

**SGEU**

Indigenous  
Committee

# INDIGENOUS 101

**FACTS TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING**



THERE CAN BE NO  
**RECONC**  
WITHOUT TRUTH





# ILIATION

On the path toward reconciliation, we all play our part, and the first step is learning and acknowledging the truth of Indigenous past and present in the country we call Canada.

There are many myths and misconceptions about First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples in our country. Here we'll break down some of the most common and most harmful ones.

We encourage you to visit the sources listed and actively learn more for yourself.



# MYTHS AND FACTS





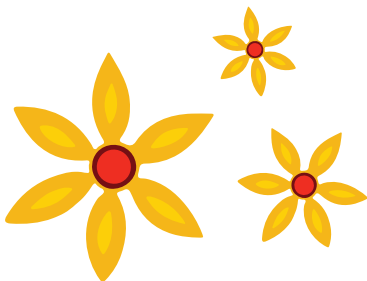
## MYTH:

“All the injustices against Indigenous Peoples happened long ago – everyone should move on and take responsibility for their lives.”

## FACT:

There has been no point in time where injustices against Indigenous Peoples have stopped. Every generation tends to want to place injustice firmly in the past, but it is a contemporary issue requiring work today and into the future.

Source: Vowel





## MYTH:

“There is no connection between Indigenous unemployment and health and social problems.

## FACT:

The impact of the residential school system is multi-generational, current and a primary contributor to the social problems of many survivors, their families and communities.

Employment rates and opportunities on reserves vary due to regional economic circumstances and the presence or absence of on-reserve resource bases that can generate employment. Mostly incomes are low and employment prospects poor, so it is not surprising that a large proportion of the Indigenous population is unemployed and lives in poverty.

Source: Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.



## MYTH:

“Indigenous Peoples get free housing on reserves”

## FACT:

First Nations can apply for social housing programs offered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The housing programs to assist Indigenous people are only applicable for dwellings on reserve lands and are mainly designed to give low-income families access to rental housing.

Bands and First Nations that meet CMHC lending criteria apply to a bank for conventional mortgage funds to finance the social housing construction, usually with CMHC providing loan insurance. The band rents the housing units to its members and maintains the mortgage. On many reserves, the house is owned but the land is not therefore it cannot be sold, This makes it impossible to build up equity in your home.

Source: Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.



# MYTH:

“Indigenous people are more likely to perpetrate crimes than be victim to one.”



# FACT:



Indigenous people are overrepresented in the Canadian criminal justice system as both victims/survivors and accused/convicted individuals. Colonialism has led to cultural alienation, territorial dispossession, intergenerational trauma, systemic discrimination and socio-economic marginalization, which together continue to have profoundly negative impacts on the lives of many Indigenous people today.

Issues of Indigenous people being both over-policed and under-policed has been identified as an example of systemic discrimination. Studies have found that biases have led to Indigenous peoples being seen as less worthy victims by the police, having their credibility questioned, and having their requests for assistance ignored or not adequately supported.

Source:

Understanding the Overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the Criminal Justice System.



## MYTH:

“The intentions of residential schools were good, and it’s all in the past anyway.”

## FACT:

Indigenous people experienced hundreds of years of having their children forcibly taken. Many didn’t come home. Some did but had experienced terrible abuse and neglect. This was inflicted on five generations of people. This unimaginable trauma requires resources for mental health, physical health, psychology and healing for generations. These resources would be required for anyone, regardless of race or religion, to “move on” from trauma, and are unavailable for a large portion of Indigenous people.

There were 20 residential schools in Saskatchewan, operating from 1889 to 1996.

Sources:

Miller, University of Regina



## MYTH:

“Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People just put themselves in dangerous situations.”

## FACT:

In 2023, Statistics Canada released a report showing that Indigenous women and girls were six times more likely to be murdered than other groups of people in Canada. Between 2009 and 2021, Indigenous women and girls made up 2% and 3% of the Canadian population, yet represented 5% and 7% of homicide victims. The United Nations (in addition to Canadian and Manitoba-led inquiries) have consistently noted that the deaths, and the failure to seek justice for these victims, are a clear violation of international and domestic law and demonstrate the deadly intersections of racism, colonization, misogyny and homophobia. Crime is often about violence, power, and control – no one deserves to be a victim.

Source:

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women,  
Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People.



## MYTH:

“Indigenous Peoples have an abundance of reserve lands.”

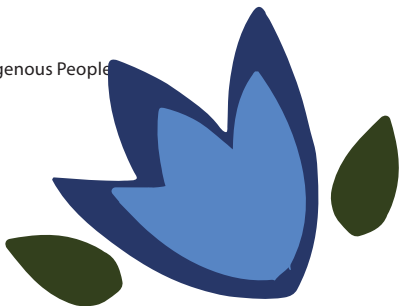
## FACT:

Just 0.2 per cent of Canada's total landmass is reserve land, and it is home to over 300,000 Indigenous Peoples (20% of the Indigenous population).

