

Say WHAT?!!

Many words only make sense in one language. Sometimes a word is shared by two languages. But these words are part of at least three languages: an Indigenous language as well as French and English. Do you think some, all or none of them are for real?

kayak

This word from Inuktitut refers to a small boat with an opening for a person to sit in. That person uses a double-ended paddle to move the kayak around. And of course it's one of our favourites!



Anthony Brennan



moccasin

The rest of the world uses this word, too, usually to mean a kind of soft leather shoe or slipper. It's an Ojibwe word for exactly that — a slip-on shoe sewn from an animal skin.

salal

This bush and its berries grow wild all over British Columbia. So it's not surprising that it would have a name specific to that area, taken from a language called Chinook Jargon that was a mixture of First Nations languages with English, French and others.



toboggan

Forget about those American “sleds.” Every Canadian kid knows that the proper thing to slide down a snowy hill on is a toboggan. The word pops up as *udabagan* (Abenaki) and *topagan* (Mi'kmaq), but we all know what we're talking about. Fun fact: Some Americans use this word to mean a knitted cap, which Canadians would of course call a tuque.



ouananiche

We admit this freshwater Atlantic salmon found in eastern Canada isn't that well-known. Its official name is the French way to spell the Montagnais word *wananish*, or little salmon.

