AN INTRODUCTION TO
FIRST NATIONS LITERATURE
LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this unit, learners should be able to:

1. Display improved reading and writing skills.

2. Describe various forms of First Nations literature.

3. Identify some elements and techniques that authors use to communicate ideas.

4. Write their own pieces of literature.

5. Demonstrate an improved capacity for critical thinking.

6. Appreciate and enjoy literature.
Teaching literature is both an opportunity and a privilege. It is an exciting process that opens minds to the vast range of human thought and experience.

It is especially exciting to be able to introduce First Nations learners to literature through the works of First Nations writers. In recent years, as First Nations have renewed their efforts to shape their own destinies, control their own education, and write their own stories, many First Nations writers have emerged. The material in this unit comes from such writers, poets, and playwrights. Some of the stories also come from elders who, after hundreds of years of passing them on orally from one generation to the next, now share them with the rest of the world in written form.

Most basic literacy learners have had limited opportunities to think and talk about literature and the craft of working with words. The main goal of this theme unit is to engage learners in a process of reflection, analysis, and appreciation of literature. Learners will explore the reasons why people write, and the many avenues, approaches and styles that writers use to convey who they are, where they come from, and how they feel. This unit will help learners to examine the different elements or components that make up stories and poems, and in the process, it will strengthen their capacity to think critically and to make educated decisions about their literary heritage.
**Unit description**

This theme unit reviews the difference between literature and other written material, examines the First Nations oral tradition, and provides a starting point for the further study of short stories and poetry.

Learners are introduced to basic literary terms such as plot, setting, characterization, theme, point of view, and imagery. Discussion of these subjects provides learners with opportunities to articulate their own ideas about what they read, and to gain confidence in their own use of language, both oral and written. As well, learners will have the opportunity to do their own creative writing, and thus to discover that who they are and what they have to say are worthwhile.

The cost of reproducing Thomas King’s work was prohibitive; therefore, we were unable to include a copy of “Borders” and King’s “Commentary” from *All My Relations*. This is unfortunate, as we have referred to “Borders” frequently in this unit. We suggest that you purchase a copy of *One Good Story, That One*, to make use of “Borders”, or substitute that selection with one the learners will enjoy.

An excellent resource for this theme unit would be:  
**An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English**,  
Daniel Moses and Terry Goldie, editors. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992. ISBN 0-19-540819-5. There are numerous selections that can be used with all the activities in this unit.
ACTIVITY 1: DIFFERENT KINDS OF WRITING

**Purpose / description:**
Learners learn how to make judgments about what is literature and what is not.

**Materials:**
Overhead projector or flip charts
Two paintings (Any two paintings chosen by you that would be suitable for a discussion of what represents “good” art)

Engage the learners in a brainstorming session about the kinds of writing that people engage in. You can assist them by “filling in the gaps;” i.e., suggesting items such as grocery lists, love letters, newspaper articles, etc. As they present their items, write them down in list form on the overhead or flip chart.

When you have finished compiling the list, discuss which items the learners would consider “literature.” Ask them why such items as short stories, poems and novels are “literature,” while grocery shopping lists are not. It might be helpful to mention some elements often found in literature:

- imagination: imaginary people, things, places, and events
- exploration of serious ideas
- discussion of moral and spiritual values
- more complicated language than in popular entertainment
- any combination of some or all of these elements that provides a thoughtful and moving experience for the reader

Ask the learners to examine the two paintings you have brought to the class. This could be done in a full class session or by the learners in small groups. When they have had some time to do this, discuss the paintings with them.

- What do you like or dislike about these paintings?
- What makes these paintings good pieces of art, or perhaps, not art at all?
- Who decides what is art?
- Who decides what is good art?
From the discussion of the paintings, move on to a similar discussion about literature. You might ask them to think about a story or poem they have read and enjoyed:

• What made the story or poem good?
• What are the elements of a good story?

Mention, if the learners have not, things like characterization, setting and plot (see Glossary of Literary Terms in the Appendix). Explain what these terms mean and discuss them in relation to the stories the learners have talked about.
ACTIVITY 2: LITERATURE AND THE ORAL TRADITION

Purpose / description:
Learners discuss excerpts from the autobiographies of First Nations people to explore the links between the oral tradition and written accounts of life in the past.

