

Museum of  
North Vancouver

# SCHOOL PROGRAM KIT

TEACHER'S PACKAGE  
SECONDARY EDUCATION GUIDE  
2021/22

# MOHNA



## INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN NORTH VANCOUVER BOOK



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

KIT INTRODUCTION .....	1
BOOKING INFORMATION .....	2
CONNECTIONS TO BC'S CURRICULUM .....	3
LESSON PLAN.....	4
VOCABULARY LIST .....	5
LESSON ACTIVITIES .....	6
APPENDIX 1: THREATS TO INDIGENOUS CULTURE .....	14
APPENDIX 2: COAST SALISH CULTURAL PRACTICES .....	15
ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCES .....	16
CONTACT INFORMATION.....	17
TEACHER EVALUATION FORM .....	18
ARTICLE: A HOUSE FOR LANGUAGE .....	19

## Cover Images:

**Top Middle:** Dominic Charlie, 1967, photo by Anthony Carter, courtesy of Museum of Anthropology, A038288

**Top Right:** Annie Harry, 1953, photo by Anthony Carter, courtesy of Museum of Anthropology, A037510

**Bottom Right:** Mary Agnes, 1939, Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, AM54-S4 Port P430

**Bottom Left:** Chief Mathias Joe, 1943, NVMA Fonds 27

**Top Left:** Evelyn Joseph and Rhonda Joe (?), 1958, NVMA 4165

## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

This education kit is based on the book *Indigenous People and First Nations in North Vancouver: History, Traditions, and Culture* written by Khelsilem, a Skwxwú7mesh-kwakwaka'wakw\* writer and educator raised in North Vancouver. The book highlights significant aspects of the traditional and contemporary cultures of Indigenous people and communities in North Vancouver. While acknowledging that many different groups and communities of Indigenous people travelled throughout, occupied, and gathered resources on the north shore of Burrard Inlet and surrounding areas, including the ancestors of the present-day xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) people, this book focuses on the recent contributions and histories of the Indigenous people who have communities on the north shore today.

This book is part of MONOVA's series of "flipbooks," large format, limited edition illustrated books, which provide easily accessible introductions to aspects of North Vancouver's history. It also constitutes part of MONOVA's travelling exhibit, "Chief Dan George: Actor and Activist." As an introduction to the rich histories, traditions, and culture of the Indigenous people in North Vancouver, this book draws on archival documents and historic images from the Archives of North Vancouver and other institutions, and contemporary images and stories.

Included in this kit is a detailed teacher's package that provides instructors with lesson plan activities that guide students in the analysis of archival photographs. The lessons and activities were designed to complement BC's social studies curriculum for grades 9 & 10, as well as the 2017 draft curriculum for the following grade 11 & 12 courses: BC First Peoples 11 and Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12. Through analysis of photographs and content within the book *Indigenous People and First Nations in North Vancouver: History, Traditions, and Culture*, students will come to understand big ideas within the curriculum related to the effects of colonialism on the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Through this program, students will be introduced to the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) cultures and learn how cultural expressions help Indigenous groups advocate for self-determination.

There are almost three hours of lesson plan activities within this education package (including extension activities). Ideally, material would best be delivered over two or three class periods. We hope that your classroom programming is enriched by this education kit. For additional resources see our Education pages on [monova.ca](http://monova.ca).

We thank the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) people for sharing their photos and stories. Funding for this project was made possible through the Museum Assistance Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

\*Squamish-Kwakiutl (formerly)

*We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Kelsey Beaudry, North Vancouver School District Teacher and MONOVA Staff Member, to this program.*

# BOOKING INFORMATION

## Pick up & Drop Off

- Rented Kits must be returned within two weeks of the loan date.
- Kits are available for pick up on Mondays and Tuesdays between 12:00 -5 pm
- Kits must be picked-up and dropped off at the Archives of North Vancouver, 3203 Institute Road, North Vancouver.

## Fee & Deposit

- \$30.00 Program Fee
- \$50.00 Deposit (re-issued after return of Kit)
- Pay by credit card, cheque or cash at the time of pickup. Two separate transactions required.

## Late Fee

If the Kit is returned late, the teacher may be charged a *daily* late fee of \$10.00.

