

Indigenous Role Models

Politics and Government

Elijah Harper (Oji-Cree)

In 1990, with an eagle feather raised, Manitoba's lone aboriginal MLA voiced his opposition to the Meech Lake Accord -- a constitutional amendment to gain Quebec's acceptance of the Constitution Act. The accord had been negotiated without the consultation of First Nations and Harper's historic stance brought the accord to a standstill.

Former politician and honorary Cree Chief Elijah Harper holds up one of the eagle feathers he famously held during the 1990 debate over the Meech Accord.



SHEILA NORTH (Cree)

Sheila North made her mark on the Indigenous community and Canada at large as the first female Grand Chief of Manitoba Keewatinowki Okimakanak, representing over 30 Northern Manitoban First Nations. She grew up in the community of Bunibonibee Cree Nation (a.k.a. Oxford House) and later pursued a career in journalism and communications, reporting for CBC and working as a radio personality and Cree translator. She is also largely credited with starting the #MMIW hashtag and co-producing a documentary, *1200+*, about missing and murdered Indigenous women.



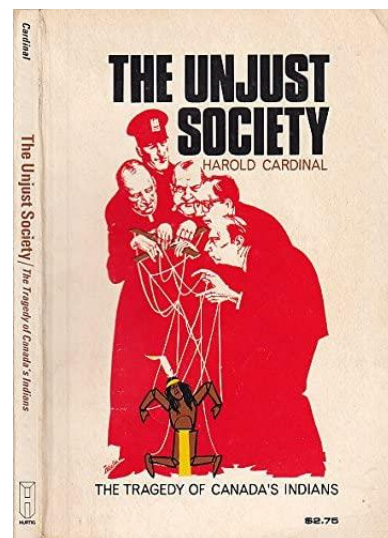
JODY WILSON-RAYBOULD (We Wai Kai)



Prior to becoming a Member of Parliament, Jody Wilson-Raybould, who is a member of the We Wai Kai Nation and is also known by her traditional name, Puglaas, worked as a crown prosecutor in British Columbia and as an adviser at the B.C. Treaty Commission, which oversees treaty negotiations between First Nations and the Crown, and she was elected as Regional Chief for the B.C. Assembly of First Nations. In 2015, she was elected as an MP for the Liberal Party, under which she was appointed Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, making her the first Indigenous person to hold the title. In early 2019, Wilson-Raybould resigned from the Liberal Cabinet after going public with complaints that Prime Minister Trudeau and his staff had tried to pressure her into making a deal in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. (Trudeau denied the allegations.) She was later expelled from the Liberal caucus – but that didn't stop her. Later that year, she ran as an independent in her riding of Vancouver Granville and was re-elected as an MP.

Louis Riel (Métis) – The founding father of Manitoba and a leader to the Métis people, Riel sought to preserve the rights and culture of the Métis among the encroachment of European influence across the country and into the west.

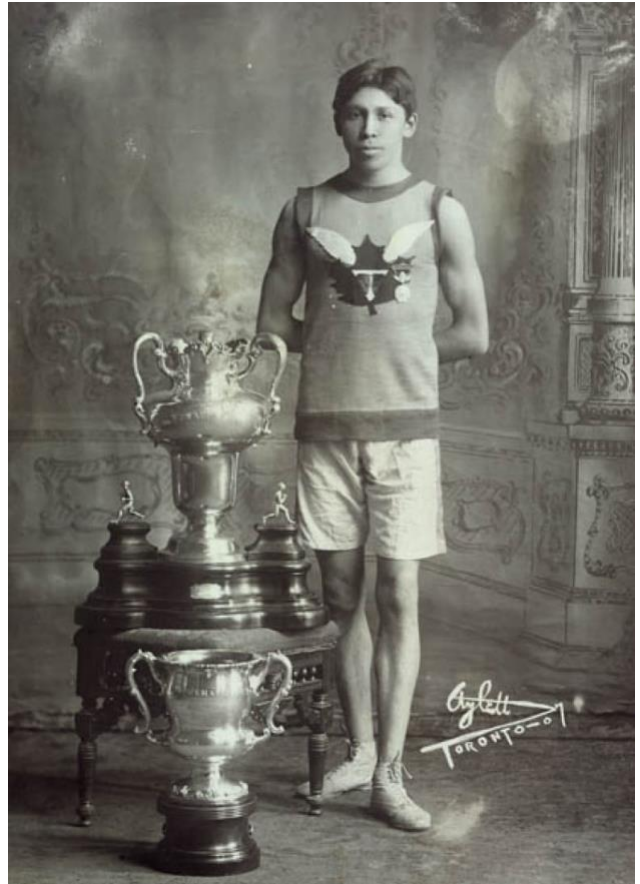
Harold Cardinal (Cree): He rose to national prominence with the publication of *The Unjust Society*, in answer to then prime minister Pierre Trudeau's proclamation that Canada was a “just society.” He was the main author of the Red Paper – another satirical response to the government's White Paper policy on the First Peoples.



