

The Project Approach to Learning at

**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning | St. Matthew



**Project Name:** Indigenous Culture

**Age Group:** 6yrs-7yrs

**Project Start Date:** November 2020

**Project End Date:** April 2021



**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning Ontario

Formerly Owl Child Care Services of Ontario

## Background

Our project on Indigenous Culture started at the beginning of November 2020 and finished on April 2021. The ages of the children who participated in this project were 6 and 7 year olds. Rukmanie was the staff who was involved with this project.

## Phase 1: Beginning the Project

This project started when the children were exploring activities during Halloween. They were making Dracula by using tin cans and paint, and paper was used for the features. When Nora finished making her Dracula, she left it for the glue to dry and went home. Dylan then stacked his finished Dracula on top of Nora's and said, "Hey look, the Dracula looks like a totem pole." Elijah then added, "Oh yes, I know what a totem pole is, we learned about that at school." Dylan then added, "I know this because my dad usually reads books about the first people who lived in Canada." A few days after while we were playing outside Ezekiel was playing with some rocks when Hubert asked, "What are you doing with the rocks?" Ezekiel replied, "I am just stacking them on top of each other." Hubert then said, "It looks like the thing that you find in very cold places. I can't remember the name of it right now." We researched on the iPad and realized that he was talking about Inuksuks. The interest grew on this topic so we brought in many books that were related to this topic. (Stolen Words written by Melanie Florence, Shin-chi's Canoe and Shi-shi-etko by Nicola I. Campbell, Wild Berries, Birdsong and Dragonfly Kites Pimithaagansa by Julie Flett.) We were able to educate ourselves on Residential schools and the way of life of the Indigenous people and their languages. As the days went by, the children were getting more and more curious about this topic. They were asking more questions and we were seeking more answers. Hubert came one day and asked, "When is Indigenous Day, can we celebrate it?" We did some research and realized that Indigenous Day was already celebrated. Avery then asked, "Can we celebrate our own Indigenous Day?" With that in mind we decided to celebrate our own Indigenous Day to explore Indigenous Cultures as a project.

**Formal Meaning:** It refers to the nation of a place based on human ethnic culture that has not migrated from its homeland. To be Indigenous is therefore by definition different from being a world culture such as the Western or Euro American culture.

**Informal Meaning:** The way of life of the first people who ever lived on our land, their language, food, music and celebrations.

## What do you know about this topic?

- Indigenous people speak different languages
- Their language was taken away from them
- They make teepees
- People took away their land
- They used to live in houses that were called Longhouses
- They went to special schools far away and were treated badly
- They were the first people who lived in our country
- They lived in different villages

## What do you want to know about this topic?

- What are totem poles and why do they have them?
- Why do they make teepees?
- What kind of food do the Indigenous people eat?
- What are some musical instruments?
- About some of their celebrations
- What are Inukshuks and how are they made?

## Guest Expert (A mom from our group)

Our guest speaker is a mom from our group. When we found out about her background and asked her to share her expertise and knowledge with all the health and safety measures in place, she was happy to do so. Our guest expert brought in drums that were given to her as gifts, pouches that were made of hide, and some eagle feathers. She also had some traditional Indigenous fabrics and handmade bowls. First, she explained to the children about the sacred fire. She said, "It helps to bring peace, relieves your stress and does away with any bad energy." She then burnt some sage and lavender in a bowl. The children started to smell the sage and lavender when Elijah said, "I like that smell." Then Dylan added, "This will take away all the bad things." She then played one of her drums and sang an Indigenous song for the children. While she was doing this some of the children started to dance around her in a circle. After that she answered the children's questions that were sent to her before her presentation. One question was about the Moose Campaign which arose from some brochures that she had sent for the children earlier. She said, "The Moose Campaign helps to protect women and children from violence." Nora then commented, "My mom did some research on the Moose Campaign and she said it is to keep us safe." She then asked the children, "Why is the Eagle on top of the totem pole?" Ezekiel answered, "Because the eagle is very strong and also when somebody gives you the feathers it brings good luck."



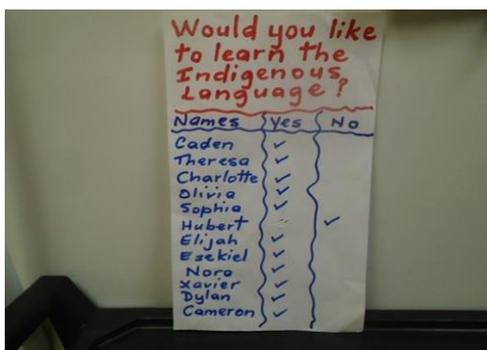
Our guest expert was displaying all the items and explaining the importance of them.