## Damaged or Lost Kit

If there is damage to the educational kit or contents missing, the \$50.00 deposit will not be returned. Please ensure all items are in the Kit prior to returning.

In the case of a lost or stolen kit, the teacher will be invoiced for the full value of the Kit.

**For more information on booking**, please contact us at [programs@monova.ca](mailto:programs@monova.ca)

# CONNECTIONS TO BC'S CURRICULUM (BASED ON MINISTRY WEBSITE)

	Grades 9/10	Social Studies 11 and BC First Peoples 12	Social Studies 11 and Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12
<b>Big Ideas</b>	<p>Disparities in power alter the balance of relationships between individuals and between societies.</p> <p>Historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural society.</p>	<p>The impact of contact and colonialism continues to affect the political, social, and economic lives of B.C. First Peoples. Cultural expressions convey the richness, diversity, and resiliency of BC First Peoples.</p> <p>Through self-governance, leadership, and self-determination, B.C. First Peoples challenge and resist Canada's ongoing colonialism.</p>	<p>Indigenous peoples are reclaiming mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being despite the continuing effects of colonialism.</p> <p>Indigenous peoples continue to advocate and assert rights to self-determination.</p>
<b>Content</b>	<p>The continuing effects of imperialism and colonialism on Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world.</p> <p>Discriminatory policies, attitudes, and historical wrongs.</p> <p>Truth and reconciliation in Canada.</p>	<p>Resistance of B.C. First Peoples to colonialism.</p> <p>Provincial and federal government policies and practices that have affected, and continue to affect, the responses of B.C. First Peoples to colonialism.</p>	<p>The varied identities and worldviews of Indigenous peoples, and the importance of the interconnection of family, relationships, language, culture, and the land.</p> <p>The resilience and survival of indigenous peoples in the face of colonialism.</p>
<b>Curricular Competencies (Skills)</b>	<p>Gather information and communicate findings.</p> <p>Construct arguments defending the significance of individuals/groups, places, events, or developments.</p> <p>Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments.</p>	<p>Gather information and communicate findings.</p> <p>Assess the significance of people, events, places, issues, or developments in the past and present</p> <p>Assess the long- and short-term causes and consequences and intended and unintended consequences of an action, event, decision, or development.</p>	<p>Construct arguments defending the significance of individuals/groups, places, events, or developments.</p> <p>Assess and compare the significance of the interconnections between people, events, and developments at a particular time and place, and determine what they reveal about issues in the past and present</p> <p>Determine and assess the long- and-short term causes and consequences, and the intended and unintended consequences, of an event, decision, or development</p>

# LESSON PLAN

## Goals and Objectives

1. To explore the curriculum-based themes related to the First Peoples of Canada.
2. To show students that Indigenous people play a significant role in history and the contemporary development of North Vancouver.
3. To demonstrate to students that Indigenous people have experienced challenges when expressing their cultural traditions.
4. To reveal the ways in which Indigenous groups on the North Shore practice and preserve their cultural heritage.

## Essential Questions

- Who are the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) people?
- What are the different aspects of Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) culture?
- Why is it important to preserve and protect cultural expressions and practices?
- What is colonialism?
- How have the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) cultures been impacted by colonialism?
- In what ways have the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) people worked to protect and preserve their cultures?
- What is the significance of this book? Why is it important for Museums and other public education organizations to produce these types of programs and publications?