Materials:
Autobiographical excerpts: examples: Max Smokeyday and Frances Scott, from And They Told Us Their Stories, Saskatoon Tribal Council, 226 Cardinal Crescent, Saskatoon, S7L 6H8.

Begin the activity by discussing the differences between literature and oral storytelling. If learners have trouble with this, you could mention traditional storytelling gestures, music, the tone of voice and the loudness or softness of the storyteller. A writer has only words to offer. The rest of the story is in the reader’s imagination. Point out how the oral tradition has influenced many Native writers.

Distribute autobiographical excerpts to the class. Have the learners break into small groups to read these stories. They can do this by having one person read aloud, by taking turns reading to each other, or by reading silently.

The History theme unit emphasizes the fact that First Nations people have always passed on their history in the form of stories. In the context of the two stories they have read, what do the learners think “as told by...” means? You could ask learners questions like these:

- How is the experience of reading these accounts different from listening to the speaker directly?
- How many learners in the class would be able to understand the native language of a First Nations person from the Prairies?
- What is the value of these written accounts?
Ask the learners to reflect on stories they remember from their own communities.

- Who told you stories about your family?
- What kind of stories do you remember?
- What elements of the stories do you remember: exciting events? happy events? the hardships of life in the past?
- What were the traditions of your families, clans, and cultures?

Ask the learners to write one page about themselves (an autobiography), or about someone else they know (a biography) such as a relative or family member. Since learners were asked to do this in Activity 12 in the History theme unit, you might suggest that they try to do something slightly different this time: e.g., describe their first memories of childhood, or memories of their parents or grandparents. Encourage them to be more “literary” than “historical,” i.e., describe a scene in some detail, and say what they thought and how they felt, instead of just describing what happened and when.

When they have finished, ask them to form pairs, and in a peer-editing activity, read and revise each other’s stories. The goal of the revisions is to make sure that:

- Information is clearly stated so the reader can understand what the writer wants to say.
- Information is organized logically, e.g., events are described in chronological order.
- Paragraphs have unity, i.e., they deal with one major topic, grammar, spelling, and punctuation are correct.

Allow time for this work and then invite learners to share their stories with the rest of the class, if they wish.

It might be interesting if one of the learners were to read aloud what he or she had written, then put the paper aside and tell the story once more, but this time speaking from memory and using gestures (and perhaps music) in the style of a traditional storyteller.

Extension activity
If the class has not already done so (in Activity 2 of the Communities theme unit), learners could interview an elder in the community or invite elders to come into the class to tell them their stories.
ACTIVITY 3: PLOT – WHAT HAPPENS?

Purpose / description:
Learners read a short story that shows how events can be organized in
different ways to add interest to a story.

Materials:
“Borders” by Thomas King, from One Good Story, That One, Toronto: Harper
Perennial, 1993. ISBN: 000-224-000-9, or any other suitable story.

Begin the activity by noting the similarities between the craft of writing and
other crafts. Just as potters, carvers, jewellery designers, and drum makers
create beautiful things out of materials like clay, wood, argillite, silver, gold,
and hide, so writers work with language to create different forms of literature
such as novels, poetry, drama, essays, and short stories. And just as we
examine the structure of a piece of pottery by referring to the type of clay, the
shape of the finished product, the designs carved or painted on it, and the
glaze, so we examine a piece of writing by examining the elements of
language used by the writer. This and the next four activities examine the
techniques and materials that writers use.

Distribute the story to the learners.

Read it aloud to the class, or have pairs or small groups of learners read it
together, until the scene in which television people arrive. Ask learners to
stop reading at the end of the sentence: “Some of the television people went
over to the American border, and then they went to the Canadian border.”

Ask learners to predict what is going to happen next. You could record their
predictions on a flip chart or you could ask learners to take some time to
write a brief ending to the story. They might like to do this in small groups.