Athletics

Tom Longboat (Onondaga): He ran the 1907 Boston Marathon 4:59 seconds faster than anyone of the previous winners. Two years later he won the title Professional Champion of the World in another . Longboat's coaches and the press didn't approve of his training regime and called him "lazy" when he incorporated hard, easy and recovery days – something that is now the norm.

Legendary Onondaga runner Tom Longboat ran the 1907 Boston Marathon 4:59 seconds faster than anyone of the previous winners. (Charles A. Aylett/Library and Archives Canada)



Sharon Firth and Shirley Firth (Gwich'in First Nation) Sharon and Shirley Firth were among the first Indigenous athletes to represent Canada at the Olympics. They competed in four Olympic Games (Sapporo (1972), Innsbruck (1976), Lake Placid (1980), and Sarajevo (1984) and are the only female Canadian skiers to do so. They are both Members of the Order of Canada; they both

received the Golden Jubilee (2002) and Diamond Jubilee (2012) Medals and were inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame (2015).



Jesse Cockney (Inuvialuk)

Jesse Cockney is an Inuvialuk cross-country skier who competed for Canada at both the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics.

Cockney was born in 1989 in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and started skiing when he was 3 years old. Skiing was an integral part of his family's life. His father skied on the national junior team and won 2 Canada Games gold medals. His sister has also skied for Canada in international competitions. When Cockney was 7, his family moved to Canmore, Alberta, where he was able to get involved in competitive cross-country skiing.

Cockney made his Olympic debut at the 2014 Winter Olympics where he finished 54 in the 50-km free mass start, 11 in the 4x10km relay, and 53 in the sprint free. In 2015, he competed in his first FIS World Championship, and in 2017, he skied as a member of Canada's world team. At the 2018 Winter Olympics test event, he finished 10th in the classic sprint. He also broke into the top 10 of the free sprint at the World Cup Finals in March 2017. In the 2018 Olympic Winter Games, he finished 35 in the sprint classic. Find out more at [Canadian Olympic Team, Jesse Cockney](#).

LAW



MARION BULLER (CREE)

Marion Buller is a Cree jurist in British Columbia and a member of the Mistawasis First Nation in Saskatchewan. She started her career working in civil and criminal law and in 1994 became the first Indigenous woman to be appointed as a provincial court judge in B.C. Most recently, she served as Chief Commissioner for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. When the Commission's final report was released last year – containing 231 calls to justice – it was her powerful words that introduced us to the 1,200-page watershed document. “This report is about deliberate race, identity and gender-based genocide,” [Buller wrote](#). “The violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people is a national tragedy of epic proportion.”

Leroy Little Bear (Siksika)

In 1972, Leroy Little Bear became one of the first Indigenous students to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Lethbridge. He went on to earn a law degree at the University of Utah. Back at the University of Lethbridge, Little Bear focused his passion and skills as a researcher and faculty member. He founded, and for over 20 years chaired, the first Native American Studies Department in Canada.



He brought his research skills to his position as advisor to First Nations and the provincial and federal governments on land claims, hunting and fishing, and treaty issues. Little Bear also served on a number of government commissions and boards, including the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and Its Impact on the Indian and Métis Peoples of Alberta. In 1998, he moved to Harvard University for a year and a half to serve as director of its Native American Program. After retiring from the University of Lethbridge in 1997, he focused new research on the blending of Western physics with North American Indigenous science, particularly, the richness of Siksika (Blackfoot) knowledge and teachings as expressed through songs and stories.

The Arts



CHRISTI BELCOURT (Métis)

Christi Belcourt effortlessly draws connections between the environment and Indigenous land rights through her breathtaking visual art. Using mainly acrylic paints, the Scarborough-born Metis artist's work is inspired by her culture's historical beadwork, often featuring floral designs that represent themes of identity and community. Belcourt has received several accolades for her artwork, including the 2016 Governor General's Innovation Award and the 2016 Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Her work can be found in the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Indian and Inuit Art Collection and more.



Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki): She is a documentary filmmaker whose more than 40 films have chronicled indigenous life in Canada from the 1971 debut *Christmas at Moose Factory* to her most famous work *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*.

Daphne Odjig (Odawa-Potawatomi): She is described as the driving force behind the Indian Group of Seven. Her paintings are in the Woodland style and her work has addressed colonization, women and children and erotica.



KAWENNÁHERE DEVERY JACOBS (Mohawk) Acting wasn't always in the cards for Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs. She grew up on Kahnawake Mohawk Territory in Quebec, where she didn't see a lot of acting roles for Indigenous women. So she decided to go to school to become a social worker instead and was working at the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal when she was cast in her first leading role, Aila in 2013's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. Since then, Jacobs has had standout roles in crime drama *Cardinal*, Netflix's supernatural series *The Order* and Amazon Prime Video's *American Gods* as fan fave Sam Blackcrow. "I kind of hate the term 'strong female leads' – essentially all of the women-identifying people I know are strong women,"



TANYA TAGAQ (INUIT)

Credited for bridging the gap between traditional throat music and pop, Tanya Tagaq is a force in the Canadian music scene. The Juno winner grew up in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, and began



practicing throat singing at age 15 while attending high school in Yellowknife. The Inuk singer has since released four albums (in addition to EPs), written an award-winning book called *Split Tooth* and received the Order of Canada.

BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE (Cree)

There is no disputing the fact that Buffy Sainte-Marie is a musical legend. Hailing from Qu'Appelle Valley, Sask., the singer-songwriter taught herself to play the piano at age three, and now, at 79, her prolific career spans 21 albums. Sainte-Marie has used her music as a vehicle to promote awareness of Indigenous issues; one of her earliest tracks, "Now That the Buffalo's Gone," references Indigenous land rights, while "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying" addresses the exclusion of Indigenous people from American history. (Sainte-Marie is a dual citizen and currently resides in Hawaii.) She is the first Indigenous person to win an Oscar (the 1983 Best Original Song award for *An Officer and a Gentleman*), and she has devoted her talents and passion to the realms of visual arts, education, social activism and composing.



SAGE PAUL (urban Denesuliné tskwe)

"I didn't see myself in the industry because I didn't have the money to produce a collection – or even have access to people at the bigger corporations because to work at those corporations, you have to intern and work for free, which I wasn't able to do," fashion designer Sage Paul told *ELLE Canada* last year. "I really encourage those who are on the fringe to create a space for themselves." Paul has certainly created an admirable space for herself in the Canadian fashion landscape.

An urban Denesuliné tskwe and English River First Nation member living in Toronto, Paul has created a wealth of unique and singular designs inspired by family and sovereignty. Her dedication to Indigenous representation in fashion is evident in her community involvement:

She is the co-founder of Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto, she sits on the



Ryerson School of Fashion Advisory Board and she has taught an Indigenous-fashion course at George Brown College for the past two years.



Cody Coyote (Ojibwe)

Ottawa Hip-Hop/Electronic Artist / Keynote Speaker/
Workshop Facilitator/ Writer Cody

Coyote was nominated for the **Summer Solstice Indigenous Music Awards** not just for his music, but for his social activism and youth mentorship.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q2772tc2vY&list=PLOTmWK5ZC4I_MIRFIN4cEpofC1jfkYkb

SOCIAL JUSTICE

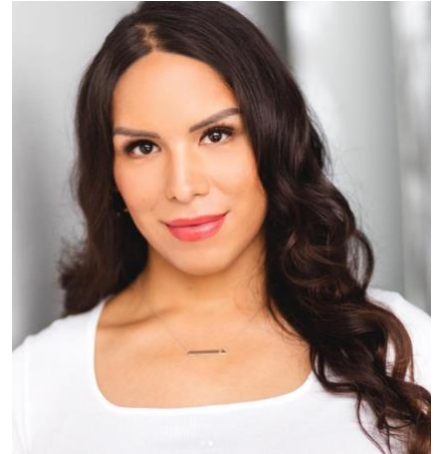
AUTUMN PELTIER (Anishinabek)



Activist Autumn Peltier was just eight years old when she began advocating for the universal right to clean water. Growing up on Wiikwemkoong Unceded Anishinabek Territory on Manitoulin Island, Peltier learned about the importance of clean water from her mom and her aunt and that many Indigenous communities across Canada don't have access to it. Now 15, she has accomplished a lot since first taking on the cause. In 2016, she met with Justin Trudeau ("I'm very unhappy with the choices you've made," [she told him](#)); she was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize in 2017, 2018 and 2019; and last year, she was named chief water commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation – an advocacy group for 40 First Nations across Ontario – taking over the role from her late great-aunt. She has also spoken at the United Nations General Assembly twice, saying: "I've said it once, and I'll say it again: We can't eat money or drink oil."