# VOCABULARY, TERMS & NAMES

**Learning Objective:** Select terms that may be useful to review with your students.

<p><b>Squamish:</b> The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation is comprised of descendants of the Coast Salish Aboriginal peoples who lived in the present day Greater Vancouver area; Gibson’s landing and the Squamish River watershed. Squamish also refers to a Salishan language.</p>	<p><b>Tsleil-Waututh:</b> An Indigenous group who traditionally inhabited the lands around, and the waters of, Burrard Inlet, British Columbia. The səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) are a Coast Salish people who are closely related to but politically separate from the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and x̓wməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations.</p>
<p><b>First Nations:</b> The Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples of Canada</p>	<p><b>Indigenous:</b> occurring naturally in a particular region or environment.</p>
<p><b>Coast Salish:</b> A cultural subgroup of Salish speaking people who traditionally inhabit the Pacific Coast of British Columbia.</p>	<p><b>Culture:</b> the pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that allows groups to transmit knowledge to succeeding generations</p>
<p><b>Traditions:</b> The handing down of beliefs, legends, customs etc., from generation to generation; a continuing pattern of cultural beliefs or practices.</p>	<p><b>Reservation:</b> A tract of public land set apart for a special purpose, as for the use of an Indigenous group.</p>
<p><b>Regalia:</b> The distinctive clothing and ornaments carried at formal occasions as an indication of cultural status.</p>	<p><b>Colonialism:</b> the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.</p>



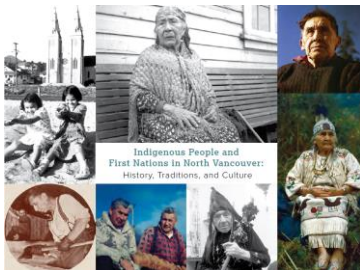
## LESSON PLAN ACTIVITIES

### Introductory Presentation & “True or False” Activity (35 min.)

**Set-up & Teacher Note:** This activity is a combination of a slide presentation, and an active, “True or False” game. You will need a power point projector, a screen, the electronic PDF of “Indigenous People and First Nations in North Vancouver: History, Traditions, and Culture”, and you will need to set up three stations in your classroom. Alternatively, you could simply use the book instead of the electronic PDF.

Make 3 signs and set-up 3 stations in your room. The first station should have a sign that says, “TRUE”; the second station should have a sign that says, “PERHAPS”; the third station will have a sign that says, “FALSE.” This is an active game, therefore students are expected to get up and walk around the room.

#### STEP 1: Introduce the Book and the Program



PDF SLIDES/ BOOK PAGES

##### Slide 1 - Title Page

Explain to students that they will learn about the history, traditions and contemporary culture of the səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Peoples on the North Shore.

Explain to students that you will be reading a series of statements. Students are to listen to each statement, and then move to the TRUE, FALSE, or PERHAPS stations, based on their personal reaction to the statement. Once students pick a station, they should discuss their responses with their fellow classmates and explain why they chose that particular station/answer.

#### STEP 2: Read a Statement and have students move to their chosen station.

**STEP 3: Read the Corresponding Slide(s)** and explain why each statement(s) is true or false. Repeat these steps for all statements.

**STEP 4: Ask students what they have learned** about the Indigenous people of the North Shore. Have them write or present a brief description of their assumptions and new learnings. Share these with their teacher or classmates.



Statement 1: True or False?

**All Indigenous people in Canada are Coast Salish.**

(Have students move around the room to the various stations. Give them time to justify their movement to the station with their peers.)

Answer: False; Coast Salish people are a cultural subgroup of the Salish speakers who traditionally inhabit some southern areas of the Pacific Coast of British Columbia and America.

Statement 2: True or False?

**Most Indigenous people in British Columbia speak the same language.**

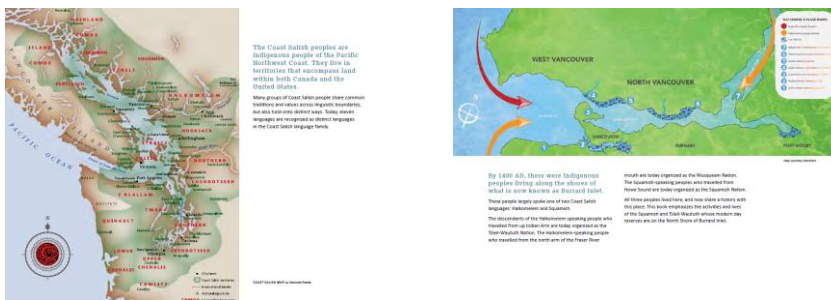
(Have students move around the room to the various stations. Give them time to justify their movement to the station with their peers.)

Answer: False; today, eleven languages are recognized as distinct languages in the Coast Salish language family. Many other indigenous languages are spoken in B.C. and the rest of Canada.