Ask learners to read their endings to the class. Discuss the different endings.
Which one do the learners like best? Why?
Then finish reading the story. Ask learners to discuss the ending:

- Is the outcome a surprise? Why? Why not?
- Is the author’s ending better than any suggested by the learners? Why? Why not?
- Is it a good ending? In what ways?

Before examining the story in detail, ask learners to discuss their reaction to the story.

- Did you like the story? Why, or why not?
- What did you like best about it?
- How did you feel when you read the story? Happy? Sad? Angry? Did you have other feelings?
- Did the people in the story seem real? In what ways?
- How was this story different from what you read in Activity 2?

Then ask learners to address the question “What happened in this story?” by identifying the sequence of events that occurs in the story. A useful way to show the structure of the story is by writing three headings — Beginning, Middle, and End or Conclusion — on an overhead projector or on a flip chart, and asking learners to indicate where events in the story should be listed. Ask learners to consider questions like:

- What events take place?
- In what order do they occur?
- Who does what to whom?
- How does this influence the outcome of the story?
- In the unfolding of the plot, is there a high point (climax)?
- Is there any suspense?

This may not be a simple story for learners because there are events that do not easily fit into the Beginning, Middle, and End categories. You might find it helpful to discuss the concept of “flashback” in which the narrator, in the middle of one story, tells of things that happened at an earlier time. Learners familiar with stories of Coyote or Raven may recognize this technique; it is used in many of those stories. “Borders” contains several “flashback” sections — to the time when Laetitia is taken to the border, and going even farther back to the time before Laetitia left home.
You could ask learners to identify where those sections begin and end:

(“I was seven or eight when Laetitia left home.” ...)
(“When she was still at home, Laetitia would go on and on about Salt Lake City. ...”)
(“When Laetitia and Lester broke up, ...”)
(“One Sunday, Laetitia and I were watching television. ...”)

Discuss where these events should be listed on the flip chart.

Discuss why King did not start his story when Laetitia and Lester were just talking about Salt Lake City. In what ways does King’s approach make the story more interesting?

Conclude the activity by reminding learners that the plot is not always a straightforward chronological sequence of events. Sometimes two events are happening at different locations at the same time; sometimes events are mixed up in time as in this story.

Ask learners to keep their copies of “Borders” for use in the next five activities.
ACTIVITY 4: SETTING – WHERE AND WHEN DOES THE STORY TAKE PLACE?

Purpose / description:
Learners examine how a writer describes the time and place of events in a story.

Materials:
“Borders” by Thomas King

Ask learners to read “Borders” and identify any reference to the place where events in this story occur. List these on a flip chart sheet or on the board.

Since the learners have read the story in the previous activity, they will know that the main events in this story occur at the Canada-US border. Some may know that Coutts is in Alberta and Sweetgrass is in Montana, but for any who don’t, there are many clues to the general location:

• references to Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Banff, Cardston (all in Alberta);
• the family are Blackfoot, a prairie Nation;
• mention of prairies and the water tower: “It’s the first thing you see.”

Even though King does not describe the setting in any detail, you could ask learners to discuss the following questions:

• What kind of town is Coutts? Is it a busy, thriving town? Do many tourists visit it?
• Is this a busy border crossing? How might the story have been different if the border crossing had been on a major highway between two cities?

Ask learners to suggest two or three places they know well enough to describe in one paragraph. Have them form pairs or small groups to write about one of the suggested places. Allow time for learners to recall the scene and to list some of the most obvious features of the place. Encourage them to also think of and describe aspects of the place that makes it special or
distinctive: e.g., the colour of the leaves on the trees along the river in fall, the way snow piles up against the fences, the way lights and neon signs splash the streets with colour on rainy nights.

Then have each group share their writing with the rest of the class. Discuss the descriptions.

If more than one group described the same place, discuss the similarities and differences in the descriptions.

• Was it possible to tell whether each group liked or disliked the place they had described?
• How might a description be different if the writer disliked the place he or she was describing?

