



You are here : [Home](#) > [People](#) > [Traditional Knowledge](#) > [Communicating Traditional Knowledge](#)

[RAMP](#)
[RIVER](#)
[PEOPLE](#)
[RESOURCES](#)
[ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT](#)

Communicating Traditional Knowledge

Stories

Stories are used to communicate real-life experiences and to document events and changes over time.

How Things Have Changed: Told By Fred Marcal, Chipewyan Trapper

Marcel recalls when he seen his first Truck...

"The Oblate Mission Brother Charbonneau sitting in a noisy metal box that moved by itself and smoked like a fire made of wet wood. He had asked around to find out what the thing was called, Brother Leroux had answered, "It's a Ford." "

Guns, Kettles and Cloths.....Not FUR???

"He had travelled to the Hudson's Bay Company after a long winter in the bush, the manager had told him he had better have money next time to buy guns, kettles, and cloth, instead of bringing in fur to trade."

"To the fifty-two-year-old Chipewyan trapper, everything was changing"

(Meili 1991)

My First Airplane: Told By Victoria McDonald, Fort McKay Elder

"There was a bunch of us out in the bush with my grandfather, and we heard this big noise. When we saw the plane, the first thing we thought of was maybe the war was coming, so we were all scared. We were crying. My grandfather told us to go hide in the bush. He said he was the oldest and he'd stay behind and die (Meili 1991)."



Sharing TK at a plant workshop in Fort McKay
Source: H. Fortier
(click to enlarge)

Folklore

Folklore is used to recount supernatural events or to explain aspects of our world such as the appearance of northern lights in the sky.

Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis)

Folklore from northern lands explain the green, white, yellow and red shimmers of the Northern Lights. They believe they are reflections of great herring pods, gods fighting, the path to the heavens, sheets of northern ice cracking and reflecting the light into the sky or the arctic fox starting fires or spraying up snow with its tail (Webexhibits 2008).

The Ghost in the Store By Melissa

"There is a store in the local mall that is haunted. My friends often had dealings with this ghost, often if no one else was present in the store. There would be merchandise that went missing and reappear in odd places, and books that would fall off the shelves while the aisles were empty. This wouldn't be odd, but the books that fell weren't in precarious positions. We would find books on the floor, put them back, walk away only to find the book on the floor again when we returned (Cold Spot 2008)."

Legends

Legends are often elaborately woven tales told to explain some aspect of our natural world or to warn children of the consequences of having a bad personality.

Wesakechak

"Wesakechak is a traditional character in Cree storytelling. He is a creature of the woods and a friend and compatriot of everyone including the animals and the trees. Wesakechak is no hero but

rather a sly trickster who sometimes wins but just as often loses. Wesakechak may be lazy but he is also very smart (Fort McKay 2001)."

How the Birch got their Markings

"Wesakechak had a bear that he wanted to eat. He wanted to empty his stomach, so he asked the birch trees to hug him tightly. Then the trees played a trick on Wesakechak and wouldn't let him go. When he finally got free he was really angry with Wassquay (Birch Tree). So Wesakechak got a whip and he whipped the tree. That is why the birch trees have black markings all over (Fort McKay 2001)."

Rituals

Rituals are carried out in hopes of obtaining a certain result such as long life, a healthy child or as a way of simply bringing the community together to share knowledge.

Tea Dance By James Grandjambe

"If you have a bad dream that someone's put a curse on you, go out and buy food, make a feast. Then your drum and pipe will be played and that's how you get out of the curse (Meili 1991)."

"He speaks about a woman who suffered several miscarriages and became pregnant again. He learned through the vision that if she would make a Tea Dance and feast, her pregnancy would come to full term. The woman agreed and the feast was made. Several months later a healthy little girl was born (Meili 1991)."

The Blueberry Festival

The Blueberry Festival has been celebrated ever since 1965 during Labour Day weekend. The festival is a way to both raise charitable funds, and to provide a party for the community. The initial festival consisted of a midway, a parade and what would evolve into one of western Canada's richest and most competitive ball tournaments (Fort McMurray 2007).

"It was something for all members of the family, recalled charter Kinsman."

The Blueberry Festival remains one of Fort McMurray's premiere community events, and is currently run by an exhibition society.

(Huberman 2001)

Pow-wow

A pow-wow is an event where people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honor Native culture. Pow-wows vary in length from one-day session of five to six hours to three days. Major pow-wows or pow-wows called for a special occasion can be up to one week long. Pow-wows are both still found in the culture of the Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan people (Pow Wows 2008).

Songs

Legends, folklore and stories can be communicated through song and dance as an alternative way of sharing knowledge. Alternatively, some songs are simply sounds with no meaning.

"The Ballad of the Northern Lights"

*"And the skies of night were alive with light,
with a throbbing, thrilling flame;*

*Amber and rose and violet,
opal and gold it came.*

*It swept the sky like a giant scythe,
it quivered back to a wedge;*

*Argently bright, it cleft the night,
with a wavy golden edge."*

Poetry of Robert Service

This ballad is a good description of the cold clear winter nights in Fort McMurray.

(Fort McMurray Tourism 2008)

Native Drums

At a powwow drums are very important because without the drums and the singers the people couldn't dance. The Native people characterize the drum as the heart beat of mother earth. When they beat the drum they believe they can hear and feel Mother Nature (Pow Wows 2008).

There may be many drums at a powwow, but each powwow features a host drum, which is given great respect and some authority. The members of drum groups are often family, extended family, or friends. Traditionally only men would drum and women would sit behind the men singing high

harmonies. Beginning in the mid 1970s however women began drumming with men and seconding, or singing, an octave higher, the song (Pamajewon 2004).

Native Singing

The lyrics of most songs employ vocables, meaningless syllable sounds such as "ya", "hey", and "loi". The song structure consists of four *pushups*, singing the chorus and verse through four times. In each chorus the melody is introduced or *led off* by the lead singer whose is then *seconded* by another singer who begins to vary the melody before the end of the leader's first line. They are then joined by the entire chorus for the rest of the pushup (Roberts 1992).

Next page: Traditional Knowledge in the Environmental Assessment Act ►

[Website Terms Of Use](#)