

Background Information

Teacher note: The purpose of this excerpt is to provide background information to support *Examining Cross-cultural Observations* MT. It is intended for use within the context of the *Modelling the Tools* resource only. Terminology found in the excerpt must be considered within the context of the historical time period.

The following excerpt is intended to help students recognize that anthropological accounts are culturally sensitive and, as such, may reflect elements of cultural superiority, ethnocentrism and stereotyping. This account by Dom Guy Oury offers one First Nations perspective on the arrival of Jesuit priests in First Nations communities.

Epidemics

The first epidemics of small pox and measles coincided with the arrival of the Jesuits (who were probably responsible for bringing the disease) in 1635–1640. In this passage, Marie de l’Incarnation (the founder of the Ursuline Order of Nuns) reported on a speech by one of the oldest woman Elders given at an assembly of four tribes, providing us with a rare First Nations’ point of view.

It is the Black Robes who make us die by their spells; listen to me, I prove it by the reasons you are going to recognize as true. They lodged in a certain village where everyone was well, as soon as they established themselves there everyone died except for three or four persons. They changed location and the same thing happened. They went to visit the cabins of the other villages, and only those where they did not enter were exempted from mortality and sickness. Do you not see that when they move their lips, what they call ‘prayers’, those are so many spells that come forth from their mouths? It is the same when they read from their books. Besides, in their cabins they have large pieces of wood (they are guns) with which they make noise and spread their magic everywhere. If they are not promptly put to death, they will complete their ruin of the country, so that there will remain neither small nor great.

Dom Guy Oury, Marie de l’Incarnation, Ursuline, (1599-1672). *Correspondence*, Letter L (Solesmes, 1971), pp. 117–118.

Adapted from Ruth Sandwell et al. *Early Contact and Settlement in New France* (Vancouver, BC: The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2002), pp. 33–60. Permission granted by The Critical Thinking Consortium for use by Alberta teachers.