Walking on Turtle Island Blanket Activity:
(An adaptation of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise)

Introduction

This activity is an adaptation of the Blanket Exercise created by KAIROS – an ecumenical movement for ecological justice and human rights. The original Blanket Exercise was created as "a teaching tool that uses participatory popular education to raise awareness of the nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada."

This resource maintains the integrity of that original goal while adding an interactive component that increases student participation. Additionally, this adaptation is intended to be completed within a single 75-minute teaching period. In short, we hope that this resource allows educators to quickly bring a diverse group of students to a shared place of basic understanding about the historical relationship between Canada and the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples with whom we share this land.

Credits

This "Walking on Turtle Island Blanket Activity" has been created by:

Kevin Reed – Limestone District School Board
Shawn McDonald – Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

With appreciation to the creators of the original "Blanket Exercise", 1998: Ed Bianchi, Suzanne Doerge, Chris Hiller, Dr. Rose-Alma J. McDonald.

The document creators would like to thank the many students and teachers who have demanded greater knowledge and better understanding. It is to those many voices that this resource is dedicated.

Permission to use of this resource is freely given. However, you may not make alterations to the original documents without the expressed consent of the creators.
**Preparation: Before Running the Activity**

For many students, this activity introduces new perspectives and deals with challenging subject matter – particularly issues arising from Canada's Residential School System. It is important that the classroom teacher introduce these topics to the class prior to running the Walking on Turtle Island Blanket Activity.

For additional background information, please refer to, "Backgrounder by Province/Territory: Education for Reconciliation Call to Action #62" available through the KAIROS website: http://www.kairos canada.org/product/petition-education-for-reconciliation-call-to-action-62/

**Running the Activity: Tips**

The following suggestions reflect our collective experience running this activity with a variety of age groups and audiences. These are our best suggestions for a successful experience:

- Always use blankets, never sheets. Students quickly develop a connection to the warmth and comfort of blankets. This does not happen when you use thinner bed-sheets. Avoid the temptation to improvise as this subtle change alters the experience for your students.
- Print the script on single-sided paper. Duplex printing can make it difficult for some student leaders to follow along with their roll in the activity.
- Use a traditional shaker as a prompt for students. Since this is a participatory exercise, students will become engaged in conversation and roll-playing (particularly during the trading game). A traditional shaker works extremely well as a prompt to re-gain students' attention while maintaining the integrity of the roll-playing activity.
- Display the accompanying presentation while you run the activity. Having the script displayed for all students to see and follow helps to maintain student engagement and can often save the activity if you are faced with a large group or a soft-spoken leader.

**Follow-up: After Running the Activity**

It is important that the classroom teacher is prepared to direct students' reaction to this activity in a constructive way. For suggestions on how to engage students in social action on First Nations, Metis and Inuit issues in Canada, please refer to the KAIROS publications "Strength for Climbing: Steps on the Journey of Reconciliation" and "Education for Reconciliation Action Toolkit." These publications are available free of charge from the KAIROS website: http://www.kairos canada.org/resources/order/
Walking on Turtle Island Blanket Activity:

This activity works best with groups of 20 or more, but may be adapted to work with a minimum group of 15 people (1 Narrator, 1 European, 1 Aboriginal, 12 Participants).

Room Setup

Organize the room so that 8-12 blankets are arranged in the middle of the room. Place enough chairs for each participant in a large circle surrounding the blankets and facing the centre of the room. Post signs on the four walls of the room to represent the geographic regions in Canada. (North/South/East/West) or (Arctic/Great Lakes/Atlantic/Pacific).

List of Characters

1. Narrator (usually the teacher)
2. Aboriginal Characters: 1 First Nation, 1 Metis
1-2. European/Canadian Character
   (note: the European Character becomes the Canadian Character during the game)
12+. Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12-17 Participants</th>
<th>18-24 Participants</th>
<th>25+ Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 cards for each of 4 Nations</td>
<td>6 cards for each of 5 Nations</td>
<td>6 cards for each of 6 Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inuit</td>
<td>- Inuit</td>
<td>- Inuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Haida</td>
<td>- Haida</td>
<td>- Haida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Beothuk</td>
<td>- Beothuk</td>
<td>- Beothuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Anishinaabe / or Haudenosaunee</td>
<td>- Anishinaabe</td>
<td>- Anishinaabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Siksika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Anishinaabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Haudenosaunee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Haudenosaunee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What You Will Need

8-12 Blankets: preferably old or worn blankets as they will be used on the floor.