Some reserves are tiny, and some are great distances from urban centres, education facilities, health centres and employment opportunities. Reserves are not Traditional or Treaty Territories, which can be vast.

Source:

Insight on 10 Myths About Indigenous Peoples





## MYTH:

“Indigenous Peoples  
are all the same.”

## FACT:


There is a diversity of histories, culture, traditions, worldviews and languages among First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. The First Nations alone include over 600 bands and over 2,000 reserves in Canada – 70 in Saskatchewan alone.

There are over 70,000 Inuit in Canada, many of whom reside across four regions in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Northern Quebec, Labrador, and Nunavut.

Métis is a distinct culture that arose from relations between First Nations and early European settlers. The “historic Métis Nation Homeland” includes the three prairie provinces and extends into Ontario, B.C., Northwest Territories and the northern U.S.

Source:

Insight on 10 Myths About Indigenous Peoples, Government of Canada,  
Métis Nations Saskatchewan



**DID**  
**YOU**  
**KNOW?**





## DID YOU KNOW?

In June 2021, as little as 44.7% of high school students who identify as Indigenous graduated on time compared to 78.8% of non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous people do not all receive free post-secondary funding, and only status Indians are eligible to receive funding for post-secondary education through Indigenous Services Canada funding; non-status Indians, Inuit and Métis are not eligible. Eligibility is just one criterion. Students must apply to their home community band office. Some communities have too many applicants and long waiting lists that can never be funded. Some students are required to be residents in the community, which eliminates the students who live in urban centres.

Although some bands set aside funding, graduates are more likely to fall away from higher education due to the lack of available funds.

Sources:

Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.

Ministry of Education Annual Report, Hango



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Métis sash holds great significance. It is a visible symbol of Métis identity. It was mostly worn around the waist for men or over the shoulder for women. They were created from European wool, using a First Nations fingerweaving technique. Each colour holds great meaning, such as gold representing Prosperity and Honour. Traditionally, the sash has many practical purposes, including:

- Muffler or scarf
- Sling, bandage or tourniquet
- Bridle/saddle blanket
- A rope (useful to portage canoes)
- Identifying one's kill in a buffalo hunt
- A calendar system

A sash is presented as a thank you to honour individuals for outstanding cultural, political and social contributions to the Métis Nation.

Source:  
British Columbia Métis Nation



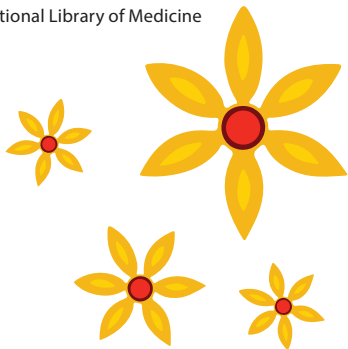
## DID YOU KNOW?

There are Four Sacred Directions in First Nations culture. Each of the Four Directions are represented by a distinctive colour, such as black, red, yellow and white. East refers to the physical birth. South symbolizes adolescence and exploring new experiences. West symbolizes adulthood and its challenges. North symbolizes life's final phase that manifests all wisdom and spirituality.

The Four Directions can also represent seasons of the year, aspects of life, animals and the Four Sacred Medicines (tobacco, cedar, sage and sweetgrass)

Sources:

First Nations Pedagogy Online, National Library of Medicine



# THE 5 LINGUISTIC GROUPS OF SASKATCHEWAN ARE:

Dene

Dakota

Nakota

Cree

Saulteaux

Saskatchewan is also the homeland of the Métis, making Michif another Indigenous language spoken within the province.

Source:  
Government of Canada

## DID YOU KNOW?

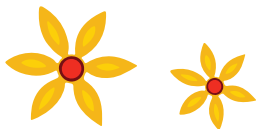
The significance of storytelling to indigenous communities cannot be understated. Indigenous Peoples have long passed their family and local histories, legends, religious rites, and family remembrances down through Oral Tradition, usually through Elders.

Storytelling is a foundation for holistic learning, relationship building and experiential learning. It is integral in maintaining identity and community cohesion and gives Indigenous people a voice.

Stories impart valuable life lessons and contribute to a source of historical knowledge. Language loss was part of a systematic destruction or assimilation of Indigenous Peoples.

