

Activity #1

Medicine Wheel

Indigenous spirituality & culture

What the TRC says about reconciliation

It requires that the paternalistic and racist foundations of the residential school system be rejected as the basis for an ongoing relationship. Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.

Inviting an Indigenous speaker

The best way to learn about Indigenous people is from an Indigenous Elder. Contact a [Friendship Centre](#). For protocols for inviting Elders, see page 6 in the Introduction to this resource.

Who are Indigenous people?

The Indigenous (or Aboriginal) people in Canada are First Nations, Inuit and Métis. See page 4 in the introduction for definitions.

Communicating with Parents

These activities and the conversations may affect children (and adults) differently. Read the section about communicating with parents in the Introduction on page 6. Each activity includes a sample letter for parents and includes suggestions for what you may say to parents about the activities. Adapt them to suit your group's needs.

Objectives

Medicine wheel teachings will differ according to different Indigenous traditions. This activity includes aspects of an Ojibway medicine wheel. It includes instructions for making a medicine wheel and takes about twenty minutes. Children will:

1. Learn about aspects of the medicine wheel common to many Indigenous cultures.
2. Identify colours and directions associated with an Ojibway medicine wheel.
3. Learn that medicine wheels can teach us about living peacefully with all creation.
4. Make a medicine wheel to help children remember and share what they've learned.

Overview for Leaders

Medicine wheels date back thousands of years to the stone patterns and formations found in places like the plains of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. [Read about these in the Canadian Encyclopedia](#). Medicine wheels are an ancient tradition but practiced differently – and sometimes not at all – by Indigenous people today. Some Indigenous cultures use medicine wheels in prayer, in healing, in learning or in caring for the land and other sacred teachings. Remember that these teachings can be as diverse as the hundreds of Indigenous cultures in Canada. Medicine wheel teachings in this activity are from the Rev. Dr. Margaret Mullin, executive director of Winnipeg Inner City Missions and the Rev. Shannon Bell-Wyominga, minister with the Cariboo Presbyterian Church. These teachings are integrated into an activity to share this knowledge with children. [Watch a six minute YouTube video](#) about a child making a medicine wheel. This video does not depict the exact same activity described in this resource, but will give you a good idea how children can interact with medicine wheel making.

What is a medicine wheel?

“The Medicine Wheel is a circular symbol representing the wholeness of traditional Native life. It is a perfectly balanced shape without a top or bottom, length or width. It represents constant movement and change. It also represents and symbolizes unity, peace, harmony and courage. It is a testimony of the human being’s ability to survive and to maintain balance. The ultimate goal is to strike a harmonious balance in life. The circular form of the Medicine Wheel shows the relationship of all things in a unity, a perfect form, and suggests the cyclical nature of all relationships and interactions. Everything in the universe is part of a single whole.” From [Teachings of the Medicine Wheel](#), Unit 2, Student Manual, Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, 2010, p. 3.

The medicine wheel described in this activity and craft draws upon Ojibway teachings. Directions and colours may differ in different Indigenous cultures. Christian teachings have been accorded to the medicine wheel according to teachings by Indigenous Christians in Presbyterian ministries with Indigenous people.

What do the Indigenous people of the territory that you live in believe about the medicine wheel? How could you connect with them to learn more about their beliefs? See the box “Inviting an Indigenous Speaker” on the previous page for links to find Indigenous people living near you.



Preparation

1. Using poster paper and coloured cardstock, make a large example of a medicine wheel with the four equal quadrants, the top being white and in clockwise order then yellow, red and black. On each coloured quadrant, label as follows:
Yellow: east, spring, new life, earth, physical
Red: south, summer, youth, air, emotional
Black: west, fall, adult, water, spiritual
White: north, winter, Elder, fire, intellectual
2. Prepare one sign in each colour of the medicine wheel and display one sign on each wall of the room with its corresponding direction. Post the yellow sign on the east-facing wall; the red sign on the south-facing wall; the black sign on the west-facing wall and; the white sign on the north-facing wall.
3. Prepare to read the section "Learn about the Medicine Wheel."
4. If you plan to make a medicine wheel hoop, prepare an example (see page 14).
5. Bring the supplies needed for each child to make either a paper or hoop medicine wheel, including copies of the "Seven Sacred Teachings with Bible Verses."
6. Bring the items needed for the Closing.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

Find out whose traditional territory you are on. See page 8 for resources on how to do this. Say:

We gather today and stand on the traditional territory of *[name the Indigenous people who lived here before you]*. We understand

- ◆ that this land was very important for Indigenous people who lived on it before us;
- ◆ that this land is still important for Indigenous people today;
- ◆ and that Indigenous ways of living with each other, and their ways of relating to the Creator, have always been connected to this land and its creatures.

Learn about the Medicine Wheel

Parts of the Medicine Wheel

Gather in a circle. Hold up the poster of the medicine wheel. Tell the children what it is and ask them to describe it. Encourage their observations and ideas, but introduce these components:

- ◆ **It is always a circle**
Many Indigenous people believe they are connected to the land – and all creation. These connections are represented by a circle.
- ◆ **The circle is divided into four equal parts**
These represent different parts of creation. They are equal and interrelated. They balance with each other to make the whole circle complete.

