



Teaching Somali Immigrant Children: Resources for Student Success

Mulki Ali, Kelsey Franklin, Kerry Harvey, Guled Hussein,
Sarah Jane Lees, Jill Munro, and Bette Yelich, Authors

Pamela Young and Earl Choldin, Editors



**The Alberta
Teachers' Association**

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Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation
2nd Floor, 10575 114 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 3J6
Phone: (780) 453-2638
www.cmef.ca

Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 142 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1
Phone: (780) 447-9400
www.teachers.ab.ca
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Introduction

Many children from recent immigrant families face special challenges in school – cultural, language and social. Those challenges become their teachers’ challenges. The Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation and the Alberta Teachers’ Association are developing a series of resources that will be useful to teachers as they work with students and their parents from immigrant families.

Each resource is developed by teachers and community resource people with the assistance of a professional development consultant. This publication, the first in the series, addresses the challenges of Somali-Canadian students.

The teachers and community resource people worked in two teams, each team deciding what kind of resource it would develop that could meet the needs of Somali students, their parents, and the schools they attend. The teams worked Saturdays and evenings over a period of two months.

Comments and suggestions from readers and users will be appreciated. Please send them to echoldin@hotmail.com.

Working with limited funding, a single new volume is planned annually. With additional funding the process can be accelerated. Funding suggestions are welcome.



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Understanding Somali culture and immigration: A quick guide for educators

Mulki Ali, Balwin Elementary-Junior High School, Edmonton, Alberta

Guled Hussein, Centre for Race and Culture, Edmonton, Alberta

In a number of Canadian cities and towns, educators are receiving large numbers of Somali refugee and immigrant students in their classrooms. Immigration is a profoundly disruptive life transition requiring extensive adjustment and adaptation. These students may arrive with severely limited English language proficiency, and may have endured stressful socio-economic and emotional experiences. These experiences may contribute to negative attitudes towards school, poor behavior, lower academic performance and increased absences. Educators too may experience stress in their interactions with Somali students, due to the lack of a support system to understand the values, beliefs, backgrounds and socio-economic conditions of these students.

This guide is intended to assist educators to understand a little more about the backgrounds of and challenges facing Somali refugee and immigrant students. In Somali culture, educators are considered to be second parents. As such, teachers are expected to offer support to their students, to help and guide them to the “right path.” Somali people have a high expectation of educators to build a strong foundation for their children’s futures. Therefore, educators need to make an effort to understand the values and beliefs of their Somali students, who, from a Somali perspective, may be considered the teacher’s “newly adopted children.”

Overview of Somalia and Somali culture

Geography

Somalia is one of the oldest nations in the world. It is located in east Africa, near Kenya and Ethiopia. The

country is about the size of Texas, with an estimated population of 10 million people.

Religion

Somali people are Muslims. All social norms, attitudes, customs, gender roles and interactions are derived from Islamic traditions.

Food

Somali food is low in calories and high in protein. As Muslims, Somalis do not eat pork or drink alcohol. Somali families and friends eat with their hands and use a shared plate.

Social structure, family and gender roles

The family is deeply valued in Somali culture. Males are considered the head of the family. Women play important roles in decision making about children’s education, health care and participation in social activities.

Ethnicity

Somali people share common ancestors, culture and beliefs, and a common language and religion.

Education and Literacy

Before Western colonization, the Somali education system was based on religious studies. During the colonial era, a Western education system was introduced. Primary education was made available to all people. However, higher education was limited and out of reach for most.

History

From the 7th century until the 19th century when European colonization occurred, Somalia was a vibrant

nation and an important trade centre, linking Africa, Arabia and India. In the 1960s the country gained independence from its British and Italian colonizers. From 1970 to 1990, Somalia was ruled by a military dictatorship and the country became one of the most advanced military powers in Africa. Then the military government collapsed and civil and tribal war started, which continues to the present day.

The Somali immigrant's journey

The civil war has affected every aspect of Somali society including disintegration of families and communities, displacement of the entire population, and the destruction of the economic system, education, and health services. These fallouts of war have taken a heavy toll on children's lives.

Life in refugee camps

Before arriving in Canada, most Somali newcomers lived in refugee camps in Kenya for more than 10 years. They have been subjected, either directly or indirectly, to many kinds of physical and mental abuses. These abuses have severely impacted children's lives. Childhood becomes a nightmare experience in refugee camps. There are no formal schools, programs or stable individual family homes. Children are continually exposed to abuse and witness the inability of their parents or other important adults in their lives to make changes or take action. The experience of life in refugee camps has contributed to many children's sense of fear, lack of confidence, and trust in authority.

Life in Canada

For the most part, newcomers enjoy being in Canada and dream of rebuilding their family's lives. However, they face tremendous challenges starting life in a new country. Although there are no official statistics, most Somali newcomers are unemployed and live below the poverty line. The majority of Somali people came from rural backgrounds and were nomads or farmers. It is unlikely that they were exposed to any western education system. They are more likely to struggle in adjusting to life in Canada than immigrants from urban areas.

Attending school in Canada

Most parents aspire to the success of their children in Canada. However, their children may continue to suffer and feel isolated. In the school system, children may feel that they are not valued, and that they are outsiders within the student population. Their teachers may complain about Somali students' behavior and actions. These circumstances have contributed to some Somali students feeling hopeless about their future, developing aggressive behaviors, and exhibiting a lack of interest in school.

What can educators do?

Somali people have high expectations for educators and believe that teachers have short and long term impacts on their children's future. From the perspectives of parents, here are some recommendations on how to assist Somali children and youth to fulfill their potential:

1. Understand the needs and challenges facing newcomers.
2. Support new students and build their self-confidence.
3. Assist students to reduce the sense of fear that often characterized their lives before coming to Canada.
4. Value new students and build their sense of belonging in the classroom and the school community.
5. Exhibit positive attitudes towards and acceptance of Somali students.
6. Facilitate students' and parents' adaptation and adjustment to the new school system.
7. Ensure a safe school environment, free from racism and bullying.
8. Value and respect the culture and beliefs of Somali newcomers.
9. Establish collaborative networks with parents and students.
10. Establish and maintain communication between the school and the Somali community.

