GORD DOWNIE & CHANIE WENJACK FUND

Lesson Plan

# DWF LESSON PLAN: *NECHAKO*

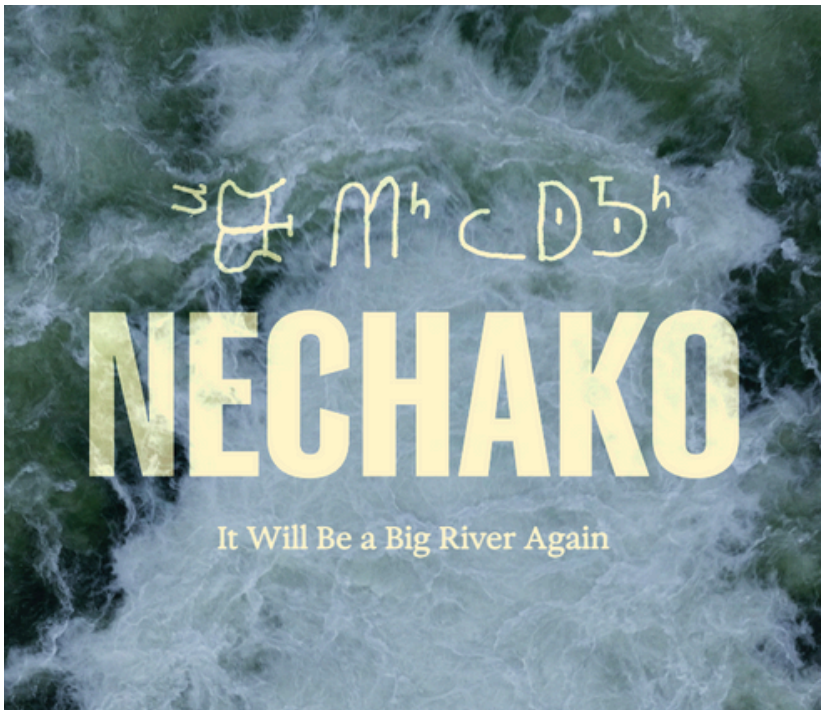
*It Will Be A Big River Again*

## SUGGESTED AGES:

Grades 8-12

## SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS:

Social Studies, Indigenous Studies, Geography, Environmental Science, Civics, English Language Arts




## DURATION:

2–4 class periods (90 minutes for *Nechako – It Will Be A Big River Again* viewing, 25-30 minutes for DWF LIVE: Restoring a River, Reclaiming a Way of Life with Lyana Patrick and Jasmine Thomas, and 80-100 minutes for further class discussion and research)

**Disclaimer:** Educators and group leaders are responsible for ensuring lessons and materials presented in their classrooms or groups are appropriate for their unique students.

ONF NFB EDUCATION

**Please note:** *Nechako*: *It Will Be A Big River Again* includes occasional strong language used in emotionally charged moments. These expressions reflect the real frustration and pain of community members affected by the Nechako River's history. Educators are encouraged to preview the film to determine suitability for their class and provide context as needed. For younger students or if strong language is a concern, you can mute or skip those brief moments. Before viewing, let students know the language reflects genuine emotion, not disrespect, and helps convey the depth of the community's experience, then discuss why such language can appear in authentic storytelling about trauma and resilience.

## ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO:

- Focus on the emotion and intent behind the words.
- Reflect on how language can express injustice and the need for change.
- Listen with respect and empathy.

## OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the environmental and cultural significance of the Nechako River to the Stellat'en and Saik'uz Nations.
- Explore how colonization, industrial development, and dam construction have impacted Indigenous lands and waterways.
- Examine the ongoing legal and moral battle for the restoration of the Nechako River.
- Build empathy and awareness about Indigenous-led environmental advocacy and sovereignty.
- Inspire students to reflect on their role in reconciliation and environmental stewardship.

## MATERIALS:

- **NFB: *Nechako: It Will Be A Big River Again*** (1 h 30 min)
- **NFB Discussion Guide *Nechako: It Will Be A Big River Again***
- **DWF LIVE: Restoring a River, Reclaiming a Way of Life**
- Internet access for research
- Audiovisual equipment (projector, speakers, etc.)
- Student notebooks, sticky notes, sketch paper, or digital note-taking tools
- Chart paper or digital collaboration tools (Canva, Miro, Jamboard, etc.)
- Pencils, markers, etc.

# LESSON PLAN

## INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES):

- Play *Nechako: It Will Be A Big River Again* **trailer** (less than 2 minutes) from the NFB website.
- Use this **map of the Nechako River in British Columbia** (or search online for a different map) to locate the **Stellat'en** and **Saik'uz** First Nations.
- **Ask students:**
  - What role do rivers play in sustaining life, culture, and community?
  - What might happen when a river's flow is changed or restricted?
- **Provide background:** In the 1950s, the Kenney Dam was built to power an aluminum smelter, drastically reducing the Nechako River's flow and devastating the land and salmon and sturgeon populations. Today, the Stellat'en and Saik'uz First Nations are leading a landmark legal battle to restore their river and reclaim their way of life.

