

DDSB Aboriginal Welcome Wheel Lesson Plan Series:

Introduction to the Medicine Wheel

Title: DDSB Aboriginal Welcome Wheel Lesson Plan Series

Introduction to the Medicine Wheel

Curriculum Expectations:

DDSB Character Education Resource Document:

“We demonstrate respect for ourselves, each other and our environment.”

Policy Connections:

Ontario First Nation Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2007:

“All students in Ontario will have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives.”

Learning Goals:

- to encourage students to be open to different perspectives, cultural traditions, ways of seeing and knowing

- to recognize and become familiar with the DDSB Aboriginal Welcome Wheel some of its meanings

- to consider the Medicine Wheel Teaching as a holistic way of looking at the balance and interconnectedness between themselves, others, the natural world around them

Prior Knowledge: Awareness of where the school’s Aboriginal Welcome Wheel plaque is located and what the plaque looks like.

Multiple Intelligences: Bodily Kinesthetic, Visual/Spatial, Interpersonal

Materials:

- small Aboriginal Welcome Wheel and interpretive guide
- Medicine Wheel cards
- this lesson plan
- chart paper/board and markers/chalk (Optional)

Lesson:

There are a variety of ways to use the materials in this lesson plan. All the teachings can be shared at once or a few at a time. Please read the plan through first and decide whether or not you will include the OPTIONAL section contained in Appendix A – Generating the Medicine Wheel From 1D to 3D. This section develops the Medicine Wheel from one dimension to three using a series of lines and points out/explains some of the differences between a ‘Western’ perspective and an Aboriginal world view.

*Also decide whether students will create the Medicine Wheel on the board (magnetic surface) while sitting at their seats **or** on the floor in the centre of a large circle.*

Lastly, there are a myriad of follow-up, extension activity suggestions in Appendix D – be creative and make this your own ... interpreting the Medicine Wheel is personal!

Minds On (Elicit and Engage)

1. Tell students that today's focus is the school's Aboriginal Welcome Wheel. Illicit/explain that the term *Aboriginal* includes three recognized groups in Canada:

First Nations – the indigenous or first people who inhabited North America before Europeans arrived

Métis – people who self-identify as having mixed First Nation and European ancestry

Inuit - the indigenous or first people of the North.

2. Explain that many different Indigenous cultures around the world have Sacred Circle, Mandala or Medicine Wheel teachings. Today students will discover some Medicine Wheel teachings of the Anishinabe (Ojibway) people of Turtle Island (North America) as depicted through the DDSB Aboriginal Welcome Wheel.

3. Place the Aboriginal Welcome Wheel in the centre of the board (or circle on the floor). Ask students if they have seen this in the school before and if so where it is located. Explain that it is called the DDSB Aboriginal Welcome Wheel and is meant to welcome First Nation, Metis and Inuit students and families to the school, as well as to teach everyone more about Aboriginal cultures and perspectives.

4. Ask students to look at the wheel silently for 30 seconds or so and think about what they see. Have them share with a partner, and then allow time for a whole group discussion of the Wheel's various visual elements, i.e. colour, background images, silhouettes, words etc.

5. CIRCULAR – Point out that the Medicine Wheel is circular, and that in a circle everything is equal, balanced and interconnected. To the Ojibway nation the Medicine Wheel is the circle of life because all things in life are in a circle. The Earth is a circle (sphere) as are the Sun, Moon other planets and stars.

6. CYCLICAL – The Medicine Wheel is also cyclical; i.e. it goes around repeatedly in cycles. The cycles are circular too, like the cycles of day and night, or the four seasons. The Medicine Wheel's many cycles each have four parts or stages. This is sometimes called, 'The Power of Four', 'The Cycles of Four', or just 'The Fours'.

Action! (Explore and Explain)

Hand out all Medicine Wheel (36) cards. Some students may have more than one card.

1. Point out that the Welcome Wheel is divided into four quadrants, like the Medicine Wheel. Invite the four students who have **colour** words on their cards to stand up. Ask them to place The Four Colours outside the appropriate Medicine Wheel quadrant. (i.e. match background colour on cards to outer ring of wheel and place just outside wheel) Note the four colours; yellow, red, black and white.

2. Ask the class to name the four cardinal directions. They will likely say north, south, east

and west. (linear perspective) Explain that on the Medicine Wheel we think of the directions in a circle and start in the East because this is where the sun rises and the day begins. Invite the four students who have **direction** words on their cards to place them in the appropriate quadrant.