Community resources

Another way to establish a greater understanding of Somali culture is to explore the resources available to the community in your town or city. Why not try having a meal in a Somali restaurant, or shopping in a Somali grocery store? We have provided a list of places that provide services to the Edmonton Somali community.

Somali Organizations in Edmonton

The Somali Canadian Cultural Society of Edmonton (SCCSE)
13160-127 Street, Edmonton, AB, T5L 1B2
780-441-987
<http://www.somaliedmonton.com/english/>

Alberta Somali Community Centre (ASCC).
102, 10212-127 Av. Edmonton, ABT5E 0B8
780-757-3334
<http://www.albertasomali.com/>

Somali Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization (SCERDO).
12052 Fort Road, Edmonton, AB T5B 4H1
780-491-0233
<http://www.scerdo.org/>

Somaliland Cultural Association of Edmonton.
200, 10711-107 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5H 0W6
780-757-8773

Jama Jama Somali Media Society of Alberta
World Domination Headquarters
Room 0-09 Students' Union Building
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2J7
780-492-2577

Downtown Islamic Association
9216-105 Ave
Edmonton, AB

Somali Businesses

African Safari Restaurant
10610 105 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5H
(780) 423-6614

Mareeg Cafe and Restaurant
9420 118 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5G 0N6
780-757-2223

Banaadiri Xamereey Bistro
11732 95 St NW
Edmonton, AB T5G 1L9
780-474-6655

Kaffa Cafe and Dessert
9223 111 Ave NW
Edmonton, AB T5G 0A1
(780) 756-4788

Hamar Weyne Family Dining
9570 111 Avenue NW
EDMONTON, AB T5G 0A7
780-756-2626

Macmacaanka Waamo
1120 107 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5H 0X8
780-445-0713

Sahaba Restaurant Ltd
10715 107 Ave NW,
Edmonton, AB T5H 0W6
780-428-7774

Red Sea Restaurant
11040-107Ave
Edmonton, AB

Grocery Stores

Northeast Halal
7614 144 Ave NW
Edmonton, AB T5C 2R7
780-633-9158

Adam Store
10719 107 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5H 0W6
780-426-5533

United Halal Meats
11739 95 St NW
Edmonton, AB Canada
780-474-7774

Capital Convenience & Halal Meat
10804 107 Ave
Edmonton, AB, Canada
780-990-0930

Maca Halal Meats
10610 105 St NW
Edmonton, AB T5H2W9
780-969-9901

Cultural Stores

African Beauty Supplies
11748 95 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5G 1L9
780-471-2212

Fahmo Fashion Store
8608 118 Ave NW
Edmonton, AB T5B 0S8
780-758-3884

Iftin Store
9516 118 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5G 0N7
Tel: 780-474-7426

Yagleel Studio
11745 - 95 Street
Edmonton, AB
780-298-7761

Travel Agent

African Wings Travel TC
9227 111 Ave Edmonton AB T5G 0A2
780-757-4114

Ashaba Mosque

Downtown Islamic Association (Sahaba Mosque)
9216 105 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5H 0J5,
CANADA
780-757-8800



Where do you begin? Connecting your school with the Somali community

Mulki Ali, Somali Intercultural Consultant, Edmonton, Alberta

Kelsey Franklin, Balwin Elementary-Junior High School, Edmonton, Alberta

Sarah Jane Lees, Queen Elizabeth High School, Edmonton, Alberta

Jill Munro, Edith Rogers Junior High School, Edmonton, Alberta

“Where are we going wrong?” This is a common query that teachers and school administrators have when they are less successful than they would wish to be in involving immigrant parents in the school community. Fortunately, we discovered some potential new ideas through our discussions with members of the Somali community during the “Strengthening the School-Community Connection” program, and became even more aware of the need to listen carefully and respond sensitively to the messages and concerns that Somali parents share with us. As a result, we were able to develop a variety of strategies, some potential meeting topics, and community resources that could support families and assist schools to increase Somali parent involvement in the school community.

Our strategies are centered around making initial connections with the Somali community and then extending and enhancing those connections. We have also provided three appendices that list additional resources for further consideration. We encourage you to adapt and modify these strategies to your individual context as you build your own framework for addressing the needs of the Somali families in your own community.

Making Initial Connections

First, it is important to reach out to Somali families and invite parents to come to the school and become more involved. Whenever possible, this should be done with the support of intercultural consultants and other community leaders. Through these meetings, schools

may be able to identify school and community concerns that could be addressed collaboratively.

Second, once parents have made the choice to participate in such discussions, school personnel must be sensitive to the cultural practices that are fundamental to the Somali culture. Ignorance of Somali culture increases the risk of school staff members unintentionally offending and perhaps derailing the development of these new and fragile relationships. First meetings might be more successful if they were organized and chaired by someone from the Somali community. School personnel would assume the roles of participants in the meeting, acting as representatives of the school instead of leading the meeting.

Third, it would be helpful to find other opportunities to meet and communicate with families. This would support the development of strong families and support the students in our school communities. Schools could invite other community agencies to work with them to support Somali families. Co-hosting parent/family information sessions at the school would be one strategy for increasing communication opportunities. Please see <http://www.edmonton.com/moving-to-edmonton/immigrants.aspx> for a list of community agencies in the Edmonton area. This site lists agencies that can be helpful to families, with a brief description of each.

A list of agencies serving immigrants in Calgary can be found at <http://www.directionsforimmigrants.ca/calgary.htm>

Lists of agencies serving immigrants in other Alberta cities can be found at <http://www.aaisa.ca/settlementAgencies.php>

Extending Relationships

Connecting families through phone fans

Since oral traditions are an important characteristic of the Somali culture, it may be ineffective to send parents written invitations to come to the school, even if the invitations are translated into Somali. Instead, Somali parents would likely be more receptive to personal invitations made by phone. These phone call invitations could be made by intercultural consultants or by some of the Somali families within the community.

