



# LIVE Arts Leah Dorian

## Living History, Telling Metis Stories

### Overview

Strand: Visual Arts  
Level: Grade 5  
Content: 45 minute broadcast + hands-on activities.  
Broadcast date:  
May 6, 9:30am-10:15 am

This session will give students the opportunity to participate in a live broadcast with Métis artist Leah Marie Dorion. The presentation and related activities are based on Dorion’s popular children’s book *The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Métis Story* (2009). Dorion will discuss how she visually represents Métis culture through the art form of illustration. Students will also learn about traditional Métis values and the concept of connectedness.

Please see page 2 for a **Pre-Broadcast Activity** and page 4 for a **Teacher Guided Hands-On Activity**. This post-broadcast activity will give students the opportunity to use what they have learned during the broadcast to create their own artwork.

### Artist Bio

Leah Marie Dorion is an interdisciplinary Métis artist raised in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. Leah views her Métis heritage as providing her with a unique bridge for knowledge between all people. An instructor at the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Prince Albert, Leah has degrees in Native Studies and Education. She has numerous creative projects to her credit including academic papers for the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, children’s books, art exhibitions, and several video documentaries that showcase Métis culture and history. Leah’s paintings honor the spiritual strength of First Nations women and the sacred feminine. The subject matter of her artistic creations is deeply connected to her own First Nations philosophy, worldview, and culture.

The Métis people have a beautiful oral tradition of storytelling. Inspired by these cultural teachings, Leah has written and illustrated several children’s books about the historic relationship the Métis people have to the land. *The Giving Tree: The Retelling of a Traditional Metis Story* (2009) is based on a true story that she learned from Elder Frank Tomkins. This book teaches about the sacred law of reciprocity that is an important aspect of traditional Métis values and beliefs. The illustrations include representations of traditional Métis cultural symbols and Métis lifestyle practices. As a Métis artist and storyteller, Leah creates images with a uniquely Métis style. Her illustrations integrate the vibrant colours historically used by Métis women in their beadwork and related designs

### Curriculum Aims & Goals

**Creative/Productive:**  
Students will create their own maple tree drawing inspired by the *The Giving Tree* story and learn about traditional Métis style beadwork, forms and colours.

**Critical/Responsive:**  
Leah Marie Dorion will discuss the illustration process and show the original sketches that were used in the published story. Students will compare people to trees in order to examine the concept of “connectedness”.

**Cultural/Historical:**  
Students will explore the symbols used in *The Giving Tree*, including the infinity symbol, the circle, and representations of traditional Métis clothing. Students will also learn about the Métis cart values wheel.

## Pre-Broadcast Activity

During the broadcast, students will explore the symbols used in *The Giving Tree*. This activity will help prepare students for the broadcast.

1. Please read *The Giving Tree* by Leah Dorion with your students.
2. Students may also watch the following video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImSu9y-gsUM>
3. Have your students answer the following questions:

- What small creature is sleeping in the hollow of the Giving Tree?
- What is offered at the base of the tree when Métis people first arrive at the Giving Tree?
- What item did mama forget to pack into the grub box?
- What two offerings did the boy place back into the hollow on behalf of his family?
- Name three Métis values that are expressed in the story the giving tree.

## Pre-Broadcast Materials/ Resources

### ***The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Metis Story* by Leah Dorion**

This book is available in many school libraries or can be ordered from ordered from Gabriel Dumont Institute Publishing Department in Saskatoon at <https://gdins.org/product/the-giving-tree-a-retelling-of-a-traditional-metis-story/>

## **Broadcast Program (45 min)**

### **Artist Presentation 1:**

Leah will share the story of her journey as an artist. She will introduce the students to her illustrated book *The Giving Tree*, and show students sketches and original illustrations used to create the book.

### **Materials/ Resources for Broadcast**

Students will need a pencil and one sheet of paper to use during the broadcast.

### **Activity 1:**

*Giving Tree* movement/stretching activity

### **Artist Presentation 2:**

Leah will show students examples of Métis clothing from the *Giving Tree* such as a Métis sash, moccasins, polka dotted hankies, and tobacco pouches. Leah will also explain the Métis cart values wheel.

### **Activity 2: Snowball activity**

Leah will ask students questions about her Métis heritage. They will write their answers on a piece of paper and crush it up like a snowball. Students will throw their snowballs into the center of the circle, and then choose another student's answer to read aloud.

### **Artist Demonstration:**

Leah will demonstrate how students can make their own maple leaf creation inspired by *The Giving Tree*.

### **Activity 3:**

Students will compare people to trees in order to examine the concept of "connectedness". How are human similar to trees?

## **Curriculum Outcomes**

[www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca)

**CP5.8** Create art works using a variety of visual art concepts (e.g., positive space), forms (e.g., graphic design, photography), and media (e.g., mixed media, paint).

**CH5.2** Compare traditional and evolving arts expressions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists from different regions of Canada, and examine influences of pop culture on contemporary arts.

Refer to renewed Arts Education curriculum documents for further information on outcomes and assessment.

## **Teacher Guided Hands-On Activity (30-60 minutes)**

This post-broadcast activity will give students the opportunity to use what they have learned during the broadcast to create their own artwork.

During the broadcast, Leah Marie Dorion discussed how Métis women created patterns and used pointillist designs. In this activity, students will make their maple tree leaf drawing.

The maple leaf template is posted under Visual Arts Resources at the LIVE Arts website:  
<http://liveartsaskatchewan.com/resources/visual-arts/>

### **Materials and resources for hands-on activity:**

- 1 piece of Bristol board weight paper for each student 12"x12" (or alternatively 8 ½"x 11" heavier card stock)
- Fine tip or standard markers
- Pencils and white erasers
- Pin or finishing nail (for student punch holes into the paper)
- Photocopy of maple leaf pattern (1 per student)

### **STEPS:**

1. Hand out card stock and photocopy of the maple leaf pattern.
2. Place the maple leaf pattern over the cardstock.
3. Using the pin or finishing nail, students should poke holes through the shape of the maple leaf pattern so that it is transferred to the card stock or Bristol board underneath.
4. Ask students think of a "big idea" for their maple leaf creation. Encourage them use the discarded hole punched paper or scrap paper to try out their ideas.
5. Once students have settled on a design, ask them to sketch it onto their maple leaf using pencil.
6. Students will then use markers to trace over pencil lines and complete their illustration.
7. Have students write up a short artist statement explaining the symbol and inspiration related to their new maple leaf creation. Statements could be one paragraph or longer.
8. Ask students share their statements and artwork.