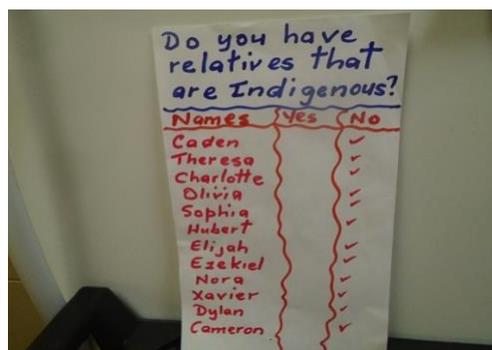
Our guest expert and her son were lighting the sacred fire and then explaining the importance of it. She was also playing a drum and singing Indigenous folk songs.

## Phase 2: Developing the Project

### Surveys



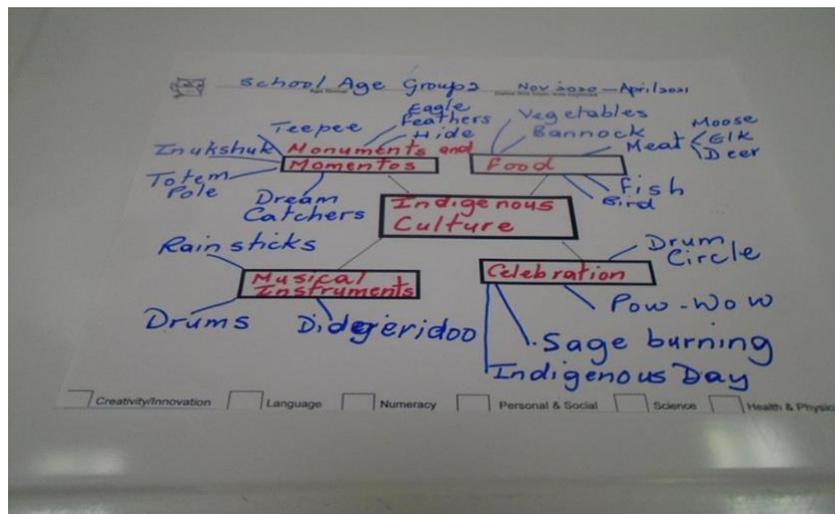
Would you like to learn the Indigenous Language?		
Names	Yes	No
Caden	✓	
Theresa	✓	
Charlotte	✓	
Olivia	✓	
Sophia	✓	
Hubert	✓	✓
Elijah	✓	
Ezekiel	✓	
Nora	✓	
Xavier	✓	
Dylan	✓	
Cameron	✓	



Do you have relatives that are Indigenous?		
Names	Yes	No
Caden		✓
Theresa		✓
Charlotte		✓
Olivia		✓
Sophia		✓
Hubert		✓
Elijah		✓
Ezekiel		✓
Nora		✓
Xavier		✓
Dylan		✓
Cameron		✓

After the survey was completed, we found out that one child's mom has Indigenous background.

### Web



### Vocabulary

Totem pole, Inukshuk, Rain stick, Pow wow, Cree language, Dream catcher, Drum, Bannock, Sage, Lavender, Hide, Feathers, Teepee, Indigenous, Drum circle

## Totem Pole

We started by making two totem poles. The children used acrylic paint and painted pop bottles. Each child was given their own bottle to create a character that is represented on a totem pole. They then used fabric to design the features of their character. Dylan said, "Every animal on the totem pole tells a story of the people in a family." Then Elijah added, "I am making the eagle so I will paint my bottle and the wings black." Hubert who was listening to the conversation said, "I am going to paint mine green to make a frog with a red mouth." While the children were creating their part of the totem pole Theresa commented, "Well I don't know what I want to make but I want it to look scary." So, she painted her bottle blue and added blue and yellow features. Avery painted hers blue with a red mouth and large white teeth. When Cameron saw that his eyes were opened wide, he said, "That is scary." Caden then replied, "A totem pole usually looks a bit scary." Nora, Ezekiel, Xavier and Sophia all worked with a variety of other material to make their part of the totem pole special. Each character was then stacked on top of each the totem poles. Cameron commented, "The eagles should be on top because they have wings and they are strong." There was a snow owl, a frog, a peacock, a cheetah, two eagles, a wolf and many more.



