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TRUE NORTH CALLING



TEACHER GUIDE



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OVERVIEW

This educator's guide is designed to accompany True North Calling, the six-part CBC documentary series that follows the lives of several compelling, resourceful Canadians living across the North, showing what it takes to make it and achieve their dreams, in Canada's toughest terrain.

From the Northwest Territories, to the Yukon to Nunavut, we can watch as these characters deal with unforgiving terrain, unpredictable weather and unexpected challenges to earn a living and make a life for themselves, their families and in some cases, their communities. Each of them has to figure out how to combine the traditional knowledge that has kept people alive for millennia in the North with the increasing demands of the modern world.



Guide Credits

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MINDS ON

Using a brainstorming application (try popplet.com) or by drawing a mind map on the chalkboard, create a list of the class's expectations and ideas about Canada's North. Think about both positive and negative expectations you may have and be sure to consider different aspects of life, such as:

- Physical geography and landscape
- Weather
- Modes of transportation
- Work and employment
- Schools

- Entertainment
- Culture
- Government and politics
- Food
- Housing

Keep this list in mind as you watch the episodes of *Truth North Calling*. How did your expectations measure up to what was presented in the stories about people living in the North? After watching, go back to the mind map or Popplet and change or add information based on what you have learned.

Viewing Questions

As you watch each of the True North Calling episodes, identify the challenges faced by each subject.

1. How do they respond to the challenges?
2. In what ways are the challenges particular to life in the North?
3. How could an improvement in infrastructure in the North alleviate some of these challenges?

Infrastructure

Basic structures and facilities needed for the effective operation of a community. For example: roads, sewage systems, power supplies, hospitals, schools, and — by some definitions — housing.

North by Numbers

Canada's North is defined by the geographical point at which permafrost is consistent throughout the year. Generally, this point is near the 50th or 60th parallel north — circles of latitude that are 50 or 60 degrees north of the equator. The permafrost changes the way people can access and make use of the land. For example, in Iqaluit the permafrost extends to a depth of up to 300 metres making it extremely difficult to bury sewage and water access pipes. Pipes that have been buried regularly crack and burst because of shifting layers of permafrost; pipes that have been run above ground must be heated and monitored to keep the water from freezing. Building of any kind must take the permafrost into account and this has an impact on all infrastructure development.

Development of infrastructure is fundamental to stability and prosperity in the North. Without dependable, four-season access roads, or reliable ports for shipping by water, supplies must be flown in to most northern communities. This means that basic grocery items such as flour, tea, coffee and fresh fruits or vegetables can cost as much as three times the price of these items in southern areas. Because of exorbitant prices, most northern communities struggle with food insecurity which is defined as regularly worrying about running out of food or going without food for at least a day.

Exorbitant

Unreasonably high, as in price or charge

No road in means no road out; industries that might be enticed by the resource-rich North — mining, for instance — are discouraged from investing because of the cost of transporting goods to southern and international markets. Local independent businesses such as fishing boats on Great Slave Lake are also limited by a lack of dependable access to markets. Limited investment results in higher rates of unemployment — in Nunavut, unemployment is twice the national average. Poverty and an ensuing sense of powerlessness can be linked to increased social problems: violent crime in the Yukon is four times the national average, the homicide rate in Nunavut is nine times the average and incarceration in the Northwest Territories is ten times the rate in Ontario.

An absence of health infrastructure compounds the problem. The infant mortality rate in the Canadian Arctic is three times the Canadian average. Suicide rates over ten times higher than the rest of Canada indicate an urgent need for mental health strategies. Often, to receive necessary medical treatment or support, people

must relocate to southern regions, which can result in dividing families.

Despite a long list of challenges that come with living in Canada's North, 118,000 people choose to build their lives there. While reasons vary — the independent spirit of the wilderness, the transformation that results from overcoming adversity, or the connection to over 5000 years of Indigenous history on the frozen land — the North continues to hold an undeniable allure.



Try This!

True North Calling documents the experiences of people living in four northern communities: Iqaluit, Nunavut; Inuvik, North West Territories; Yellowknife, North West Territories; and Whitehorse, Yukon Territories. Using a map of Canada, locate each city. Calculate the distance of each city from your location. You may want to use Google Maps for this. If possible, you may want to “pin” each location on a classroom wall map along with the measured distances, or project the Google Map; this will help to create a “big picture” of Canada's North and its relationship to the rest of the country.



among Inuit — especially amongst youth — is more than ten times the national average. Additionally, while there has been an important increase in Inuit women taking advantage of education and employment opportunities, Inuit men are struggling with unemployment and an alienating lack of purpose.

