



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

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Guided learning on Canada Day

Canada Day can mean many different things to many different people. This moment is often framed as a celebration of unity and national identity. For some, particularly those with multi-generational ties to Canada, it may represent the confederation of provinces and the official formation of Canada in 1867. For others, specifically for immigrants and refugees, it can mark a time of new beginnings, a celebration of the journey to a new home that can bring new opportunities.

This day also falls against the backdrop of deep and institutional colonial violence; a reality Indigenous community across Turtle Island continue to face. It may be a time for settler Canadians to grapple with the legacy of colonization and consider how to actively participate in reconciliation, a reminder about the foundation that Canada is built on stolen land and broken treaties.

These truths can sit side by side, and while they may feel contradictory, it invites us to listen deeply, reflect honestly, and rethink what it means to live together on this land.

This resource offers a few starting points: immigrant stories that celebrate each other, artworks that honor culture and tradition, and perspectives that help us come to reality with the tensions of belonging.

Connecting to land through maps

Understanding Canada Day comes with understanding where you are in these respective lands. **The Native Land Digital Map** is a living document that is informed by the contributions of Indigenous communities, Indigenous knowledge holders, and their stories. This interactive map allows users to click and see the mapping of Indigenous connection to land and water. It also offers an opportunity to acknowledge the deep, living presences of Indigenous peoples and stories.

This resource can be used as a guide to deepen conversations about reconciliation, encounter Indigenous stories and names for the first time, and seeing Indigenous and Western mapping together. Seeing Indigenous and Western points of view is also known as *Two-Eyed Seeing*, a guiding principle shared by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall. *Two-Eyed Seeing* is about learning to see the world through one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges, and through the other with the strengths of Western knowledges and using both eyes together for the benefit of all.

[Learn more about The Native Land Digital Map.](#)

Here are some additional resources that deepen learning about Indigenous territories, treaties, agreements, and relationships to land across North America:

- [Whose Land](#)
- [Inuit Nunangat Map](#), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
- Otipemisiwak Metis District Territories, Metis National Within Alberta
- Community Council Map, Metis Nation of Ontario
- Reconciliation Calendar – Decolonizing the Calendar, 13 Turtle Moons

Reclaiming the Anthem: “Our home on native land”

In February 2023, acclaimed Canadian singer and songwriter **Jully Black** sparked national conversation when she changed one word in her rendition of the national anthem during the NBA All Star Game. She changed one lyric and sang “our home **on** native land” instead of “our home **and** native land”. The change was subtle but powerful, an intentional shift that acknowledges the reality of Indigenous sovereignty and colonization, and it also carried emotional weight.

This act resonated [particularly well among Indigenous communities](#) because it publicly affirmed and called out a truth that Canada has long struggled to fully acknowledge; that it is built on stolen Indigenous land. In doing so, Jully Black reframed the anthem not as an unquestioned patriotic tradition but allowed the opportunity for honesty and accountability to shine on a large stage.

The rendition was met with [intense political controversy online](#) ([French version here](#)), but this subtle shift echoes exactly what this guided learning journey is about; facing the truth, acknowledging the past, recognizing Indigenous sovereignty, and our nations working towards reconciliation.

[Check out Jully Black’s rendition of the national anthem.](#)

Here are some additional resources that provide a deeper context to Jully Black’s impactful rendition of the Canadian anthem:

- [“I sang the truth”: Why Jully Black changed the lyrics to “O’ Canada” during the NBA All-Star Game](#), Toronto Life
- [Big reactions to Jully Black’s lyric swap in O Canada](#), YouTube
- [Home on Native Land](#)

Connecting to the land through art

The **Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada (IAC)** is a powerful national collective, the only Indigenous organization to have a National Arts Service Organization charitable status and is dedicated to preserving and revitalizing Indigenous cultural knowledge through arts. It functions and supports Indigenous women artists in preserving culture, storytelling, and ancestral knowledge through creative expression. This collective allows art to be a form of healing and continuity. Through community education and relationship-building grounded in the arts, the IAC seeks to foster healing and empowerment within Indigenous communities, while also nurturing greater understanding and respect for Indigenous cultures across non-Indigenous society.

From beading and hide tanning to contemporary performances, art demonstrations, silent auctions, and multimedia installations, the collective ensures that Indigenous art forms remain vibrant and central in conversations about reconciliation and cultural continuity.

This resource is particularly relevant to Canada Day by how the IAC is a reminder of mourning of the ongoing effects of colonization being seen today, but at the same time, it's a work of celebration that honors the past and allowing Indigenous art and stories to live on. Engaging with the work of Indigenous artists and creatives is a meaningful way to reflect on what Canada Day can represent.

[Check out The Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada's website and look through the beautiful and amazing artwork exhibits and installations.](#)

Here are some additional resources on the Canada Day celebrations of Indigenous culture and arts:

- [Canada Day Indigenous Celebrations](#), City of Kitchener

Additionally, please check out our Canada Day resource guide to further engage with diverse perspectives as well.

“Our Immigrant Stories” | Interview by Aquil Virani

In this thoughtful interview, artist Aquil Virani shares his creative process behind *Our Immigrant Stories*, a collaborative art project that invites participants to reflect on the immigrant heroes in their lives. Through written submissions, photos, and multimedia art, Virani amplifies everyday stories that often go unseen; he wanted to focus on both big and small stories. Virani is the son of a French mother and an Ismaili Muslim father from Tanzania, and he uses art as a form of storytelling and everyday activism.

What is particularly interesting is that Virani speaks about the “idealized” immigrant, and his work, importantly, urges us to think more critically about Canada’s immigration narrative: how are immigrants evaluated based on their “contributions”? How do newcomers, including recent immigrants, grapple with their place in a settler-colonial country? How do we honor our immigrant roots while being accountable to Indigenous land and history?

This interview is especially powerful for those reflecting on the layered meaning of Canada Day. [Please read the interview on the Canadian Museum of Immigration’s website.](#)

[Additionally, please check out Aquil Virani’s “Our Immigrant Stories” collaborative art projects that further showcase and detail other immigrant stories and artworks.](#)

Regardless of how you choose to mark Canada Day this year and going forward, we hope the resources included in this guide provide some additional perspectives on how people from other identity groups with different connections to Canada may choose to recognize the day.