



The annual Aboriginal Arts & Stories deadline is March 31. Please note that the contest accepts submissions year-round; post-deadline, submissions will be considered for the following year's contest. The contest is open to Canadians of Indigenous ancestry (self-identified, Status, Non-Status, Inuit, and Métis) between the ages of 9 and 29. We ask Indigenous youth to create a piece of writing (max. 1,000 words) or art that explores Indigenous heritage or culture.

Your entry into the Aboriginal Arts & Stories competition must include a 200-400 word artist's statement that explains how your piece explores Indigenous heritage and culture and tells us a little about yourself. The prompts in the Artist's Statement section are guidelines; you may choose to express yourself differently.

You may enter online at [our-story.ca](http://our-story.ca), or by mail.

### ACTIVITY 1:

## The Power of Four

### A. Introduction to the Project Idea

The number four is sacred for many Indigenous people. It connects humans with the natural world. For example, we have four seasons of the year and four cardinal directions. There are four stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. The Medicine Wheel has four quadrants. Create an original piece of art that shows why the power of four is important in Indigenous cultures.

### B. Process: Understanding, Thinking and Sketching

1. Brainstorm things you can think of that come in fours. They may or may not have connections with Indigenous culture.
2. Add to your list by researching the importance of the number four. Start locally by asking people in your family or community. In some Indigenous communities, four is an important part of ceremonies and cultural practices. Remember that each Indigenous group is unique and they may not share the same ceremonies and beliefs.

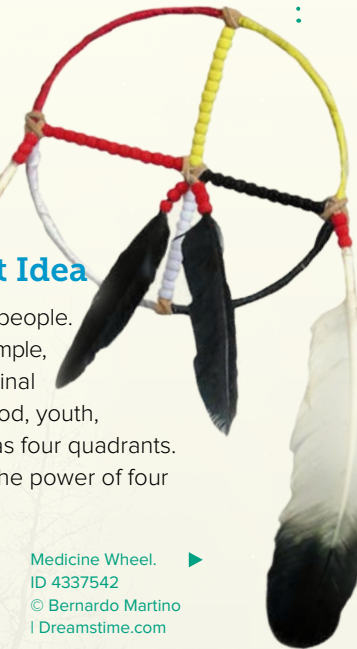
Also, some Indigenous wisdom is private, only for use by the group. It is important to respect that. Work with your teacher to research the history of the Medicine Wheel and the four directions teachings through books and websites.

3. Review your list and pick out several items that form pictures in your mind. Draw some sketches of different ideas to see how they might be visually represented.

### C. Artist's Statement: 200–400 words

I chose to make a piece of art about the number four because...  
The number four is important to me culturally because...

Medicine Wheel.  
ID 4337542  
© Bernardo Martino  
I Dreamstime.com



## ACTIVITY 2: Picturing Language

### A. Introduction to the Project Idea

Are you familiar with an Indigenous language, or are you learning one? Do you have a relationship with an Indigenous language even if you do not speak it? How could you transform language into a picture? Some artists like to express their ideas by putting words and pictures together in their art. Create your own piece of art that combines traditional language with images.

### B. Process: Understanding, Thinking and Sketching

1. Explore an Indigenous language to find words or sayings that hold an important meaning for you, your family, or your community. You may ask speakers in your community or consult printed language materials. Try listing some words that show feelings, such as love, anger, strength, or happiness. Think about words used to show how you feel about family connections, or connections with the land. You could even write your own sentence that reflects how you feel about your language, culture, or community.
2. Look at examples of how other artists have used text in their artwork. How do the words they chose connect to the ideas they are trying to show in their art? Start with some examples from past winners of this art challenge such as [Erica Giasson-Nolan](#) and [Eva Grant](#).
3. Decide on the theme of your art piece. It may be about how you feel when you are with members of your community, your grandparents, or Elders. It might express how you feel when you are out in nature. The words or sentences you choose may suggest the theme.
4. What visual elements go with your theme? You will want to combine text and images to create a composition. Draw a few sketches to get some ideas.
5. Decide what media to use for your art piece. What is the best way to represent your theme?

### C. Artist's Statement: 200–400 words

I decided to create an art piece about this Indigenous language because...

My relationship to this language is...

I used these words in my art piece because...

The phrase \_\_\_\_\_ is meaningful to me because...

I chose to design my piece in this way because...

## ACTIVITY 3: Sports in Action

### A. Introduction to the Project Idea

Put action into an artistic creation with an art piece about an Indigenous game or sport, or an Indigenous athlete.

Here are four ways you might look at this project:

1. Show action in a traditional sport or game. You might choose one that is not played anymore, or one that is still enjoyed, such as lacrosse or snow snaking.
2. Show action in a modern sport that is popular in Indigenous communities, such as basketball or soccer.
3. Show action through a famous Indigenous athlete of the past, such as runner Tom Longboat, Olympic water polo player Waneek Horn-Miller, or kayaker Alwyn Morris.
4. Show action through an Indigenous sports hero who is active today, such as women's boxing champion Mary Spencer or your favourite hockey player of Indigenous ancestry.

