

# It's All Relative

Throughout Canada's past, families have taken different shapes.



## What is a Family?

A family has to have more than one person. Beyond that, families may do lots of different things, like caring for each other. Families can have many different people and generations, or just a few. They may live together or in different places. How would you define the word **family**?



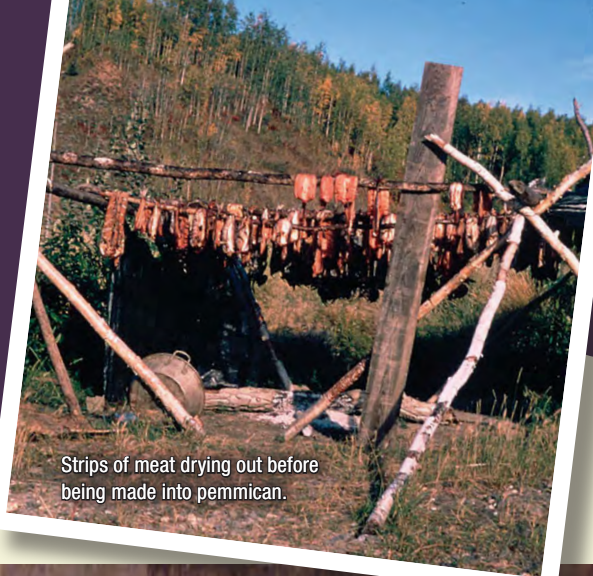
**B**efore Europeans came to what is now Canada, First Nations and Inuit had their own customs and traditions when it came to creating a family and caring for each other. Marriage was common. Weddings were celebrated in many different ways — they were often like big community parties, sometimes with days of feasting and gift-giving. Men and women were generally seen as equal partners. Two-spirited people — those who didn't label themselves "man" or "woman" — also often had a place in many Indigenous societies.

Anthony Johnson and Dr. James Makokis, who are two-spirit and Indigenous, won the television competition *Amazing Race Canada* in 2019.



istockphoto, CP Images

**B**ecause of the fur trade, many Indigenous men spent much of their time hunting and trapping animals for fur. That meant they weren't always home to hunt food, although Indigenous women could net fish, snare rabbits, or harvest other animals to feed their families. Indigenous women also worked for the fur trade, making pemmican (a food made of animal fat, dried meat and berries) and preparing furs to be traded.



Strips of meat drying out before being made into pemmican.