Nation Cards: 1 set of six for each Nation in the activity (the number of Nation Cards will depend on the number of participants you have)

European Cards: 12 cards for each European Character

European Hats: 1 for each European Character (black beaver hat, or paper hat with British and French flags)

Canadian Hats: 1 for each European Character (red beaver hat, or paper hat with Canadian flags)

Metis Sash: 1 for the Metis Character

Feather: 1 for the First Nations Voice (Aboriginal Character)

Shaker: 1 for the Narrator to use as a prompt

Game Setup

Photocopy (or print) the Nation Cards so that each Nation has its own colour of paper. You should have 6 Nation Cards of the same colour for each Nation in the game.

Print and post the four direction labels so they are clearly visible on the correct corresponding walls of the room (East, South, West, North).

It is recommended that the teacher play the role of the Narrator as this role provides the best position for controlling the game and answering any questions that may arise.

Select 1 or 2 participants to play the role of the European/Canadian Characters. Instruct them to speak in a LOUD authoritative voice. Allow them a few minutes to look over the script and provide them with their first (European) hat. It is helpful if you explain that they will be required to fold back the blankets as the game progresses.

Select 1 participant to play the role of the First Nations Voice (the Metis character will be selected later in the game). Provide the First Nations character with the feather and explain that whenever they speak they will hold up the feather for everyone to see.
Invite students to be seated in the chairs surrounding the blankets and ask them to remove their shoes. Randomly distribute one Nation Card to each student. Ensure that you have an approximately equal number of students assigned to each Nation.

_Narrator:_ This activity is called the Blanket Activity. It will briefly explain the historical relationship between the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and Europeans and Canadians. It is not always a pretty picture because Aboriginal peoples--the First Nations, Metis and Inuit--were pushed aside over centuries.

These blankets represent the land we now know as Canada. Some Aboriginal people, including those from this area, call it Turtle Island. You will play the role of Aboriginal people in Canada during this activity. Please take a seat on the blankets.

_Have students sit on blankets._

Please follow the instructions and listen carefully during this activity. The purpose of this activity is to remember some of the bad things that were done to Aboriginal people. In the process we can better understand who they are and our responsibilities as Canadians.

[Next slide]

_First Nations Voice:_ Long before the arrival of Europeans, Turtle Island was our home. Millions of people lived here in hundreds of nations. Some of our nations included the

Anishinaabe (Ah nish naw bay),
Haida (Hi duh),
Beothuk (Bay o tuck)
Inuit (Een oo eet).
Siksika (Sick sig ah),
and Haudenosaunee (Ho den oh show nee),

We fished and hunted. Some of us farmed. Each nation had its own language and culture. Each nation had a story which explained how the people came to be.

[Next slide]
Narrator: Each of you has a coloured card listing your nation. Please look at it now. In a minute you will find the other members of your nation—they have the same coloured card as you. When you have found the other members of your Nation, please sit with them in a small circle.

Your group should sit in a spot that corresponds to where your group lived on Turtle Island. The description of the people will give you a clue as to where to sit. To help you locate your place on Turtle Island we have identified the North, South (the Great Lakes), West, and East.

Would you please find the other members of your nation now.

Allow students to find their group members and then help them to find the appropriate place to sit on Turtle Island.
- Anishinaabe – Ontario (South)
- Haida – British Columbia (West)
- Beothuk – Newfoundland (East)
- Inuit – Nunavut (North)
- Siksika – Alberta (Central)
- Haudenosaunee – Ontario & Quebec (South)

Narrator: Please select a person from your group to read the short description of your Nation to the rest of the class.

As each group reads the description of their Nation, distribute any remaining nation cards to the appropriate groups. Once all of the groups have been introduced, each group should have ALL six of their nation cards to use in the next activity.