Once the four colours and four directions are placed on the Wheel share the Unity Teaching:

*The Unity Teaching**

The Medicine Wheel teaches us about equality and respect for all people of the four colours and the four directions on Earth. The four colours come together in the centre of the wheel where all nations are joined in the spirit of unity.

*Unity Buttons (small pins showing The Four Colours) are available for purchase from the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto's Cedar Basket Gift Shop. www.ncct.ca or (416) 964-9087.

3. Invite the four students who have **season** words to stand and place them in the appropriate quadrants. Explain that the annual cycle starts with the new life of Spring, continues through the growth of Summer, harvest in Fall and the time of rest or dormancy in Winter.

4. Continue inviting students to build the layers of the Medicine Wheel in this manner, explaining the meaning of the Cycles of Four as you go:
(This can be done in separate lessons as well.)

- The Four Times of Day/Night

The **sun rises** in the east, is highest in the sky at **mid-day** in the south, and **sets** in the west. The **night** time (moon) belongs in the north.

- The Four Sacred Plants

In the east is **Sacred Tobacco**, which is used to give thanks.

Cedar is in the south and is a healing plant/tree. (Cedar tea)

Found in the west **Sage**, is considered a cleansing plant. It is often burned to invite positive energy so people can see, hear, speak, think and feel things in a good way. (smudging)

In the north **Sweetgrass** is like the hair of Mother Earth. It is braided to remind us that as people we are strong when mind, body and spirit are bound together in a balanced way.

- The Four Animals

East – **Eagle** – flies the highest, sees the farthest and is closest to the Great Mystery or the Creator; eagle feathers are considered sacred

South – **Deer** – teaches about generosity and sharing because it gives its meat for food and

skins for clothing, shoes, drums etc.

West – **Buffalo** – guards the western doorway and teaches people to look within themselves for guidance

North – **White Bear** – teaches about fasting because of its long winter hibernation; also teaches about strength, truth and the wisdom of the elders to guide the youth

- The Four Elements

All four natural elements are necessary for our survival. They are honoured with gratitude for supporting all life on Earth.

East – **Water** – rivers and watersheds are considered the veins of Mother Earth and all living things require clean water to survive; as people we are all born out of water and tears cleanse us

South – **Fire** – fire energy from the sun is at the base of all food chains; fires keep us warm and allow us to cook food (sometimes the energy takes the form of Fossil Fuels/electricity)

West – **Earth** – plants require soil and minerals to grow; mountains, plains, deserts and all lands support life

North – **Air** – the Earth's atmosphere is like a blanket of air, allowing everything to breathe and live

- The Four Stages of Life

Each stages of life has gifts to contribute to the community.

East – **Birth** – Infancy and childhood; innocence, curiosity

South – **Youth** – adolescence; seeking, questioning

West – **Adult** – adulthood; providing for others, care-taking

North – **Elder** – old age; wisdom gained through experience

- Four Aspects of Human Beings

As humans we all have four aspects of ourselves, or four ways of knowing and learning.

East – **Spirit** – enables us to see and have vision; knowledge is *revealed*

South – **Heart** – allows us to feel and know through *relating*

West – **Body** – enables us to act and do; to learn and know through *responding*

North – **Mind** – allows us to think and learn/know through *reflecting*

5. Explain that balance within all these cycles and 'Fours' of the Medicine Wheel is very important. Invite students to comment on specific words or 'Fours' they find interesting or meaningful. End the lesson here, or choose/create an extension activity.

Consolidation (Elaborate, Evaluate, Extend...)

Here are a few follow-up activities. See Appendix D for more information and suggestions.

1. Invite students to illustrate one of the words/concepts and create a bulletin board.
2. Divide the class into groups of four and have each group create a dramatic representation of one of the Cycles of Four, eg. Tableau.
3. Ask students to select one of the Cycles of Four to write about and/or illustrate.
4. Have students research and explore more about the Medicine Wheel online. The www.fourdirectionsteachings.com is a fabulous, interactive site that features the Medicine Wheel teachings of five different First Nation traditions.
5. Listen to Aboriginal music, read a book by an Aboriginal author, go outside to explore ...

