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## Exploring Language and Indigeneity with Paula MacDonald

for grades 5+

**Join us in welcoming Paula MacDonald. Paula is a Cree deaf woman from Treaty 4 territory. MacDonald is a national youth representative for the Deaf Indigenous of Canada committee and the Canadian Association of the Deaf, where she is dedicated to improving accessibility to services for the deaf.**

**We are excited for you to meet Paula in this inspiring workshop as she shares her remarkable journey of learning American Sign Language (ASL) and embracing her deaf and Indigenous identities. In this engaging session, Paula will delve into her experiences growing up with adopted hearing parents who were unfamiliar with ASL and deaf culture, leaving her feeling disconnected from both her deafness and her Indigenous heritage.**

**Paula will discuss the challenges she faced navigating a world that did not fully understand or accommodate her needs, yet also celebrate the resilience and strength she found within herself and her communities. Through personal anecdotes and reflections, she will highlight the beauty and power of ASL as a visual language and explore how it has enriched her life and opened her up to a community of people with a vibrant culture and many gifts.**

**This workshop is an opportunity to gain insight into the intersectionality of deaf and Indigenous identities, to learn about the importance of language and culture in shaping individual experiences, and to be inspired by Paula's journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Join us as we celebrate diversity and embrace the richness of deaf and Indigenous cultures together with Paula MacDonald.**

# Exploring Language and Indigeneity

**Paula speaks about deaf culture. Deaf culture is a vibrant and rich community that encompasses shared beliefs, values, traditions, and language among individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. At its core, deaf culture celebrates deafness as a unique identity rather than a disability, emphasizing the importance of sign language, typically American Sign Language (ASL), as a primary mode of communication. Deaf culture values visual communication, including facial expressions, body language, and gestures, which are integral to conveying nuance and emotion in ASL conversations. Deaf culture also embraces collective experiences, such as shared struggles with societal barriers and discrimination, as well as collective achievements and milestones. Additionally, deaf cultural events, such as Deaf clubs, festivals, and theater productions, play a vital role in fostering community connection and pride. Deaf culture is a dynamic and diverse community that celebrates deaf identity, language, and heritage while advocating for deaf rights and accessibility. Paula also speaks about deaf schools, and the dark history of those schools. she speaks about how those schools tried to take away sign language, and saw being deaf as a problem that needed to be solved. At one point they even let go of any deaf teacher - it wasn't until a deaf university was set up in the United States where we saw sign language coming back and deaf culture being revitalized. Paula makes the comparison between residential schools and deaf schools, and comes from two cultures who were both silenced and treated like a problem. She also speaks to sitting in circle and how it is important for deaf people to see everyone when they have a group discussion, and how traditionally many Indigenous people sat in circle to communicate. This is such a beautiful overlap of communication; both wanting everyone to be on equal footing and able to see and interact with each other as a whole.**

**As a class we encourage you to sit together in circle and go through the following discussion questions:**

- What do you think deaf culture is? What are the things that make up a culture?**
- Imagine never being able to have a fluent conversation with your parents. How do you think this would have impacted your childhood, teenage years, and future relationship with them?**
- How do you think being adopted impacted Paula's connection to her Indigenous culture?**
- How do you think deaf residential schools have correlation with the Indian residential schools?**
- Did you know that Indigenous people had sign languages prior to colonization? What do you think it means for deaf Indigenous people to reclaim these languages and revitalize them?**

# Exploring Language and Indigeneity

We invite students to read this short article titled “People’s History of Canada: The History of Deaf Communities in Canada The Importance of Recognizing and Preserving Signed Language” by clicking or scanning the QR code.



Scan or click the barcode



After reading the article we encourage students to create a poster or brochure that helps people understand deaf history in Canada and the importance of deaf culture and sign languages. Many people don’t know the dark history of what many children went through in deaf schools and how deaf education has been a journey to get to where it is now, with still a long way to go. Paula’s story is inspiring and shows her resilience, but there are many ways that it could have and should have been an easier and kinder journey. We want you to amplify Paula’s story and the story of deaf people around the world and encourage you to look up other deaf stories or pieces of history to include within the project.

We also encourage you as a class or on your own to learn some signs! ASL or American Sign Language is the most common sign language in Canada. You can find many resources online helping you learn different signs. We hope this resource inspires you to continue to learn sign language and to support and amplify the deaf community.