First Nations Voice: This land is very important to us. When the land gives us more than we need, we trade those things. Other people do the same. In this way, the needs of all the people are met.

[NEXT SLIDE]

Narrator: In order for your group to survive, you must ensure that you have FOOD, SHELTER, TOOLS, and CULTURE. Each member of your group has something to offer – an item of food, a tool, etc. The individual items are on the backs of the cards you carry.

Discuss what food, shelter, tools and culture are and why they are important for survival. (Students often have trouble understanding the role of culture).
Examine what your group has been given from the land and see if you have something in each category: FOOD, SHELTER, TOOLS, and CULTURE.

If you are lacking any of these items, you will need to trade with other groups to ensure that ALL of your needs are met. Please select one member of the group to trade with the other groups.

[NEXT SLIDE]

Allow groups ~5 minutes to trade with one another. Then have each group describe what they have collected or traded to satisfy each category: FOOD, SHELTER, TOOLS, and CULTURE.

Note: Occasionally you may encounter a group that refuses to trade with others. This provides an excellent opportunity to discuss the consequences of non-cooperation when Nations are involved. For example: the possibility of future reciprocity when ‘your’ Nation is hungry; or the possibility of raiding parties or even war amongst nations.

[NEXT SLIDE]

**Narrator: The Arrival of Europeans**
Five hundred years ago, Europeans started coming to Turtle Island. They wanted to find a route to Asia. The first Europeans thought they had arrived in India so they mistakenly called the people they met, “Indians.”

But the people already had names for themselves. Their names often mean “the people”. The names Inuit, Haida and Anishinaabe all mean “the people.”

**First Nations Voice:** When the Europeans first arrived on Turtle Island we out-numbered them and we invited them into our communities. The newcomers depended on us for their survival.

[NEXT SLIDE]

**Narrator: Friends and Allies**
Soon, the Europeans and Aboriginal people found they each had goods that the other wanted. Europeans wanted furs and Aboriginal peoples wanted metal objects, like pots, knives and guns. In the beginning there was cooperation and support.

**European Voice:** Your participation in the fur trade is essential. We will gladly offer you pots and tools for your beaver pelts which we use to make hats and clothing.
Have the Europeans come onto the blankets and read their description card. The Europeans should wear hats (these hats can be made using a sheet of newspaper and flags and will be changed when Canada is created). Next, have the Europeans visit each group and trade metal goods with them.

Have each Aboriginal group describe how they traded with the Europeans and if this exchange was a good trade for their people.

**Narrator:** The settlers and their leaders accepted you as independent nations. They saw that you had your own governments, laws and territories. They made treaties with you.

**European Voice:** In addition to your furs, we also need your help. We seek alliances against our European enemies. We will offer you trade goods as symbols of our agreements.

**First Nations Voice:** We formed alliances with the Europeans and even fought wars with them. Some of us, like the Anishinaabe (Ah nish nah bay), formed alliances with the French, and some, like the Haudenosaunee (Hoden oh show nee), formed alliances with the British.

**Narrator:** Great Peace of 1701
In 1701, the French governor called on all of the First Nations who lived around the Great Lakes and Acadia to meet near Montreal. Over 1000 people from 40 different nations came – including the Haudenosaunee, their long time enemies. At this meeting, all of the First Nations and the French agreed to live in peace.

**First Nations Voice:** The British Defeat the French
The French and the British fought with each other for decades. At times, they pulled us, the First Nations, into their struggles. Eventually, the British and their allies defeated the French.

**Narrator:** The British wanted peace and an orderly development of North America so they issued a special law. This law, known as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, was supposed to protect Aboriginal people and their lands.
**European Voice:** King George the Third of Great Britain says the First Nation people own their lands. The King also says the only legal way for others to gain control of those lands is if the government makes treaties with First Nation people.

**Narrator:** But more Europeans kept arriving. They wanted more land. For them, land was something that could be bought and sold. For them, treaties were a way of getting Aboriginal people to give up their land. Aboriginal peoples started to get pushed aside. Many resisted when people tried to take their land but they were not always successful.

