

“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 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 ELA and Social Studies 8 outcomes that could be used to explore the poetry of Rita Joe. Poetry enhances literacy skills such as vocabulary development and reading comprehension strategies. Through the use of the gradual release of responsibility framework, teachers can model and guide learners to discuss, read, and comprehend texts, towards greater independence.

English Language Arts 8

Learners will reflect on how the cultures of communities, inclusive of the Mi’kmaq, Acadians, African Nova Scotians, and the Gaels, are expressed through a range of communication forms

- Investigate ways in which communication forms are an expression of culture and identity
- Comprehend cultural expressions using speakers’/writers’/producers’ choices

Inquiry Question: How does Rita Joe use language in her poetry?

As part of an inquiry, learners can:

- Examine Rita Joe’s use of colloquial language (i.e. her use of “talk” instead of “voice” in “I Lost My Talk”) and the effect it has on her audience, and explore the ways they could use the language of their community in relation to audience and purpose.
- Consider Joe’s purpose for including Mi’kmaq words in some poems in relation to the audience.

Suggested Poems

“I Lost My Talk”, Nimbus 2021

“Keskmí”
The Blind Man’s Eyes, p. 6

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflect on the language of their own communities and examine their use of language as part of their identity. - 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'kmaw perspectives like Rita Joe's. 	<p>"The Language the Empire of My Nation" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 29</p>
	<p>"4" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 59</p>
	<p>"14" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 71</p>
<p>Learners will create oral, written, and visual communication forms for a range of audiences and purposes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Investigate how ideas can be developed when creating oral, written, and visual communication forms ● Apply writing, design, and research processes 	
<p>Inquiry Question: How can different communication forms be used to affect oneself and others?</p> <p>As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investigate the ways that visuals can extend the meaning of a poem by examining Pauline Young's illustrations for "I Lost My Talk." They then can extend the meaning of a communication form of their own choosing by combining it with another communication form. For example, they can add music to a reading of one of their own poems, or they can add visual elements to one of their own stories, to further develop the meaning of their original communication form. - 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. - 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 they care about. 	<p>"I Lost My Talk", Nimbus 2021</p>
	<p>"I Was That Kid" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 9</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>Learners will comprehend a range of communication forms using listening strategies, reading strategies, and viewing strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyse how communication forms influence comprehension ● Reflect on how perspectives influence comprehension of communication forms 	
<p>Inquiry Question: How does the audience affect the content of texts?</p> <p>As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examine how Rita Joe's poetry is reflective of her as a "gentle warrior." - Compare poems Joe writes about her childhood to those written when she is much older. They can consider if their own age influences their understanding of the poems, or what other factors influence their understanding of the poems. - Explore the elements of author's craft in Rita Joe's poetry (i.e. similes, metaphors, personification, imagery) and discuss what effects she is trying to have on her reader. - Examine the audience Rita Joe is writing for in different poems, and consider how she uses different techniques in her poetry depending on the audience. 	<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>"In Order of Line" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 46</p>
	<p>"I Became an Adult at Age Five" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 1</p>
	<p>"The Sixth Sense"</p>

	<i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 5
	"Love" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 75
	"The Tree" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i> , p. 83
	"Poor Man, Poor World" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i> , p. 14
Social Studies 8	
<p><i>Note to Teachers:</i></p> <p>The table below includes a selection of Social Studies 8 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<p>Learners will reflect on 20th and 21st century Indigenous experiences in Canada</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the purpose and impacts of assimilation policies on Indigenous cultures in Canada Reflect on the impacts of residential schools on Indigenous peoples of Canada Analyse how Indigenous peoples have advocated for their rights in Canada 	
<p>Inquiry Question: How Have Residential Schools Impacted Indigenous People in Canada?</p> <p>As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the poetry of Elder Rita Joe to consider the impact of the residential school system on Rita Joe and the Mi'kmaq Gather information on the intentions behind the residential school system in Canada and how they related to assimilation. Learners could begin with <i>Rights and Advocacy</i>, pp. 27-32 Consider various ways that Mi'kmaw and other Indigenous people are working to heal from the impacts of residential schools. Learners could begin with <i>Rights and Advocacy</i> p. 32 and p. 42 	<p>Suggested Poems</p> <p>"Hated Structure: Indian Residential School, Shubenacadie, N.S." <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 10</p> <p>"I Lost My Talk", Nimbus, 2021</p> <p>"Legacy" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 55</p>
<p>Learners will evaluate the impact of equity and inequity in a changing Canadian society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate experiences of inequity and resistance from various perspectives Investigate how first voice can lead to an informed understanding of equity and inequity 	
<p>Inquiry Question: Why is it important to consider first voice when investigating issues of equity and inequity?</p> <p>As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the poems of Rita Joe to gather a first-voice perspective on inequities the Mi'kmaq have faced and how they have responded 	<p>"2" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 57</p> <p>"22" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 79</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research various inequities Mi'kmaw and other Indigenous people have faced, and how communities are responding to those inequities. Learners could begin with <i>Rights and Advocacy</i>, pp. 17-24 and pp. 33-35 - Learners could choose an issue of inequity Mi'kmaw and other Indigenous people have faced, and gather first-voice perspectives on that issue to help others develop a more informed understanding. For example, learners could use the case study: "Movements and Moments: The Kanehsatake Resistance" (Social Studies 8 Provincial eLearning) to consider the role of first voice in developing an accurate understanding of historical events. 	<p>"A Heritage that Never Died" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 26</p>
<p>Learners will plan an advocacy action in response to an issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Investigate various forms of advocacy 	<p>"Prejudice Is Something We Can Do Without" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 60</p>
<p>Inquiry Question: How can we use our voices to create change in our communities? As part of an inquiry, learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore how Elder Rita Joe used her poems as a way of creating change for her community - Consider how Rita Joe's work inspired Mi'kmaw and Indigenous youth to take action through writing and other forms of art. Learners could begin by viewing "Gentle Warrior, a song tribute to Mi'kmaw poet Rita Joe", produced by Eskasoni Reserve High School students as part of the Rita Joe Song Project - Learners could investigate other ways that Mi'kmaw and other Indigenous people use their voices to make change. For example, learners could use the case study: "Rights and Advocacy": Indigenous Advocacy" (Social Studies 8 Provincial eLearning) to gather information about how Shannen Koostachin used her voice to raise awareness about the state of schools in Attawapiskat First Nation 	<p>Ankita'si (I Think) <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 40</p> <p>"Wenjmajita'si (I am filled with grief)" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 20</p> <p>"9.1" <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 64</p> <p>"Ntapekiaqnm na na'ta'q (My Song is Fading) <i>We Are the Dreamers</i>, p. 36</p> <p>"I Wrote, Now You Write" <i>The Blind Man's Eyes</i>, p. 82</p>