SLIDE 2 – MAP – PAGES 5 AND 6

Show students the slide and read the page: “Coast Salish peoples are Indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast.”

Emphasize: There were two Coast Salish languages on the north shore of the Burrard Inlet: Halkomelem (Tsleil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh sníchim (Squamish).



Statement 3: True or False?

**The səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples are very connected. They share common cultural traditions and family.**

Answer: True.

Statement 4: True or False?

**The crest of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) is a thunderbird.**

Answer: True; however, the crest of the səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) is a wolf. The people are sometimes called “people of the wolf” or “people of the inlet.”

SLIDE 3 – PAGES 7 AND 8

Read and discuss these pages.



Statement 5: True or False?

**Chief Dan George was an advocate for First Nations rights in Canada. He was also a successful movie actor.**

Answer: True.

SLIDE 4 – PAGE 9



The səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) people and the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) people are connected through family. For example, Chief Dan George’s mother was Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and his father was səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh).

Chief Dan George worked for the betterment of his people and promoted greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. For many, Chief Dan George is best known as an actor. His most notable role was as Old Lodge Skins alongside Dustin Hoffman in the movie Little Big Man (1970), for which he was nominated for an Academy Award.

## Statement 6: True or False?

**In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in North Vancouver, some Indigenous people lived in detached homes and practiced Catholicism.**

Answer: True



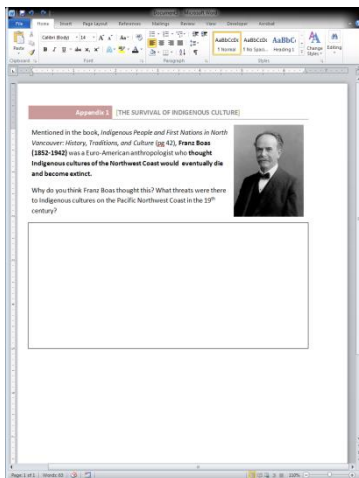
### SLIDE 5 – PAGE 13 & 14

Missionaries from several different Christian sects actively converted Indigenous people in British Columbia in the nineteenth century. There was a Catholic mission in North Vancouver.

Families raised on the Mission Reserve (Eslhá7an) lived in detached homes rather than traditional long houses.

*Emphasize:* St. Paul's Church still exists today and is a landmark on the North Shore. Do the students know where they can see it? What colour are its spires? (silver)

## Think /Record/ Pair/Share (10 min.)



### “Survival of Indigenous Culture” Worksheet: Appendix 1

Hand out worksheet and have students independently respond to the first question. Then, have them go into pairs, and share their responses.

Share partner responses as a class.

## Review of European Colonization and Colonialism (10 min.)

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist Franz Boas thought Indigenous cultures of the Northwest Coast would become extinct. Colonialism and European influences threatened spiritual beliefs, traditions and languages.

### Review colonialism with your students:

**Colonialism:** the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and looking for economic gain.

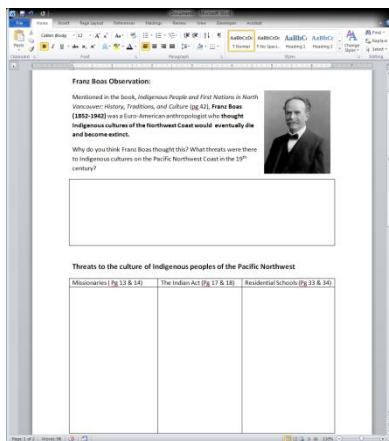
### You may also want to review these key events in Canadian history:

- Exploration of Canada by the English, Spanish and French
- The Fur Trade ( employed Indigenous people and served foreign economies )
- The Royal Proclamation
- The Indian Act

To gain some understanding of the importance of studying history, you may recommend that your students watch this Ted Talk ('Why Canadian history isn't as Boring as you think it is' – Chris Turner).

[youtube.com/watch?v=CBPvQRazhw8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBPvQRazhw8)

## Slide Presentation (15 min.)



Teacher Notes: Show students the pages below from the book using your Power Point projector or the book. These pages refer to Missionaries, The Indian Act, and Residential schools as imposing change on Indigenous traditions. On the bottom of their **“Survival of Indigenous Culture” worksheet (Appendix 1)** have students take notes as a class on three government initiatives that threatened the culture of Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast.)

