



Materials	Internet access, whiteboard/chart paper, markers, post-it notes
Learning Outcome	Engage in learnings about Indigenous cultural traditions, and ways of seeing and knowing related to sacred or traditional tobacco

Flipped Classroom Strategy (Optional)

A flipped classroom is an instructional model where direct instruction is delivered to students *outside of and before* instructional time. Students are introduced to content that supports the introduction, comprehension, and recall of content and then instructional time is utilized to apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate content.

Before implementing this activity during instructional time, provide students with the links to the videos titled [Traditional Tobacco](#) and [Respecting Tobacco: Traditional vs. Commercial](#). Ask students to watch the videos and be prepared to discuss them in class.



Activity Description

If utilizing a flipped classroom approach, begin a discussion about the videos that students watched before class asking them about areas of interest and if anything was surprising to them. If not utilizing a flipped classroom approach, watch either the [Traditional Tobacco](#) or [Respecting Tobacco: Traditional vs. Commercial](#) video and discuss it.

Support the group with developing a KWL chart (What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned chart) about the uses and purpose of sacred tobacco. Going around the room, students will share what they know and what they want to know about sacred tobacco (the what they learned column is filled out at the end of the activity). Provide students with post-it notes to write their points and post them on the white board or chart paper

Explore students' answers and theme similar answers and use the *What I Want to Know* answers to support instruction for the remainder of the activity. A variety of content about sacred tobacco is provided below. Consider instructional strategies such as Think-Pair-Share or the Jigsaw method to share content and have students teach each other and engage in meaningful discussions.

At the end of the activity, provide students time to complete the *What I Learned Column* of the KWL chart. Debrief the content learned and asked students if there is anything they didn't learn that they wanted to learn. If so, support students with researching the content they want to learn about.



NORTH

Sweetgrass

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.

WEST

Sage

Found in the west sage, which 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.

EAST

Tobacco

In the east is tobacco, which is used to give thanks.

SOUTH

Cedar

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

Source: [Introduction to the Medicine Wheel](#) with permission to share from [ENESC](#)



Tobacco, one of the four sacred plants of Indigenous Peoples (Sweetgrass, Sage, and Cedar being the other three) has a very long history and a conflicted present. Considered to be a sacred medicine, it was once used in spiritual ceremonies by Aboriginal Indigenous Peoples in North and South America long before contact with Europeans. Sacred usage of it is so entwined with some Indigenous cultures that it literally is present at every stage of life: it is associated with birthing rituals, courtship, marriage, death, and personal prayer. Sacred tobacco is sometimes not just tobacco, but is a blend of a variety of plants such as kinnikinick (common bearberry) and the bark of the Red Osier Dogwood.

The smoke is believed to be the pathway to the spirit world, and as such, carries all thoughts, feelings and prayers to the Creator. It is sometimes thrown straight on to a fire but is most commonly burned in a sacred pipe. The smoke is not inhaled but allowed to drift up to the Creator. It is sometimes offered by hunters, with their left hand as that is closest to the heart, before and after a hunt, as thanks to the Creator and to the animal. It is spread on the ground as an offering to the Earth or on the water as acknowledgment to its critical role in life and to ask for safe passage. It is frequently given as a gift in advance of a request for guidance. It does not feature this way in Inuit culture as it, or its substitutes, cannot grow in the harsh northern climate.

Traditional ways Indigenous people use sacred tobacco as medicine:

Pipe Ceremonies

The Pipe Ceremony is typically held at the beginning of a large gathering, event, or even negotiation, and is an important ritual for building communal and interpersonal strength. Most Pipe Ceremonies include an offering of the pipe smoke to all four directions, to the sky, and to the Earth in acknowledgment of the four elements. Each person in attendance takes their turn to either blow smoke from the sacred pipe, or waft it around their body in order to ask for guidance and protection. Importantly, tobacco smoke is typically not inhaled during the Pipe Ceremony.



Non-smoke Offerings

Traditional dried tobacco leaves are commonly offered to the Creator in dry, unaltered form. Tobacco leaves may be placed on the ground, sprinkled near or in water, or placed on a rock as a way of expressing gratitude. The offering of dry tobacco leaves is also a common practice in sacred places and is often accompanied by a prayer.

Smoke Rituals

The most common traditional use of sacred tobacco is in smoke rituals, but that doesn't always have to include a sacred pipe. Tobacco can be sprinkled over a fire or placed on hot coals. The smoke produced is said to be a direct connection to the Creator and can also be used as a means of cleansing people and objects.

Gifting to an Elder

Another common traditional use of sacred tobacco is as a gift or offering in thanks to an elder, spiritual leader, or person of medicine. Tobacco is offered in exchange for knowledge, wisdom, guidance, or even in exchange for other medicines or healing. In many Indigenous cultures, the offering and acceptance of tobacco is considered a binding contract.

In Thanks for Sacred Medicines

Along with tobacco, there are three other sacred medicines, all of which were gifted by the Creator and by Mother Earth. When harvesting sacred medicines, Indigenous Peoples will often leave small piles or sprinklings of tobacco as an offering of thanks to the Creator and Mother Earth for the other sacred medicines (Cedar, Sage, and Sweetgrass).



Indigenous Medicine Wheel

The term Indigenous 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.

Many different Indigenous cultures around the world have Sacred Circle, Mandala or Medicine Wheel teachings. The information below includes Medicine Wheel teachings of the Anishinaabe (Ojibway) people of Turtle Island (North America).

