

Facing Colonization in our Work with the Land & Building our Understanding of Indigenous Perspectives*

"Traditional systems of Indian education represent ways of learning and doing through a Nature-centered philosophy. They are among the oldest continuing expressions of environmental education in the world."
-Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*, 1994, p.21

NOTE: This document is a "living" document created by two educators, Landere Naisbitt & Caylin Gans, who are of settler colonial descent in the United States who acknowledge the need for and responsibility to face past and ongoing impacts of colonization. It is a documentation of our own learning and action steps to help guide us moving forward rather than a template for others to follow. However, our hope is that, by sharing it, we may encourage others to reflect on their own work in this area.

CONTEXT

This can be an uncomfortable conversation to have, but we feel it's necessary to have it. There is growing awareness both in academic literature and in the Environmental Education and nature-based field in general to think more critically about how we relate to nature/the land and, in particular, around what perspectives and stories we leave out.

Though it may not seem so at first glance, nature-connection is a deep, complex, and sensitive topic because of how it's intertwined with human identities, rights, access, and power dynamics. As a country with a colonial history, it has been widespread practice to leave out or diminish the perspectives and histories of the people who lived on the land before the colonists' arrival. To understand why this happened we must be honest with ourselves and acknowledge that the founding of the US was based on widespread and centuries-long land theft and genocide of Indigenous peoples. The effects of this intentional violence/eradication echo to this day and in some places continue.

Therefore, to not acknowledge Indigenous peoples' presences, histories, and worldviews, which encompass a deep relationship to the land, we are perpetuating colonialism and systems of oppression even within seemingly innocent nature-based, outdoor education programs.

We hope to contribute to the growing momentum in North America to improve our awareness of these issues and do what we can to work towards a more fair and just educational system and society.

What We've Learned

- In general, *Western (Europe and N. America) world views*: Nature & humans are separate; *Indigenous world views*: Humans are part of Nature (NOTE: There are many different Indigenous world views!)
- There can be a fine line between acknowledgement and cultural appropriation and this line differs from person to person - it's a HARD line to walk and takes strength to hold that tension and continue the work.
- Building relationships with Indigenous peoples is ideal, but they may or may not want this. This takes *sensitivity* and *time*.
- Starting points for acknowledging indigenous presences, histories, and perspectives:
 - Learn about the people who lived/live on the land where your programs run and work to build reciprocal relationships
 - Acknowledge Indigenous peoples & their languages and place-names in documents (e.g. Ecological Impact Assessment, Program Policies) - seek guidance to avoid appropriation
 - Include a wide variety of stories - what can you share with your learners that tells more than just colonial narratives?
- There is no tried and tested path or process to doing this - we are ALL experimenting. Expect to make mistakes and learn along the way. Have compassion for yourselves and others throughout.
- Take small steps often and never stop trying

*Designed for educators in the homeland of the Abenaki/Abénaquis, part of Wabanaki Confederacy, which also known to many as New Hampshire and Vermont, USA (see <https://native-land.ca/> to learn more about Indigenous territories)

A FEW TERMS & MEANINGS

Indigenous Peoples: *Umbrella term used internationally to define the original inhabitants of colonized countries, with Indigenous being the most favoured term. However, it is always respectful to be specific about the Nation you are referring to; use the term that they use to self-identify.* - [Indigenous Ally Toolkit](#)

Cultural Appropriation: *The act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture.* - [Cambridge Dictionary](#)

Settler Colonialism: *A form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home... This form is distinct from the exploitation colonialism that has been so deeply theorized in post-colonial studies, because, in settler colonialism, settlers come to the new land seeking land and resources, not (necessarily) labor.* - [Tuck et al \(2014\)](#), p. 6

Reconciliation: *An ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change.* - [Principles of Truth and Reconciliation](#)

Tokenism: *Whereby participatory espousals in projects and policy briefs do not necessarily translate into a real and locally meaningful participatory process on the ground. Instead, communities may become mere information providers and at best involved in consultation, not in the more important and effectual positions with decision-making power. Participation then becomes passive and tokenistic rather than rigorous and active* - [Smith \(2008\)](#), p. 359