Summarize the activity by reviewing the basic elements of a setting:

• place
• time (date, month, year, season, historical era)
• time of day or night

Review additional elements sometimes included in a setting:

• sounds
• smells
• a particular time in one’s life
• weather
ACTIVITY 5:
CHARACTERIZATION – WHO IS THE STORY ABOUT?

Purpose / description:
Learners examine a story to find out about the characters in it and the ways those characters interact.

Materials:
“Borders” by Thomas King
Glossary of Literary Terms (see Appendix) – copy for each learner

Distribute the Glossary of Literary Terms. Ask learners to read “Borders” once more, making a list of the major and minor characters.

Learners who have difficulty with this concept might consider a favourite television program, such as “North of 60,” where the major (lead) roles are fairly obvious.

Ask learners some general questions about the people in this story, e.g.:

- Do these people seem real?
- Do you know, or have you met, anyone like the people in this story?
- Which character do you like most?
- What do you think about after reading about the narrator’s mother?

Ask learners to refer to the Glossary of Literary Terms and identify the protagonist in this story. Ask learners to consider the following questions and give reasons for their answers:

- Is there an antagonist in this story? Is it one person? Several persons?
- Are those people personally antagonistic to the protagonist?
- Are the antagonists “good” people or “bad” people?
- Is the protagonist fighting the “system”?
- Is it a familiar struggle?
Arrange the learners in small groups and have each group work on a sociogram. Then have each group produce a profile of one of the characters (a different character in each group), listing his or her characteristics and answering the following questions:

- What do we know about this character’s identity, appearance and background?
- How is the character revealed in the story? By what he/ she says or by what he/ she does? Through his/ her thoughts? By the way others react to him/ her? By the way the author describes him/ her?
- Does the character go through any changes in the course of the story?
- Would we know more about the characters if the narrator were an adult and not a 12 or 13 year old?

Now that learners have a “feeling” for the characters in the story, ask them to read the story aloud. Each learner could read a short section of the story in turn, or they could dramatize the reading by having different learners take on particular roles in the story.
ACTIVITY 6: POINT OF VIEW – WHO’S TELLING THE STORY?

Purpose / description:
Students carry out a small role-play exercise to get a first-hand experience of how point of view can affect the description of an event or of other people. They then examine point of view in Thomas King’s short story “Borders.”

Materials:
“Borders” – copy for each learner (from Activity 3)

Explain to the class that this is a role-play activity in which they are to: imagine a particular event, e.g., a car accident at a busy street corner, and act the parts of people who saw the accident or were involved in it. Then each role player has to describe what happened from their own point of view. (These descriptions should all be slightly different from one another.)

E.g.,
• Character A is driving a car and hits a pedestrian, character C.
• Character B, another pedestrian, is waiting for the crosswalk light.
• Character D is in his/ her own car, waiting for the green light.
• A police officer arrives and asks characters A, B, C, & D what happened.

Ask learners to take the parts of the different characters and imagine what might have happened. Then have them describe to the police officer (or the class) what happened from their own point of view.

Discuss how each point of view is different and why the descriptions vary. You could explore some of the factors that can affect point of view, e.g., physical location, relationships between the characters, personal values and beliefs, emotional state of the observer.
Then, in full class session, discuss point of view in the story “Borders:”

- Is the story being told in the first person (“I thought,” “I said,” “I saw,” etc.) or in the third person (“he said,” “she looked,” etc.)?
- From whose point of view is the story being told?
- Is the story told by a participant in the action (as in the role play described above) or by a narrator who is outside of the action?
- Is this a reliable account of what happened?
- How might the narrator’s point of view be different from an adult’s point of view?

Divide the learners into two groups. Have one group tell the story from the mother’s perspective and the other from the border guard’s perspective. Then have each group present its version of the story to the whole class. Compare the different points of view. How are they different from the narrator’s version?

Ask learners to try to recall an incident that might have embarrassed them when they were around twelve years old that involved their mother, a relative or friend. Invite them to write about their recollection from the point of view of the twelve year old.

Have them edit each other’s work in pairs (peer-editing).

Once they have done the revisions, invite the learners (if they feel comfortable) to share their stories with the whole class.
ACTIVITY 7: IMAGERY: WHAT DO WE SEE, FEEL, AND HEAR?