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Appendix A – Generating the Wheel from 1D – 3D

Appendix B – Medicine Wheel Handout

Appendix C – Medicine Wheel Word Card Master

Appendix D – Medicine Wheel Information by Jan Beaver

Appendix A
OPTIONAL - Generating the Wheel from 1D – 3D – Script/Instructions

(1.) Use chart paper or the board to demonstrate how the Wheel/Circle can be derived from a line, and how some 'Western' and 'Aboriginal' views differ.

(2.) Draw a straight, horizontal line on the board/chart paper. Explain that this one-dimensional line represents the Western view of time. It is often called a 'time line'. (See illustration following.)

(3.) Demonstrate by walking a short way in front of the class:

- Point/look behind you and ask students, "If I was walking along a time line, what would be behind me?" (The Past)
- Point/look in front of you and ask students, "What would be in front of me?" (The Future)
- Point to where you are standing and ask, "What about where I'm standing right now?" (The Present)

Explain that in this one-dimensional (back and forth) way of looking at time the past and the future are not connected to one another; they stretch on to infinity in both directions.

(4.) Draw a straight vertical line down through the first line, explaining that this diagram is now two-dimensional (back and forth, up and down). Tell students that in the Western view of the world we also have lots of two-dimensional thinking - that of dualities or opposites, i.e. up and down, above and below, good and bad, right and wrong, black and white, day and night, the HAVES and the HAVE NOTS.

Point out that in the Western culture we really focus on the line coming up from the middle, i.e. we are always striving to have more (better, newer, improved) as we climb this 'Ladder of Success'. Our culture values 'Progress' or infinite economic growth and consumption. We HAVE a lot, whereas many other people in the world have much less than we do. Many don't even have enough to survive (the line coming down from the middle). This has led to much imbalance in human societies and the natural environment all around the world.

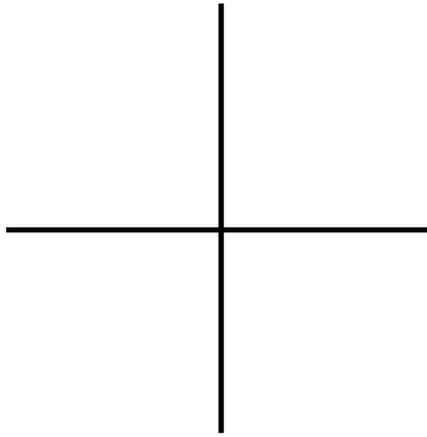
(5.) Draw a circle to connect all the lines while suggesting that what has been forgotten, or perhaps obscured over time, is the circle that connects everything together. This is the Medicine Wheel or the Circle of Life. This perspective places importance on the balance and equality between people, plants, animals and the elements that support life. Many Indigenous peoples base their world view on the cycles of nature and our interconnectedness with them.

Appendix A
Generating the Wheel from 1D – 3D VISUAL

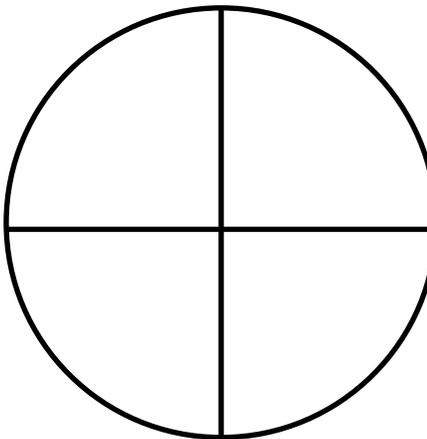
2. Draw a straight, horizontal line.



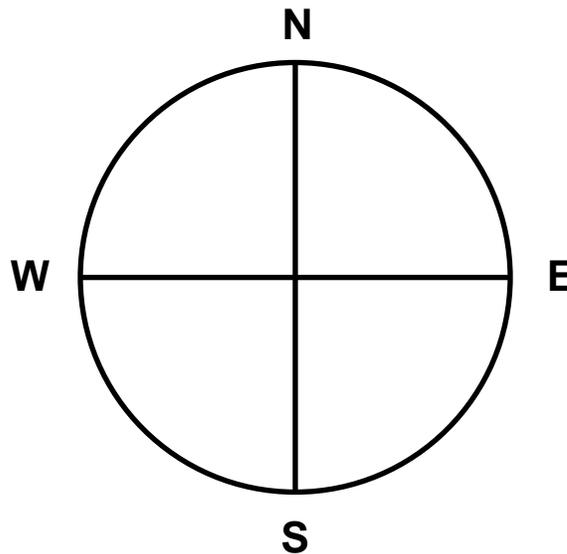
4. Draw a vertical line down through the horizontal one.



5. Draw a circle to enclose both lines.

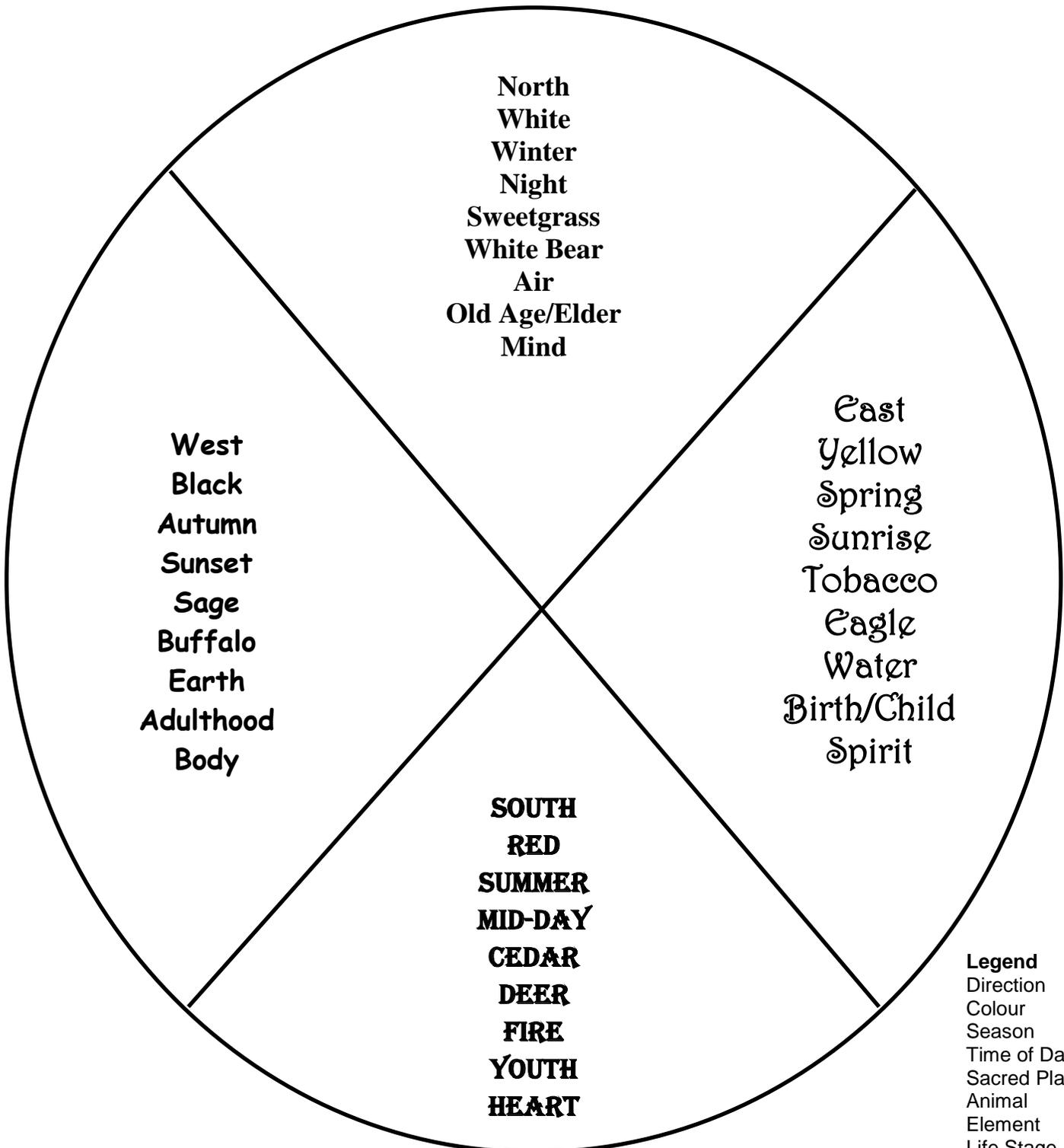


6. Medicine Wheel with Four Directions.



Appendix B The Medicine Wheel

*Adapted from a variety of sources, including:
The Mishomis Book, Ojibwe/Powawatomi Teaching, The Sacred Tree,
Ceremony in the Circle of Life, The Gifts of the Medicine Wheel*



