

# IDLE NO MORE: A Protest for Aboriginal Rights

## MINDS-ON ACTIVITY: Considering Personal Bias

Your teacher will write the six statements below on the board. After each statement is read aloud, you will be asked to indicate your reaction to each statement by showing:

- **Thumbs up** (I think this is a true statement)
- **Thumbs down** (I think this is a false statement)
- **Thumbs sideways** (I'm not sure)

<b>1</b>	Idle No More is an environmental movement to protect Canada's water and natural resources from exploitation.
<b>2</b>	Idle No More is a group of angry Native people engaged in disruptive protests.
<b>3</b>	Idle No More represents diverse groups of Aboriginal people coming together for greater justice and self-determination.
<b>4</b>	Idle No More began as an online protest movement created by four Aboriginal women.
<b>5</b>	The Idle No More movement is gathering strength and support.
<b>6</b>	The Idle No More movement is making unreasonable demands on the Canadian government and Prime Minister Harper.

After you have indicated your initial beliefs — don't worry, there are no right or wrong responses — consider the following questions. Use these questions to examine your own personal bias/perspective and the origins of that bias/perspective. (Your teacher may also model answers to the questions.)

1. Do you feel well informed about the Idle No More movement? Why or why not?
2. What has been the source of your information on this topic (friends, family, social media, direct involvement, school, the media)?
3. Do you think these sources are biased? Do they represent multiple perspectives on the issue? Where do you think you need to go for more information?
4. Do you care to learn more about the Idle No More movement? Why or why not? What questions do you have about it?

### ACTIVITY:

Follow media coverage on Idle No More or another Aboriginal issue. Analyse the perspectives offered by comparing at least 3 different sources. Evaluate which source is more credible, balanced and objective.



## SETTING THE STAGE

Idle No More was created by activists Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam and Jessica Gordon. In November 2012, these four women organized and led a teach-in in Saskatoon in response to the introduction of the omnibus bill C-45. The bill weakened environmental protection laws, in particular, laws protecting all of Canada's navigable waterways. The bill would limit the scope of protection to only a small number of waterways of considered important for navigation. Many of the waterways that would no longer be protected passed through First Nations lands. Many Aboriginal people feel that water is a special, even a sacred, resource that must be preserved for future generations. They felt the change in law jeopardized clean water in Canadian communities. They also felt that the government should have consulted with Aboriginal communities regarding the change in the law since it directly affects their lives.

Idle No More protests were timed to coincide with the beginning of a hunger strike by Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat, Ontario and the announcement of her demands for a meeting with Prime Minister Harper and the Governor General to discuss Aboriginal rights.

An intense social media campaign was launched to gather supporters both in Canada and worldwide.

## Aboriginal Identity and Terminology

Aboriginal People have the right to choose how they identify themselves. Terminology regarding Aboriginal identity is complex and changes. The fundamental principle is that Aboriginal People should have the right to "name themselves" after centuries of colonial efforts to eliminate their identities and impose new ones. Here are four helpful points to familiarize yourself with the issue of identity and terminology provided by the First Nation Studies Program at the University of British Columbia.

[indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/identity.html](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/identity.html)

1. Many Indigenous people prefer to identify themselves by specific local terms based on family and community location and traditional names. They may or may not be supportive of more general terms — such as "Aboriginal," "Indigenous" or "Indian" — that arise out of European or international legal frameworks, and group them in with other groups who they may not consider related.
2. "Aboriginal" is the least contentious and most inclusive general term currently used in Canada. In most conversations, it is preferable to "Indian" or "Native." In many contexts, the use of "Indian" may be viewed as offensive.
3. "First Nations" is a widely accepted term and may be used sometimes generally, but is increasingly used specifically for reserve communities and the people living in them or closely associated with them. It is sometimes used more generally as a contemporary replacement for "Indian," but may not always be taken to apply to non-status Indians. Métis people often view "First Nations" as an exclusive designation that does not include them, and some Inuit people may feel the same way.
4. "Métis" may sometimes be used to describe any person of mixed European and Indian ancestry. That definition is, however, frequently challenged by Métis people who trace their own lineage to particular historic Métis communities. The broader usage to describe general mixed ancestry is not supported by current Canadian case law.

