

Bringing Métis Children's Literature to Life—Métis Christmas Mittens

Author and Illustrator: Leah Marie Dorion

Translator: Norman Fleury

Overview of Story: The holiday season has always been a very special time for Métis families. A family-oriented people, the Métis often didn't have money to buy expensive presents, but instead made practical items with much love. In this spirit, award-winning author and illustrator, Leah Marie Dorion takes readers back to the Métis tradition of making mittens for loved ones. *Métis Christmas Mittens* is a touching ode to Métis family life is accompanied by Leah's distinctive and evocative art.

Themes in this book:

- Métis families/community
- Tradition
- From Red River to Peace River
- Showing how to belong
- Generosity/sharing
- Smoked and tanned moose hide
- Recycling
- Christmas
- Making mittens (pompoms and fringe)
- Winter

Possible Curriculum Connections:

Arts Education

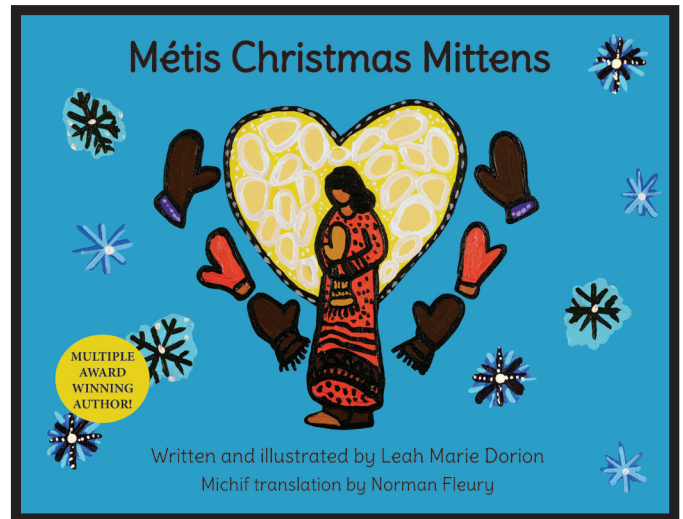
- Create art using various forms and media
- Analyze various Saskatchewan artists and forms
- Observe visual details
- Recognize and describe distinctions between various art styles (Métis beadwork/ First Nations beadwork)

Language Arts

- Comprehend and respond (oral and written)

Health

- Interpersonal skills
- Identity is influenced by relationships



Social Studies

- Cultural diversity
- Relationship to land
- Relationship with natural environment
- Daily life/survival in local communities
- How individuals and communities meet needs
- Métis communities across Canada
- Family traditions and celebrations



Before Reading:

Show the cover of the book to the students. Predict what the book will be about based on the title and cover. Tell the students that the book is about a tradition. Then ask the students, "What is tradition?" Record their responses. Discuss their definitions but do not actually define it for them. Let them know that the definition may become clearer as the story is read. Tell them that the purpose of the reading is to, "Listen to the story and see if you can figure out what tradition was happening AND think about if anything like this happens in your family."

During Reading:

As the book is read, stop from time to time to add to the definition of tradition. Cue the students with questions, such as: "Did we get more information that will help us come up with the definition of tradition? Do you have any connections with this part of the story?"

After Reading:

Upon completion, have the students come up with a completed definition of tradition. Ask the students if they made any connections to the story as it was being read.

Give examples of family traditions.

1. Every New Year, we eat boulettes (bullets) and galette (bannock) for lunch before we have the big meal. It is a tradition in our family.
2. Every Sunday, after church in the summer, we stop at the ice cream shop and get an ice cream cone. It is a tradition now.
3. Every Christmas, we all wear the same pyjamas. It has become a fun tradition in our family.

What is the tradition in this story? (In this story, making mittens for Christmas is a tradition. They do it every year so it has become a tradition for the community.) Now let's discuss with a partner or small group any traditions you might have in your family. After a few minutes share with the class.

Introduce to the students to this graphic organizer:

Facts I connected with	Connection/Puzzles (What it makes me think about and questions it raises)	Feelings (How I feel about this connection.)

You may want to ask the students to discuss tradition at home (see sentence stems below for ideas) and return with some ideas before you do the above organizer. Have the students share their homework/research.



Family Tradition Information Checklist

My tradition _____

What happens _____

When it happens _____

Where it happens _____

Who is part of this tradition _____

What you hear, see, feel, smell, or taste _____

Additional post-reading activities:

Making Mittens:

Using scraps of leather or fabric, trace the outline of a mitten on two pieces of heavier paper or fabric. After the pieces are cut out stitch around the outside of the mitten. For younger students you might want to have the students make a paper mitten and then adorn it using sequins, paint, etc. Use the template at the back of the book if necessary. To adorn the mittens use a variety of mediums. Use larger beads if the students are capable, OR use the point of a paintbrush to decorate with paint (flower beadwork designs), etc.

Sense of Belonging Activity:

1. Group the children into groups of five. Give each group a flip chart page that has been divided into five sections (roughly the same size/one portion for each student) using curved lines. Also give them colouring materials.
2. Have the children assign group roles. For example time-keeper, spokesperson and manager.
3. Allocate one section of the flip chart page to each child in the group. Tell the children that they have ten minutes to draw all the places they feel they belong to outside of



school. This task will not work well if the children are seated conventionally around a table. They may need to lie on the floor or stand around a table.

4. After ten minutes, have each child talk to their group about their drawings. Ask them to listen very carefully to each other because at the end there will be a memory game to see who was listening well.
5. Next, ask the spokesperson from each group to present their group's map to the rest of the class. As each child's work is being presented, ensure that the child feels it is a fair representation of what he/she said in the group session. Allow brief explanations or additions to be made if necessary.
6. At the end, pass around cards with the children's names on them, blank side up. Have each child pick out one name. Ask them if they can remember what the other child spoke about. If they are able to summarize what they heard, give them a round of applause. If they have trouble remembering, invite the other children to suggest a response.

Making Words Activity:

Use the word /tradition/ as the "secret" word. Make a list of smaller words using only the letters in /tradition/. See how many two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine letter words you can make. In the end, the students try and figure out what the "secret" word is.

Chase the Mitten Down:

Have everyone get out their mittens/gloves from their locker. Place one mitten at the end of the room/gym and put the other mitten in a basket at the other end of the room/gym. Form two teams. Students should then grab a mitten from the basket and race to the other end of the gym and find its partner and race back. Continue relay until everyone is back with a pair of mittens. Cheer your team.

Mitten Poem Activity:

1. Present the poem to the students. Read aloud, then do a shared reading. Discuss the poem.
2. From there, the students can find rhyming words, compound words, or whatever they are learning at the time (phonetically or structurally).

Mittens

Stripes or dots or sparkling white,
Mittens in winter fit just right.
Wool and cotton, maybe leather—
Mittens warm us in cold weather.
In rainbow colours and darkest black,
Mittens fit in a pocket or in your pack.
Thumbs alone, fingers together,
We love mittens in cold, cold weather!

(Author Unknown—Poem from www.canteach.ca/elementary/songspoems33.html)