Planning culturally appropriate Parent Council meetings

Through the phone fan, parents could be invited to participate in the parent council meetings. In order to assist Somali parents who do not yet feel comfortable with these types of meetings, it might be beneficial to invite parents to come to the school prior to the meeting's beginning. Parents could then be briefed in Somali about the meeting topics. If they had comments, questions or concerns for the school, an intercultural consultant or a community spokesperson could ask those questions on behalf of the parents if they did not feel comfortable doing so themselves.

In addition, it is likely that meeting attendance would be increased if the pre-meeting time was seen as an opportunity for eating and socializing. Not only do these activities help to build relationships, but they honor traditional Somali cultural norms for gatherings and meetings. Since some parents may be coming directly from work to the meeting, and may not have afterschool childcare, providing food and activities for children of all ages may help to foster parent participation.

Setting up a community meeting place

Because many Somali parents drop their children off at school, it might be beneficial to provide a space in which parents could meet, have a cup of coffee or tea, enjoy conversation, and access support from another community member if they are experiencing challenges. This space could also act as a location where parents could receive English as a second language instruction through a conversation club, access a clothing exchange program, or find out about community services that would support their families. The establishment of a community hub could encourage parents to spend time

in the school, and assist them in becoming comfortable enough to forge relationships with the school staff.

Highlighting community needs and strengths

It is important for schools to ask parents and Somali community leaders to identify the community's needs. Schools could then collaborate with other community agencies to support parents in addressing these. A community immunization program, eye examinations, assistance with forms, taxes, and applications for housing or schooling are examples of services that could be offered. Formal informational sessions could include such topics as finding out about Registered Educational Savings Plans, scholarships, parenting strategies, or the criteria for high school graduation.

The Somali community should not be viewed from a deficit perspective, as each community has cultural wisdom and strengths that can enrich our schools and our ability to reach out to the families of students that attend our schools. Community strengths, therefore, need to be identified, emphasized and utilized within the school to guide the implementation of culturally appropriate activities. A *Somali as a First Language* tutorial program could be held in the school during non-instructional times. Also, community leaders could be invited to the school to talk about their work and act as positive role models for Somali youth.

Reaching the community through meetings, programs, and events

Community meetings could be held around some of the following topics:

- High school completion requirements
- University, college, and technical institute entrance requirements and fees
- Registered Apprenticeship Program
- Setting up Registered Education Savings Plan accounts
- The importance of maintaining/building first language literacy to foster second language academic success
- Recertification
- Government services to support children with disabilities

Community programs could be organized around some of the following activities:

- Collective kitchens for sharing recipes, resources for increased purchasing power and finding locally

available substitutions for ingredients in traditional recipes

- Clothing exchanges and ReUse fairs
- Heritage language adult programs taught by community volunteers
- Adult computer literacy and resume writing courses
- Home reading clubs using selections that respond to interests and needs of the community
- Afterschool activities which could involve parents or community speakers for homework club, peer tutoring, culture club or junior achievement

Community celebrations of student achievement could be organized around some of the following activities:

- Poetry cafe night in which students read their own work
- Student award nights
- Art exhibits
- Student science demonstrations
- Math fairs
- Book release party in which student writing is published and shared; could include posters explaining writing process and curricular outcomes

Community service and advocacy evenings could be organized around some of the following services:

- Car seat safety checks
- Vision screening
- Dental services
- Haircuts and styling
- Public library services, including giving families school library cards to support whole family literacy learning
- Tax services
- Collective letter writing on specific issues

Online Professional Development Resources

<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/MON-3%20Here%20comes%20everyone.pdf>

http://www.inclusiveeducationpdresources.ca/getting_started_in_esl_about.php

<http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/1218133/section2k12eslproficiencybenchmarks.pdf>

<http://education.alberta.ca/media/507659/eslcto9gi.pdf>

Somali recipes from local community member: <http://tammyssomalihome.blogspot.com/>

Somali words for teachers of Somali ELL students:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soMQdpSyBWw>



Let us tell you: Somali students' impressions of starting school in Canada

Kelsey Franklin, Balwin Elementary-Junior High School, Edmonton, Alberta

Sarah Jane Lees, Queen Elizabeth High School, Edmonton, Alberta

Jill Munro, Edith Rogers Junior High School, Edmonton Alberta

As the teachers of immigrant students, we tap into many informational sources as we strive to create the best possible educational experiences for our students – our past instructional experiences and those of our colleagues, professional development presentations, and content area journals. However, one source of knowledge we may forget to consult are the students whom we hope to engage with our teaching. Our students can provide us with their unique perspectives, thoughts and feelings that accompany their newcomer experiences, which we can in turn use to inform our teaching approaches and therefore, better serve our students' affective and academic needs.

The following selections were written by Somali high school students about their experiences arriving in Canada. They produced this writing as part of an in-class assignment in which they were responding to a short story about a girl who had moved from Cuba to the United States. Switching schools can be difficult for young people at the best of times, but when the change involves adjusting to an entirely new language and culture, it can be overwhelming. These students have offered to share their writing to help Canadian teachers understand their experiences and feelings as they worked to figure out a new school in a new country. The voices of the students highlight their individual thoughts, impressions, experiences and concerns as they adjust to life both inside and outside the classroom in their new culture. Although they are all Somali, and proud to be so, the differences in their observations act as an important reminder to teachers that immigrant students must be treated as individuals, even if they are members of the same cultural group. Although the writing showcases the differences between students, some common themes emerge as well. Many

of the students mention their discomfort with Canadian culture. As one student says, "Everything is strange and everything is different and everything is hard." The people, the language, the weather, even the "houses and the beds" are unfamiliar. One student mentions how much she misses mango trees. It is little wonder that the students report feeling "scared," "sad," "mad," or "lonely all the time."

Perhaps the strongest theme that runs through the students' writing is their need to connect with friendly faces among the students or staff in their new schools. Initially, many students feel vulnerable in the school environment, as if people are ignoring them, or even laughing at them. So, it is understandable that making a first friend represents a turning point in the lives of some students, both inside and outside of school. One friend can help a student negotiate life in the halls or lunchroom. Many students talk about their first friend as opening the door to other friendships. Some students give an early friend credit for teaching them English, and generally increasing their language learning, in various contexts throughout the day.