Purpose / description:
Learners examine the power of words to create vivid pictures in our minds.

Materials:
“The Rice Song” by Jamie Lee, from Winds of Change Magazine, Volume 6, Number 4, AISES, Autumn, 1991. ISSN: 088-8612
“Borders” by Thomas King (from Activity 3).

Glossary of Literary Terms

Distribute the story “The Rice Song” to the learners and ask them to read it alone or in groups.

Before examining the story in detail, ask learners to discuss their reaction to it.

• Did you like the story? Why, or why not?
• What did you like best about it?
• How did you feel when you read the story?
• How was this story different from what you have read in previous activities in this unit?

Ask learners to review the elements studied in previous activities in the context of this story:

• What is the setting?
• What is the plot?
• Who are the major and minor characters?
• From whose point of view is the story told?

Introduce the concept of imagery (see Glossary of Literary Terms). Find a passage in the story where the writer uses language to create an image that enables the reader to see, hear, or feel what the narrator is experiencing.
Ask learners to discuss the following phrases:

- "...but something about those dark grains jumbled with plain old steamed white rice ..."
- "."...a little bit of brown in all that whiteness..."
- Why does Lee use that image twice?
- What is the importance of that contrast?

Ask learners the following questions:

- What was Christina's deep need?
- What image does Lee use to describe that need?
- What are Christina’s memories of her grandmother?
- What is the primary image that evokes that memory?

Introduce the literary devices of simile and metaphor (see the Glossary of Literary Terms). Provide some common examples of each, e.g.,

- He ate like a horse.
- She was as light as a feather.
- His mind was a garbage dump, full of useless information.
- In the circus world, Tiny Tim was an intellectual giant.

Ask learners to find similes and metaphors in “The Rice Song:" E.g.,

- "a sprig of parsley asleep beside it"  "a gunpowder flash of recognition"
- "like mud and grit"  "like the paling chlorophyll of a plant"
- "like great thirst"  "the swirling vortex of thoughts"

- What do learners see when they read those words?
- In what ways do those words make the story more interesting or lively or real?

Ask learners to read through “Borders.” Ask them to discuss the meaning of phrases such as:

- “floating after some man like a balloon on a string”
• “to chase rainbows down alleys”
• “spreading jelly on the truth”
• Are there simpler ways of saying what these phrases mean?
• Do these phrases fit well into the story, i.e., are they words that real-life people might use?
• What do these phrases add to the story?

Provide some examples of alliteration, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia, and ask learners to look for these in “The Rice Song:”

E.g.,
• “bone brittling weariness”
• “It was another place, another planet.”
• “clack clacking of a computer keyboard”

Conclude the activity by reminding learners that both writers and storytellers use a wide range of literary devices to make their stories richer and more interesting.

**Extension activity:**

In “The Rice Story,” a simple plate of rice brings forth a stream of memories for Christina. You may be able to stimulate learners’ memories in much the same way with a number of items familiar to First Nations people.

Place the following items in separate paper bags:

• alder, cherry wood or cedar
• smoked fish or dried trout
• berries: raspberries or saskatoon berries
• a piece of hide

Let each learner inhale the smell of the bag’s content without looking at the object. Ask them to recall what they remember or associate with the smell. Does this smell bring back any memories? Are they good or bad? Give the class time to remember and reflect on the past.

Have learners write a description of the memories they have of the smell and what it means to them. Encourage the use of imagery, metaphor and other literary devices that have been discussed.

Have the learners edit each other’s work in a peer-editing activity. Ask them to share their writing with the whole class.
ACTIVITY 8:  
THEME – DOES THE STORY HAVE A CENTRAL IDEA?

Purpose / description:  
Learners look for the central idea or central message of a short story.

Materials:  
“The Rice Song” – copy for each learner (from Activity 7).  
“Borders” – copy for each learner (from Activity 3).

Indicate that while setting, plot, characterization, and point of view are important in themselves, they also have a more important function, that is, to establish the theme of the story. Ask learners to think about “The Rice Song” and consider new questions that involve looking deeper into the story:

• What is the meaning of this story?  
• What is the author really trying to communicate?  
• How does the author communicate that message?

