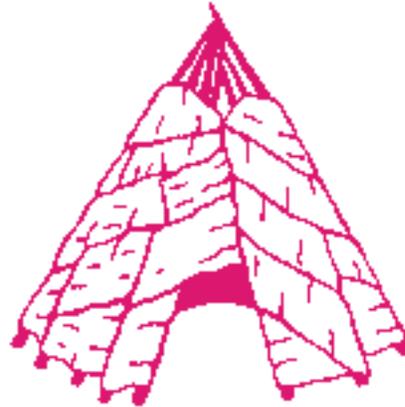
### DUMA AND HIS MI'KMAQ CANOE

Hi, kids! I'm Duma. That is a Mi'kmaq name, and this is my Mi'kmaq canoe. Actually all Algonquin peoples used this kind of canoe. It is made of birchbark, which means that it is lightweight and easily portable. Canoes had to be easy to carry in the old days because canoe travellers had to be able to carry their canoes overland between lakes and rivers. This activity is called "portage" which means, "to carry." To make this kind of canoe you have to stitch birchbark sheets together around a wooden framework using specially prepared white spruce root as binding material. You make the canoe waterproof by putting on a coating of heated spruce gum and grease. Birchbark canoes are prepared using materials that you can easily find in the woods. You can make a temporary raincoat out of birchbark if you need one.

My canoe is special because it takes you on an unusual journey. Welcome aboard! Come along with me into the past!



There were no highways in the early days of Canadian history. The original inhabitants of our wonderful country used the rivers and lakes as highways. That's why we are in a canoe. On this trip we will see two of the kinds of dwellings the original inhabitants of our country lived in.



Look ahead! We are approaching the Mi'kmaq village of Whycomomagh on the Bras d'Or Lakes in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Mi'kmaq people and other Algonquin peoples lived in cone-shaped wigwams

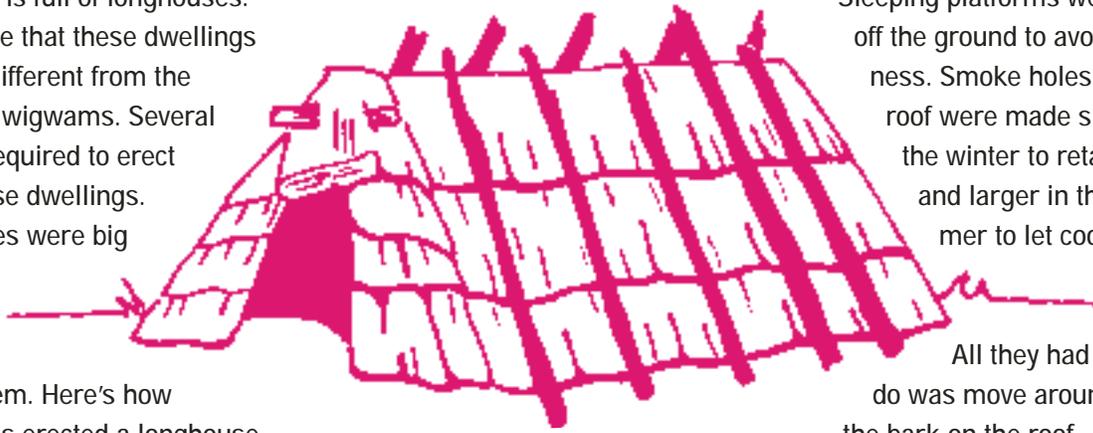
like these. Wigwams are simple to make, and are easily portable. People who know how can erect a wigwam in an hour. Here's how you do it. First you make a cone-shaped framework of poles and cover this framework with birchbark, caribou skins, or woven rush mats. (Rushes are sturdy, grass-like plants.) Then you place evergreen boughs on the floor to keep the dampness out, but leave space for a hearth, the place where the fire is made for cooking and heating. Next you cover the sweet-smelling boughs with rush mats or fur rugs. You store your belongings around the edges under the poles, high off the ground to keep them dry. Then you make a

hole in the roof to let fresh air in, and even more important, to let smoke out! There's nothing worse than a wigwam full of smoke!

Now we are moving very, very quickly along the surface of the sparkling water. Journeying westward along the St. Lawrence River we come to the Iroquoian village of Hochelaga. (This is where the city of Montreal stands today.)

Hochelaga is full of longhouses. You can see that these dwellings are quite different from the Algonquin wigwams. Several men are required to erect one of these dwellings. Longhouses were big because large families lived in them. Here's how the Iroquois erected a longhouse.

First they erected parallel lines of poles, and then bent these towards each other to form a frame in the shape of an upside-down U. More poles were added to form a roof. Then the roof was covered with elm or cedar bark. A row of hearths ran the length of the house.



Sleeping platforms were built off the ground to avoid dampness. Smoke holes in the roof were made smaller in the winter to retain heat, and larger in the summer to let cool air in.

All they had to do was move around the bark on the roof.

We are moving quickly over the shining water again. Now we are back at a familiar shore, and it is time to go. I enjoyed exploring with you in my special, time-travelling, Mi'kmaq canoe. 'Bye.

## Activities for Grades 5-6



### Activity #1

#### finding your way through the woods

Night is falling and we need to get back to the village quickly! This is our map. Can you find the most direct route to the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Algonquin village near Maniwaki, Quebec?

## Activity #2

### quiz: first Nations communities



- Which province or territory has the greatest number of First Nations communities?
- Which province or territory has the second greatest number of First Nations communities?
- Which province or territory has the fewest First Nations communities?
- How many communities does your province or territory have?

## Activity #3 quiz: places the original inhabitants named

Match these place names with the description. Draw a line between the place name and the description.

1 **Coquitlam**  
(British Columbia)

2 **Wetaskiwin**  
(Alberta)

3 **Musquodobit**  
(Nova Scotia)

4 **Tuktoyaktuk**  
(Northwest Territories)

5 **Oshawa**  
(Ontario)

6 **Rimouski**  
(Quebec)

(a) This word comes from the Mi'kmaq word, which can be translated as "rolling out in foam" or "suddenly widening out after a narrow entrance at its mouth."

(b) This is an Inuit name that can be translated *tuktu*, "caribou," *yaktuk*, "looks like," or "reindeer that looks like caribou."

(c) The name refers to sockeye salmon common to the area.

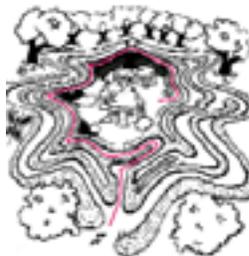
(d) This is a Seneca word that means "crossing the stream," or "carrying place".

(e) This is a word of Mi'kmaq or Maliseet origin, which has been translated as "land of moose" or "retreat of dogs," perhaps referring to its fine hunting grounds.

(f) This word comes from the Cree word *wi-ta-ski-oo-cha-ka-tin-ow*, which can be translated as "place of peace" or "hill of peace."

## Answers

Activity #1: →



Activity #2: First Nations Communities: (a) British Columbia (b) Ontario (c) Prince Edward Island (d) check to see if your answer is correct!

Activity #3: Place Names Quiz: 1c, 2f, 3a, 4b, 5d, 6e.

This information is also available on the Internet at <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca>.

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