

## Preparing to participate in the Blanket Exercise

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The following are important words and concepts we will encounter during the Blanket Exercise. Taking a few minutes to think about them will help you prepare for what you will experience during the Blanket Exercise on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### ***What is a treaty?***

Treaties are agreements between sovereign nations. Hundreds of treaties of peace and friendship were concluded between the European settlers and First Nations during the period prior to Confederation.

These treaties promoted peaceful coexistence and the sharing of resources. After Confederation, the European settlers pursued treaty making as a tool to acquire vast areas of land. The numbered treaties 1 through 11 were concluded between First Nations and the Crown after Confederation.

For Indigenous peoples, treaties outline the rights and responsibilities of all parties to the agreement and they are very much alive today. Treaties should involve all Canadians equally, yet many Canadians hardly know treaties exist.

### ***What does it mean to be a sovereign nation?***

A sovereign nation has the right to self-determination and has a government and territory that is recognized by other nations. While European nations focus on the protection of individual rights, Indigenous nations centre on collective rights such as land, language, spiritual traditions and self-governance, to name a few. Indigenous individuals rely on strong nations for their well-being because they protect and nurture the collective rights through which an individual finds cultural meaning and identity.

The historic “peace and friendship” treaties are central to sovereignty and nationhood as they address how to coexist as distinct peoples. Yet the more modern, “numbered treaties” often did not take this approach.

***Assimilation*** is the process of absorbing one cultural group into another. This can be pursued through harsh and extreme state policies such as removing children from their families and placing them in the homes or institutions of another culture. Forcing a people to assimilate through legislation is cultural genocide—the intent is to eradicate a culture.

### ***What is the difference between equity and equality?***

Equality means each person gets the same treatment or the same amount of something. It involves systematically dividing something into equal parts. Equity, on the other hand, recognizes that not everyone has the same needs.

Equity is about justice and a fair process that leads to an equal outcome. It takes into account the injustices of the past and how they have placed some in positions of privilege while others face significant barriers to achieving well-being.

### ***Indigenous peoples***

This is a term for which there is no one definition because it is up to each Indigenous person to define themselves, something that for far too long has been done by others. Cree lawyer,

Sharon Venne, suggests that being Indigenous means being “descendants of the people occupying a territory when the colonizers arrived.”

Indigenous is a word that has come into widespread use through the recognition that those people who are the original inhabitants of a place, and who have been marginalized by ethnic groups who arrived later, have much in common with other peoples worldwide with the same experience.

Not only does the word speak to global solidarity amongst these peoples, but it has important legal significance as well. Indigenous peoples’ rights have been recognized at the international level in various ways but most importantly in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007.

When we speak of peoples, as opposed to people, it is a recognition of collective rights: that each Indigenous people is a distinct entity with its own cultural and political rights.

**Aboriginal peoples** refers to the original peoples of North America who belong to historic, cultural and political groups. *Canada’s Constitution Act, 1982* recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

There are a number of synonyms for Aboriginal peoples, including Indigenous peoples, First Peoples, and original peoples. None of these terms should be used to describe only one or two of the groups.

Because Aboriginal peoples is the term used in Canada’s constitution, it has specific importance within a Canadian legal context.

**First Nations** is not a legal term but replaces “Indian” in common usage. There are many First Nations in Canada: Innu, Cree, Sauteaux, Ojibwe, Haida, Dene, Mohawk, Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Blood, Shuswap, etc., each with its own history, culture, and traditions.

**Inuit** are the Indigenous Circumpolar people of Canada and other northern countries. They were formerly called Eskimo, which the Inuit consider a derogatory term. In Canada, the Inuit live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, northern Québec, Labrador and, in recent years, southern Canadian cities as well.

**Métis** are the mixed-blood descendants of Cree, Ojibwe, Sauteaux, Assiniboine women and French and Scottish fur traders and other early settlers. They have their own culture and history. As is the case with many Aboriginal languages, the Métis language, Michif, is endangered. Métis society and culture were established before European settlement was entrenched.

**Europeans:** For the purposes of the Blanket Exercise, “Europeans” means two distinct but related things. The European characters represent the European empires of the time, and all the power and wealth that came with them: the British and the French above all others, but also the Spanish, Russian, Dutch, and others. Ultimately, most of the laws we’ll be hearing about in the exercise came from the British, and then from the Canadian government.

At the same time, the European characters also represent the explorers and the settlers—the ordinary people who often came here to escape poverty or violence, or were even brought here against their will.