

“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 both 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 heritage as Nova Scotians. Her work invites readers to expand their own understandings as they explore her thoughts, feelings, and experiences both as an individual, and as a Mi’kmaq woman. Her poetry can support learners in considering our shared historical and contemporary contexts as they engage in inquiries related to the Mi’kmaq and other Indigenous peoples.

Note to Teachers:

The table below includes a selection of Social Studies 11 outcomes that could be used to explore the poetry of Elder Rita Joe as part of an inquiry. Learners can consider how Elder Rita Joe used her poetry to respond to historical, political, and economic inequities the Mi’kmaq faced. Learners can also consider how Rita Joe, and other artists inspired by her work, use their words as a call to action to encourage others to work towards reconciliation.

Teachers should note that some of Elder Rita Joe’s poetry includes historical terms like “Indian” and other terminology that would not be used in a modern context. Before reading these poems with learners, teachers should provide explicit instruction around the use and context of historical terms.

Mi’kmaq Studies 11

I1: Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of worldview and perspective on interpretations of history and culture.

Inquiry Question: How are we connected to the history and culture of the First Peoples of Nova Scotia? As part of an inquiry learners can:

- Explore the poetry of Elder Rita Joe, and work of other writers inspired by her, as expressions of contemporary Mi’kmaq culture. Learners can consider what elements

Suggested Poems

“I am the Indian” <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 1	“5” <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 60	“My River Runs Free” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i> , p. 22
“In Order of Line” “Someday They Will Listen” <i>We are the</i>	“8” <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 63	“Old Stories” <i>The Blind Man’s Eyes</i> , p. 23

<p>are common across works, and how expressions of culture vary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider how Elder Rita Joe used her poems as a way to protect and celebrate Mi'kmaw culture and history. Learners can then investigate other ways that Mi'kmaw Elders, knowledge keepers, artists, activists, and community members are celebrating and revitalizing Mi'kmaw culture. 	<i>Dreamers</i> , p. 46		
	"Aye! No Monuments" <i>Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 59	"21" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 78	"Legacy" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 55
	"The Challenge" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 82	"Untitled" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 86	"Ode to Rita Joe" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 116

Canadian History 11

Culture and Diversity: demonstrate an understanding of culture, diversity, and worldview, recognizing the similarities and differences reflected in various personal, cultural, racial, and ethnic perspectives.

<p>Inquiry Question: Why is it important for all Nova Scotians to understand Mi'kmaw culture and worldviews?</p> <p>As part of an inquiry learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use Rita Joe's poems to gather evidence of the traditions, teachings, values, and beliefs that are part of Mi'kmaw culture and worldview. Learners can then conduct further research on Mi'kmaw culture and worldview using other sources. - Explore how Rita Joe used poetry to compare and contrast aspects of Mi'kmaw and European/settler worldviews. Learners can then explore a relevant contemporary issue to consider how Mi'kmaw and settler values and beliefs inform decisions and actions. - Consider how Rita Joe used her writing to educate readers about Mi'kmaw culture and worldviews in order to honour and foster a deeper understanding of the Mi'kmaq. Learners can then reflect on how the work of Rita Joe, and other Indigenous writers can support actions towards reconciliation. 	"I am the Indian" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 1	"In Order of Line" "Someday They Will Listen" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 46	"2" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 57
	"Wenmajita'si (I am filled with grief)" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 20	"Aye! No Monuments" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 59	"8" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 63
	"Mi'kmaw Culture is Like Looking Through a Window" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 25	"Legacy" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 55	"21" <i>We are the Dreamers</i> , p. 78
	"Your Buildings, Tall, Alien" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> p. 72	"The Challenge" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 82	"(Untitled)" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 86
	"Here" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 157	"Honouring Rita" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i> , p. 203-205	

Contemporary Canadian Studies 11

Learners will reflect on the complexity and diversity of Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous cultures in Canada

- Analyse the continuing effects of colonization on Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous cultures in Canada

<p>Inquiry Question: How has education been used as a tool for colonization and assimilation?</p> <p>As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Rita Joe's poetry to find evidence of how attempts at assimilation and colonization affected her and other Mi'kmaq. Learners can then explore other sources such as "The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada" (2015) where learners can explore the testimony of Shubenacadie Indian Residential School survivors Albert Marshall, Dorene Bernard, David Nevin, Alan Knockwood, William Herney, Noel Knockwood, Ben Sylliboy, and others. Consider how Rita Joe used her voice to counter the colonialist narratives about Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous people she, and her children, experienced in school. Learners can then research other ways that Indigenous writers, artists, community leaders, activists and their allies have worked to ensure authentic portrayals of Indigenous people and their experiences in schools. 	<p>"Keskmsi" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 6</p>	<p>"Someday They Will Listen" <i>We are the Dreamers</i>, p. 24</p>	<p>"I Lost My Talk" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 11</p>
	<p>"Hated Structure: Indian Residential School, Shubenacadie, N.S." <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 10</p>	<p>"6" <i>We are the Dreamers</i>, p. 61</p>	<p>"My River Runs Free", <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 22</p>
	<p>"3" <i>We are the Dreamers</i>, p. 58</p>	<p>"19" <i>We are the Dreamers</i>, p. 77</p>	<p>"Assimilation" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 54</p>
	<p>"A Heritage that Never Died" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 26</p>	<p>"I Lament Forgotten Skills" <i>Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 77</p>	<p>"European Traders Are Still Here" <i>Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 62</p>
	<p>"Ode to Rita Joe" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i>, p. 116</p>	<p>"O Canada" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i>, p. 131</p>	<p>"Reflections on My Learning and Teaching as Activism and Transformation: III. Language is Culture and Knowledge" <i>The Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2</i>, p. 165-167</p>