At this point, the Europeans begin to slowly fold or push back the blankets. Reduce the diameter of the circle by 1 - 2 metres - making the blanket space smaller and forcing the participants towards the centre of the circle.

**Narrator:** You are reminded that you must NOT step off the blankets, even as they get smaller.

Wait for the Europeans to fold back the blankets and for the participants to settle into their new space.

[NEXT SLIDE]

**Narrator: The Creation of the Metis**
While this was happening, Europeans and First Nations came together to form a new people called the Métis (pronounced May Tee). These people created a new language and culture that borrowed from both Aboriginal and European cultures.

Select one person to represent the Metis people and have them tie the Metis sash around their waist.

**Metis Voice:** We, the Métis, were important in the fur trade. We were translators of both language and culture. We established communities across Canada but our main homeland is the Red River Valley in Manitoba.

[NEXT SLIDE]

**Narrator: Death and Disease**
By the year 1800, Europeans started to outnumber Aboriginal peoples in eastern North America. One reason for this was the diseases the Europeans brought with them; diseases such as smallpox and measles.

These were new diseases for Aboriginal people and thousands, if not millions, died. Some people say that more than half of the Aboriginal people in North America died from diseases brought by Europeans.
Would each nation select one person to leave the blankets. These people represent those who died from diseases unintentionally brought by Europeans.

Wait while each nation selects a participant to leave the blankets.

_first nations voice:_ We are the Beothuk (Bay oh tuck), the original people of what is now called Newfoundland. Many of our people starved or died from diseases brought by Europeans. Some of our people were even hunted down and killed. Our people are now extinct.

_narrator:_ Would all of the Beothuk now leave the blankets.

Wait while all of the Beothuk participants leave the blankets.

[next slide]

_narrator:_ the creation of Canada
Europeans kept coming to North America in ever greater numbers. In 1867 the nation of Canada was created. The new government of Canada took over responsibility for Aboriginal people from the British government.

The Europeans should make a show of removing their black (European flag) hat and replace it with a red (Canadian flag) hat to symbolize the transition from European to Canadian control.

[next slide]

_narrator:_ The British North America Act, also known as the Constitution Act, 1867, put “Indians and Lands reserved for Indians” under the control of new Canadian government.

_canadian voice:_ We are a young country but we want to grow from coast to coast to coast. We will buy the vast lands of the Hudson's Bay Company. Then, settlers will be able to live there and we will block the Americans from expanding north. As settlers moved in Aboriginal people lost their land.

Have the Canadians continue to reduce the size of the blankets.

_first nations voice:_ We were not involved in the creation of Canada or in the purchase of the Hudson's Bay lands. These actions had a huge impact on us. We called on Canada to negotiate treaties so we could share the land.

[next slide]
Narrator: The Indian Act 1876
In 1876 all the laws dealing with Aboriginal peoples were gathered together and put into a law called the Indian Act. The Canadian federal government now controlled almost every aspect of your lives.

Canadian Voice: [loudly and walking slowly around the blankets]

- You may not leave your community without a permit.
- You may not vote.
- You may not get together to talk about your rights.
- You may not participate in your traditional ceremonies.
- You may not practice your traditional forms of government.
- If you do any of these things, you may be put in jail.

First Nations Voice: The Indian Act completely changed our lives. We were treated like we knew nothing and couldn’t run our own lives. We went from being strong, independent nations to poor dependent "bands".

The Indian Act continues to this day. It limits our rights and our ability to govern ourselves. In many communities, we do not have healthy schools, proper housing or clean running water.

Narrator: The Metis Fight Back
When Canada bought the Hudson Bay Company lands, the Metis fought to protect their homeland. They organized under the leadership of Louis Riel. They secured some of their rights when the province of Manitoba was created. But the fight was not over.

Metis Voice: In 1885, we, the Métis, fought for our land and for our rights. We won some of the battles, but in the end, we were defeated. We were pushed out of our homes and lost many of our rights. We are still fighting to get them back.