### SLIDE 5 – PAGE 13 - Missionaries



For 66 years, from 1880 to 1951, the Indian Act made it a criminal offence for Indigenous and First Nations peoples in Canada, to practice and perform traditional ceremonies and celebrations.

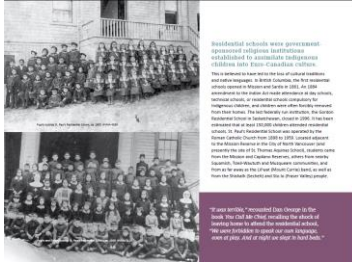
Dance, cultural arts, and the performance of traditional songs and stories were outlawed and considered by the act to be "immoral and wasteful". In 1951, the Indian Act was amended and this prohibition stopped.

In response to the prohibition Indian Act, modern the Chief Dan George and Gordon Charles formed the "Haida Dance Group". These performing groups were created and performed traditional songs and stories, and were highly successful. The group is now a well-known and respected group.

These dance groups also provided opportunities to teach younger generations about their identity and culture and to create a sense of pride.



SLIDE 6 – PAGES 17 – The Indian Act



SLIDE 7 – PAGE 33 – Residential Schools

## Video Re-cap: Colonization and its effect on the Indigenous peoples of Canada (10 min.)

Watch the first 6min. of the video: 'Why is Canada Not as Perfect as It Looks?':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zgNxxwHkWiK>

Have a discussion and reflect upon the selected book pages.

## Group Work: Fighting to Preserve Culture (20 min.)





















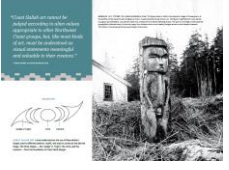

**Divide the class into 10 groups (groups of 2 or 3)**

Each group is to be given 2 or 3 pages from the book. The groups and photographs are in the chart below.

**“Preserving Coast Salish Culture” worksheet: Appendix 2**

Each group must read their assigned pages from the book, look at the photographs, and fill out the worksheet attached. They must write a sentence for their designated topic about how the səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) people are working to keep their traditions and culture alive.



Dance/Music	Language	Technology/Travel	Food	Shelter
<p>Pp 16, 17, 18, 20</p>    	<p>Pp 29, 30, 31</p>   	<p>Pp 26, 27</p>  	<p>Page 34</p> 	<p>Page 15</p> 
Clothing & Regalia	Religion/Values	Sport	Education	Art
<p>Pp 41 &amp; 42</p>  	<p>Pp 12/13</p>  	<p>Pp 29, 44</p>  	<p>Pp 32, 33</p>  	<p>Pp 21, 22, 24</p>   

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

## Present (50 minutes — 5 min. per group)

- Each group presents their assigned page from the book. They must demonstrate how the səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) people are preserving that aspect of their culture.
- The others in the class are to fill-in the rest of their chart (**“Preserving Coast Salish Culture” worksheet: Appendix 2**) as each group presents.

## Journal Reflection (15 min.)

Students reflect on their learning by responding to the following writing prompt:

*What is the significance of this book? Why is it important for Museums and other public education organizations to produce these types of programs and/or publications? In what way would a book written by a non-Indigenous author differ from this one?*



# APPENDIX 1—THREATS TO INDIGENOUS CULTURE

## Franz Boas Observation:

Mentioned in the book, *Indigenous People and First Nations in North Vancouver: History, Traditions, and Culture* (pg. 42), Franz Boas (1852-1942) was a Euro-American anthropologist who thought Indigenous cultures of the Northwest Coast would eventually die and become extinct.