Sources:

First Nations Pedagogy Online, Canadian Geographic





## DID YOU KNOW?

### Who are the Métis?

The Métis emerged as a distinct people/ Nation in the historic Northwest during the course of the 18th & 19th centuries, prior to Canada becoming a formal nation state. While the initial offspring of these unions were individuals who possessed mixed ancestry, the gradual establishment of distinct Métis communities, outside of First Nations and European cultures and settlements, as well as the subsequent inter-marriages between Métis women and Métis men, resulted in the genesis of a new Indigenous Peoples – the Métis.

The Métis Nation–Saskatchewan is made up of 12 regions.

Source:  
Métis Nation Saskatchewan



## DID YOU KNOW?



The circle is seen as a dominant symbol in nature and considered sacred. It has come to represent wholeness, completion, and the cycles of life, including human communication.

Movement in the Medicine Wheel and in Native American ceremonies is circular. Typically, this is in a clockwise, or “sun-wise” direction. This helps align with the forces of nature, such as gravity and the rising and setting of the Sun.

Sources:

National Library of Medicine First Nations Pedagogy Online

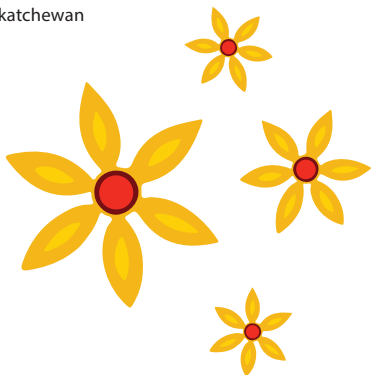


## DID YOU KNOW?

Smudging is a sacred cultural ceremony. Often, tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and/or cedar are burned to purify the body, mind, heart and spirit of people who enter a ceremonial area in preparation for a later event. Smudging can also be performed as a separate sacred ceremony. Smudging involves placing the medicine(s) into a fireproof vessel and then lighting it with matches. During the smudging, people waft the smoke to cover their head and body. The rising smoke is believed to carry words and prayers to the Creator.

Sources:

Sask Culture, University of Saskatchewan





## DID YOU KNOW?

Tobacco, cedar, sage and sweetgrass are the Four Sacred Medicines.

- Tobacco is commonly used in ceremonies.
- Cedar is primarily valued for its restorative properties, as well as its ability to purify spaces and people of negative energy.
- Sage is used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings, as well as for smudging to cleanse a person or place.
- Sweetgrass is seen as the sacred hair of Mother Earth, often burnt at the start of a ceremony or prayer to attract positive energies.

Sources:

First Nations Pedagogy Online, Durham College



## DID YOU KNOW?

Bill C-31, or a Bill to Amend the Indian Act, passed into law in April 1985. It brought the Indian Act into line with gender equality under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It proposed to modify the Indian Act, including significant changes to Indian status and band membership. Three major goals were to address gender discrimination of the Indian Act, to restore Indian status to those who had been forcibly enfranchised due to previous discriminatory provisions, and to allow bands to control their own band membership as a step towards self-government.

Source:

The University of British Columbia - First Nations  
& Indigenous Studies







## DID YOU KNOW?

Indigenous veterans who have served their country in war faced challenges and injustice during peace.

After WW1, returning veterans did not receive the same assistance as other soldiers under the War Veterans Allowance Act.

Between the two world wars, some Indian reserve land was sold to the Soldier Settlement Board for non-Indigenous veterans to farm.

Indigenous veterans were excluded from laying wreaths to honour their fallen comrades at the National Memorial in Ottawa until 1995.

Source: Government of Canada



## DID YOU KNOW?

The First Nations population in Saskatchewan is the highest in Canada. In 2021:

- **17%** of the population here self-identified as Indigenous.
- **62,800** people here self-identified as Métis.
- **460** people here self-identified as Inuit.

Almost half of the Indigenous population in Saskatchewan are under the age of 25.

More than 1/3 of the Indigenous population here live in the more populous cities of Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert.

**SGEU is the first ever labour union to elect an Indigenous VP. It is a role dedicated to Indigenous representation and advocacy.**

Sources:

Indigenous Peoples of Saskatchewan 2021 Census of Canada,  
2021 Census Data – Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, [SGEU](#)



# DEVELOPING COMMON LANGUAGE

There are three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples: First Nation, Métis and Inuit as defined by the Constitution Act, 1982.

## **First Nation:**

- The term used by the original inhabitants of this country to describe themselves and with whom the treaties were signed.

## **Inuit:**

- Term used to describe a distinct group of Indigenous people traditionally inhabiting Arctic regions The name Eskimos is no longer an acceptable term, Inuit in their language Inuktitut means “the people”.

## **Métis:**

- A distinct nation, existing as early as the mid 1700's who were descended from Scottish and French fur traders who married into First Nations families. The French word 'Métis' means mixed and many Métis now prefer the term 'Michif' as they no longer consider their culture or identity to be mixed.