- ◆ **The quadrants are four different colours**

The colours, representing all the races on the earth, made by one Creator and making up one circle are: (clockwise from the top) white, yellow, red and black.

- ◆ **The quadrants represent the four directions**

The directions are: (clockwise from the top) north, east, south, west.

- ◆ Sometimes the medicine wheel quadrants include the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, fall) and other aspects of life such as the natural elements (fire, earth, air, water), human elements (intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual), or even types of creatures.

Remind the children that Indigenous people believe that “everything we do, every decision we make, affects our family and our community; it affects the air we breathe, the animals, the plants, the water in some way. Each of us is totally dependent on everything else.” (From Evelyn Steinhauer, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta.)

Ask children to stand in the middle of the room and have them face the different directions in turn as you read aloud the corresponding section of “Parts of the Medicine Wheel” for each one. Invite children to imagine (and do) actions that correspond with what they are hearing.

Parts of the Medicine Wheel

East is yellow. The sun rises there to start a new day. The season is **spring**. There is always a new beginning. We think of new life, **infants and children**. The element is **earth** which connects us all. We think of our **physical** well-being.

South is red. Everything coming from there is warm. The season is **summer** and we think of **youth** and their energy. The element is **air** which all life shares and needs to breathe. We are aware of our **emotional** health.

West is black. Here we are preparing for the completion of our circle. The season is **fall** with plants changing and leaves falling. We think of **adults** and the life experiences they have. The element is **water**, most of our bodies are made up of water and most of the earth’s surface is water. We think of our **spiritual** needs and beliefs.

North is white. There is cold and some living things go dormant (to sleep). The season is **winter**. We think of **older people, of Elders** who have knowledge and wisdom to share with children and grandchildren. The element is **fire**, which can give warmth. We remember our **intellectual** abilities.

Life Teachings of the Medicine Wheel

Invite everyone to sit in a circle. Read these words from Dave Chief, Oglala Lakota to explain the importance of the Circle, which is the shape of the medicine wheel. As they listen, invite them to make up motions or gestures with you (e.g. pointing) according to the words. At the end you might show them to clasp their two hands together and hold their arms out in front and away from their bodies to show a circle. Read aloud:

“The Circle has healing power.
In the Circle we are all equal.
When in the Circle
No one is in front of you
No one is behind you
No one is above you
No one is below you
The sacred Circle is designed
to create unity.”

Then ask children to describe how they act to show they care about other people? Ask the children what living in unity with creation (the environment) looks like? (*Encourage and accept responses.*)

Some Ojibway people say this is how we can live in unity with all creation. Read the following:

1. Learn and share your wisdom
2. Seek and speak the truth
3. Be humble
4. Show love for all
5. Respect all creation
6. Have courage in all you do
7. Act and speak honestly

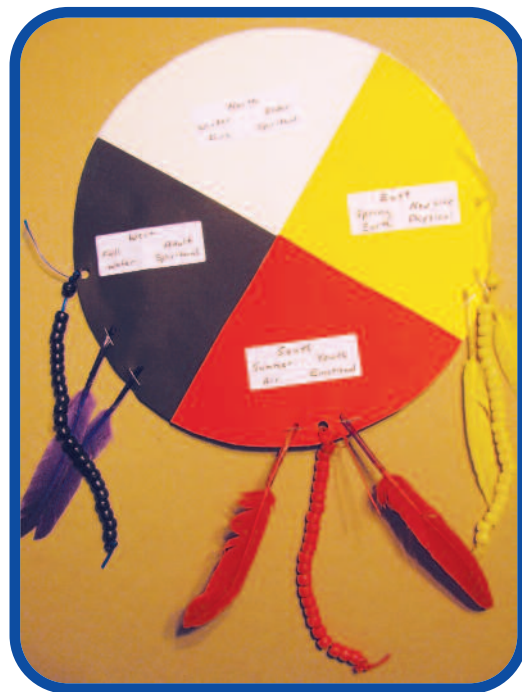
Make a medicine wheel

Select or give participants the choice of making one of the following medicine wheels in Part A and then adding life teachings to it as described in Part B.

Part A

Craft Choice 1: Medicine Wheel Poster

You will need: Templates for drawing a large circle and for drawing quadrants for that size circle, sheets of poster board, different colours of card stock, scissors, glue, stapler, different coloured feathers,



leather or plastic lacing, beads (white, yellow, red and black), fine and thick markers, ruler, hole punch. All supplies are widely available at craft stores and dollar stores.

Instructions:

Invite children to make their own medicine wheel with the four colours and to add other elements that are important to them. Use the large circle template to draw the big circle. Cut it out and, using the quadrant templates, children can cut out the different colours and glue them on. Alternatively, help the children draw lines on a large circle and colour in the quadrants or outline them in the different colours. Encourage them to identify the meaning of the four different parts for them, and then to add their own drawings (e.g. animals), coloured feathers or lacing with beads to the sections. Medicine wheels are often primarily pictorial, but words can also be printed on, or labels made and added, about the meanings and teachings. To add the seven sacred teachings, see below. Encourage the children to talk about their choices and to present their medicine wheels to each other.