The importance of making friends points to the need for teachers to find ways to support relationship building within the classroom. Teacher observations during class breaks could help identify new students who may be feeling isolated. Opportunities for structured peer interactions might help these students develop new relationships. One student gives her teacher credit for helping her make a friend, by suggesting a partner for an in-class activity. It may be helpful to ask one student to act as an orientation mentor to a new student during his or her first week in school. Ice-breakers and partnered learning activities could be helpful in giving new students a chance to connect

with more than one student in the first few months. Understanding the significance of social relationships for immigrant students may encourage teachers to be tolerant of occasional off-topic conversations during class time. These conversations may be a crucial stepping stone to getting settled in a new school community. As a follow-up technique to these various relationship-building strategies, teachers could schedule one-on-one conversations with new students after their first month in school to see how they are adjusting. Asking at an early parent-teacher conference whether the student is making new friends could help identify the need for individualized social opportunities based on the student's existing interests and talents.

These are only a few strategies that you could use to help the immigrant students in your classroom feel more at ease in your school community. We hope you will think of others as you read the students' words. More importantly, we hope that you will find ways to access your own students' voices, listen carefully to their words, and consider ways you can act on their insights to support and ease their integration into our school communities. We believe the results will be worth the effort.

New Friend

Hani

When I came to Canada, I met new friends and new teachers at school. I was scared of the teachers because I didn't know them at that time. I am happy because now I know my teachers.

My first friend was Hani. She is my best friend at _____ School. She is nice. She has a beautiful face. I met her in class with Mr. Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy said, "You don't have a partner. You can be partners together." That's how we met.

New place

A.K.

"I will miss you!" When someone goes to move to a new place, such as a new city or even a new country, his or her friends usually tell him or her that. Thus, some people think that moving to a new place is not a good thing because they will be losing their old friends. However, you will find new friends. When you get a new place, new home, and new life, your life is going to change. You are going to see different things, like different people. People come from different countries.

They speak different languages. When you go school, you meet new friends.

Critical Condition

Abdishakur

It was two years ago when I fell on Sunday morning. It was something big for me and for my whole family that I was in critical condition. No one knew what was wrong with me because I was a healthy boy. But that is how life is, today you are healthy and maybe tomorrow you are dead. After several tests, the doctors discovered that I was suffering from a tumour on the left-side of my brain. That was what caused me to have a stroke. The stroke numbed the left side of my body. Doctors decided to make a surgery to decrease the size of the tumour. Now I am feeling good and I thank God

New Friends

Saoodah

The first time I came to Canada, I didn't have any friends, so I was lonely all the time. To make friends is so hard. To make a new life is so hard. I went to school everyday and, I didn't have a friend to talk to. I saw everyone at lunch time with a friend or in the class. I was really scared about the people, because back home everyone was same. They talk to each other back home but in this country I see everyone is different. They don't talk until you talk to them. In this country the girls are driving cars. Most girls do not wear a hijab. Their face is open. My first time I made a friend, she was so cute and kind. She just came at lunch time, and she asked about school, and if I have a friend. I told her this is my first time at school that someone talked to me. She said, "Oh that's mean, you are new at school." I said to her, "I started last week". She said "I can be you friend". I liked her and her name. Her name is Angel. She has a nice name. Then she showed me all the school. Later, I made lots of friends. Now I have a new friends and a new life. To make a friend is so hard. But to have a friend is so wonderful. Friends stand with you all the time. They make you smile, happy, and sometimes make you cry, you have to trust and respect, BFFs and good friends.

New country

Ajay

When I came to Canada, my life changed. Everything is different, the houses are different and beds are different. Then I went to school. I made new friends

and my friends changed my life. They taught me their culture of this other country and I had never learned these new things.

After that, one day my friends and I went to the mall and one of my friends told me to steal something. My other friends told me not to do that because I am new to the country. The guy who told me to steal, his name is A-- and my other friend is Mohamed. A-- and Mohamed had a fight because A-- wanted me to steal something so I can get in trouble.

After, when I learned how to speak English I started to hang with Mohamed not A--. A-- is a bad person and he always gets me into trouble but Mohamed always tells me to stay clear. One day, A-- came to me and asked me if we can go to the mall and steal something. I told him, "I am not hanging with you anymore." Because he is a bad person and I said, "We are not friends any more." Mohamed is a nice guy and funny but A-- is a bad person and always acts like a gangster.

After one year, my friend A-- went to Africa. When he came back, my friend had changed. He stopped acting like a gangster. He has become a good person.

New Friends

Dunia

When I first came to Canada, I started school in grade 6. I was scared because I never went to school with white people and people that speak English. There were no people that understood me. The people were friendly and kind and good-looking but I didn't know what they were saying. I got mad. I thought that they were being mean to me. Finally, one day, a Muslim girl named Selma came to my school. She looked nice, beautiful and was helpful to me. She was tall and shy too. But if I was friendly to her, she would talk to me. She talked to me in Somali but talked English with the other girls. She never left me behind. When I had her, I wasn't lonely and shy anymore. She changed my life. I love her so much and miss her when she is not with me.

She is good at soccer, really good at soccer and basketball. So I tried being nice and happy, so that the girls won't think I am crazy. The girls told Selma what they were saying and she told me in Somali. I was happier. Selma taught me English day-by-day. It kind of took me a long time to learn English. I learned some words, so I said thank you to Selma. It was really nice of her to teach me English. We all became friends. We played sports after school and went to each other's

houses. No matter where I go I always remember them. I liked her for who she was. It didn't matter to me how they looked. Now I have new friends, I have to treat them all the same. Treat them the way you want to be treated.

"A real friend is hard to find, difficult to leave and impossible to forget."

New Life

Gigi

My name is Gigi, I'm from Somalia. I moved to Canada. When I moved to Canada I had to make a new life and follow new rules. Everything is new, everything is strange, and everything is different. I have to go to a new school and see new people, to make new friends.

