



Storytelling to Improve Sexual and Reproductive Health

Storytelling is one of the oldest ways people have shared information about many parts of life. Stories are unique to our families. Stories carry medicine.

Highlighting the intersection of storytelling, decolonization and healthcare within Métis communities, Métis author Maria Campbell emphasizes that stories are more than narratives—stories are sources of wisdom that carry the teachings of our ancestors and hold the power to heal.



“When Métis gather, stories flow like rivers—strengthening our bonds and deepening our connection to Métis culture.”

LFMO Health Forum Participant, 2024

To develop our sexual and reproductive health toolkit, we turned to our community first. We wanted to hear about their experiences so that we could provide them with stories and resources for healing. Here is what some of the participants at our 2024 Health Forum shared about the benefits of storytelling:

“Our Ancestors are a part of the story, and the more we talk about them, the more they are a part of our life.”

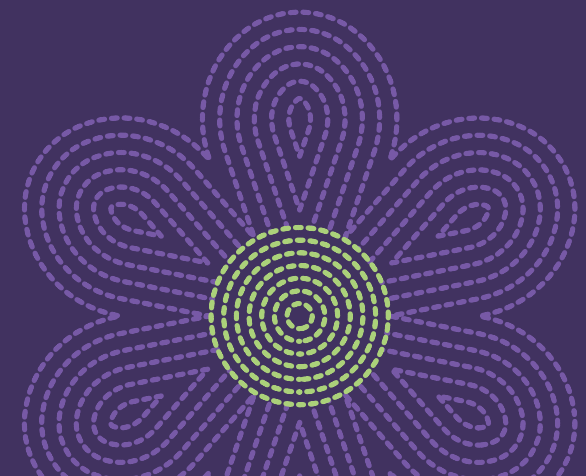
“Elders are the gatekeepers of wisdom, knowledge, and history. They impart tradition, knowledge, culture, values, and lessons using orality and role modelling traditional practices.”

By using reflective practices that center on storytelling, we can empower individuals to learn and open up about sexual and reproductive health.

Disclaimer: These worksheets are for educational purposes only. For medical advice, consult a trusted healthcare provider who respects your cultural values and needs.

Storytelling for Métis Health and Wellness

Identity and storytelling are central to Métis culture. Stories preserve history, teachings, and values through oral tradition for future generations. Through oral storytelling, we can share cultural knowledge, promote healing, foster community, and support Métis holistic health. These stories often include lessons about well-being, mental and physical health, and the importance of relationships with the land, water, and each other.





“The eagle feather is what carries us. It carries out thoughts and prayers to creator, and the grandmothers and grandfathers.”

LFMO Grandmother Linda Boudreau-Semaganis



Photo credits: LFMO Grandmother Linda Boudreau-Semaganis, 2024

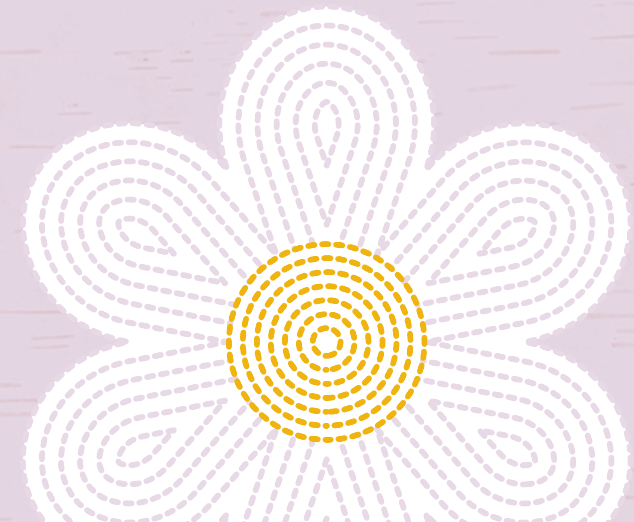
The Art of Storytelling

There are many different ways and teachings when it comes to storytelling. These often depend on where a person comes from, who taught them, and the resources they have. Every story has four important parts: listening, understanding, remembering, and sharing.

It's said that if you hear a story four times and still can't remember or retell it properly, then it might not be your story to share. But when you do share stories—with care and respect—your life and the lives of your listeners can be enriched with knowledge, culture, and connection.

Storytelling is a powerful tool. It helps us talk about things that matter deeply—like our health, our bodies, and our rights. By sharing stories about sexual and reproductive health and body sovereignty, we can build stronger communities, honour our experiences, and support one another in ways that reflect who we are as Métis people. Use this gift of storytelling in a good way, to teach, to learn, and to make the world a kinder and more informed place.

From “The Art of Storytelling,” published by the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. Research and compiled by Linda Boudreau-Semaganis with A. Adrian Wolfleg.



Willow Teaching: Flexibility, Resilience, Kindness

Growing and thriving along riverbanks, swamps and marshes, the willow draws nourishment from the water and holds firm to the earth, tolerating rocky and clay soil. While their branches are strong, they bend easily, never breaking under the weight of snow or the push of the prairie wind. The willow reminds us that real strength is not about being rigid, it's about being flexible—knowing when to bend and yield and how to stand tall again.



Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak

The willow has been part of Métis life for generations—gifting us with the opportunity to engage in ceremony. Shaping spaces for healing, branches have been used to form the framework of sweat lodges. Red Willow baskets were used to collect berries, fruits and vegetables.