### B. Process: Understanding, Thinking and Sketching

1. Decide what part of the sports theme you would like to focus on — a sport, game, or an athlete. Will it be from the past or the present? Do some research and decide what appeals to you the most.
2. Once you have decided on the topic for your art piece, think about what parts of it you could use to show action. Think of what actions take place in the sport and how to best represent one or more of them.
3. Think about how you can make a clear connection with Indigenous culture in your art work. Depending on your topic, the connection may be obvious or it may need something added to make the connection clear.
4. What style will you use? You may decide to make a realistic composition that shows a sport in action, or you may choose to create an abstract design. A realistic picture would probably use realistic colours, while an abstract design could use other colours that help express the idea of action.
5. Once you have made your artistic choices, create a rough sketch of your ideas.

### C. Artist's Statement: 200–400 words

I chose to represent this sport or athlete because...

This sport or athlete is connected to my Indigenous culture because...



Montreal Canadiens goalie Carey Price, #31. ▲  
ID 41072673 © Jerry Coli | Dreamstime.com

Lacrosse Champions. Men from Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk Nation) at Kahnawà:ke who were the Canadian lacrosse champions in 1869. Image courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/C-001959. ►





## ACTIVITY 4: Relationships with the Land

### A. Introduction to the Project Idea

Traditionally, Indigenous people have held a deep connection to the land. Their traditional territories, and the plants and animals that live there, have given them strength for thousands of years. In this project you will reflect on your relationship to the land and design a piece of art that shows your relationship with the natural world.

▼ *The Bourke's*, Melanie Jewell, Fort Smith, Northwest Territories.  
Aboriginal Arts & Stories Winner, 2012.



### B. Process: Understanding, Thinking and Sketching

1. Think about some of the times you have been in nature. This includes being in a park, on a beach, out on the land, or on the sea. List some of the things you have seen, such as the wildlife, plants, trees, unusual rocks, rivers and lakes, or valleys. Try to visualize them in your mind.
2. How do you feel when you are in nature? Do you feel a connection between nature and your Indigenous culture? Conversely, do you feel that you do not have a relationship with nature, or have lost your relationship to the land? Try to express your feelings in words or pictures.
3. Talk to other people such as Elders, community members, and family members about their relationship to the land. What are some important feelings they have about the land, about a specific animal, or about a specific plant?
4. Think about how you can show the relationship between people and nature. How can you picture these feelings and connections? You may want to make a piece about your connection or disconnection with the natural world, about your community, or about Indigenous peoples' relationships with nature in general.
5. If possible, go for a walk in nature with an Elder or another adult. This could be in a park if you live in a town. Think about your relationship with the land as you observe the natural world.
6. Decide how you can best visually represent your relationship with the land. Will you create a painting or drawing? You may want to design a mixed media piece, or take photographs. Imagine a few ideas before making your final decision.

### C. Artist's Statement: 200–400 words

I have represented my relationship to the land by visually expressing...

My relationship with nature is important because \_\_\_\_\_ and I have shown this by...

This piece represents my relationship (or loss of connection) with nature by...

The elements of this piece that demonstrate my own feelings about the land are...

I chose to represent nature in this way because...