Maintaining a focus on the importance of family and generational bonds, Franco and his wife ensure that their children are exposed to the Inuktitut language and participate regularly in traditional activities including hunting and food preparation. He has also helped organize a volunteer program that brings the men of the community together to perform the ritual service of delivering river water to the elders.

The People Behind the Numbers

Franco Buscemi – Iqaluit, Nunavut

Franco Buscemi has chosen to raise his family in Iqaluit. An important part of his decision is his desire to raise his children with as much access as possible to their Inuit culture and traditions. Franco, the general manager of the local fuel plant, is part of a new generation of Inuit that has made a conscious decision to not only live in the North, but also to dedicate themselves to the development of their community. For Buscemi, this development is particularly focused on the youth and men of Iqaluit. The suicide rate

Food Prices in Nunavut ¹

- 2 litres of orange juice – \$26.29
- Chicken – \$16.00 per kilogram
- 2.5 kg bag of flour – \$13.00
- 4 litres of milk – 12.39 (with subsidy applied)
- A nice meal in an Iqaluit restaurant – \$100.00 per person
- A combo meal at McDonalds – \$27.50



Kylik Kisoun Taylor – Inuvik, North West Territories

Kylik Kisoun Taylor is building his business, North Tundra Tours, in the hopes of reuniting his family in Inuvik. The eldest of Kylik’s two young daughters has been diagnosed with autism and he cannot afford the cost of supporting her needs in the northern town. So, his children and wife live in Midland, Ontario. Travelling to visit when he can, Kylik tries to stay in touch through Skype.

In many ways, Kylik is trying to translate what he loves about the North into a money-making enterprise. International tourists, particularly from China, will pay top dollar for an “authentic” wilderness experience. Kylik’s most recent idea will provide tourists with an opportunity to participate in herding the reindeer from their wintering grounds in Jimmy Lake, to their calving grounds on Richards Island, near Tuktoyaktuk. It is a trip that involves some risk, dependent on Kylik and his team’s ability to safely shepherd guests through often uncertain terrain. It is also a risky business venture, but if he is successful Kylik may well be able to afford to bring his family together at last.

Hunting in the North

Attitudes towards hunting likely vary a great deal between communities in the North and communities in the south. Hunting is an important aspect of Inuit and other Indigenous people’s cultural traditions. It is also a central part of many proposed solutions to food insecurity in the North.

Shawn Buckley – Great Slave Lake – Yellowknife, North West Territories

Great Slave Lake is 614 metres deep and the tenth largest lake in the world; Shawn Buckley is the third generation in his family to fish there. In the winter months, Shawn fishes through the ice; after a two-month break when the ice is too thin to work on and too thick to allow passage of his fishing boat, he is back on the water and once again hard at work. Metis fishermen, the Buckley family moved from Saskatchewan in the 1970s. In the 1940s Great Slave Lake was one of the most productive lakes in North America, but since the sixties the fishery has been in a gradual decline. Unlike other fisheries, the decline is not due to dwindling fish stocks; rather, it is a result of fewer people fishing the lake.

// Everybody says it’s tough, but what isn’t? I don’t think I’d want to do anything else. //

– Shawn Buckley



While once there were over 250 fishermen working the lake, now Shawn is one of approximately a dozen active fishermen. Despite the fact that he faces little competition, high fuel costs and limited markets mean that Shawn still struggles to achieve an adequate profit from the sale of his catch. Supplementing his income by providing guided tours of the lake and an authentic fishing boat experience to international tourists, Shawn remains hopeful that he will be able to someday pass his business on to his young son. And if heart and hard work is all it takes, then Shawn stands a good chance of doing just that.



Kate Mechan and Bart Bounds – Whitehorse, Yukon Territories

Food security is vital to the future of Canada’s North and Kate Mechan and Bart Bounds are members of a relatively new, but fervently passionate, group of people determined to contribute to that security by establishing farming in the North. Despite the fact that less than 2% of the Yukon is suitable for farming, the 2001 census indicated that there were 170 farms in the Yukon; that number is now estimated to be closer to 185 farms. Grass hays, oats, hardier vegetables such as potatoes, greenhouse vegetables and flowers all grow well in the Yukon. The growing season is short and unpredictable with average frost-free periods varying widely from 21 to 93 days within a 500km area. Even with the slight advantage of

longer hours of daylight during the summer months, and a more temperate location for their specific farm, Kate and Bart still face considerable challenges. Once again, a lack of infrastructure has a considerable impact, making it more difficult to bring in the material required to build up their farm and to deliver their produce to market. Living entirely off-grid, dedicated to organic farming practices, and raising a young family in a 270-square foot yurt, the couple seems to have made a conscious decision to embrace the authenticity and uncertainty of life in the North.