I remember the first time that I came to Canada. I saw a lot of white people. I was in the airport I saw a hundred white people I was thinking, "I'm the only girl that's black" and I'm like, "Wow! Mom, I want to go outside to see more people and see if there is a mix of people or not."

So when I started at a new school, I thought I'm going to see only white people. I was surprised, I saw mixed people like African people, Chinese people, and I was so happy to see all those people. I wanted to know if they were nice or not nice. I was so scared to talk to them. I didn't talk to anybody. I wanted to, but because I was scared to talk to them, but I smiled for them. I wanted to see who's nice and who's not nice.

When I graduate, I want to be a nurse. I want to study at the University of Alberta. I would like to be a nurse because I like to help people. I'm glad to be in Canada because I can easily study to become a nurse.

I miss mango trees. I miss how people used to be nice. I miss my best friend so much because she was nice to me every time that she saw me and we never fought.

New Life

Axmed

My name is Mohamed. I am from Somalia. I was living in Turkey with my sister for 5 years. Then we came to Canada one year ago. The country was so new to me and at that time I was so happy. I was so excited to see Canada. The first city I had been to was Ottawa. I liked Ottawa because Ottawa is so beautiful and they have hot girls and they have so many people. Then I left Ottawa because my sister told me, we have to leave. She

told me, we have to leave because she told me she has a friend in Edmonton. Then I told her, “Okay.” She told me, “We have to leave tomorrow.”

After that, the next day, we came to Edmonton. Then I started to go to school. At that time, I didn’t know how to speak English and my friend was laughing at me. Then, the first two days, I was sad because I didn’t know how to speak English. After that time, I started to speak English but not too much. Then I started to make friends at school. They started to love me because I was making something fun and they were laughing at me. I became friendly. They started to make me, his or her friends.

My sister started to go to school and she’s doing a good job and that’s good for her. She’s starting to speak English but not too much.

I will say something to the new people, who will come in this country. I will say, if someone looks at you don’t be mad. Because you might think “Who is this guy? And where is he from?” But don’t be mad.

New Life

Samiir

The first time you come to a new country that you like, it seems like you are in the right place. It is the place you wished to go but still you need help for everything like; money, a house, buying food and visiting your parents. It’s even hard to go anywhere without a car. You need to have a car, if it’s your car or your families’ car.

Where ever you go, whatever you see, when you come to a new country, everything is strange and everything is different and everything is hard.

There are three things that are always together; a new country, a new life and new people. Those three things are always together while you are in the world.

The City of Fort Saskatchewan

Abdullah

When I was in Fort Saskatchewan for the first time, I saw different stores and different people and different schools. The next day, I saw in the city, different jobs and different homes. They really are nice homes.

There is winter and summer. Winter is when the city is snowing so bad and is really cold. So I wear a jacket, like a big jacket. Summer is really nice. I play soccer outside with my best friends. People sit outside because sometimes it gets hot in summer

Who am I and where do I fit in? Lesson ideas to explore identity with immigrant students

Kerry Harvey, Balwin Elementary-Junior High School, Edmonton, Alberta
Bette Yelich, Queen Elizabeth High School, Edmonton, Alberta

As a result of our discussions with Somali cultural representatives during the “Strengthening School-Community Connections” project, it became clear to us that teachers of newcomers, and more specifically teachers of Somali newcomers in junior and senior high settings, struggle with helping their students adjust to their new school and culture. We decided that if educators could help youth explore their identities, they could assist students to find their place in their new school, community, and country.

We compiled the following lessons, handouts and sentence frames as a starting point for teachers who wish to explore identity with their students. The materials are not meant to be a cohesive unit plan, but rather a variety of activities, language structures, and discussion topics from which teachers can develop identity units that suit the needs of their own classes. They are designed for students at both high and low levels of language acquisition.

We divided the topic of identity into six areas:

- Birthday/Name
- Deep and Surface Culture
- Family
- Gender
- Migration Experience
- Values – Canadian Values / My Culture’s Values

The purpose of this project was to compile lessons, handouts, sentence frames and activities that fit into each of these categories. This compilation is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of the topic of identity, but rather a starting point, and an invitation to other educators to consider their own ideas for helping newcomer youth explore their identity. We recognize that a significant missing piece is lessons that guide newcomer youth’s exploration of their own cultural identity. We hope that this will occur in the classroom through discussions with parents and students, and through the contribution of community representatives and elders who have been invited to the classroom.

Lessons that Explore Birth date and Identity

Note: It is not uncommon for refugee children not to know their true birthday. Birth records may not have been kept in their home countries, or may have been lost during the migration journey. Teachers are advised to determine this situation before beginning lessons on birthdays and then to decide if the lessons are appropriate for their students.

Lesson – On the day I was born... a Family Interview

Objectives:

Writing/speaking → Students generate interview questions (who, what, when, where, how, why)

Speaking/listening → Students ask parent(s) interview questions

Listening/writing → Students listen to and record parents' answers

Reading/speaking → Students share information collected with their classmates

Procedure:

1. Review of *who what when where why how* question forms
2. **Brainstorm** → Where could you look to find information about the day you were born?
 - Newspapers

- The Internet
- Parents

3. **Brainstorm** → What do you want to know about the day you were born?

- Generate questions as a group.
- Record answers on chart paper.
- Guide discussion so that students come up with questions similar to the attached recording sheet.

4. **Interview Parents** → Give students recording sheets and get them to **ask their parents** the questions. Tell them they can use their first language if they need to, but should record their answers in English.

5. **Students share their birthday interviews with the class.**

6. **Students write paragraphs about the day they were born.**

7. **On the following two pages are useful handouts:**

- a) Parent Interview Recording Sheet - "On the day I was born . . ."
- b) Paragraph Organizer - "Let me tell you about the day I was born"

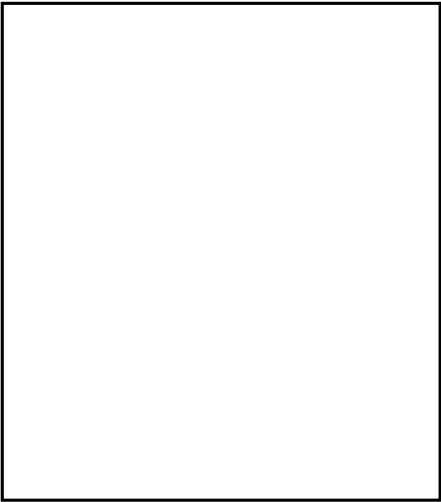
A list of wonderful read aloud books about names and their meanings can be found at: www.state.lib.la.us/empowerlibrary/storybooks%20about%20names.pdf

On the day I was born . . .