This could be done in small groups or in a full class session. Compare and discuss the learners’ ideas until they reach agreement on what the story means. Ask learners to refer to the story when they answer these questions. If necessary, guide the learners by examining the implications and consequences of certain actions and events in the story.

Ask learners to think about “Borders.”

• Is it a simple story of the problems encountered when a mother tries to visit her daughter in the United States?  
• The title of the story is “Borders,” but strictly speaking there is only one border involved. What other border is Thomas King referring to?  
• Where is the border between First Nations people and European society: at the edge of each reserve? On the surface of a person’s skin? In the laws imposed on First Nations? Somewhere in the mind? Somewhere else?

Conclude the activity by pointing out to learners that Jamie Lee and Thomas King have both described relatively simple events, yet managed to communicate in a wonderfully powerful and inspiring way the abiding strength of First Nations culture and spirit.
ACTIVITY 9: POETRY

Purpose / description:
Learners examine the differences between prose and poetry and explore the power of poetry.

Materials:
Poem “Sweetgrass,” by Mary Sky Blue Morin.

Read the poem “Sweetgrass” to the learners.

Then distribute the copies of the poems to the learners. Allow time for learners to read “Sweetgrass.”

Before examining “Sweetgrass” in detail, ask learners to discuss their reaction to it.

• Did you like the poem? Why, or why not?
• What did you like best about it?
• How did you feel when you read the poem?
• How was this poem different from what you have read in earlier activities in this unit?

Ask learners to list the differences between poetry and prose. At this stage of learning, most learners will note only differences in external form: e.g., line length, overall length, rhyme.

Discuss the poem. Ask learners:

• What are the qualities of sweetgrass?
• What effect does sweetgrass have on people?
• How does this poet communicate these qualities?
Ask for a volunteer to read aloud “Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border.” If learners are reluctant, read it aloud yourself.

Ask learners to discuss their reaction to the poem.

- Did you like the poem? Why, or why not?
- What did you like best about it?
- How did you feel when you read the poem?

If you sense that some learners are having difficulty understanding words in the poem, have learners form small groups or pairs to make up lists of words they do not know. Ask groups to report to the whole class and record the words on one complete list. Divide the list into sections for pairs or groups of learners to find dictionary definitions for their assigned words and report back to the class.

Have the learners reread the poem.

In both the story by Thomas King and the poem by Alootook Ipellie, the authors write about borders. Discuss what these borders are. Are they the same or different? How are they different?

Return to the discussion of the differences between prose and poetry. Encourage learners to go deeper than the differences in external form. If necessary, refer to “Borders” and the poems just read to show how poems are more often concerned with feelings, ideas, impressions, and images than with telling a story. Discuss the language of poetry as opposed to the language of prose. Direct the learners’ attention to the economy of language, the rhythm, the play of words used in poetry.

Divide the learners into five groups and divide the poem into five parts: (a) stanza 1 & 2, (b) stanza 3 & 4, (c) stanza 5 & 6, (d) stanza 7 & 8, (e) stanza 10, 11 & 12

Ask each group to refer to the Glossary of Literary Terms to make a list of metaphors, similes, alliterations, and any other literary devices they can find in the stanzas they have just read.
Ask the groups discuss their interpretations of the assigned stanzas.
Have all the groups read stanza 9 and discuss the following questions:

- What is the author saying?
- What are the two different worlds?
- What are the two opposing cultures?
- According to the author, why are these cultures unable to integrate?

Have the small groups come back and piece the poem back together. Discuss with the whole group the significance of the last two lines of the poem. Do they agree or disagree with the writer’s feelings? Why or why not?

**Extension Activity**

Ask the learners to go to the library and find other kinds of poetry. Have them choose one poem they particularly enjoy to share with the class. Have them explain their reasons for choosing the poem.

Have the learners write a poem about an experience, a feeling, an idea, an event or an impression important to them. Encourage them to read their poems aloud to each other.
SWEETGRASS

by Mary Sky Blue Morin

The Sweetgrass braided sacredness – opens minds appeases spirits calms Indian hearts protects Indian souls.
The Sweetgrass is strong.