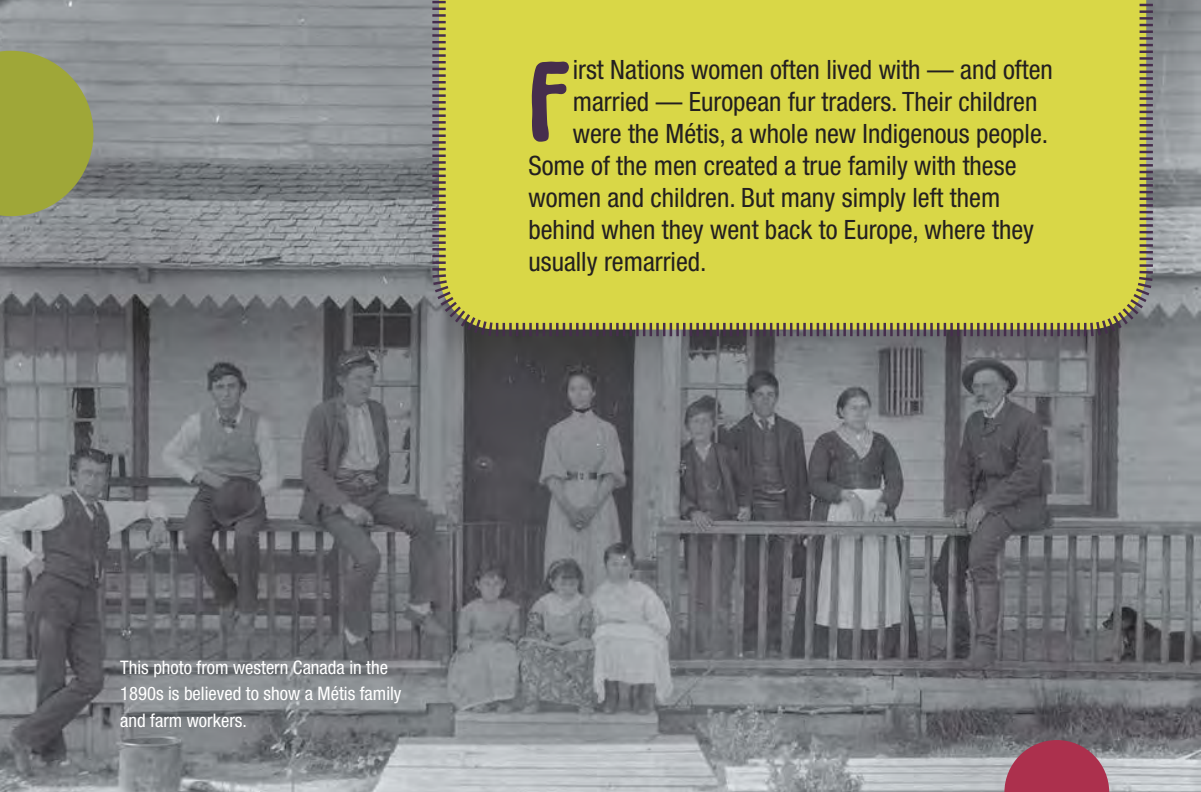
Library and Archives Canada

**N**ew France had lots of young men, but it needed women, too, if businesses and farms were to succeed. Between 1663 and 1673, more than 750 young women — most were teenagers — came to French settlements in what is now Canada. They were known as *les filles du roi* or **daughters of the king** because King Louis XIV had paid for their journey and some small gifts. They were carefully supervised by nuns until they married. Many had large families, becoming the ancestors of tens of thousands of French Canadians.



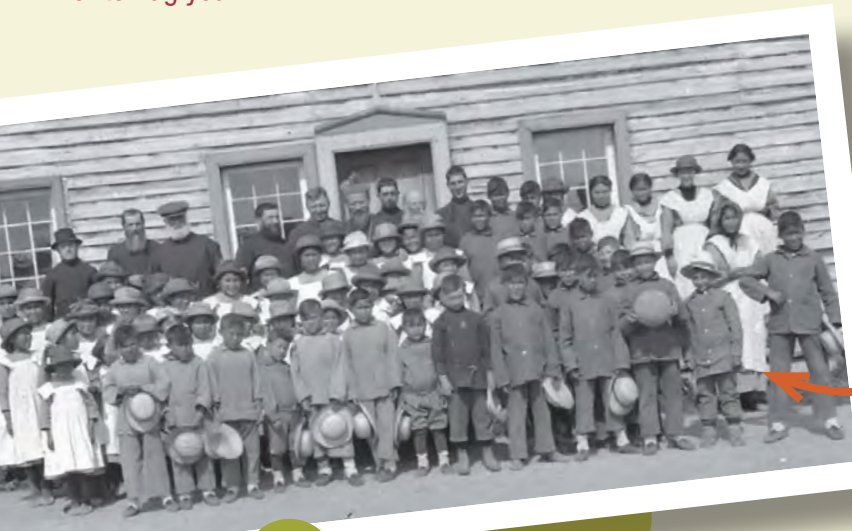


First Nations women often lived with — and often married — European fur traders. Their children were the Métis, a whole new Indigenous people. Some of the men created a true family with these women and children. But many simply left them behind when they went back to Europe, where they usually remarried.



This photo from western Canada in the 1890s is believed to show a Métis family and farm workers.