Avery (age 6) and Elijah (age 7) are painting and decorating pop bottles for the totem poles.



Dylan (age 7) is stacking the painted pop bottles to make the totem poles. A display of our finished totem poles.

## Rain Sticks

We discovered that rain sticks are used by many different Indigenous groups and decided to make our rain sticks with cardboard tubes. Each child had their own piece of cardboard tube for health and safety reasons. When Sophia started to use the hammer she said, "This is fun but still scary." Some of the children used old bed springs to put into their tubes. When Hubert saw that he was very curious and asked, "How is this going to work?" Then Elijah answered, "It will be the same as the nails." The children then used Indigenous craft paper to decorate their tubes. Some children used strips of paper while others used large sheets. When they were finished, the bottoms of the tubes were sealed and then it was time to pour the materials that were used to make the musical sound. Hubert poured pebbles and some rice into his rain stick and as he was doing this he said, "It sounds like hail or very heavy rain." Avery helped to fill a smaller tube with rice and commented, "This one sounds like real rain." Theresa then added, "I like the sound of mine, it has beans and rice." Then Xavier started to laugh and said, "It sounds like something you can eat." When the rain sticks were finally finished the children enjoyed shaking them and listening to the different sounds from the variety of materials that were used.



Nora (age 7) and Dylan (age 7) are hammering nails into the cardboard tubes to make the rain sticks.



Hubert (age 7) is filling rice into the tubes for the sound effects. A display of our rain sticks.

## Teepee

One day when we were outside the children found a huge pile of branches under the trees where they were playing. Together they all started gathering the branches and moving them around one of the trees. There were also some strings that the children decided to use to attach the branches. While they were working Avery said, "We need to use the long branches first then the little ones." Hubert then added, "We can also use the pine needle branches to cover the open spaces." Dylan then commented, "We need to make it very big so we can all fit inside." Together the children helped each other to gather the branches and position them in place. When they were finished Sophia said, "We need something to cover the teepee." So, the next day we used a sheet and tied it around the teepee. Xavier, Theresa and Nora all gathered pieces of twigs and leaves and put them in a pile inside the teepee and said that they were going to make a pretend fire to keep everybody warm. The children then went and sat inside the teepee. Elijah and Ezekiel took two pieces of sticks and started to rub them together when Avery asked, "What are you doing?" The boys answered, "We are trying to start a fire, when you rub two sticks together you can start a fire." Then Dylan commented, "That is how the Indigenous people started their fires a long time ago." Hubert then added, "When you are in Scouts and you go camping that is how you can start a fire."



The children are stacking branches to make a teepee. The finished teepee.



The children are wrapping a sheet around the branches and are trying to secure the ends to the tree.

## Drum

While we were watching a video on an Indigenous community during the Pow Wow celebration, the children saw the drum circle and were wondering if we can make a drum like that and have our own drum circle. We decided that when we have our Indigenous Day celebration, we could make a drum and have a drum circle. We started by using a large tub. When Theresa saw the tub she said, "How are we going to make a drum with that big tub?" Then Hubert answered, "We can turn it upside down and use a stick to hit it." Nora then added, "We can use a piece of cardboard to cover it and make the top of the drum." Ezekiel then commented, "That will be a big drum." Dylan heard that and said, "The drum that is in the middle of the drum circle is usually big." With that said, Charlotte and Dylan volunteered to help glue the cardboard onto the top of the tub. Dylan was curious about what it would sound like if he banged on the cardboard. When he banged the cardboard he said, "This is strong and loud." After that Nora and Theresa used a wood pattern shelf liner to cover the side of the tub. Theresa said, "We don't need glue, the paper is very sticky." Then Nora added, "It looks like real wood that is used to make drums." The next day Elijah, Caden and Theresa attached jute ropes as the string to tighten the drum's base. When this was all finished Ezekiel, Dylan and Caden had a turn banging on the drum and said that they can't wait for the Indigenous Day celebration to have a Pow Wow with a drum circle.



Charlotte is hot gluing a piece of cardboard on a tub to make the top of the drum. Nora is using shelf liner to decorate the drum.



Elijah is stringing jute rope on the drum. Ezekiel is enjoying some beats on the drum.