Once lit it is passed to me.
I grasp the smoke spread it over my hair my body my heart I am cleansed.

The Sweetgrass weaves its familiar scent around my friends. Its Power captures their senses to come back to the Indian Way. The Sweetgrass is strong.
WALKING BOTH SIDES OF AN INVISIBLE BORDER

by Alootook Ipellie
It is never easy
Walking with an invisible border
Separating my left and right foot

I feel like an illegitimate child
Forsaken by my parents
At least I can claim innocence
Since I did not ask to come
Into this world.

Walking on both sides of this
Invisible Border
Each and every day
And for the rest of my life
Is like having been
Sentenced to a torture chamber
Without having committed a crime

Understanding the history of humanity
I am not the least surprised
This is happening to me
A non-entity
During this population explosion
In a miniscule world

I did not ask to be born an Inuk
Nor did I ask to be forced
To learn an alien culture
With an alien language
But I lucked out on fate
Which I am unable to undo

I have resorted to fancy dancing
In order to survive each day
No wonder I have earned
The dubious reputation of being

The world’s premiere choreographer
Of distinctive dance steps
That allow me to avoid
Potential personal paranoia
On both sides of this invisible border

Sometimes this border becomes so wide
That I am unable to take another step
My feet being too far apart
When my crotch begins to tear apart
I am forced to invent
A brand new dance step
The premiere choreographer
Saving the day once more

Destiny acted itself out
Deciding for me where I would come from
And what I would become

So I am left to fend for myself
Walking in two different worlds
Trying my best to make sense
Of two opposing cultures
Which are unable to integrate
Lest they swallow one another whole

Each and every day
Is a fighting day
A war of raw nerves
And to show for my efforts
I have a fair share of wins and losses

When will all this end
This senseless battle
Between my left and right foot

When will the invisible border
Cease to be

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ACTIVITY 10: FINAL REVIEW

**Purpose / description:**
Learners reflect on what they’ve learned in this unit.

**Materials:**
Thomas King’s commentary on Native literature. This can be found in the 1990 edition of *All My Relations*, King, Thomas, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

Read Thomas King’s commentary on Native literature aloud to the class, or ask learners to read it aloud. Ask the class to note any words they are unsure of. Provide (or assign learners to find) definitions of those words.

Discuss King’s views. Ask learners whether they agree or disagree with King. Why or why not?

Have the learners review the stories, poems, and plays they have read. Discuss the knowledge they have gained from their reading and their understanding and appreciation of the range of Native literature.

Have them write a one-page description of what they liked and disliked about their readings. Remind them to give the reasons for their point of view.

Have learners discuss their different points of view in an *open-ended discussion.*
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Highly recommended anthologies containing work by First Nations writers: 


GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

Alliteration: the repetition of the same first sound or letter in a group of words or a line of poetry: “sweet silent sounds.”

Antagonist: the major opponent in a story.

Autobiography: the story of a person’s life written by him/herself.

Biography: the story of a person’s life written by someone else.

Character: a person portrayed in a novel, play, short story or poem.

Climax: the peak, the highest, most interesting point in a story.

Fiction: novels, short stories, and other prose writings that tell about imaginary people, places, and events, even though these may be based on reality.

Hyperbole: an exaggeration, an overstatement.

Imagery: pictures in the mind created by words; things imagined by the reader through the senses.

Simile: a comparison in a poem or story which uses the word “like” or “as.”

Metaphor: a comparison in a story or poem without the use of “like” or “as.”

Myth: a legend or story about events in the supernatural world.

Onomatopoeia: the naming of a thing or action by imitating the sound made by the thing or action: e.g., “buzz,” “hum,” “sizzle.”

Plot: the plan and sequence of events in a story or novel.

Prose: the ordinary form of spoken or written language.

Protagonist: the main character in a play, short story or novel.

Setting: the time and place where the action occurs in a story, novel or play.

Theme: the main and central idea in a story, novel, play or poem.