Land Education: *Puts Indigenous epistemological and ontological accounts of land at the center, including Indigenous understandings of land, Indigenous language in relation to land, and Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism. It attends to constructions and storying of land and repatriation by Indigenous peoples, documenting and advancing Indigenous agency and land rights.* - [Tuck et al \(2014\)](#), p. 13

Place-based Education: *Methodology that offers learners authentic experiences in their local communities and environments for the purpose of increasing student engagement and achievement, and for promoting democratic participation in local community processes* - [Greenwood \(2014\)](#), p. 95

Place-conscious Education: *In short, while place-based education is often framed as a method to improve school outcomes, place-conscious education can be framed as a philosophy that challenges educators to rethink the assumptions of schooling in the context of the places we inhabit and leave behind* - [Greenwood \(2014\)](#), p. 95

STARTING PRACTICES FOR ACKNOWLEDGING INDIGENOUS PRESENCES, HISTORIES, & PERSPECTIVES

Educating Ourselves & Building Relationships

- Seeking out educational opportunities (e.g. [Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education Online Course](#))
- Reading books and articles by Indigenous authors (see resource section below)
- Attending film screenings & other events hosted by or in partnership with Indigenous peoples
- Working to build reciprocal relationships with Indigenous community members (see tips)

TIPS for building relationships

1. Attend Indigenous Community events that are open to the public and introduce yourself/your work and ask if there is an interest in collaboration. If not, inquire about other resources. Keep showing up.

→ Gauge the situation to determine a good time to ask for ways to collaborate. It might not be at the first meeting or the second.

2. If invited to collaborate remember to ask an Elder or member of the Indigenous community what they consider to be appropriate compensation for their time/resources/etc.

3. If Indigenous community members visit your program, ask what is most meaningful and relevant for her/him/them to share rather than projecting your agenda on their contribution.

Writing Our Program Documents

- Writing a policy for Land & Histories Acknowledgement in our Program Handbook (see draft below)
- Creating Ecological Impact Assessments for all of our programs to build our understanding and relationship with the land and mitigate our impacts. Incorporating within it, at minimum, an acknowledgement of Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages

LAND & HISTORIES ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Any land-based and place-based educational program carries a responsibility for acknowledging the presence and histories of the people and ecological communities that currently inhabit and have inhabited the land in the past. We will strive to respectfully recognize these presences and histories and the impact they have on the place and current communities, including what stories have been told and not told. We will acknowledge them in our program documents, activities and experiences, and through attempting to build reciprocal relationships with local communities, including Indigenous peoples. We make this acknowledgement conscious of the continuation of settler colonialism and oppression of Indigenous peoples into the present day and commit to furthering our knowledge, awareness, and activism so that we may better take part in the greater process of reconciliation. We also acknowledge that this requires time, trust-building, deep reflection, and is ultimately a long-term process.

Designing Our Programs

- Reflecting on our biases and assumptions. Asking ourselves¹:
 - *What do I know? What informs my knowing? What do I not know?*
 - In what ways does my lesson connect with the land and the peoples of the land?
 - How is the lesson based in storywork (making meaning of place and culture through stories)?
 - How is the lesson heartfelt?
 - How is the lesson transformative - how is it going to make a difference?
- Utilizing strategies that support land-based learning²:
 - Learn the cultural and historical content that put Indigenous ways of knowing (that emerge from specific land and place), into context.
 - Learn practical skills and knowledge for living in specific environments.
 - Allow for extended interactions with the natural world so as to develop relationships to place and environments.
 - Establish service related activities designed to support and advance land and place-based priorities for Indigenous peoples.
 - Support Indigenous peoples environmental traditions as contemporary expressions and not as something of the past.

¹ Questions are from *Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education*, 2018

² From *Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education*, 2018: Adapted from Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Kivaki Press.