The two main goals of the movement are the establishment of a nation-to-nation relationship between First Nations and the government of Canada as well as social and environmental sustainability. There are a diverse range of ideas within the First Nations population regarding how these goals would best be achieved. Some of the shared concerns amongst First Nations people and their allies who back the Idle No More movement are the need for treaty modernization; increased land claims; and the end of resource exploitation on First Nations land without benefit to First Nations communities.

To promote its cause, Idle No More flash mobs danced in shopping malls and other public spaces. Brief blockades of railway lines and border crossings occurred. All protests and demonstrations were peaceful. The protests have, however, caused polarized debate in the media, bringing out supporters and critics.

As the movement gained recognition, the founders stated that they wanted Idle No More to remain "grassroots", believing that the movement represents a different vision than that of First Nations chiefs. The Idle No More originators feel that many First Nations chiefs are not negotiating effectively with the federal government and that the chiefs do not adequately represent the needs of Aboriginal peoples. Despite this friction, by early January

2013 both Shawn Atleo, leader of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), and other chiefs were beginning to use the protests' momentum to demand treaty rights and improved living standards. The AFN is an organization representing First Nations leaders in Canada.

On January 4, 2013, Prime Minister Harper announced a meeting with a delegation of First Nation leaders coordinated by the AFN. The meeting was held on January 11. The preparations for the meeting were the subject of intense negotiation within the AFN membership. Some Ontario and Manitoba chiefs voted not to attend. They chose to boycott the meeting, demanding that more chiefs be in attendance and questioning the meeting's agenda.

Attending the meeting were AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo and a delegation of chiefs from several provinces and the Yukon, as well as AFN representatives from its Youth Council, Women's Council and Elders Council. The ceremonial meeting with Governor General Johnston was attended by around 100 chiefs, including Chief Theresa Spence. The meeting concluded with a promise to continue the dialogue with Atleo and to further consult with First Nations groups on environmental issues and legislative matters.

On the day of the meeting, the Idle No More movement organized protests on Parliament Hill and in cities across Canada.

## To Consider

1. Do you think the Idle No More movement has been successful? Explain your answer.
2. What impact do you think the Idle No More movement may have in the future? Explain your answer.

## ACTIVITY: Evaluating Sources

Read the excerpt of the Idle No More Manifesto to further understand the goals of the movement.

1. What are the main arguments?
2. Who is the author? Why is the author writing this manifesto?
3. What solutions are implied?
4. What counter arguments could be made to this manifesto? Who might make them and why?

**// We contend that:** The Treaties are nation to nation agreements between Canada and First Nations who are sovereign nations. The Treaties are agreements that cannot be altered or broken by one side of the two Nations. The spirit and intent of the Treaty agreements meant that First Nations peoples would share the land, but retain their inherent rights to lands and resources. Instead, First Nations have experienced a history of colonization which has resulted in outstanding land claims, lack of resources and unequal funding for services such as education and housing.

**We contend that:** The state of Canada has become one of the wealthiest countries in the world by using the land and resources. Canadian mining, logging, oil and fishing companies are the most powerful in the world due to land and resources. Some of the poorest First Nations communities [such as Attawapiskat] have mines or other developments on their land but do not get a share of the profit. The taking of resources has left many lands and waters poisoned — the animals and plants are dying in many areas in Canada. We cannot live without the land and water. We have laws older than this colonial government about how to live with the land.

**We contend that:** Currently, this government is trying to pass many laws so that reserve lands can also be bought and sold by big companies to get profit from resources. They are promising to share this time...Why would these promises be different from past promises? We will be left with nothing but poisoned water, land and air. This is an attempt to take away sovereignty and the inherent right to land and resources from First Nations peoples.