The federal government took about 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children away from their families and put them in residential schools. The goal was to erase their culture and make them more like English- or French-Canadian children. The schools ran from the late 1800s right up to the mid-1990s. These children did not grow up in their own homes, so many of them never had an example of a loving parent. One woman whose mother had been in a residential school said “my mom never really showed us love when we were kids coming up...she was never there to console you or to hug you.”



Children and school officials outside the Fort Providence residential school in the Northwest Territories around 1920.



While it was never officially illegal in Canada for people of different skin colours to marry, their families and community often made it very hard for them to be happy. In Ontario in 1930, a white woman named Isabel Jones and a mixed-race man named Ira Johnson became engaged. Her mother was so angry that she called in a racist terrorist group called the Ku Klux Klan. They kidnapped the young woman and watched her every move for days, and threatened the young man. The Klan members were eventually sent to prison for a short time. The couple went ahead and were married.



Between 1869 and 1932 more than 100,000 children were sent from Great Britain to Canada. Many had no family or had been abandoned. Many came from families that were too poor to support them, and some were simply taken by people who thought they were helping. These kids were known as Home Children or Barnardo Children, named for Dr. Thomas Barnardo, shown at left, who had the idea to send them to Canada, usually to farm families. Many were treated almost like slaves and weren't even sent to school. But many had better lives here than they could have had in Britain and went on to have families of their own.

A group of Barnardo boys who came to Canada from Great Britain in 1922.







The Timlecks were one of the families that competed in Toronto's Great Stork Derby in the 1920s and 1930s.

## Baby Contest

In 1926, Toronto lawyer Charles Millar died, leaving a very unusual will. It said that his money — worth something like \$9 million today — would go to the Toronto woman “who, in the ten years following my death, has the most children.” Newspapers all over the world covered what they called The Great Stork Derby. In the end, the money was divided among four families.

**T**alk about a big wedding! On July 23, 1939, 105 couples were married in a Roman Catholic mass held at a Montreal baseball stadium. At least 25,000 people in the stands cheered them on.



**S**tarting in the 1950s, women came from the Caribbean to Canada to work as servants and to care for kids in busy families. The rules said these women could not be married. Because they wanted the work, some of them hid the fact that they had children. In 1976, the government sent seven of these women back to Jamaica for doing this. But many Canadians stood up for the women, who became known as the Seven Jamaican Mothers. In the end, they were allowed to come back to Canada and bring their families with them. This illustration of the women comes from a poster called “A Visual Timeline of Caregiving Work in Canada” by the Kwentong Bayan Collective.



Kwentong Bayan Collective, iStockphoto

**F**or a long time, couples who wanted to end their marriage had to go to the United States or endure a difficult, dragged-out process in Canada. In 1968, the Canadian government allowed couples who had lived apart for three years to get a divorce. They could also divorce if one partner had been cruel or abusive or had abandoned the other. In 1986, the rules changed to permit divorce after one year of separation.







CP Images, iStockphoto

In 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada said that any two people who are married or have lived together for more than three years should be thought of as spouses. Michael Leshner and Michael Stark, shown above, had been together for 22 years when in June 2003 they became the first same-sex couple to marry legally in Canada. In July 2005 the Canadian government voted to give two women or two men the right to marry anywhere in the country.





# DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Remembering and retelling stories accurately was a skill that knowledge-keepers have used for as long as people can remember. There are still many knowledge-keepers preserving their culture and its ways of looking at things this way today. In the past, they did not have the technology that we have now to make telling and saving our stories so much easier. Think about a story you want to tell about your family to future generations so that it does not get lost.

## STEP 1:

Draw that story in the space below using artwork or symbols that reflect your family.



## STEP 2:

Once you have written or drawn your story, visit [pinnguaqlearning.space/curriculum/lesson/understanding-the-importance-of-oral-stories](https://pinnguaqlearning.space/curriculum/lesson/understanding-the-importance-of-oral-stories) to record your story in a digital format so you can share it with family, friends, and future generations!