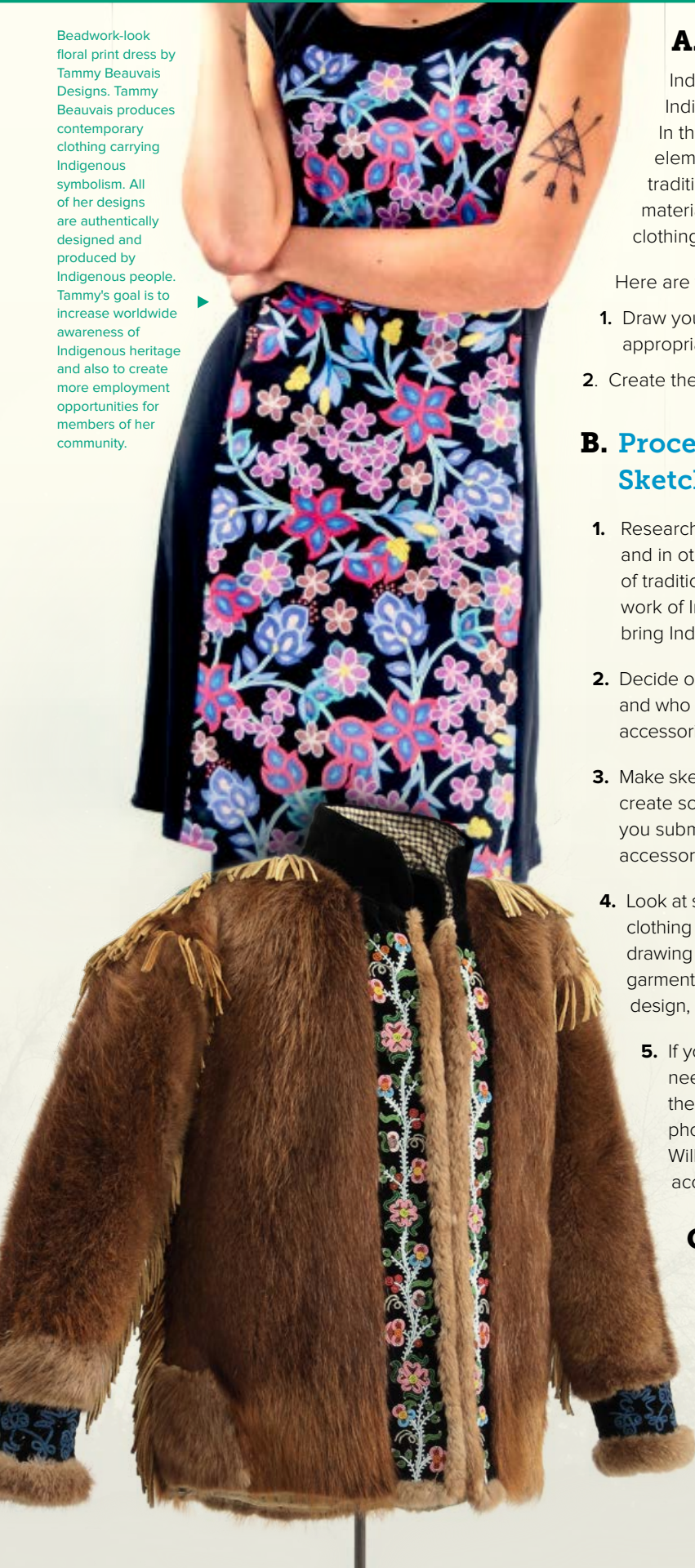
◀ *The Spirits of Our Ancestors*, Tania Larsson, Hammer, Ontario. Aboriginal Arts & Stories Submission, 2015.





## ACTIVITY 5: Indigenous Fashion Design

Beadwork-look floral print dress by Tammy Beauvais Designs. Tammy Beauvais produces contemporary clothing carrying Indigenous symbolism. All of her designs are authentically designed and produced by Indigenous people. Tammy's goal is to increase worldwide awareness of Indigenous heritage and also to create more employment opportunities for members of her community.



### A. Introduction to the Project Idea

Indigenous design is very popular in the fashion world and some Indigenous designers are creating in-demand, high fashion pieces. In this project you will design clothing or accessories that incorporate elements of Indigenous culture and heritage. The designs might use traditional styles of clothing or symbols. They may also use traditional materials or techniques, such as beading. Your design could be modern clothing, like a t-shirt that uses traditional designs, patterns, or symbols.

Here are two ways you can do this project:

1. Draw your fashion design on paper. Show the designs in colour on an appropriate background.
2. Create the design and photograph it. You will then submit the photo.

### B. Process: Understanding, Thinking and Sketching

1. Research traditional clothing used by Indigenous people in your local area and in other parts of the country. Read books in your library with illustrations of traditional clothing or search online for examples. Then research the work of Indigenous fashion designers to see the many different ways they bring Indigenous ideas into their clothing and accessories.
2. Decide on what type of clothing or accessory you would like to design, and who would wear it. You may want to design an outfit that combines accessories (such as jewellery, a hat, a belt, or shoes) and clothing.
3. Make sketches to develop your ideas. Will you use traditional designs or create something new? Decide on how you will present your design. Will you submit an illustration of the design, or will you make the clothing or accessory and send in a photograph?
4. Look at some designers' profiles to get ideas of how to present your clothing and accessories. Many fashion designers begin their work by drawing designs on paper. Often they will show the front and back of a garment. To make a finished art piece, add some other features to the design, such as a background or an interesting border around the page.
5. If you decide to create an actual garment or accessory, you will need to submit a photograph of it. This means you will have to make the piece and put some thought into how you will capture it in a photograph. Think about how to present it in an interesting way. Will you or a friend model it? Will you show the clothing or accessory against an interesting backdrop or use creative lighting?

### C. Artist's Statement: 200 – 400 words

I chose to create \_\_\_\_\_ because...

The garment/accessory that I designed/created relates to my Indigenous culture in the following ways...

This garment represents \_\_\_\_\_ elements of my Indigenous culture because...

◀ Dene coat, 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beaver fur, velvet, silk, cotton cloth, wool cloth, tanned and smoked hide, glass beads, metal beads, cotton braid and cotton thread. ME988.136.17 © McCord Museum