KILEY MAY (MOHAWK)

“Transitioning is a form of art, and it’s my greatest artwork to date,” two-spirited artist Kiley May told [HuffPost Canada](#) in 2019. From Six Nations reserve and now based in Toronto, the Hotinonhshón:ni Mohawk actor, dancer, model and writer is vocal about her experience as a trans and two-spirited Indigenous woman in the arts. “I made the decision a long time ago to sort of live publicly and be an open book for the sake of education,” she told [CBC](#) in 2017. “That’s just my personality.” She has since been featured in *It: Chapter Two*, she currently stars as River on CBC’s *Coroner* and she continues to advocate for trans and two-spirited rights on her social-media platforms.



LARISSA CRAWFORD

Larissa Crawford has a powerful voice. The Calgary-based Jamaican-Métis activist and anti-racism researcher served as the youth head delegate of Canada and successfully lobbied for Indigenous world views and the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the G7 Summit in 2018. She is the founder of [Future Ancestors Services](#), a youth-led professional-services social enterprise that focuses on our responsibility for climate justice and equity. The organization recently raised more than \$20,000 in donations over three weeks to support grassroots anti-racism and climate-justice initiatives as well as the Future Ancestors Waashayshkwun Grant fund for diverse independent speakers, trainers, researchers and artists in Canada.



Science and Engineering

Dr. Stanley Vollant (Innu)

Dr. Stanley Vollant, the first Innu surgeon in Quebec, has worked to inspire and help Indigenous youth to fulfill their dreams, including embarking on a 6,000 km walk to bring Indigenous peoples together and foster cross-cultural understanding in Canada.

Vollant was born in 1965 in Québec City and raised by his grandparents in the village of Pessamit in the North Shore region of Québec. He spoke Innu and learned a love of the land from his trapper grandfather. He learned French when he started school and excelled in his studies and sports. He



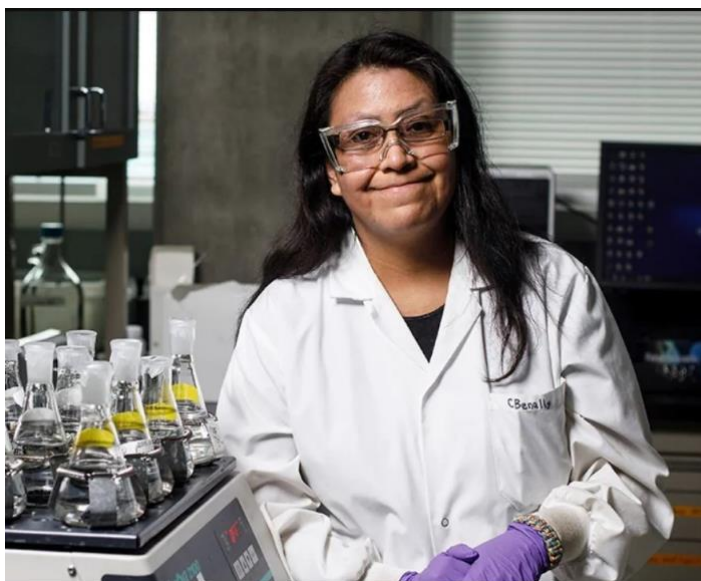
studied medicine at the Université de Montréal and finished his residency in general surgery in 1994. He began his work at the regional hospital in Baie-Comeau, Québec where he became known for his innovative work, particularly with laparoscopic surgery and lectured in many schools.

In 2001, he was elected president of the Québec Medical Association, the first Indigenous person to head a medical association in North America. After moving to Ottawa, he served as director of the Aboriginal program at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Medicine.