**We contend that:** There are many examples of other countries moving towards sustainability, and we must demand sustainable development as well. We believe in healthy, just, equitable and sustainable communities and have a vision and plan of how to build them. Please join us in creating this vision. **//**

Idle No More Manifesto: [idlenomore.ca/manifesto](http://idlenomore.ca/manifesto)

## ACTIVITY – Aboriginal Advocacy: Before and Beyond Idle No More

The Idle No More movement has gained a wide audience as one of the most recent examples of Aboriginal advocacy. However, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been engaged in strengthening and empowering their communities and engaging in legal and political challenges to provincial and federal governments for a long time. Many Aboriginal peoples have also sought to educate non-indigenous Canadians about their role in the resolution of the many challenges facing Aboriginal communities and to encourage non-indigenous Canadians to join them to achieve common goals.

### Research Activity

Choose one of the following examples of Aboriginal advocacy. Prepare a brief oral report to share that focuses on identifying the main issue, explaining the response to the issue, evaluating the effectiveness of the act of advocacy, and summarizing whether or not you feel the issue is important to you.

<b>A</b>	<b>Listuguj Mi'Gmaq Fishery, 1981 – A battle for the right to fish</b> Suggested source: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJNAbGXk9cU">youtube.com/watch?v=CJNAbGXk9cU</a>
<b>B</b>	<b>Grassy Narrows First Nation, 2012 – Six young people walk 2,000 kilometres trek to raise awareness of mercury poisoning</b> Suggested source: <a href="http://cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2012/05/23/tby-grassy-narrows-walkers.html">cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/story/2012/05/23/tby-grassy-narrows-walkers.html</a>
<b>C</b>	<b>Mother Earth Water Walk, 2006 – Ojibwa Josephine Mandamin walk around the great lakes to raise awareness of the health of the great lakes.</b> Suggested source: <a href="http://motherearthwaterwalk.com">motherearthwaterwalk.com</a>
<b>D</b>	<b>Yinka Dene Alliance-Freedom Train, 2012 – Opposing the Enbridge pipeline/tanker project</b> Suggested source: <a href="http://freedomtrain2012.com">freedomtrain2012.com</a>

### Community Connections

Research an issue of interest to Aboriginal people of your community. Ask an elder, senator or Aboriginal teacher to come to your class to address that issue.

## VIDEO REVIEW

### Pre-viewing Questions

1. What do you think of when you hear of a political protest?

---

---

2. Why do you think that some citizens engage in political protest?

---

---

3. State example of protests that helped to make a society "fairer".

---

---

4. Why do you think that some Aboriginal People in Canada are engaged in political protests?

---

---

### Viewing Questions

1. Who began the Idle No More online movement?

---

---

2. What did Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence do in order to draw the government's attention to First Nations communities?

---

---

3. List three types of protest that the Idle No More movement has precipitated.

---

---

---

4. Why were those involved in the Idle No More movement concerned about changes to existing legislation?

---

---

5. What may be the biggest challenge for the Idle No More movement?

---

---

6. Why are Eddie Gardner and Ernie Victor concerned about Bill C-45?

---

---

7. Why does Wenona Victor believe the Idle No More movement is sustainable?

---

---

8. Ernie Victor hopes the movement educated all Canadians. What does he hope we will learn?

---

---

9. Why are some people not happy with the Idle No More movement?

---

---

10. How do the protesters know that their message is being heard?

---

---

11. What was the outcome of Chief Spence's protest?

---

---

12. How did The Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo describe the Idle No More movement?

---

---

13. Romeo Saganash (Quebec NDP MP) would like Canadian law to be compatible with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. TRUE or FALSE

### Post-viewing Activity

Go to the Idle No More website and view the symbols, photographs and articles that are posted there. What is interesting or exciting about this website? What is worrisome? What else do you want to know or find out about? What are your beliefs about the Idle No More movement and how have they changed after viewing the website?