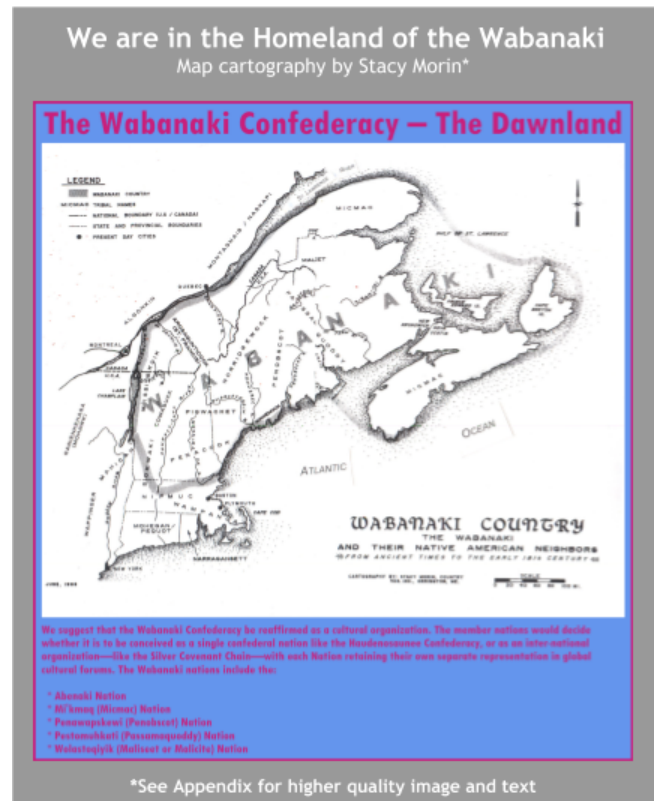
How We Facilitate Our Sessions

Territory Acknowledgement

- “Territory Acknowledgments have been described as one way you can honour and respect the land and Indigenous peoples of the area where you live, learn and work”³
- We can acknowledge we are in the homeland of the Wabanaki with our learners and provide opportunities to learn more about Wabanaki histories, presences, and culture (see [Territory Acknowledgement](#) for more information on how to do this respectfully)
- While non-native and native people can *acknowledge territory*, it is only native people who can perform a *welcome to the territory*.⁴
- **Note:** *You have to be careful that the acknowledgments don't become a token gesture but rather a meaningful practice that influences other practices in your daily life.*

Greeting and Thanks

- “The Thanksgiving Address (the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*) is the central prayer and invocation for the *Haudenosaunee* (also known as the Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations – Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora). It reflects their relationship of giving thanks for life and the world around them. The Haudenosaunee open and close every social and religious meeting with the Thanksgiving Address... The Thanksgiving Address teaches mutual respect, conservation, love, generosity, and the responsibility to understand that what is done to one part of the Web of Life, we do to ourselves.”⁵
- We can acknowledge the source of this tradition and incorporate practices to greet and thank the natural world with our learners (See resources for a children's version of the Thanksgiving Address called *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* by Chief Jake Swamp)



Practice “The Honourable Harvest” when we gather or harvest materials

“The Honourable Harvest: take only what you need and use everything you take.”

“Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them. Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life. Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer. Never take the first. Never take the last. Take only what you need. Take only that which is given. Never take more than half. Leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimizes harm. Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share. Give thanks for what you have been given. Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken. Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.”

(Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, p.183)

³ From *Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education*, 2018

⁴ From *Reconciliation Australia* (n.d.)

⁵ From *Dance for All People* (n.d.). *Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address*.

Storytelling

- We can incorporate storytelling into our sessions, acknowledging that Indigenous pedagogies often include teaching through oral storytelling.
- Within our stories, what can we tell our learners about the land where we live? What is its history, its present day, its future?
- Take care when integrating Indigenous stories into programs. Many traditional tales are not sanctioned for use outside of Indigenous communities. Make sure that the story has been shared/not stolen. The following are a few recommendations⁶:
 - Research how the story was traditionally used/by what tribe and share this with group
 - Provide background/bigger picture context
 - Ask learners to consider what the the story means
- Use the Respect for Nature and Reciprocity Framework for Storytelling (see below)

“There are many different kinds of oral stories, including personal stories, legends, yarns, dreaming and sacred stories. While stories can be entertaining, their main purpose is to convey knowledge, history, practices, beliefs, and values; they explain things for us and help us make sense of our world. Indigenous stories use language, narrative, and even humour to connect us to the land, our ancestors, and our immediate world. Stories are powerful, and as such, there are protocols associated with Indigenous storytelling. It is therefore necessary to learn how to use Indigenous stories in educational settings.”