## Inukshuk

The children wanted to go to the forest to collect rocks and built the Inukshuk. First, we did some research on the origin and purpose of the Inukshuk and learned that the Inukshuks are figures made of piled stones or boulders. An Inukshuk could also be used as a marking for a good hunting or fishing spot. With this in mind we went to the forest to gather the rocks for our Inukshuk. When we got to the forest the children noticed that the pile of rocks was covered with snow and ice. Elijah said, "There is so much snow we can't see any rocks." Cameron then added, "Well maybe we can dig down into the snow to get the rocks underneath." Ezekiel said, "I think we can use these sticks to dig the rocks." Caden, Sofia and Oliva found a few small stones under a tree and try to make an Inukshuk. Hubert commented, "I have some tree bark that you can use to balance your rocks on." Meanwhile Dylan, Elijah, Theresa and Ezekiel gathered some rocks and were able to build a small Inukshuk. On the other side of the path Nora and Charlotte with some help from Hubert were able to build another Inukshuk onto a large tree stump. We then took some of the rocks that we found to the classroom and the children stacked them together to make another Inukshuk. Later that week we used milk cartons to make an Inukshuk. Charlotte and Hubert volunteered to help. First, they hot glued the milk cartons together then used tape to secure them. When it was finished Dylan said, "It looks like a robot." Then Nora replied, "I think it looks like an Inukshuk."



Hubert (age 7) is stacking rocks in the forest to make an Inukshuk. A display of the Inukshuk that the children made in the classroom.



Charlotte (age 7) is hot gluing milk cartons to make an Inukshuk and is proud of her display.

### Phase 3: Concluding the Project

## Final Event Indigenous Day Celebration

First, we started by listening to Indigenous music and enjoying yummy bannock. Bannock is deep-fried dough that is very familiar among the Indigenous community. We enjoyed this treat with some strawberry jam and powdered sugar. While Ezekiel was taking a bite of his bannock he said, "The Indigenous people sure have yummy treats." Then Dylan added, "Oh yes this is good bannock." After that Sophia brought in an Indigenous drum that she shared with the group and said, "My grandfather gave this to my brother." Caden, then asked, "Where did he get it from?" Sophia then replied, "He got it when he was travelling somewhere but I don't know where." Xavier then added, "I have a lot of Indigenous stuff at home." After that the children looked at a display of items that were given to us by a parent. There were pieces of fabric, hide, a dreamcatcher, some sage in a pouch, eagle and goose feathers and also a bowl that was made from hide. The children were very excited to listen to Indigenous music and do a drum circle during a Pow Wow celebration. They played on the big drum and were shaking the rain sticks that they made earlier. They all took turns hitting the drum and dancing around shaking their rain sticks until it was time to go home.



A tray of bannock that was enjoyed by the children. Elijah (age 7) is enjoying his bannock.



Nora (age 7) and Charlotte (age 7) are playing the drum while some of the other children are using the rain sticks and are dancing during our celebration.

## Teacher Reflections

Throughout this project the children enhanced their skills in diversity, cultural awareness and acceptance of others regardless of their background and cultural differences. This was very obvious when a child asked, “Why do we have to learn about the Indigenous people?” and then another child answered, “Because we all live in Canada and it is good to know about other people who live here.” Then another child added, “Because you get to enjoy different food and music from them.” This topic also provoked some interest and curiosity when we were reading books and having conversations about Residential schools. One child curiously asked, “Why do the Indigenous people have to have their language taken away from them? I would not want to not be able to speak my language, that is sad.” Then another child with a concerned look also asked, “Why do the children have to leave their homes to go to school far away?” These questions were difficult to answer but with some research they were answered age appropriately to the best of knowledge. There was a wide range of emotions during some of the group discussions about this topic. The four foundations of “How does Learning Happen” were evident throughout this project. Expression was practiced through oral communication by sharing ideas, making comments, and asking and answering questions about Indigenous culture. Belonging was a part of this project by bridging the gap between home and

school. The families were involved whether as a guest speaker, sending relevant materials for us to use, or researching and reading materials that were related to the topic for the children to enhance their knowledge. Some of the children extended their learning about this topic from school while others had experiences from home or participating in events in the community. Engagement was a great part of this project because we were involved in doing many related activities during the process. There were many activities that were not documented; for example, we made dreamcatchers and discussed and explored the Moose Campaign which reassured the children about their protection and safety. Well-Being was a part of this project because the children did some of the activities outdoors by exploring the forest to collect rocks and branches to build their Inukshuk and teepee. This fostered their physical development and self-confidence. Throughout this project health and safety measures were practiced. During this project the children were given an opportunity to experience the way of life of a different culture and realized that within our school, community and country there are people that speak differently, look differently and eat differently who can still coexist together happily by accepting each other's differences.