Canadian Voice: Indian Reserves
Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada, wanted to build a country from coast to coast. To do this he needed to build a railroad. But first he needed to get First Nations to give up their lands. When they refused, he starved them until they agreed to move to reserves.
**Narrator**: The Canadian government will now place you on reserves. Reduce the size of your blankets until they are just large enough to stand on. Although you may not like this, you cannot resist.

**Have the Canadians help participants reduce the size of their blankets.**

**Narrator**: But Aboriginal people on the prairies were not the only ones to be displaced. Across Canada Aboriginal communities were forced to move, often to isolated, unfamiliar, and barren lands.

In the Arctic, some Inuit communities suffered and died because they were forced to move to places where their vast knowledge of the animals and land could no longer help them.

**First Nations Voice**: As more settlers arrived in Canada, they needed more land. The Canadian government changed the law to make it easier to take our land. But the land is important to us. When it was taken away, some of us lost our way to make a living and our culture.

**Narrator: The Indian Problem**

Canada wanted the First Nations, Metis and Inuit to fit in with other Canadians. They wanted you to farm like them, go to the same type of schools, and pray in the same churches. They wanted you to give up your identities as First Nation, Metis and Inuit. Aboriginal people were seen as a problem that had to be fixed.

**Canadian Voice**: All First Nations people who become doctors, teachers or lawyers will now lose their Indian status and we will no longer recognize you as Aboriginal people. If First Nations women marry non-First Nations men they will also lose their status. Our goal is to continue until there is no “Indian problem” and no Indian Department.

**First Nations Voice**: We resisted government actions, but when we tried to form a national organization to fight for our rights, the government pushed back. In 1927 they made it illegal for us to use our money to fight for our rights.
**Narrator: Residential Schools**
From 1820 until the 1970s, the federal government took your children from your homes and put them in boarding schools. Your parents didn't have a choice about this, and neither did you. Sometimes the police arrived to take you away. These Residential Schools were often very far from your homes. You had to stay there for most of the year.

**First Nations Voice:** Because of these residential schools, many of us lost family connections and didn't learn our language or traditions. Some of us ran away from these schools, some of us died in them, and some of us were abused. For over one hundred years we had no choice but to attend these schools. And because we grew up in these schools and rarely went home, many of us never saw how good and loving parents cared for their children.

**Narrator:** One person from each nation will now be removed from the blankets. These people represent those children who were taken away to residential schools.

The Canadian Voice should select and remove one person from each group.

[NEXT SLIDE]

**Narrator:** Some students say they had positive experiences at the schools. But most say they suffered from very bad conditions including mental, physical and sexual abuse.

**Canadian Voice:** In 2008, the Canadian government formally apologized to Aboriginal people for the residential school system.

The last residential school closed almost 20 years ago, but the negative impact of those schools is still felt in Aboriginal families and communities across Canada today. Sadly, even the sons and daughters of people who attended these schools have been harmed by them. This is called inter-generational trauma and will take many years to heal.

**Narrator:** Please be silent for a moment to honour those who died or suffered because of Canada's Residential Schools.

Allow 20-30 seconds for silent reflection.

[NEXT SLIDE]
Narrator: Reconciliation
For decades, the Government of Canada has tried to assimilate you and erase your culture. Despite this, you have continued to resist and you have succeeded in passing down your languages and ceremonies.

Many Canadians feel embarrassed about Canada's treatment of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. And after hearing about these events you may feel sad, angry, guilty, or confused.

But the time has come to improve the relationship between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. The relationship needs to be fixed so that we can be a fairer, and more inclusive nation.

First Nations Voice: We call on Canada and Canadians to respect our rights and our treaties. We are proud of our cultures and traditions and will continue to defend and protect them. We seek a better relationship than the one that has existed until today.

[Next slide]

Canadian Voice: While we may not be directly responsible for the bad things that happened in the past, we are ALL responsible for creating a better relationship as we move forward.

Narrator: We will end with these words written by Kayla, a non-Aboriginal girl: "As a young Canadian child, it makes my heart break to think that the First Nations don't have the same rights and opportunities that I have."

We will now gather in a large circle to talk about this activity and how we can help improve the relationship between Aboriginal people and other Canadians.