Craft Choice 2:

Medicine Wheel Hoop

You will need: Two white pipe cleaners for each hoop (twisted together at ends to make a circle); long, leather or plastic lacing, tape, glue, stapler, ruler, feathers and beads (yellow, red, black and white);
Option: long, thin strips of leather or cotton cloth.

Instructions:

1. Detach the pipe cleaner hoop in one place and thread on red, yellow, white and black beads in that order (about 20 of each) to correspond with the medicine wheel colours. Twist the end to close up the circle again.
Option: Instead of threading on beads, do #4 below.
2. Cut two lengths of lacing, long enough to fit across the circle, and tie them in a cross over the wire circle so that the interior of the circle is divided into four equal parts. The leather strips should be long enough to hang about 25 cm over each side of the circle. Alternatively, hang two or three strips along the bottom of the circle.
3. Tie or tape yellow, red, black and white feathers to the lacing to correspond to the colour of that quadrant of the circle.
4. Option: Cut narrow strips of leather or cotton cloth and wrap the entire hoop with them. Go round and round the wire, overlapping each round a bit, so that all the wire is covered. You may wish to wrap each quadrant in suitably coloured cloth.



5. Encourage the children to talk about what aspects of the medicine wheel might have significance in their lives.

Part B

The Seven Sacred Teachings

(For medicine wheel poster or hoop)

You will need: Scissors, tape, enough copies of the “Seven Sacred Teachings with Bible Verses” list on page 16 so that every child can have one. Option: give one bible verse to a group of three or four children.

Instructions:

Seven feathers can be attached to the bottom part of a medicine wheel to represent the seven sacred teachings. This may be done with both craft options (poster or hoop). Some Indigenous Christians have found meaning in these teachings and related them to biblical scripture. Write and cut out the scriptures passages on paper, and attach them to the feather with the appropriate sacred teaching, as in the picture on page 14. Option: Invite the children to help each other find and read aloud the Bible passages.

Closing

You will need: a Bible; copies of the Book of Praise hymnal.

Bible Story: (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

Today we learned that a medicine wheel has different parts, but that each part is important, and connected. The apostle Paul said something like this about the church! The church is like a body. Each part is different: a hand, a foot, an eye or an ear. But all parts are important because they all do different things. Each part can help us to show our love to God, and to each other.

Sing to the tune of hymn #328

It's the Creator's world
O happy day to see
the rocks and trees, the skies and seas
God loves us, you and me!

Pray

Dear Creator God,
Thank you that we can learn from
First Nations people!
The medicine wheel reminds us
that you filled the world with
different people,
and that each one is special,
and that you love all people!
In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Seven Sacred Teachings with Bible Verses

Cut out along dotted lines

.....
Respect "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king."
– 1 Peter 2:17

.....
Truth "Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" – John 8:31-32

.....
Humility "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." – Matthew 18:3

.....
Love "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." – 1 Peter 4:8

.....
Honesty "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips." – Proverbs 24:26

.....
Wisdom "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, as you come to know him." – Ephesians 1:17

.....
Courage "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love."
– 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

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– 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Handout for Home: Medicine Wheel

Dear parent or guardian,

Today we did an activity to help us learn about First Nations people in Canada. We made medicine wheels. A medicine wheel is an ancient tradition but practiced differently – and sometimes not at all – by First Nations in Canada. The circular shape is significant for representing the interconnectedness of creation: all parts of the circle are equally important; all parts are dependent on each other. For some Indigenous cultures, medicine wheels are used in prayer, in healing, or in learning about and caring for the land.

Ask your child about his/her experience today in making a medicine wheel. What ideas were familiar and what were new? What questions remain?

For more information, look up these websites together:

Origins of the medicine wheel at

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/medicine-wheels/>

Importance of the circle in Indigenous culture pages 6-7 of

<http://onlc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Medicine-Wheel-Student-Manual1.pdf>

Video of a child making a hoop medicine wheel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tocMXU2pVk

To make a medicine wheel at home:

There are few rules, or right or wrong ways, to make a medicine wheel. The guidelines we used today included these main components:

one circle, divided into four equal parts, with each quadrant representing these characteristics, from the right side going clockwise:

Yellow, east, spring, infants and children, earth, physical

Red, south, summer, youth, air, emotional

Black, west, fall, adults, water, spiritual

White, north, winter, Elders, fire, intellectual

Different media can be used to make a flat medicine wheel on poster paper. A hoop wheel can be made with these supplies: two white pipe cleaners twisted together at the ends to make a hoop, leather or plastic lacing, beads (red, black, yellow and white), feathers, hole punch, scissors, glue, tape.

If you have any questions about this activity, please contact

Name: _____ Organization: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

We believe that reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada requires us to learn and to take action. Through this activity, we are trying to encourage this process.

For information about reconciliation in Canada, see www.trc.ca.