The willow's strength is reflected in the resilience of Métis people, who have learned to adapt and endure, taking pride in their roots while bending to the needs of family, community, and land.

In times of challenge, remember the willow: bend, but do not break; be strong but gentle; stand tall, but stay rooted in kindness.

In the north, where sage is hard to find, willow is used as medicine. In spring, its fresh sap is collected to cleanse and renew. Just as the willow nourishes itself and gives to others—we are called to care for ourselves and one another.

The willow also teaches us kindness. Pussy willows sprout in the spring as soft, delicate buds—a reminder of gentleness and the power of small acts of kindness.

Stories to Share with Your Community

Our work on this toolkit was guided by Grandmother Linda Boudreau-Semaganis. Following our conversations with the community and Métis health experts, she shared four stories about Métis sexual and reproductive health. We invite you to read and share these stories with your friends, family and community. Bring them to a gathering to share, learn and discuss.

❁ "When women gather, the healing begins."

LFMO Grandmother Linda Boudreau-Semaganis

Gathering and Sharing for Sexual and Reproductive Health

Métis women gather for the purpose of visiting and sharing Métis women's knowledge for wellness. Gathering together and visiting provides an opportunity to promote social connections for learning. These gatherings provide a space to discuss reproductive health topics, answer questions, and offer guidance in a respectful and inclusive environment. They foster Métis identity which contributes to our overall health as individuals and community.

We can all play a role in strengthening our networks and communities. Consider facilitating a gathering in your community where Métis women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals feel safe to share and learn from one another's sexual and reproductive health experiences. What role can you play in mentoring younger generations? Which Elders or Knowledge Keepers could you invite to share and participate?

Strawberry (Otehimin) Teaching

Forever in our history, culture and traditions, the strawberry has been known as the "heart berry" and represents femininity in our nation. This berry shows itself in the season of regrowth and renewal (spring) and represents the reproductive role of women in presenting new life and continuity. It represents a time when people could look at life, let go of the things that do not serve them, begin new growth, and bring forth change—ripening like the strawberry.



Like the women in our families, strawberries take the lead in our feasts. The strawberry is also prominent in the "rites of passage" or "coming into womanhood" ceremonies, guiding girls into the new phase of their lives. It represents the monthly cleansing the body experiences to prepare to create new life.

The "heart berry" also teaches the connection between mind, body, spirit and emotion. To develop personal balance, we need our hearts to lead us and help us grow. Like our kin across the Métis Motherland, strawberry plants have a strong, widespread root system, which allows them to grow and flourish.

A small sweet berry, so intricately intertwined in a woman's life!



"The monthly cleansing time we have is a sacred process preparing out bodies to create life."

Grandmother Linda Boudreau Semaganis

Raspberry Teaching

In nature, for every feminine entity, there is a masculine counterpart. For every plant, medicine, animal, water being, winged one, crawler, creeper and human being, there is an opposite, enabling creation to continue. In Métis beliefs, the strawberry represents femininity, and the raspberry represents masculinity.

The raspberry bush stands tall on a prickly stalk, protecting it from the harm of closeness or crowding. The berries are dark red and tart, and each small section on the berry has tiny hairlike projections, representing male facial and body hair.

✿ “All plants are medicine. [...] The medicines can help us in many ways: they can help us heal from generations of shame, violence and abuse. Medicines can help restore a good way of life.”

Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us* (2007)

Raspberries are hardy and continue to grow year after year, a particularly good source of vitamins and flavourful nourishment. The raspberry leaves have a medicinal property that can assist a woman during and after childbirth, as well as other medicinal uses.

Reflection Question:

When you are engaged in care, research, or programming focused on Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ sexual and reproductive health, how do you support the sexual and reproductive health of the whole community – including men and boys, women and girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people – in a way that honours collective healing?



Sharing Stories Helps Us Build Connections and Stay Connected

- ✿ Consider the role storytelling plays in shaping your understanding of body sovereignty and health knowledge. How might sharing stories support you or others in navigating the unknowns of each life stage?
- ✿ Reflect on how storytelling can validate and normalize diverse experiences within Métis sexual and reproductive health. How could this impact individuals seeking connection and understanding in their health journey?



Photo credits: LFMO Grandmother Linda Boudreau-Semaganis, 2024

Questions for Your Gathering

- * Reflect on how the plants in these teachings relate to your understanding of health and well-being. What are your experiences with these plants?
- * Are there other plants that you associate with healing properties? Share your knowledge.
- * How can these teachings help you embrace your reproductive health and life phases? What do they offer? What more would you like to know?
- * What are your personal experiences with moon time, and how do the teachings you received shape your understanding of this sacred cycle? How can you share wisdom with the next generation, ensuring that all identities honour and carry forward this knowledge?

Moon Time Teachings

Moon time is considered a time of natural cleansing, a ceremony that menstruating people go through every month. It is a time for mental, physical, emotional and spiritual cleansing—a true gift.

Prior to colonization, we rested, reflected, and recovered during menstruation. We are so powerful during this time that we can take strength away from the medicines, which is why menstruating people do not participate in other ceremonies during this time.



“I went through the life stages and did not know what was normal.”

LFMO Health Forum Participant, 2024

Historically, sharing Moon Time and Strawberry teachings with young people was reserved for women. These teachings focus on the reproductive phase and the importance of nurturing and respecting the body. They emphasize care at every stage of life, from youth to adulthood to eldership.

