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MÉMÈRE MÉTISSE/MY MÉTIS GRANDMOTHER

Directed by Janelle Wookey

Canada | 2008 | 30 min

TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of documentary film by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their classes, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some web links that provide starting points for further research or discussion. In separate packages, there will also be support materials available with information regarding general viewing and teaching principles for documentary film and the fundamental aspects of making documentary films.

The Film

In *Mémère métisse*, Franco-Métis filmmaker Janelle Wookey sets out to understand why her grandmother, 73-year-old Cecile St. Amant, has spent most of her life denying her Métis roots. Wookey's film exploration has three goals: to get St. Amant to admit she is Métis, to find out why she was embarrassed about her Aboriginal ancestry and to get her grandmother to register as a Métis with the Manitoba Métis Federation. Through loving guidance and unrelenting questioning, Wookey succeeds on all three counts, helping her grandmother honour a past she has hidden for over 60 years.

The Filmmakers

Winnipeg-based director Janelle Wookey was until recently the co-host of *Friday Night Flicks* on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). A 2008 graduate of the Red River College Creative Communications Program, Wookey won the Emerging Talent Award at the 2008 ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival.

Educational package written and compiled by Suzanne Methot suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca

VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

There are important themes in this film that have broad implications for students and their futures.

Take time to activate your students' background understanding of these themes before viewing.

This will help them as they come to their own understanding and develop their critical abilities.

The following three subsections, on this page, are intended to provide you with a range of pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. They are followed by a set of questions based upon the film's larger thematic domains, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes, and a page of web links for further investigation.

Pre-Viewing Activities

View the film trailer on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHYxiegxNUQ). Have students work in pairs or small groups to predict the themes they think might be part of the film (responses could include identity, culture, history, family, elders and youth).

Play the first 30 seconds of the film (the opening shots, featuring the extreme close-up of Cecile St. Amant's face). Ask students why they think the filmmaker used this technique. How does this technique attract the viewer? How does the filmmaker use this technique to set up the film's themes? We don't often see an older woman's face in extreme close-up—what might the filmmaker be trying to say about contemporary media and the story she wants to tell?

Print several of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or in pairs to discuss the ideas in the quotations. Then ask them to share their conclusions with the large group. As they discuss the quotations, ask students to think about the following:

- What is the main conflict in this film? How do you know this?
- From whose perspective is this story told? How do you know this?
- What values are being promoted? How do you know this?
- Whose point of view do the values represent? Are your values represented? Why or why not?

Have a large-group discussion about one of the Extension Activities quotations. Ask students to structure their questions and responses around the themes of identity, relationships, sovereignty and challenges.

Viewing Activities

Have students take notes on the connections they see between the issues in this film and the ones stated in the Big Questions/Ideas/Themes section of this guide.

Have students describe what they see in the film. Ask them to withhold judgment and observe carefully. They can write notes or give an oral description.

Ask students to create a mind map as they watch the film. The mind map should contain the following key words: conflicts, techniques, purpose and perspective. To get students started, use the following prompts:

- What are the main conflicts we encounter in this film? Were the conflicts resolved at the end of the film? Why or why not?
- How was the film made? What conventions or production techniques are used? How do these techniques attract the viewer?
- Who produced this media text, and for what purpose? Who profits if the message is accepted? Who may be disadvantaged?
- How would this story be different if told from the perspective of another character in the film?

Have students jot down three questions for discussion that the film raises in their minds.

Post-Viewing Activities

Ask students if the predictions they made after viewing the film trailer were correct. Have them give specific evidence from the film—facts revealed in images or voiceover/dialogue—that supports or disproves their predictions.

Have a large-group discussion guided by student questions written during the last Viewing Activity.

Have students revisit the quotations they discussed during the Pre-Viewing Activities. Have a large-group discussion to see whether their opinions have changed after viewing the film.

Show students the short YouTube video about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Winnipeg visit, during which the TRC screened *Mémère métisse* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jm2Iic_HVY&NR=1). In the video, the term "lost generations" is used. Ask students to write a one-page response or prepare a short oral presentation on the following questions: Why would the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is gathering testimony from across Canada on Aboriginal peoples' experiences in residential school, screen this film? What themes are present in *Mémère métisse* that might also apply to survivors of the residential school system?

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated sub-topics in the film. Using the conceptual map as a guide, ask students to create questions they think will represent the important issues. Then, using the questions and the conceptual map, ask students to make interconnections among elements of the film. This should take the form of an argument, including a thesis statement and evidence from the text. Have students make a final judgment about the text based on the argument they created above. Students will learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis and interpretation. Finally, ask students to reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the Pre-Viewing, Viewing, and Post-Viewing Activities. Did these steps help inform their ideas? Ask students to write a personal reflection to summarize what they have learned.