Sources:

Russell Fayant, Metis Studies Faculty, SUNTEP Regina



# GLOSSARY OF SELECT TERMS

## Colonization

- The process through which a foreign people establish control over a territory and, if applicable, its Indigenous Peoples. Control is established through various means, including political or economic legislation directed at Indigenous Peoples or their lands, foreign settlement, and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples into the colonizer's culture.

## Duty to Consult

- The duty to consult is a statutory, contractual and common law obligation that must be fulfilled by the Crown prior to taking actions or making decisions that may have consequences for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. It is an important step toward reconciliation.

## Indian Act

- The primary law the federal government uses to administer Indian status, local First Nations governments and the management of reserve land. It also outlines governmental obligations to First Nations Peoples. It is an evolving, paradoxical document that has enabled trauma, human rights violations and social and cultural disruption for generations of Indigenous Peoples.

## Indigenous

- Indigenous does not mean 'first', it means 'from there'. Indigenous people are First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Métis are Indigenous because their culture, language and traditions arose in Canada and exist nowhere else.

## Intergenerational Trauma

- Trauma refers to a very serious negative experience. Intergenerational means something occurring across generations. Intergenerational trauma is when trauma is passed down through families.



## Reconciliation

- Attempts made by individuals and institutions to raise awareness about colonization and its ongoing effects on Indigenous Peoples. Also refers to efforts made to address the harms caused by various policies and programs of colonization, such as residential schools.

## Reserve

- A tract of land set aside under the Indian Act and treaty agreements for the exclusive use of an Indian band. Reserve lands are not strictly “owned” by bands but are held in trust for bands by the Crown. Some Nations were relocated to reserves in areas that were completely alien to their traditional lands.

## Sovereignty

- Sovereignty is an abstract legal concept. It also has political, social and economic implications. In strictly legal terms, sovereignty describes the power of a state to govern itself and its subjects. In Indigenous context, it broadly refers to the rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and to govern their own affairs.

## Status/Registered Indian

- Indian Status is a legal identity defined by the Indian Act. It applies to some Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The terms of status, including who is considered Indian under the law, have changed over time. Outside legal contexts, Indian is a term that is now considered outdated and offensive.

## Traditional Lands/Territory

- An area that a Nation has occupied and used for generations, long before reserve borders were imposed by the *Indian Act*.

## Two-Spirit

- Refers to a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit. Used by some Indigenous Peoples to describe their gender, sexual or spiritual identity.

## QUICK FACTS

- Turtle Island is another name for North America. The origin of the name comes from the Algonquian and Iroquoian-speaking Peoples.
- In 1870, the Canadian government devised a system of scrip — referred to as Métis scrip — that issued documents redeemable for land or money. Scrip was given to Métis people living in the West in exchange for their land rights. The scrip process was legally complex and disorganized; this made it difficult for Métis people to acquire land, yet simultaneously created room for fraud.
- Status was taken from First Nations people if a woman married a non-Indian, if someone went to University, if someone fought in the Canadian forces, or if someone voluntarily ‘enfranchised’ themselves in order to gain the right to vote or leave the reserve.
- Indigenous men and boys in Canada choose to keep their hair long for many reasons as a source of strength, resilience and power. It is a way to honour ancestors and connect to their culture. However, they still face shaming and teasing for their long hair.

### Sources:

Canadian Encyclopedia of Canada, Gold Rush Trail, Russell Fayant, Metis Studies Faculty, SUNTEP Regina

**See our full  
list of sources here:**



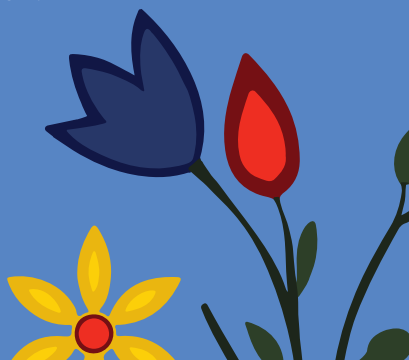
## HOMAGE TO TREATY LANDS

# A RECONCILIATION MESSAGE FROM SGEU

Saskatchewan is the traditional territory of the Cree, Dene, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota, and Saulteaux peoples and the homeland of the Métis Nation. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work here and we thank the many generations of people who have taken care of this land, long before settlers arrived.

SGEU is committed to the struggle against the systems of oppression that has dispossessed Indigenous people of their lands and denied their rights to self-determination.

Treaty No. 2 1871  
Treaty No. 4 1874  
Treaty No. 5 1875  
Treaty No. 6 1876  
Treaty No. 8 1899  
Treaty No. 10 1906





SASKATCHEWAN GOVERNMENT AND  
GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION