

“I still want to show, teach.  
 You will find when I am gone  
 I thought about all of you  
 Continue the work, you young people  
 You can do it.”

-Rita Joe, from “Wenmajita’si (I am filled with grief)”

In honour of Nova Scotia Heritage Day, 2023, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is pleased to provide the works of this year’s honouree, Elder Rita Joe. Elder Rita Joe’s poetry reflects her desire to change the negative attitudes she encountered and to celebrate the Mi’kmaq. As the “Gentle Warrior” Rita Joe used her words to share her experiences and to inspire many Mi’kmaq and other Indigenous writers.

The poetry of Elder Rita Joe is important to our shared history as Nova Scotians. Told from an authentic historical perspective and supported by primary sources, the aim of the profiles is to engage students in African Nova Scotian history by making connections with prominent African Nova Scotian people who overcame the immense challenges of their times to create novel opportunities for themselves and their communities. The stories represented have strong curricular connections that can be used to support inquiry-based learning and to create dynamic learning experiences in several subject areas.

English 11	
<b>GCO: Students will be expected to speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SCO: Students will be expected to address complex issues, present points of view backed by evidence, and modify, defend, or argue for their positions in response to opposing points of view</li> </ul>	
<b>Inquiry Question: How does Rita Joe use language in her poetry?</b> As part of an inquiry, learners can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine Rita Joe’s use of colloquial language and the effect it has on her audience, and explore the ways they could use the language of their community to affect an audience for their own purposes.</li> <li>- Consider Joe’s purpose for including Mi’kmaq words in some poems in relation to audience.</li> <li>- Consider the messages Rita Joe wants to convey to her audience about her people and the ways in which she conveys those messages. They can explore why it is important to hear from Mi’kmaq perspectives like Rita Joe’s.</li> </ul>	<b>Suggested Poems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I Lost My Talk” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 11</li> <li>“Keskmi” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 6</li> <li>“The Language the Empire of My Nation” <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 29</li> </ul>

	<p>“A” <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 59</p>
	<p>“14” <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 71</p>
	<p>“My River Runs Free” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 22</p>
<p><b>GCO: Students will be expected to respond personally to a range of texts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SCO: Students will be expected to make connections among the themes, issues, and ideas expressed in various texts</li> <li>• SCO: Students will be expected to demonstrate a willingness to explore multiple perspectives on text</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Inquiry Question: How can poetry create change?</b> As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflect on the importance of writing from one’s own perspective, as Rita Joe does, and explore what is important to them from their own experiences through a communication form.</li> <li>- Consider the ways in which Rita Joe’s poems are often a call to action to right injustice. Learners can then construct their own communication forms as calls to action about an injustice to which they would like to respond.</li> <li>- Compare Rita Joe’s prose to her poetry and examine the different ways she uses language in each. They can consider which they feel is more powerful based on Joe’s use of each genre.</li> <li>- Compare the ways other poets have responded to Rita Joe’s poems with their own, and discuss how they have taken up Rita Joe’s call in “I Wrote, Now You Write”. They can construct their own communication forms in response to a text they have read, or they can construct their own communication form and create new ones in response to each other’s.</li> </ul>	<p>“The Road to Foster Home” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 3</p> <p>“Keskmi” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 6</p> <p>“I Wrote, Now You Write” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 82</p> <p>“There is Life Everywhere” <i>The Mi’kmaq Anthology</i>, Vol. 2, p. 18</p> <p>“Poem for Rita” <i>The Mi’kmaq Anthology</i>, Vol. 2, p. 66</p> <p>“The Challenge” <i>The Mi’kmaq Anthology</i>, Vol. 2, p. 62</p> <p>“Ode to Rita Joe” <i>The Mi’kmaq Anthology</i>, Vol. 2, p. 116</p>
<p><b>GCO: Students will be expected to respond critically to a range of texts, applying their understanding of language, form, and genre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SCO: Students will be expected to recognize how the artful use of language and the structures of genre and text can influence or manipulate the reader/viewer</li> <li>• SCO: Students will be expected to examine the relationships among language, topic, purpose, context, and audience</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Inquiry Question: What makes a message powerful?</b> As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine what is meant by Rita Joe’s paradoxical moniker as the “gentle warrior” in the context of her poetry.</li> <li>- Discuss Rita Joe’s use of metaphors, similes and imagery in order to depict her experiences as Mi’kmaw in Canada.</li> </ul>	<p>“The Solid Part of One’s Identity” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i>, p. 12</p> <p>“Ntapekiaqnm na na’ta’q (My Song is Fading)” <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 36</p>

<p>- Explore the ways in which Rita Joe positions her audiences in relation to her messages, and consider the ways in which she constructs her audiences. They can examine how her poetry is meant to affect different audiences.</p>	<p>"In Order of Line" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 46</p>
	<p>"Gentle Warrior Woman" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology</i>, Vol. 2, p. 236</p>
	<p>"The Tree" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 83</p>
	<p>"Poor Man, Poor World" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 14</p>