Have students research the Métis in Canada and their response to the challenges they face (for example, membership, hunting and fishing rights, maintaining and proving historic ties to territory, or preserving the Michif language). When they have completed their research, have them create a one-page newsletter summarizing the issues. The newsletter should contain text, illustrations and at least one chart or graph. To get them started, have them visit the websites listed at the end of this package.

In most cultures, the older generation is responsible for passing on knowledge to the young. In *Mémère métisse*, the filmmaker is passing on knowledge to her grandmother. Ask students to make a five-minute video, using whatever equipment is available to them (e.g., cellphone or digital camera video), detailing the knowledge they would like to pass on to the elders in their own ethno-cultural and/or geographic community. If students have studied film production and technique, they can create storyboards before filming.

THE BIG QUESTIONS/IDEAS/THEMES

Multiple Perspectives

What is the subject of this film? Can you determine the filmmakers' perspective on this subject? What evidence can you find in the film to support your view?

How does this film help you analyze and interpret points of view about issues that concern people?

Does the filmmakers' perspective foster respect for diversity and an inclusive society? If so, how?

Identity

Whose story is told in this documentary? Whose story is not told? How does this story, and the way it is told, help you understand your own community/life?

How do the people in this film identify with their community? What are the common bonds among the people in this film? What challenges do they face in expressing their identity?

What film techniques do the filmmakers use to convey the identity of the people in this film?

Citizenship

What insights does this documentary offer about the ideals of good citizenship in the community depicted in this film?

How does the film deal with issues of freedom, equality, human dignity, and individual and collective rights and responsibilities?

Change and Continuity

How does this film help you understand a community's values and its attitudes towards an issue at a particular time?

What changes do the people in the film experience? What causes those changes? What are the consequences of those changes for the people in the documentary?

Culture and Community

Which aspects of a people's culture does this film focus on? Why do you think the filmmakers focused on those aspects?

How do the images, themes and message of this film help you understand the filmmakers' attitude towards the subject? What do you think might have been the intended audience's attitude towards the documentary subject?

Individuals, Societies and Economic Decisions

What economic systems are at work in this film? What are some of the causes and effects of the economic decisions made by the people in the film's community?

Does money play a part in the decisions being made in the film and what does it tell you about their local culture?

Power and Governance

What system of government control do we see in this documentary? How is power distributed within this society? What are the implications of that distribution on issues affecting the people's well-being and freedom?

Global Connections

What global issues are addressed in this film? What is the filmmakers' point of view on the opportunities and challenges of those issues?

Adapted from NFB Documentary Lens: <http://www.nfb.ca>

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Ask students to research the Michif language (the mixed language created from Cree and Métis French, with influences from English, Assiniboine and Ojibwe). Michif is an endangered language, with fewer than 1,000 speakers. Ask students to write a personal reflection from the point of view of one of the last Michif speakers. What feelings might the person have? Would they be sad at the loss of their language? Or might they be happy that their descendants are entering the so-called "modern" world? What does the loss of a language mean for a culture, especially a marginalized culture?

Invite a representative from a Métis organization in your province or territory to speak at your school. Ahead of time, have students prepare questions focusing on themes they have identified in the film. If possible, ask a Métis musician or dancer to perform at the same event. After the event, ask students to write an essay or reflection on one of the following questions: How have the Métis in Canada responded and adapted to the challenges they have faced? Why is music and dance so integral to Métis culture and identity? Have them use information from both the film and the event in their response.

Additional Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

How does the film reflect the importance of relationships in Aboriginal cultures? How does the relationship between the director and her grandmother change during the course of the film? How does the relationship between Cecile St. Amant and the rest of the world change during the course of the film?

How might the challenges Cecile St. Amant faced as a child have led to her decision to deny her Métis ancestry?

How does storytelling help create a person's individual identity? How does it maintain a group's cultural identity? How might Cecile St. Amant's visits to the Métis dance class and the Festival du Voyageur, where she explored Métis culture through dance and shared her story with others for the first time, have started her journey into rethinking her personal identity? How might sharing her story with others have helped her make this journey?

Quotations From the Film to Explore

"Mémère is so uncomfortable talking about her Métis background." How might the challenges Cecile St. Amant have faced in her life led to her decision to deny her Métis ancestry?

"Maybe today you are proud to be. But in our time, we were not proud to be Métis." Why might it have been difficult for

older generations to be proud of their Métis heritage? What barriers might they have faced that would have made it beneficial for them to construct a non-Aboriginal identity?