Despite his professional success, Vollant fell into a deep depression. He eventually found a remedy in reconnecting with the Earth while traveling in New Zealand. In 2008, while walking the famous Santiago de Compostela route in Spain, he had a dream of his grandfather telling him to start a similar walk in Canada to help connect Indigenous communities and inspire Indigenous youth. In 2010, he began his 6,000 km *Innu Meshkenu* (My Innu Path) from Labrador through Québec and Ontario, speaking at schools and bringing Elders and youth together along the way. In 2016, he founded the Puamun Meshkenu (path of a thousand dreams), a non-profit organization with the goal of inspiring and supporting Indigenous individuals on their way to developing their full mental, spiritual, physical and emotional potential. Find out more at [The Canadian Encyclopedia, Stanley Vollant](#).

Dr. Chelsea Benally (Navajo)

Chelsea Benally is the first Indigenous woman to graduate with PhD in **engineering** from the University of Alberta. As a teenager growing up in Flagstaff, Arizona, Benally said it was a Grade 7 class in environmental technology that inspired her to pursue science in the first place. She learned for the first time about environmental decline, and it made her want to do something about it. She devoted her studies throughout high school to science, and realized there were very few Indigenous women in STEM, which just spurred her on. She began her studies at the University of Arizona and did an internship with Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Early on in her university career, she had a son with her partner, who was from the Sucker Creek First Nation in Alberta. She visited Alberta many times and learned about the engineering department at the University of Alberta. She decided to focus on oil sands remediation, and says, "I knew I liked it here, and I knew about some of the issues involving oilsands tailings ponds and First Nation communities," she said. "I also knew from my son's father that there weren't a lot of Indigenous people who were engineers, not as many as there should be." She is now doing a post-doctoral fellowship analyzing the mud under tailings pond water, and wants to continue working in water and remediation while helping to increase First Nations participation in engineering.



SHEILA WATT-CLOUTIER (INUIT)

Nobel Peace Prize nominee Sheila Watt-Cloutier is admirably relentless in her advocacy for environmental justice, human rights and global health – specifically, the well-being and preservation of the Inuit of the Arctic. Born in Nunavik, Quebec, she began her activist work in the Kativik School Board, pushing for improved educational standards for Inuit students. Her presence in Inuit advocacy extends beyond Canada: From 2002 until 2006, she served as the international chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, representing over 150,000 Inuit from Russia, Greenland, Alaska and Canada. Watt-

Cloutier's 2016 TEDx Talk, "Human Trauma and Climate Trauma as One," brought attention to the connection between Indigenous rights and climate change.



Dr. Nadine Caron (Ojibway)

Dr. Caron is the first Indigenous woman to graduate from the University of British Columbia's medical school at the top of her class and Canada's first female First Nations general surgeon. She was born in Kamloops, British Columbia, completed her BSc in Kinesiology at Simon Fraser University in 1993, and completed her MD at the University of British Columbia Faculty of Medicine. She also completed an MA in Public Health at Harvard University. She works as a general endocrine surgeon and is an Associate Professor in the Department of Surgery in the UBC Faculty of Medicine. In an interview with CBC, she says she's optimistic about the future of Indigenous health care in Canada, but there is so much work still to be

done: "Sometimes I'm so optimistic...And then on other days I experience things in the hallways or I hear things that are unintended to be heard and you just hang your head ... And so I think in the end it's just like anything else. We're not there yet but we don't even have the right to stop trying to get there." She believes that Indigenous healing practices and Western medicine can coexist, but that "First Nations people and our other Aboriginal people in Canada really need to be respected." You can find her profile at UBC [here](#).

DR. NEL WIEMAN M.SC., MD, FRCPC (Saulteaux/Ojibwa)

As the first female Indigenous psychiatrist, Dr. Nel Wieman's significance in medicine cannot be understated. A Member of Little Grand Rapids First Nation, Anishinaabe Nation (Saulteaux/Ojibwa), She began her career providing services at the mental-health clinic on Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. She has since served as co-director of the Indigenous Health Research Development Program at



the University of Toronto, as well as a member of the Clinical Support Team at YWCA Toronto's Elm Centre, providing psychiatric services to 100-plus women living with mental-health issues and addiction. Currently, she is the acting deputy chief medical officer at the First Nations Health Authority in B.C. and is serving a second term as the president of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada.



John Herrington (Chickasaw)

Astronaut John Herrington (1958-) was the first Native American to go to and walk in space and was part of the 16th shuttle mission to the International Space Station in 2002. To commemorate his heritage, he carried six eagle feathers, a braid of sweet grass, two arrowheads, and the Chickasaw Nation's flag, according to the [American Indian Education Fund](#).