## *NECHAKO – IT WILL BE A BIG RIVER AGAIN* VIEWING (1 HOUR 30 MINUTES):

Watch ***Nechako: It Will Be A Big River Again***

**Encourage students to take notes on:**

- The effects on First Nations families, water, land, law, animals, vegetation, and Indigenous rights.
- Voices and perspectives shared by community members in the film.
- Emotional or powerful moments in the film.
- Actions taken by the Stellat'en and Saik'uz Nations to protect the river.

## GROUP DISCUSSION (20–30 MINUTES):

**Facilitate a discussion using the following guiding questions:**

1. How does the film show the deep relationship between the river and the Stellat'en and Saik'uz Nations?
2. What does this story teach us about reconciliation and environmental responsibility?
3. Read page 3 of the ***Nechako Discussion Guide***. Select one question that stands out and discuss it as a class.
4. How can we support Indigenous-led restoration projects in our own communities?

## ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):

Play **DWF LIVE: Restoring a River, Reclaiming a Way of Life**

After watching or listening to DWF LIVE: Restoring a River, Reclaiming a Way of Life with Lyana Patrick and Jasmine Thomas, discuss or write responses to the following questions:

1. What inspired Lyana Patrick to tell the story of the Nechako River through film, and how does storytelling help protect land and culture?
2. How does Jasmine Thomas's role as a Stewardship and Reconciliation Lead connect to the themes in the film?
3. What do both speakers teach us about the connection between community, environment, and identity?
4. Why is it important for Indigenous Nations to lead efforts to restore lands and waters like the Nechako River?
5. What is one way you could apply your creativity, leadership, or community action to protect a place that matters to you?

## ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):

**Option A – Creative Reflection:**
Students create a visual or written piece titled "If the River Could Speak…" that expresses the Nechako River's story, voice, and hope for renewal. (Media options: poem, drawing, spoken word, letter, or short video.)

**Option B – Research & Action Project:**
Using the ***Nechako Discussion Guide***, have students explore the ecological and social impacts of the Nechako River hydroelectric project, including declining salmon and sturgeon populations and Indigenous fishing rights. After a brief introduction to the case, ask students to form small groups with assigned roles – researcher, rights analyst, planner, and presenter – and spend about 15 minutes investigating ecological, legal, or community perspectives. Groups will then spend another 15 minutes designing a small-scale restoration or advocacy plan, such as community-based monitoring, awareness campaigns, riparian planting, or collaborative governance proposals.

## CONCLUSION (15 MINUTES):

**Invite each group to share reflections or project ideas:**

**Option A:** Have students reflect on their artistic choices and creative process for their *"If the River Could Speak..."* pieces, including:

- What ideas, emotions, or experiences influenced their design or theme?
- How they chose their materials, techniques, or composition.
- Challenges they faced and how they solved them creatively.
- What they learned about their own creative process through this project.

Remind students to write in their own voice, emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers. Encourage them to focus on explaining their thinking and decision-making as artists.

**Option B:** Have students share their process and ideas for developing realistic solutions that balance Indigenous rights with environmental protection, explaining how collaboration between Indigenous communities and government bodies can lead to fair and sustainable outcomes. Discuss potential challenges that might arise and how they could be addressed respectfully and effectively.

**End with a class "River Promise":** a short collective statement affirming respect for water and commitment to reconciliation.

- **River Promise Example:** "We promise to listen to the water, to care for the land, and to learn from those who came before us. We will use our voices and actions to protect the rivers, lakes, and streams that give us life. Together, we walk in respect, understanding, and reconciliation."

## ASSESSMENT:

- Student engagement during viewing and discussion
- Depth of reflection in written or creative work
- Group collaboration and presentation quality
- Demonstrated understanding of reconciliation and environmental justice

## EXTENSIONS:

- Research the status of the Stellat'en and Saik'uz Nations' legal proceedings.
- Explore other Indigenous-led restoration projects in Canada (e.g., **Nibi Walk**).
- Explore the Further Reading section of ***Nechako Discussion Guide*** (page 10).
- Partner with local Indigenous communities for a land-based or water stewardship activity.
- Explore page 10 of the discussion guide for further reading and ways to take reconciliACTION.
- Write a news article covering the most recent updates regarding the Stellat'en and Saik'uz Nations' legal proceedings and try to have it published in the school newspaper or local news sites.

## LEGACY SCHOOLS EDUCATOR REFLECTION AND IMPACT QUESTIONS:

Please complete the short **Feedback Form:**
**https://www.tfaforms.com/5201366**

Your feedback helps DWF improve resources and support reconciliation-focused learning throughout Canada. Plus, each submission enters you into our monthly draw for classroom resources!

**Stage I – Short Term Results (Respect and Empathy, Learning History and Impact)**

- How did this lesson help students understand the impacts of colonization and industrial development on Indigenous lands and communities, while fostering empathy, emotional connection, and respect for Indigenous perspectives and the importance of water?

**Stage II – Medium Term Results (Reflection, Taking Action, Reciprocal Relationships)**

- How did this lesson help students connect the fight for the Nechako River to broader themes of reconciliation and environmental stewardship, and understand the importance of reciprocal relationships through listening, learning, and acting alongside Indigenous voices?

**Stage III – Long Term Results (Shifting Institutional Values and Culture)**

- How might this lesson inspire your school to strengthen its approach to reconciliation, sustainability, and social justice education by integrating Indigenous-led environmental perspectives while making Indigenous leadership and land-based learning a central part of teaching practice and curriculum design?