

Bringing Métis Children's Literature to Life— The Story of the Rabbit Dance

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Overview of Story: In this charming story for young children, Métis trapper Jacques witnesses the creation of the “Rabbit Dance.” He then teaches it to his family and friends.

Themes in this book:

- Family
- Ways of living: Trapping
- Dance: “Rabbit Dance,” “*Danse du Crochet*”
- Traditional Métis lifestyles
- Gatherings/socials

Possible Curriculum connections:

Language Arts

- Listen, View, comprehend, and respond
- Procedural writing

Science

- Interdependence (human and animals)
- Diversity of living things in local ecosystems
- Habitats

Arts Education

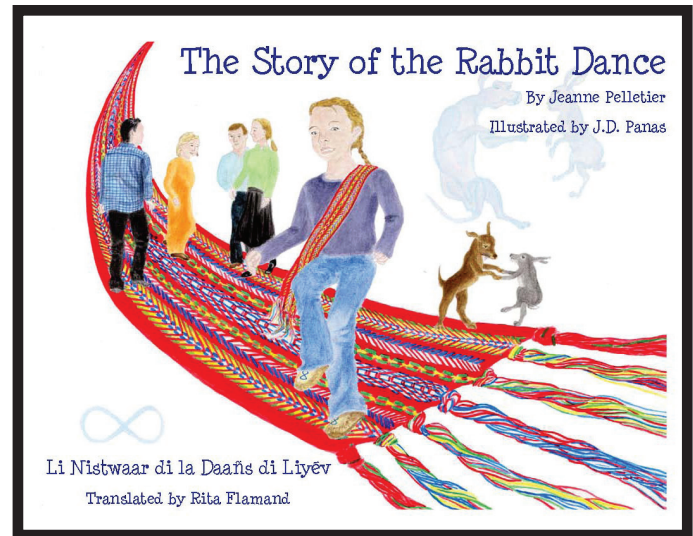
- Parfleche bag
- “Rabbit Dance”
- “*La danse du crochet*”

Social Studies

- Traditional lifestyles (trapline)
- Family
- Cultural traditions/worldview
- Cultural change over time

Before Reading: Discuss creation stories (Creation stories give an explanation of how ordinary things in life came to be). They are sometimes called “*pourquoi*” stories as *pourquoi* asks “why” in French. Pose questions and have students **infer**: How did skunks get their stink? Why are crows black and not other colours? etc. Get students to start thinking of “I wonder how ____ came to be,” questions. Record them on chart paper.

Tell the students they are going to listen to a story where the origin of the “Rabbit Dance” is explained. Tell them to listen carefully.



During Reading: Read the first 17 pages without stopping. When you get to page 17, ask the students to listen carefully because the author is going to give directions to do the “Rabbit Dance” within the story. Read each page slowly. Ask the students to **recall the important directions** as you record them on chart paper.

E.g.: Page: 19: two rows with rabbits on one side and dogs on the other.

Page 23: Dog swings rabbit and then dog chases rabbit by side-stepping in a figure eight formation. Tag the rabbit. Everyone in the line has a turn.

Page 25: Do the same thing. Rabbits chase the dogs by side-stepping in a figure eight. Tag the dog. Everyone has a turn.



After Reading: Have the students (based on the book) list the components of the “Rabbit Dance.” Write on chart paper. Then reveal the actual “Rabbit Dance” calls and **compare** the two. Fill in the missing **details** for a successful dance.

- Listen to the “Rabbit Dance” music. Break the students into groups of four partners (8 people). Have them learn the “Rabbit Dance.”

The “Rabbit Dance”: La “Daañs di Liyéw”: Everyone can do the “Rabbit Dance” and it is a lot of fun for the students.

You may want to use props for this dance (rabbit ears and puppy tails).

1. Form two lines—rabbits on one side and dogs/foxes on the other.
2. The lead couple faces each other and holds hands with wrists in crossed position.
3. The lead couple side gallops down the centre and back again. The others stay in line position.
4. The lead couple elbow swings.
5. The lead puppy releases the lead rabbit and chases the lead rabbit (using the side-step) down the middle, around the puppies, down the middle and around the rabbits (makes a figure eight).
6. The lead puppy tags the lead rabbit on the shoulder.
7. The lead couple join hands and goes to the end of the line. The next couple becomes the lead couple.
8. Repeat steps 1-7.
9. The dance is repeated until all couples have had a turn being the puppy and the rabbit.

- The “Rabbit Dance” was based on La “Danse du Crochet,” a traditional contra dance. This dance has much Métis symbolism (weaving of the sash, figure 8, etc.) and repetition. If you wish to learn it, here are the calls:

La “Danse Du Crochet”

1. Line up holding hands—women on the right side of the men in two lines
2. Face each other in two lines
3. The first couple joins hands and promenades to the end of the line, turns and dances, back down the line to the beginning.
4. Let go of hands and lady turns right and man turns left to dance around to the end of the line.



5. Join at the end of the line and dance down the middle to the front again.
6. The first couple (only) link elbows and swing, then let go.
7. The first woman links arms with the second man down the line.
8. Then links with partner in the middle. Keep going until you have linked arms with all the men in the line and with your partner in the middle.
9. Go to the beginning of the line again. This time, link elbows, swing, and the men link arms with all the women in the line, and with partner in the middle.
10. When the couple gets to the end of the line, they link arms and return to the beginning of the line.
11. This time, the couple links elbows and the men link with the women in the line and the women link with the men down the line meeting in the middle to elbow swing.
12. When the couple gets to the end of the line they elbow swing and return to the beginning of the line and then back to the end of the line.
13. The next couple repeats the process.
14. The next couple repeats the process, etc ...

**This dance is a little more complex than the "Rabbit Dance."