Legend
 Direction
 Colour
 Season
 Time of Day
 Sacred Plant
 Animal
 Element
 Life Stage
 Human Aspect

Appendix C
Medicine Wheel Card Master

East	Yellow
Spring	Sunrise
Tobacco	Eagle
Water	Birth
Spirit	SOUTH
RED	SUMMER

MID-DAY

CEDAR

DEER

FIRE

YOUTH

HEART

West

Black

Autumn

Sunset

Sage

Buffalo

Adult

Earth

Body

North

White

Winter

Night

Air

Elder

Mind

Sweetgrass

White Bear

Appendix D

Medicine Wheel Information by Jan Beaver

The Medicine Wheel

The Anishinaabe or Ojibwa nation has a teaching that the medicine wheel is the circle of life. All of creation is represented on the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel also includes all nations on Earth, not just the Ojibwa people. The teaching is that all things in life are in a circle. The Earth is a circle or sphere as are the Sun, Moon and all of the other planets and stars in our universe. The cycles of the seasons and day and night are circular. The life cycle is circular from birth to childhood to youth to adulthood to old age and finally to death and rebirth. These teachings are divided into the four directions.

East

In the east, the colour is yellow. The yellow nation is in the East. It is the dawn time of day. East represents birth. It is the season of spring and the time of new life. The Eagle represents the East. The Eagle is the bird that flies closest to Great Mystery or Creator, Gitche Manito. The Eagle is the messenger between the people and Creator. The Eagle saved the people from destruction once by interceding for us with Creator. It was a time when the people had forgotten how to live in harmony with the Earth and so Creator was going to destroy everything and start over but the Eagle pleaded with Creator to wait and see if Eagle could find some people who still remembered how to live in a good way. Eagle told Creator that he would fly out each morning at sunrise and if Eagle could find one person who still remembered how to live in a good way, Creator would have to spare the Earth. So that is why traditional native people have a Sunrise Ceremony at dawn to offer tobacco to the sacred fire and give thanks for the new day and for all of Creation. Tobacco (or ahsayma in Ojibwa) is the sacred medicine of the east. The smoke from ahsayma carries our prayers into the Spirit World. It is used when we are asking someone to do something for us, for example, perform a ceremony. The lessons we learn in the east are about kindness, open mindedness, innocence, joy, truthfulness, hope, guidance and leadership.

South

In the South the colour is red. The red nation is in the south. It is the middle part of the day. It is the season of summer. The time of life here is youth or adolescence. The animal of the south is the deer for the Anishinaabe people. For aboriginal people further south, the animal is the mouse or the coyote. The deer teaches us about being generous because deer gives us meat to eat and skins for our clothing, drums and shoes. Deer also teaches us to be loyal, honest and respectful to others. The sacred medicine of the South is cedar. Cedar is burned to purify your body from disease and to protect you. It can also be made as a tea to drink for cleansing your body.

West

The colour of the west is black. It is sunset time and the autumn time of the year. It is also the time of your life when you are a adult. The black nation is in the west. In the west is a doorway through which all people must go when they leave the Earth for the Spirit World. For the Anishinaabe people, the buffalo guards this doorway. For some native peoples further south, the bear is in this direction. The buffalo is sacred to the native people because of everything buffalo has given us to help us to survive. The lessons that buffalo teaches us are about sharing with others and being generous. The sacred medicine of the west is sage. Sage is the women's

medicine. The smoke from sage cleanses our spirits and helps us hear, see, smell, taste and feel things in a good way. Tea made from sage is good for the throat.

North

The colour of the north is white. It is the night time and the winter of the year. It is the time of your life when you are an elder. The white nation is in the north. The sacred medicine of the north is the sweetgrass. It was the first plant to grow on Mother Earth. We braid this grass as if it were Mother Earth's hair. The smoke from this sweetgrass offers protection to you and helps to take away your hunger when you are fasting. The animal of the north is the bear. The bear teaches us about the importance of fasting because the bear goes to sleep in the winter and doesn't eat for a long time until the spring. The lessons we learn in the north are about strength and truth and how to speak with a voice of wisdom to help those younger people who need guidance. As an elder, you are respected and taken care of. Elders are always served first at a feast and they are never made to line up or wait for things. Everyone must take very good care of their elders and listen to their advice.

Jan Beaver

Medicine Wheel