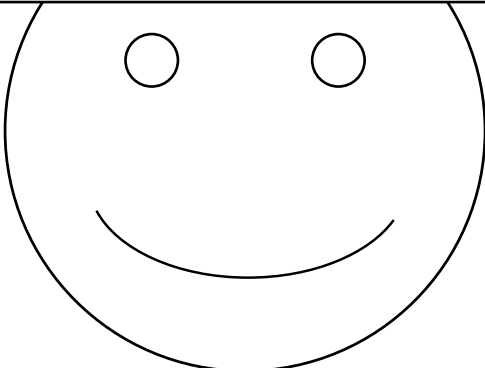
My _____ chose my name _____
because _____.

This is what I looked like



My parents felt

My brothers and sisters felt



	Where	
Day		Month
	Year	

Let me tell you about the day I was born.

I was born on _____ ,
in _____ .

On the day I was born the weather was _____
_____ .

I was named _____ by my _____ .

My _____ chose my name because
_____ .

My name means _____ .

When they met me, my parents felt _____ ,
_____ and _____ .

My brothers and sisters felt _____ .

My family says I looked _____ .

Lessons that Explore Culture and Identity

1. Lesson - Culture, values, and action

People have many different experiences when they move from one country to another. They have to learn about the new culture and adjust to their new life in that culture. They learn about new cultural markers/values while maintaining their old ones.

What was your experience when you moved from your home country to Canada? What cultural markers/values did you keep from your home country? What new Canadian markers/values did you gain?

In your groups, read through these questions and discuss them. Share your answers for each question with your partners, and write your answers on this sheet.

Vocabulary:

Cultural markers – the parts of culture on the “outside”; the things we see, such as language, clothing, music, social/communication habits, etc.

Cultural values – the parts of culture we don’t see; the ideas or beliefs that are important to a culture.

Assimilation – to become part of the culture you have moved to, and lose your own culture.

Acculturation – to adjust to, and fit in to your new culture by taking parts of the new culture and keeping parts of your own culture.

Community-building strategies – actions taken by a group to bring people together and keep them together.

2. Lesson - Introduction to Identity – Legal and personal identity: What is the difference?

This lesson can be found at the website: www.planidproject.net/teacher_resources/coreplan

3. Sentence Frames – Beginning Level - Talking About My Culture

I can talk about my culture

My name is _____ .

I am from _____ .

Let me tell you about my culture.

In my home country we eat

_____ .

In my home country we wear

_____ .

In my home country we play

_____ .

In my home country the weather is

_____ .

In my home country we celebrate

_____ .

Culture Values and Action

1. What cultural markers have you kept since you or your parents moved to Canada? (name 3 or more)

2. What cultural markers have you given up since you or your parents moved to Canada? (name 3 or more)

3. What are 3 to 5 values that are important to your cultural group?

For example, the Dinka people believe in group well-being, communication and the importance of all people having a voice, consensus (all people agree), serving the community, well-defined gender roles (men don't cook), humor, song, etc.

4. What Canadian values have you adopted since you or your parents moved to Canada?

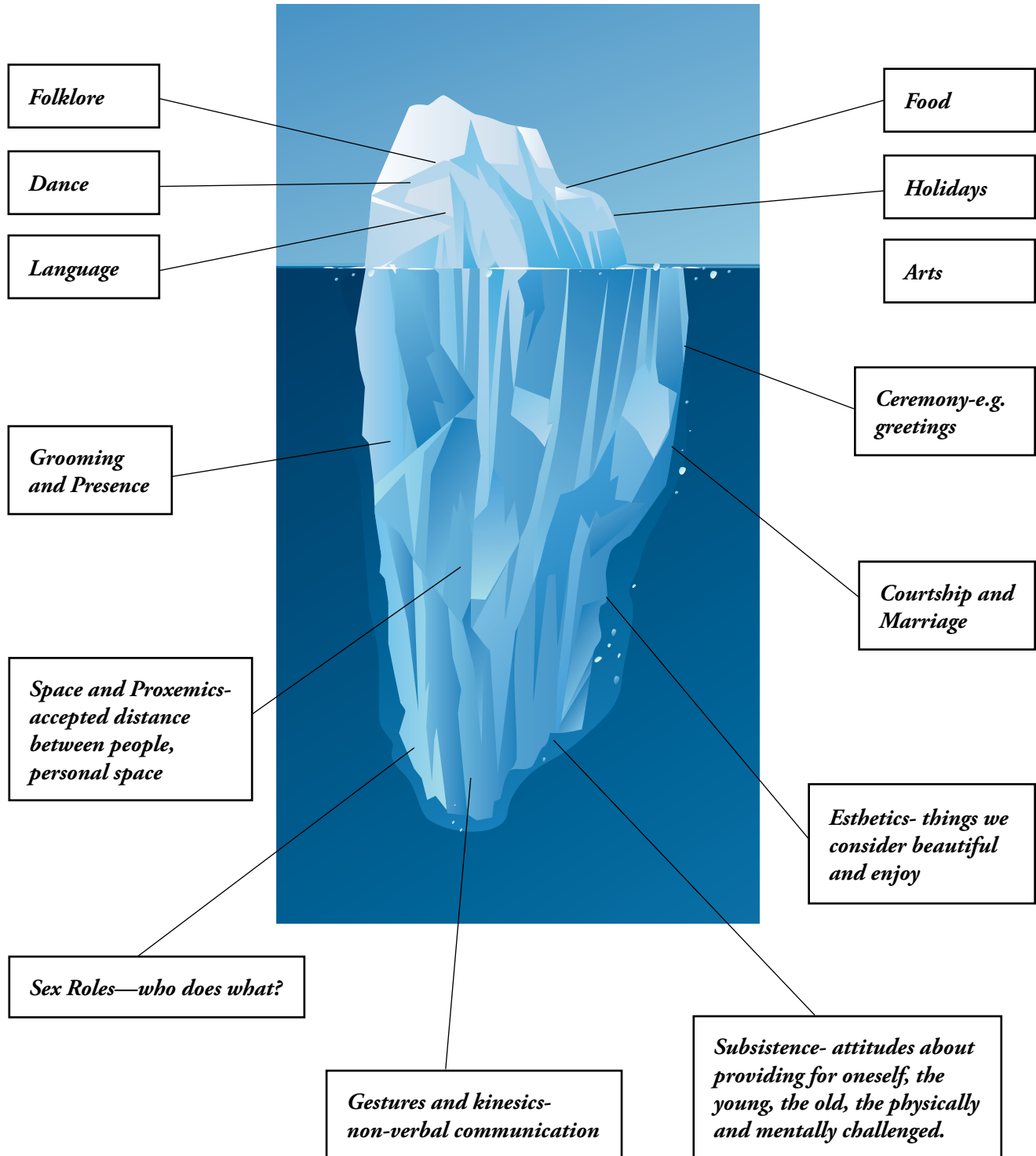
5. How do you stay involved in your cultural community?