Why do you think Franz Boas thought this? What threats were there to Indigenous cultures on the Pacific Northwest Coast in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

## Threats to the culture of Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest

Missionaries (Pages 13 & 14)	The Indian Act (Pages 17 & 18)	Residential Schools (Pages 33 & 34)

## APPENDIX 2—COAST SALISH CULTURAL PRACTICES

Coast Salish Cultural Practices				
Dance/Music	Language	Technology/Travel	Food	Shelter
Clothing/Regalia	Religion/Values	Sport	Education	Art

## ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCES

### **Native – Newcomer Relations: Case Studies in Contact, Colonialism & Resistance**

[https://monova.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Newcomer\\_Relations\\_Online\\_Materials.pdf](https://monova.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Newcomer_Relations_Online_Materials.pdf)

This online education kit includes both archival and contemporary newspaper articles relating to Indigenous rights and land title in British Columbia. This program presents the story of native activism in the mid-twentieth century through the lens of one individual (Maisie Hurley, 1887-1962), founder of the Native Voice newspaper

### **First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)**

[www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)

FNESC is a First Nations-controlled collective organization focused on advancing quality education for all First Nations learners. They provide lists of resources about First Peoples for teachers and have a teacher's guide on residential schools and reconciliation for grades 10-12 (<http://www.fnesc.ca/irsr/>)

### **Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation**

<http://www.squamish.net>

This site provides information about the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation today, their culture and their history.

### **səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nation**

<http://www.twnation.ca/>

This site provides information about the səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nation today, their culture and their history.

### **North Shore News article: “The House for Language” (attached)**

<http://www.nsnews.com/news/a-house-for-language-1.1762955>

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### MONOVA: MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES OF NORTH VANCOUVER

#### Program Coordinator

Carol Ballard

[ballardc@monova.ca](mailto:ballardc@monova.ca)

604.990.3700, ext. 8007

#### General Enquiries/Bookings

[programs@monova.ca](mailto:programs@monova.ca)

604.990.3700, ext. 8016

#### Museum Galleries

The new Museum of North Vancouver will open  
at 115 West Esplanade in Lower Lonsdale in 2021.

For more information, visit [monova.ca](http://monova.ca)

#### Archives of North Vancouver

3203 Institute Road

North Vancouver, BC V7K 3E5

*1 block east of Mountain Highway off Lynn Valley Rd*

Open: by appointment only

Book online:

<https://monova.ca/archives/>

---

# TEACHER EVALUATION FORM

1. How did you hear about the Indigenous People in North Vancouver Book kit?

---

---

---

2. Did the Indigenous People in North Vancouver Book kit support your curriculum goals?

---

---

---

3. How useful was the Teacher's Guide in providing appropriate learning activities for your class?

---

---

---

4. In your opinion, what was the most successful learning activity in the Teacher's Guide? Why?

---

---

---

5. MONOVA is planning to open a new museum facility in fall 2021. We would greatly welcome your input into future program development. Please email us.

For more information about our current programs check our [website](#). Please note that we also offer two additional online Indigenous programs: the **Chief Dan George: Actor & Activist** program as well as **Native – Newcomer Relations: Case Studies in Contact, Colonialism & Resistance**

## TO BOOK

Call 604.990.3700 ext. 8016.

Return this form to:

Program Coordinator, Archives of North Vancouver  
3203 Institute Road, North Vancouver, B.C. V7K 3E5

OR email: [programs@monova.ca](mailto:programs@monova.ca)

# A house for language

Feb 13, 2015 4:28 PM By: Brent Richter



1 / 4

It started with a dream in his teen years.

Khelsilem, the Squamish Nation activist, was visited by his elders, speaking to him in their traditional language.

As a child growing up on the Xwmelch'sten (Capilano 5) Reserve and Eslhá7an (Mission) Reserve, he had some exposure to the language — mainly words that had ceremonial or cultural significance — but no sustained study or conversation. Yet in the dream, he understood everything the elders said to him.

"I woke up and I was in tears," he said. "It was a beautiful thing that I never knew that I would experience."

The vision set him on a path to first study and then teach the language that only has seven fluent speakers remaining.

Today, at 25, he is the founder of the Language Immersion House, where he and other Squamish language learners don't just study the language, they live it.

## **The language**

The Squamish language is one of 11 in the Coast Salish language group spoken by First Nations in the area between the Fraser Valley, Central Coast, Vancouver Island and Puget Sound — though they sound little alike.

"They're so distinct that a fluent speaker from Squamish and a fluent speaker from Musqueam wouldn't be able to talk to each other," Khelsilem said.