"That's when I started asking questions." Why do youth need to ask questions of their elders? Why are the stories those questions reveal so important to the formation of personal identity? How can not receiving any answers negatively affect a person's journey toward creating a personal identity?

"Those who came from larger, poorer families weren't treated as well as the prim little girls from single-child families." How might racism and discrimination affect a person's personal identity?

"Her mother spoke Métis... and her father was quick to correct her." Why might a person from the same culture ask someone to stop speaking their language? Why might parents not teach their children their ancestral language? How might this relate to issues of internalized hatred and oppression?

"Now today, those who speak Métis sure are the lucky ones, aren't they?" Why might Cecile St. Amant think Michif speakers are "lucky" if she herself denies her ancestry? What might this say about her decision to deny her Métis ancestry?

"I know this wasn't exactly an easy thing for her to do." What does this say about the relationship between the filmmaker and her grandmother? What does it say about the responsibility of elders in Aboriginal cultures?

"To change everything and say I'm a proud Métis at 73 years of age is pretty far-fetched." Why might Cecile St. Amant be uncomfortable facing up to and/or changing her identity at the age of 73?

"Maybe I'll get government grant to pay for our suite." Cecile St. Amant says this when her granddaughter places a Métis symbol on her front door. What does this say about internalized stereotypes? Do people of Métis or other Aboriginal heritage get more assistance from the government than other Canadians? What are some of the reasons the federal government's responsibilities toward Aboriginal peoples under nation-to-nation treaties or Supreme Court decisions be misinterpreted as "grants" or special rights or favours?

"In that little moment, I think she got more than just the steps." Why would dance be a door into Cecile St. Amant admitting her Métis ancestry? How might the presence of children at the dance class make her more willing to take on a Métis identity?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY: MÉTIS RIGHTS IN CANADA

Name: _____ Date: _____ Mark: ____ /40 (See rubric)

Mixed-blood people exist across the world, sometimes from the mixing of colonial and indigenous populations. Only in Canada is a mixed-race culture, the Métis culture, recognized as a distinct culture. In a decision handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2003, called the Powley decision, Métis hunting rights in and around the area of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, were affirmed under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, which recognizes existing Aboriginal and treaty rights for status Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada. As a result of Powley, Métis in various parts of Canada have hunting and fishing rights in specific sites for the purposes of food (not for commercial sale) if they can meet the following conditions:

- Long-standing self-identification as a Métis
- Acceptance as a Métis by the community
- Membership in a modern Métis community with ties to an historic Métis community

The film showed how Métis people have maintained their Aboriginal identity while simultaneously honouring their other ancestry (in this case, French). You will be responsible for writing a persuasive essay focusing on one of the following ideas: The Métis are/are not a distinct population and should be/should not be awarded Aboriginal and/or treaty rights in their relationships with provincial and federal governments.

Your persuasive essay must address the following:

- The historical ties Métis people have to various territories across Canada
- The place of hunting and fishing, and a connection to the land, in Aboriginal/Métis culture
- The impact that the loss of hunting and fishing rights might have on Métis culture
- The impact Métis rights might have on the rights of other Aboriginal groups across Canada

Your position must be supported by research and/or information from books, the Internet and the film *Mémère métisse*.

You may also use ideas from the Pre-Viewing, Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities, the questions from the Big Ideas section and the rubric categories to help guide your research and writing.

MÉTIS RIGHTS IN CANADA RUBRIC

Name: _____ Group: _____

Categories	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Knowledge and Understanding	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Understands the historical ties Métis people have to various territories across Canada	Demonstrates limited knowledge of facts about historical ties Métis people have to various territories across Canada	Demonstrates some knowledge of facts about historical ties Métis people have to various territories across Canada	Demonstrates considerable knowledge of facts about historical ties Métis people have to various territories across Canada	Demonstrates thorough knowledge of facts about historical ties Métis people have to various territories across Canada
Explains the effects that cultural activities such as hunting and fishing have on personal and cultural identity	Explains the effects that cultural activities such as hunting and fishing have on personal and cultural identity with a limited degree of understanding	Explains the effects that cultural activities such as hunting and fishing have on personal and cultural identity with some degree of understanding	Explains the effects that cultural activities such as hunting and fishing have on personal and cultural identity with a considerable degree of understanding	Explains the effects that cultural activities such as hunting and fishing have on personal and cultural identity with a thorough degree of understanding
Thinking and Inquiry	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Uses critical thinking and inquiry to analyze and interpret information, formulate an hypothesis and form a reasonable conclusion	Applies few of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies some of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies most of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies all or almost all of the skills involved in an inquiry process
Communication	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Communicates ideas clearly using appropriate language that persuades the reader	Communicates information and ideas with limited clarity; not persuasive	Communicates information and ideas with some clarity; somewhat persuasive	Communicates information and ideas with clarity; very persuasive	Communicates information and ideas with clarity and insight; highly persuasive and well-argued