6. Do you feel you have assimilated or acculturated? Give 2-3 examples.

Handout – Surface and Deep Culture

My Culture: _____

Add examples of your culture's surface and deep cultural markers/values to the diagram: below:



Lessons that Explore Family and Identity

1. Sentence Frames - Beginning Level – My Family

I can talk about my family

My name is _____ .

I am from _____ .

Let me tell you about my family.

In my family there are ____ people.

I have _____ .

He/She is _____ .

I have _____ .

He/She is _____ .

I have _____ .

He/She is _____ .

I love my family.

Lessons that Explore Gender and Identity

Lesson - How does Gender Influence Identity? – can be found at www.planidproject.net/teacher_resources/coreplan

Lessons that Explore Migration and Identity

Recommended Resource: –

Livesey, Robert, *Coming to Canada*, Little Brick School House, 1994.

Coming to Canada Assignment

The study of history has both personal and societal value. On a personal scale, it helps us to place ourselves within a wider framework – to see how we, and our families, play roles within a regional, national and global context. History is not just about others; it is also about us. The purpose of this assignment is two-fold: to come to a better understanding of what has happened to our own families over time and to see how we fit within the framework of a growing young nation, Canada.

Part 1: Family decisions

1. When did your family decide to immigrate to Canada? Explain why and when they did so.
2. What were the “**push factors**” – the reasons why they left their original home?
3. What were the “**pull factors**” – the reasons why they chose to come to Canada?

These will involve research into conditions in the country of origin at the time of emigration and conditions in Canada at the time of arrival.

Pay particular attention to important local, national or world affairs happening at the time.

Did these affect your family’s decision to move?

4. Give some background information - Did you live in a city? Town? Rural area? What did your parents do for work? Were you involved in the decision making process to leave your country? What language(s) did you speak at home before you came to Canada?

5. More information - Did you know how to read and write in your own language before you came here? Did you go to school before you came here? For how many years? How much English did you know before your arrival?

Part 2: Your journey

1. Before you got here, what was your view of Canada and of what your life here would be like?
2. What family members or friends left with you?
3. How long did it take from when you left your home until you arrived in Canada?
4. Describe the journey. Did any noteworthy, exciting, or unexpected happenings occur on the journey?
5. How did you feel during the journey?

Part 3: Arrival in Canada

1. Where has your family lived in Canada? Where did they come to first?
2. Why and when did they come to [the city/town you live in]?
3. Since you arrived, how have your family’s attitudes toward your former country and Canada changed?
4. If you still have contact with relatives in the “old country,” note how your family’s lives here are similar or different to family members there.
5. Are you glad that your family made this move? Why or why not?

Part 4: Map component

On the world map provided or maps that you create or find, show the following:

1. Your country of origin.
2. The capital city of that country.
3. The city or area where your family came from.
4. The probable route that your family took in coming to Canada (if possible, specify the type of transportation used in brackets next to the route.)
5. Your family's first place of residence in Canada.

(cut here and attach to your story)

MY JOURNEY TO CANADA



Lesson - Migration Experience

for Beginner Language Learners

Resources:

My Name is Sangoel, Karen Lynn Williams

Blank white paper and coloured pencils

Globe

Chart paper

Sentence Strips

Fill in the blank writing sheet

Abstract:

This is an initial lesson in a larger unit that explores students' identities. This lesson explores students' migration experiences / coming to Canada. It involves a read aloud of the book *My Name is Sangoel* by Karen Lynn Williams. This is followed by a discussion about the students' own experiences coming to Canada and modeled speaking and writing activities supported with sentence stems. The final output for students will be a short speech about their experiences and a short written paragraph/fill-in-the-blanks exercise.

Objectives:

Listening/Reading: Read Aloud - Read aloud the book *My Name is Sangoel* and model the following: reading fluency; using context to figure out new vocabulary; making background connections/connections to personal experiences, listening for the gist of the story (Level 1) or for details (Level 2/3)

Speaking: Use sentence frames to support talking about personal experiences.

Writing: Text structure writing – Model a short paragraph using write aloud and sentence stems.

Procedure:

1. Reading Strategies modeled: Brief introduction to *My Name is Sangoel* book – Look at the cover and

make predictions. What will the story be about? Who is Sangoel? Where do you think he is from? Why is he telling people his name? Why is he standing apart from the other boys?

2. Listening to/Reading the story: Highlight important parts of the story on stickies as you read the story. Allow for some discussion but don't let it slow down the flow of the story too much.

3. Listening and drawing/representing: Use a world globe for support. Give an example of a move you have made, or tell a story of someone else's move. Illustrate this story for the students with a brief sketch.

Post sentence frames:

Hello, my name is _____.

I am from _____.

I came to Canada in _____ (____ years ago).

First, I went to _____.