What they have in common though is their grammatical structure, which goes beyond the subject-verb-object pattern in English.

"The affixes, like prefixes and suffixes, are the bread and butter of our language," Khelsilem said. "If you can speak those, that's when you're really flowing with the language."

Verbs chosen for a sentence also vary by whether the subject has control over them or not.

The language also has a complex system of determiners (words like some, a few or that in English) that differentiate proximity, visibility, time and gender, but only when referring to a person or animal that is female.

The broad array of determiners was well-suited for a large family group living in a longhouse where one idea or phrase would be communicated for several people at once, Khelsilem said.

Anyone who has driven Highway 1 since the 2010 Olympics will have noticed the road signs that use the preferred Squamish system of writing, most notably the spelling Skwxwú7mesh.

"Why is there a seven?" is one of the most common questions Khelsilem says he gets.

The system was developed by Randy Bouchard, an anthropologist and linguist, and Louie Miranda, a Squamish elder who helped create the first Squamish language dictionary, including phonetic pronunciations not used in English.



At the time, in the late 1970s and early '80s, typewriters were limited to the commonly-used Latin alphabet and a few punctuation and style notations.

In proper Squamish pronunciation, there is a glottal stop or brief pause before the last syllable of the word and the phonetic symbol was replaced with a "7."

## **The decline**

At the population's peak before European contact, it's estimated there were between 36,000 and 90,000 Squamish people, based on archeological evidence, oral history and studies into the environment's capacity.

After 150 years of colonization and epidemics of influenza, smallpox and measles, the population had shrunk to as few as 300 members in the 1930s, one of them Khelsilem's grandmother.

Then came the harshest time of the residential school era when children were seized from their homes as part of an explicit federal policy to assimilate First Nations.

"The perception was that our backwardness and our savage ways were from a bygone era that needed to be educated out of us and language was particularly targeted through the residential schools," Khelsilem said. "For a lot of the older generation, they got whipped and strapped and beat for speaking the language. ...They were pretty vicious about language when (my grandmother) was there."

Forcing English onto the students in the residential schools was only a part of the blow to the language. A farther reaching damage was being done with the overt and subtle racism drilled into the students, which they gradually internalized and passed on to their own children.

"They were not just robbed of their childhood but they were also taught to self hate their own identity, their own people, their own culture, their own skin colour – that it was something inferior or worthless," Khelsilem said.

As a result, few of the elders who retained the language passed it on to their children and the numbers of fluent speakers plummeted over time.

Today, Squamish children have access to an immersion class at Capilano Little Ones school on Squamish Nation lands and high school students can take classes in their traditional language while attending North Vancouver secondary schools, but outside the classroom, they are inundated with media and culture dominated by English, Khelsilem said.

"This all leads to today in 2015 where we have seven fluent speakers out of 4,000 people," he said.

## **The way forward**

Khelsilem's motivation to start the immersion house was born out of his frustration with a plateau in his own learning.

"Although I had learned the grammatical structures and some of the vocabulary ...I just didn't have enough people to talk to," he said. "Fluency only comes through immersion."

His housemates, Josh Watts and Jaymyn La Valle (also his sister), agreed to move into the language immersion house in Lower Lonsdale last fall and make time to study the language and converse. Khelsilem still consults with two of his early teachers, Vanessa Campbell and Peter Jacobs, who has a PhD in linguistics and teaches in the University of Victoria's Aboriginal Language Revitalization Program.

It's a model that's been used effectively, in the Okanagan, the eastern provinces and among the Maori in New Zealand.

Jacobs welcomes the language immersion house as a step beyond the Squamish Nation's efforts to teach the language.

"We had hoped people would take those tools and use them independently on their own to increase their language abilities. I see the house as one of those steps in our community," Jacobs said.

And there are others learning the language in school or at home. They will be the pool to draw from when it comes to the next critical step, Jacobs said.

"We probably have quite a few hundred, if not a thousand or more, Squamish people who are taking language class. Some of them have taken them from K-12," he said. "I think those people are just primed and ready for getting that immersion experience."