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 History: New France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and explain examples of conflict and cooperation between the French and First Nation peoples. • formulate questions to aid in gathering and clarifying information.
Grade 8 History: The Development of Western Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain the factors that led to the settlement of the Canadian west. • describe the causes and results of the Red River Rebellion and the Northwest Rebellion and explain the role of key individuals and groups. • formulate questions to guide research on issues and problems.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University/College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing. • use appropriate writing forms for intended purposes.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, University/ College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the relationships among language, culture and identity. • demonstrate an understanding of how Aboriginal identity is linked to the physical environment. • demonstrate an understanding of the influences on Aboriginal societies that have an impact on their sense of identity. • describe Aboriginal perspectives related to issues of identity and sovereignty. • describe the historical basis for the contemporary relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. • demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal peoples' strong relationship to the land. • describe the historical relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government, as reflected in specific treaties and agreements and the intent behind them. • describe how Aboriginal peoples adapt to external forces. • identify social, political and economic issues currently being addressed by Aboriginal individuals and communities in Canada.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures that influence present-day activities and behaviours. • describe the efforts and actions of Aboriginal communities and individuals to maintain their cultures within traditional land bases. • explain how Aboriginal peoples' links to the land and to a sustainable environment are part of their cultural identity. • demonstrate an understanding of the varying perspectives on Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination. • describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives. • identify the obstacles that Aboriginal peoples must overcome to protect and maintain their cultures and languages. • demonstrate an understanding of differences in the challenges faced by various Aboriginal peoples, including status Indians and Métis.

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe how traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures influence present-day activities and behaviours. • identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. • explain how Aboriginal peoples' relationship to the land traditionally sustained Aboriginal life in various environments across Canada and continues to be evident in the cultural practices of Aboriginal peoples today. • explain how legal definitions of Aboriginal identity in Canada affect relationships within and among Aboriginal communities • describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a variety of print and electronic resources to gather information and develop ideas for personal, school and workplace-related writing.
Grade 12 Native Studies: Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, University/College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the historical context that underlies current relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the government of Canada.
Grade 11/12 English, University/College/ Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning. • reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding media texts.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Métis and Métis Rights in Canada

Wikipedia has a well-researched entry on the Métis people.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9tis_people_%28Canada%29

The website of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

<http://www.metisnation.org>

The website of the Manitoba Métis Federation.

<http://www.mmf.mb.ca>

The website of the Métis National Council, which represents Métis people on the federal level.

<http://www.metisnation.ca>

The text of the R. v. Powley decision, from the Supreme Court of Canada.

<http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/2003/2003scc43/2003scc43.html>

The website of the Centre for Constitutional Studies at the University of Alberta has an article about Métis hunting rights in Alberta that features links to other sites such as the Métis Interim Hunting Agreement and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

<http://www.law.ualberta.ca/centres/ccs/news/?id=276>

The website of the Government of Saskatchewan has a page focusing on Métis hunting and fishing rights in that province.

<http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=928bf4b7-41ee-42a8-9b5f-f96fbaf09c0f>

The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs issued a press release in 2006 outlining why B.C. Indian bands were pleased that Métis hunting rights were not granted to Métis living in the Okanagan.

http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/News_Releases/UBCICNews06270602.htm

The Canadian Encyclopedia's entry on Métis leader Louis Riel includes links to other sites on Riel.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=a1ARTA0006837>

One of the *History by the Minute* videos from Historical-Dominion Institute, this one on Louis Riel, with a write-up on his activities as Métis leader.

<http://www.histori.ca/minutes/minute.do?id=10646>

The Canadian Encyclopedia's entry on Métis leader Gabriel Dumont.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0002444>

Various Links for Lesson Plan Ideas, Media Awareness, Critical Literacy and Documentary Films

Using Documentaries in the Classroom: This teacher librarian's personal website contains excellent resources for teaching with documentary films.

http://www.frankwbaker.com/using_docs_in_the_classroom.htm

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet-literacy resource library.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

Center for Media Literacy: A U.S. website which provides several resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.

<http://www.medialit.org>

The National Film Board of Canada website: On this site is an area with teaching resources and short documentary films that can be used as teaching aides.

<http://www.nfb.ca>

The Association for Media Literacy: This Canadian website examines how media impacts and influences culture.

<http://www.aml.ca/home>

Hot Docs Looking at Documentaries: A teaching guide that sets out questions designed to help teacher include the study of documentary film in their curriculum.

http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs_for_schools/