Stacey Aglok Macdonald – Iqaluit, Nunavut

“Our language is who and what we are and the health of our language lies at the core of our wellbeing.”²

– Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.
2008 Arctic Indigenous Language Symposium,
Tromsø, Norway

Whether she is tracking down missing equipment, scouting locations, or filming a scene in the waning daylight of an Iqaluit winter, Stacey Aglok Macdonald and her crew are driven by a steady sense of purpose. Entering its third season, *Qanurli* is an off-beat comedy show that has been billed as *Wayne’s World* meets *Saturday*

Night Live, Inuk-style. Filmed entirely in Iqaluit and presented in Inuktitut, the show is designed to entertain while immersing the audience in the Inuit language. Stacey's hope is that *Qanurli* will "make the Inuit language 'cool' so kids will want to use it." Of course, there is no shortage of challenges faced in this project: deadlines, budgets, shoot schedules, weather, costly and unreliable transport of props and equipment from southern regions, and a shortage of actors fluent in Inuktitut. On top of all this, they have to come up with enough material to create 13 episodes that will resonate with Iqaluit youth *and* be funny. In the end, the show, with its "cardboard and duct tape" approach, demonstrates the persistence, humour and community that defines much of the work being done in Canada's North.

Consider This

1. Describe some of the ways that the subjects in each story express respect for their elders. How does this compare to your own experiences with the elders in your family or community?
2. Consider the lives of the children depicted in these stories. In what ways are their experiences different from your own childhood? What benefits can you see in the way that they live? What might be some of the difficulties they face?
3. How can we improve our collective understanding and connection to Canada's North? Create a list of as many ideas as possible.
4. In what ways has this study changed your views of Canada's North? Are you now more or less likely to visit the North? Explain your reasoning.

Check This Out – Inuit Throat Singing

Listen to this audio about an Inuit throat singing workshop help during the Katingavik Arts Festival in St. John's, Newfoundland: cbc.ca/player/play/2697374544

Why would reclaiming cultural knowledge, such as throat singing, be important to building healthy communities in the North?

ACTIVITIES

Activity #1 – Northern Impressions

Using Storify (storify.com), create a multi-media exploration of topics and ideas inspired by Canada's North and the stories showcased in *True North Calling*. You may find it helpful to reflect back on the mind map or Popplet you created as a class. Collect images, video, articles, stories and audio files; add captions to each item to communicate your responses to what you have learned in your exploration of Canada's North. Share your collection with the class.

Activity #2 – Lessons from the North: Climate Change

Working with a small group, read and discuss the following quote from Canadian anthropologist Wade Davis. Ensure that all members of your group understand the quote.

// Climate change for most Canadians is seen as a technical and scientific challenge, distant from their lives. The Inuit live its reality every day. They are a people of the ice. As hunters they depend on it for their survival even as it inspires the very essence of their character and culture. Indeed, it is the very nature of ice, the way it moves, recedes, dissolves, and reforms with the seasons, that gives such flexibility to the Inuit heart and spirit. They have no illusions of permanence. There is no time for regret. Despair is an insult to the imagination. Their grocery store is out there on the land. To live they must kill the things they most love. Blood on ice in the Arctic is not a sign of death, but an affirmation of life. Death is the disappearance of the ice. Climate change for the Inuit is not an environmental or political issue, but rather an issue of cultural survival, with profound psychological and indeed spiritual implications. **//**³

– Wade Davis, anthropologist

Consider the following questions in your discussion. Take notes on your ideas and prepare to present the highlights to the class.

1. In this quote, Davis suggests that the Inuit people are “people of the ice” and that ice “inspires the very essence of their character.” If the Inuit living in the North can be represented by ice, what substance could represent people living in Canada's south? What characteristics might be represented by this substance? Compare the characteristics of the two groups through the substance metaphors; are the characteristics and values incompatible? Explain your reasoning.
2. Do you believe that people living in southern regions of Canada are less concerned about climate change? Explain your reasoning. Based on Davis' ideas in the quote and what you have learned from watching *True North Calling*, what lessons can the North teach us about the environment and our relationship with it?

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