But the house is more of a pilot project than the solution to saving a language from the brink. The next step in Khelsilem's plan is a crowdfunded, two-year full-time adult immersion academy that will churn out 15 fluent speakers per year.

Khelsilem is particularly targeting the cohort between the ages of 18 and 30, who are the most likely to have children within 10 years, potentially the first generation to speak Squamish as their first language in 100 years.

"From there, we just keep rolling. Within 30 years, we could go from seven fluent speakers to 10 per cent of the nation or more being fluent," he said. "My dream for this isn't just in my lifetime. It's a 100-year, 200-year or 1,000-year vision."

Khelsilem isn't looking for the federal, provincial or even Squamish Nation governments to fund the academy, preferring to go right to the Squamish people.

He estimates that if a quarter of the band members put up \$20 per month, the school would have enough funding to pay teachers and allow students to focus on their studies full time.

"The invitation to my people is if you really care about the language, here's an opportunity for you to do something about it," he said. "Nobody is going to come parachute into our community and save our language for us."

It's an ambitious task but Khelsilem only shows confidence and excitement to see it executed. Still, he is deferential to the teachers, elders, linguists and band members who have laid the groundwork to bring the language back from the brink, including Campbell, Miranda, and Jacobs, as well as Audrey Rivers, Val Moody, Becky Duncan and Ray Natraoro.

"I can only do this because people had the foresight and vision to do work with the language before I did," Khelsilem said.

## **The drive**

For Khelsilem, revitalizing his language isn't a career or a hobby, but rather an imperative to elevate his people out of the lasting impacts of colonization.

Many of the problems that Squamish Nation and other First Nations members face are attributed to having their identity and way of life stolen from them. Their social fabric, if it is to be mended, has to be done on their own terms and using their own language.

"I really, really believe that through the revitalization of our language, we are able to rebuild our community to be healthier, stronger and more connected. If we have a language that is alive and thriving within the community, then it's going to create a sense of community that is stronger than what we'd have without the language," he said.

The language has subtleties and concepts that don't translate directly into English, so once the language is gone, so are those concepts that have had a place in their way of life for thousands of years.

"It really comes back to that feeling that there is something integral to who we are as a people in our language and if we lose our language, then we've lost a huge part of our soul as a people," Khelsilem said.

The benefits experienced by those who have embraced relearning the language of their grandfathers and grandmothers are immediate and tangible, he said.

"I see young people who have immersed themselves in the culture, immersed themselves in the language and they stand a little bit taller. They stand a little bit prouder. They know 'I have roots somewhere,'" he said.

Ultimately, he'd like to hear siblings teasing each other, band council members debating policy and arguments being settled in their traditional language.

Reviving the language is also part of a larger goal of decolonization, the careful review of the physical, social, political or cultural systems imposed on First Nations people and leaving behind the ones that harm or hold them back.

"I don't think of it as turning the hands on a clock back in time. It's not a wish to be nostalgic about creating a world where we're living just like our ancestors. It's saying that the oppressive system that we've been forced into through colonization has created a way of life, a way of governance, a way of relationshiping that is not healthy to anybody," he said.

It also doesn't mean dispensing with everything that was introduced as a result of colonization as adaptation and innovation are the hallmarks of any successful people, he said.

Decolonization isn't a concept and practice that's a household term in the wider "settler" community because most of the writing on the subject has been by indigenous people for indigenous people, Khelsilem said, and often, people challenged by the concept or invitation to look at things differently don't respond well, sometimes with hostility or even racism. But that too may slowly be changing, just as there has been a shift in his generation away from the shame instilled by residential schools.

## **The dream**

Khelsilem has met the elders of his nation in dreams since starting his journey, though he said the experience always felt more like reality than a dream.

"For me personally, these are very spiritual, sacred moments in my life," he said.

And the experiences have served as a reminder of a lesson he learned as a young man that resonates with him and those he teaches.

"The old people used to say that everybody in this world is born with a gift but your ancestors may come to you at some point and give you more gifts. They said to us, 'What are you going to do when your ancestors come to give you gifts and you don't know what they're saying to you?'"

See Khelsilem's Squamish Language Academy website at [squamishlanguage.com](https://squamishlanguage.com).

## **Comments (0)**