Dr. James Makokis (Cree)

Dr. James A. Makokis is a Nehiyô (Plains Cree) Family Physician from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation in northeastern Alberta and the recent winner of Season 7 of [“The Amazing Race Canada”](#) with his husband Anthony Johnson as “Team Ahkameyimok” (“Never give up” in the Plains Cree language). Makokis is an Indigenous [two-spirit](#) person and is particularly noted for treating transgender people from the Cree communities and around the world, with many patients traveling from long distances to see him. His practices combines traditional Cree and Western medical practices. Makokis wanted to be a doctor since he was four, and as an adult his colleague Adrian Edgar (a former president of the Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health) suggested Makokis focus on trans healthcare, because few physicians were providing medical care for transitioning patients in that region; additionally many trans as well as Indigenous people can be wary of the mainstream health system and doctors from their own communities are sought after. He earned his Master's in health science from the University of Toronto in 2006, and graduated from the University of Ottawa's medical school in 2010 and the University of British Columbia's Aboriginal Family Medicine Residency Training Program in 2012. He and his husband, while running "The Amazing Race Canada," [wore clothing that made a statement](#): homemade red skirts with rainbow ribbons to represent missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and also to represent transgender and two-spirit people; and T-shirts with the words "water is life," to bring awareness to the [ongoing water crisis](#) in Indigenous communities.



Mary Golda Ross (Cherokee)

Ross (1908-2008) was a NASA **mathematician and engineer** who played a pivotal role in sending Apollo astronauts into space. For Lockheed Martin, she helped develop plans for the P-38 Lightning fighter plane and was one of just two women on the original Skunk Works team. Much of her work in the research, evaluation, and testing of top-secret rocket and missile systems is still classified. Ross also helped write NASA's Planetary Flight Handbook, the agency's guide to space travel.



Find more Indigenous Role Models Online Resources:

- **Top 10 indigenous heroes** <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/top-10-indigenous-heroes-includes-elijah-harper-alanis-obomsawin-1.2678637>
- **15 Indigenous People to Know in Canada** <https://www.ellecanada.com/culture/society/15-indigenous-people-to-know-in-canada>
- **Role Models** <https://education.afn.ca/afntoolkit/web-modules/plain-talk-13-first-nations-role-models-and-scholarships/role-models/>
- **Who are Role Models?** <https://education.afn.ca/afntoolkit/web-modules/plain-talk-13-first-nations-role-models-and-scholarships/who-are-role-models/>
- **Indigenous trail-blazers** <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1559226684295/1559226709198>
- **Indigenous Engineering in Canada:** <https://engineerscanada.ca/indigenous-engineering-in-canada#-q-number-and-characteristics-of-indigenous-engineers-in-canada>

• **7 Indigenous People in STEM:** https://www.sfu.ca/wwest/WWEST_blog/7-indigenous-people-in-stem-you-should-know.html

• **Engineering the Future of Indigenous Communities** https://www.dal.ca/faculty/engineering/news-events/news/2022/03/31/engineering_the_future_of_indigenous_communities.html

• **Engineers Canada:** <https://engineerscanada.ca/about/about-engineers-canada>



<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/2abf3b3abb0f4984ba203de9ea351ed9>

• **7 Indigenous Pioneers You Need to Know**
<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/g29460020/indigenous-scientists/>

• **7 Indigenous People in STEM You Should Know**
https://www.sfu.ca/wwest/WWEST_blog/7-indigenous-people-in-stem-you-should-know.html

• **AISES in Canada: Advancing Indigenous People in STEM** <https://www.aises.org/membership/caises>

• **Remarkable Indigenous Scientists and Researchers in Canada**
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/remarkable-indigenous-scientists-and-researchers>

Celebrate 21 Indigenous Athletes for National Indigenous Peoples Day
<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/celebrate-21-indigenous-athletes-for-national-indigenous-peoples-day>

• **Legendary N.W.T. skiing sisters to star in Molly of Denali episode**
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/legendary-n-w-t-skiing-sisters-to-star-in-molly-of-denali-episode-1.5536268>

• **The Sound of Canadian Indigenous. Spotify playlist:**
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6auaeyb8nkpRdYdJ9UFxcO>

• **Indigenous artists who inspire nominated for awards**
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/indigenous-music-awards-leadership-community-1.6056633>

What kind of role model will you become?