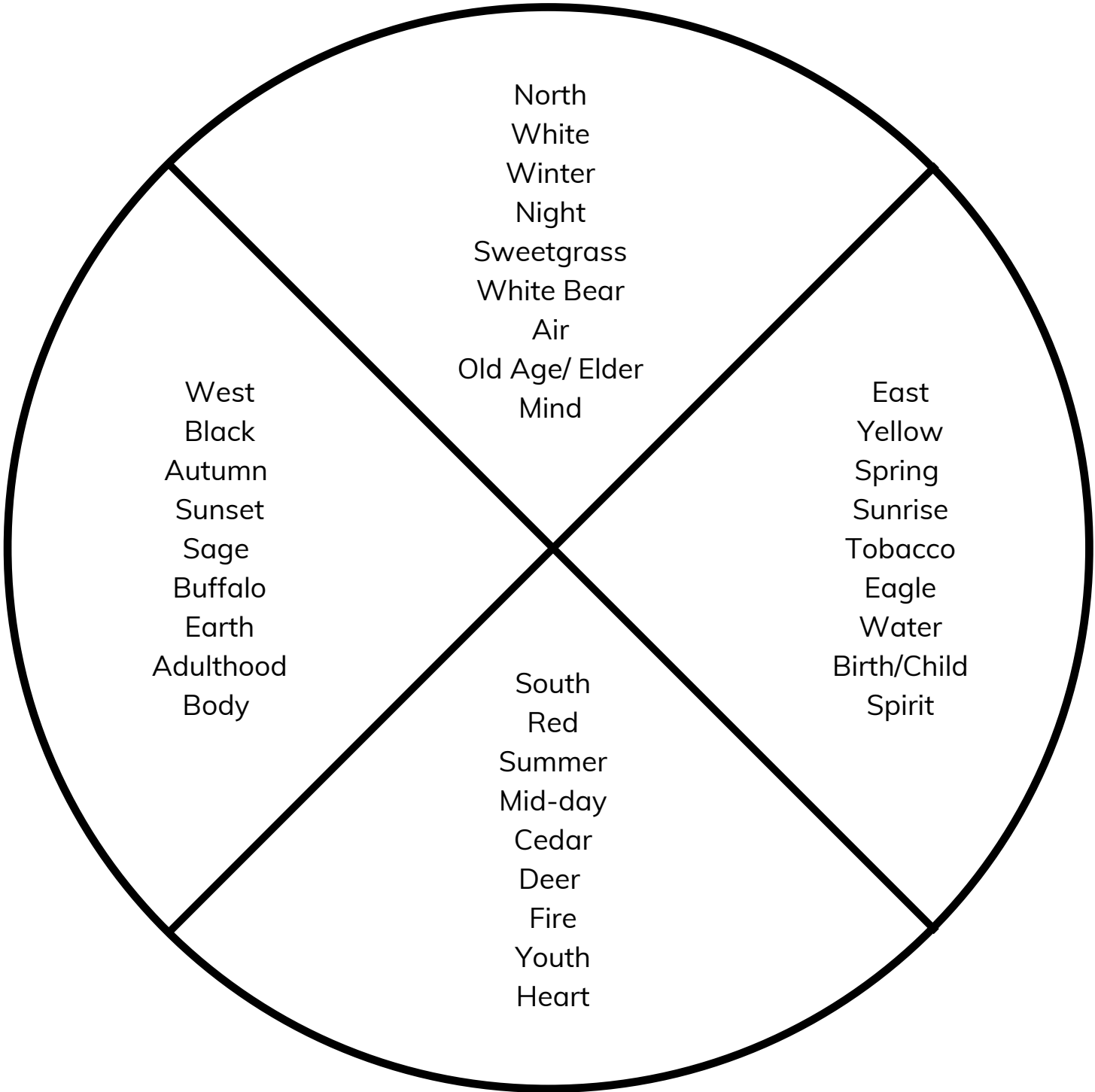
Important Elements of the Medicine Wheel:

Circular

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, and other planets and stars.

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'.



Descriptions in the Fours: Direction, Colour, Season, Time of day, Sacred plant, Animal, Element, Life stage, Human aspect

Source: [Introduction to the Medicine Wheel](#) with permission to share from [FNESC](#)

Healthy Living Competencies

THINK



Develop cognitive skills and strategies that facilitate knowledge about healthy habits, health risk situations, and the short-term and long-term effects of their health choices.

FEEL



Develop affective skills and strategies that facilitate healthy living for themselves, others, and their community.

ACT



Practice behavioural skills and strategies that facilitate choices, actions, and habits for healthy living.



Reflection Questions

Reflection is important to support learning. Consider asking students the following questions and discuss the answers together.

- How does sacred tobacco differ from commercial tobacco?
- How can you show respect for sacred tobacco but also be aware of the harm related to commercial tobacco?

Observing Learning Outcomes

Sample questions to observe learning outcomes include:

- Does the student contribute to the discussion about what was interesting or surprising about the videos related to sacred tobacco?
- Is the student able to reflect on their knowledge and learning to contribute to the KWL chart?
- Does the student actively participate in the chosen instructional activities to learn more about sacred tobacco?

Learning Extension (Optional)

Reach out to your Indigenous Education Department for support in bringing in Indigenous educators and/or knowledge keepers to your school to talk about sacred tobacco.