Second, I went to _____.

Then, I went to _____.

Finally, I came to Edmonton.

I like my new home.

4. Background Connections/representing student journeys: Ask students to draw a picture similar to the one you sketched of your journey.

5. Speaking: Students share their drawings and experiences using sentence stems for support.

6. Writing: Provide students with a fill-in-the-blank writing sheet with the sentence stems they have already used in their oral speech.

I can talk about
my migration experience

My name is _____ .

I am from _____ .

I came to Canada _____ years ago.

First, I went to _____ .

Then, I went to _____ .

Next, I went to _____ .

Finally, I came to Edmonton.

I really like my new home.

Lessons that Explore Values and Identity

Lesson 1 – What are Canadian values?

Canada is a large country with a diverse population that is continually changing. Canada accepts approximately 200,000 new immigrants a year. As educators, we are constantly helping new students negotiate Canadian culture. But at times, it is even difficult for Canadians to answer the questions “What is Canadian culture and what are Canadian values?”

Brainstorm with students a list of possible Canadian values. Some might be:

1. Multiculturalism
2. Diversity (e.g. providing gay/lesbian Canadians with full protection and equal treatment under the law including access to civil marriage)
3. Respect for human rights
4. Freedom of choice - religion, language, speech, etc.
5. Democratic values
6. Peacekeeping
7. Rule of law
8. Respect for authority
9. Bilingualism
10. Gender equality

Explore how factors such as regional differences, political ideology, religious beliefs, gender, etc. all affect a person’s values and thus there is a wide range of accepted Canadian values.

To see how others view us, you might want to look at the E-diplomat website

http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_ca.htm

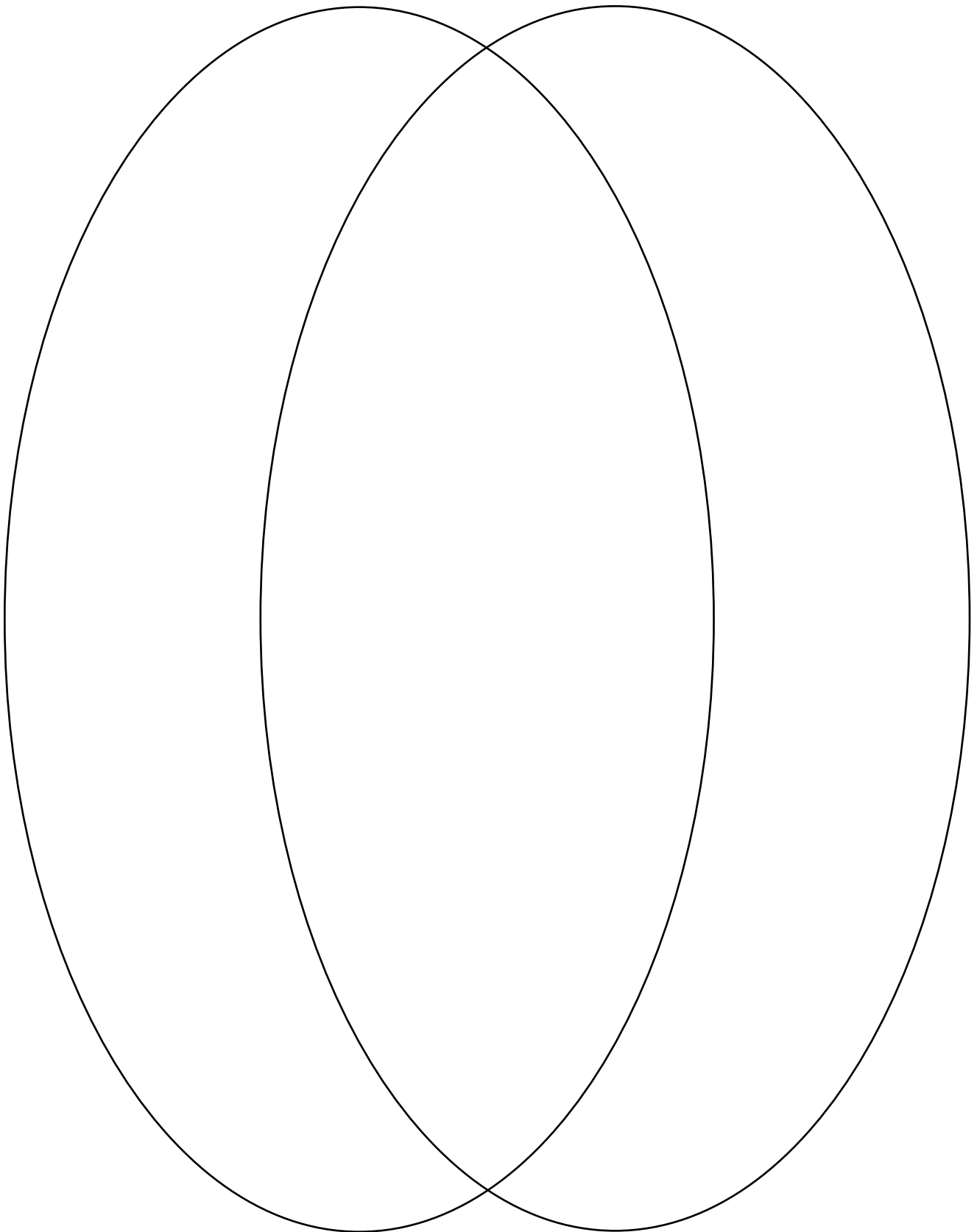
Lesson 2 - How are Canadian values different from and similar to the values of my homeland culture?

Building on the previous brainstormed list of Canadian values, students now have the opportunity to consider how their homeland culture’s values are similar to and different from Canadian values. Using the Venn diagram that follows, have students individually or in groups fill in the diagram. Students do not necessarily need to agree on the similarities and differences, but can use these as the starting point for an assignment on the challenges posed when two cultures hold different values. Students can discuss, write about, or visually depict the following:

Give an example of a time when one of your cultural values clashed with a Canadian cultural value. What happened? How did you address this challenge? What did you learn as a result of this experience?

Canadian Values

My Values



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