- Jan Hare *Introduction: Topic 4 Reconciliation for Indigenous Education*, 2018

Respect for Nature and Reciprocity Framework for Storytelling Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Do humans and the natural world have a reciprocal relationship?
2. Is harvesting of natural resources done with respect, moderation, thanks, and reciprocity?
3. Are natural spaces revered for more than their resources?
4. Are humans portrayed as a part of nature?
5. Is interaction with natural elements in the story (rocks, plants, animals) respectful?
6. Are living and nonliving things typically found in outdoor settings (rocks, plants, animals) portrayed as friends/relatives and deserving of love and care?
7. If history is involved are Indigenous groups telling/interpreting the past themselves?
8. Are Indigenous people represented as individuals having a rich heritage both in the past and the present?
9. Are traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge and stewardship portrayed as equal to western scientific understandings?

From: *Inclusive Storytelling Checklist* by Landere Naisbitt, 2019

“Story is important to processes of reconciliation. Story as a way of knowing is how knowledge, history, and memory are shared across the generations. As seen in reconciliation processes, personal and collective stories have the power to educate and heal. In doing so, they become social and political tools that can disrupt long-held ideologies, regenerate our spirits, and recreate relationships. Reconciliation allows us to create a new story about our histories and realities together in the places where we live, work and learn.”

- Jan Hare, *Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education*, 2018

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⁶ From *Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education*, 2018

A FEW RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

Specific Resources for New Hampshire & Nearby Areas:

- Indigenous New Hampshire website <https://indigenousoh.com/2017/10/19/a-brief-history-of-pre-colonial-new-hampshire/>
- Indigenous New Hampshire Storymap
<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=693c9b595c5847cfb07d100935e423ef#>
- The Cowasuck Band of the Pennacook Abenaki People website <http://www.cowasuck.org/>
- Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs <https://vcnaa.vermont.gov/>
- Vermont Abenaki Artists Association <http://abenakiart.org/>
 - *Offer courses on teaching Abenaki History and Culture in the Classroom for K12 Teachers*
- Indigenous New Hampshire Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/indigenousoh/>
- NH Commission on Native American Affairs:
<https://www.facebook.com/New-Hampshire-Commission-on-Native-American-Affairs-266595920044872/>)
- Historical Society of Cheshire County “Wonder Boxes”
 - <https://hscconh.org/2016/08/21/wonder-box-3-abenaki-material-culture-before-european-contact/>
 - <https://hscconh.org/2016/07/21/wonder-box-4-abenaki-culture-post-european-contact/>
 -
- *A Time Before New Hampshire: The Story of a Land and Native Peoples* by Michael J. Caduto

More General Resources:

- Indigenous Ally Tool Kit (from Montreal):
https://gallery.mailchimp.com/86d28ccd43d4be0cfc11c71a1/files/102bf040-e221-4953-a9ef-9f0c5efc3458/Ally_email.pdf
- Indigenous Ways of Knowing: <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/abed101/indigenous-ways-of-knowing/>
- Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education Online Course (The University of British Columbia)
<https://www.edx.org/course/reconciliation-through-indigenous-education-1>
 - *Can be audited for free*
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:
https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- [Reconciliation Australia](#): Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country

Books: List of authors/books relevant to acknowledging original inhabitants of land

- Children’s Reading List by Abenaki Artists Association:
http://abenakiart.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Children%E2%80%99s_Reading_List.193163823.pdf
- *Natural Curiosity 2nd Edition: A Resource for Educators: The Importance of Indigenous Perspectives in Children’s Environmental Inquiry* by Doug Anderson, Julie Comay, & Lorraine Chiarotto
- *An Indigenous People’s History of the US* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
- *Keepers of the Earth: Native Stories and Environmental Activities for Children* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac
- *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* by Chief Jake Swamp

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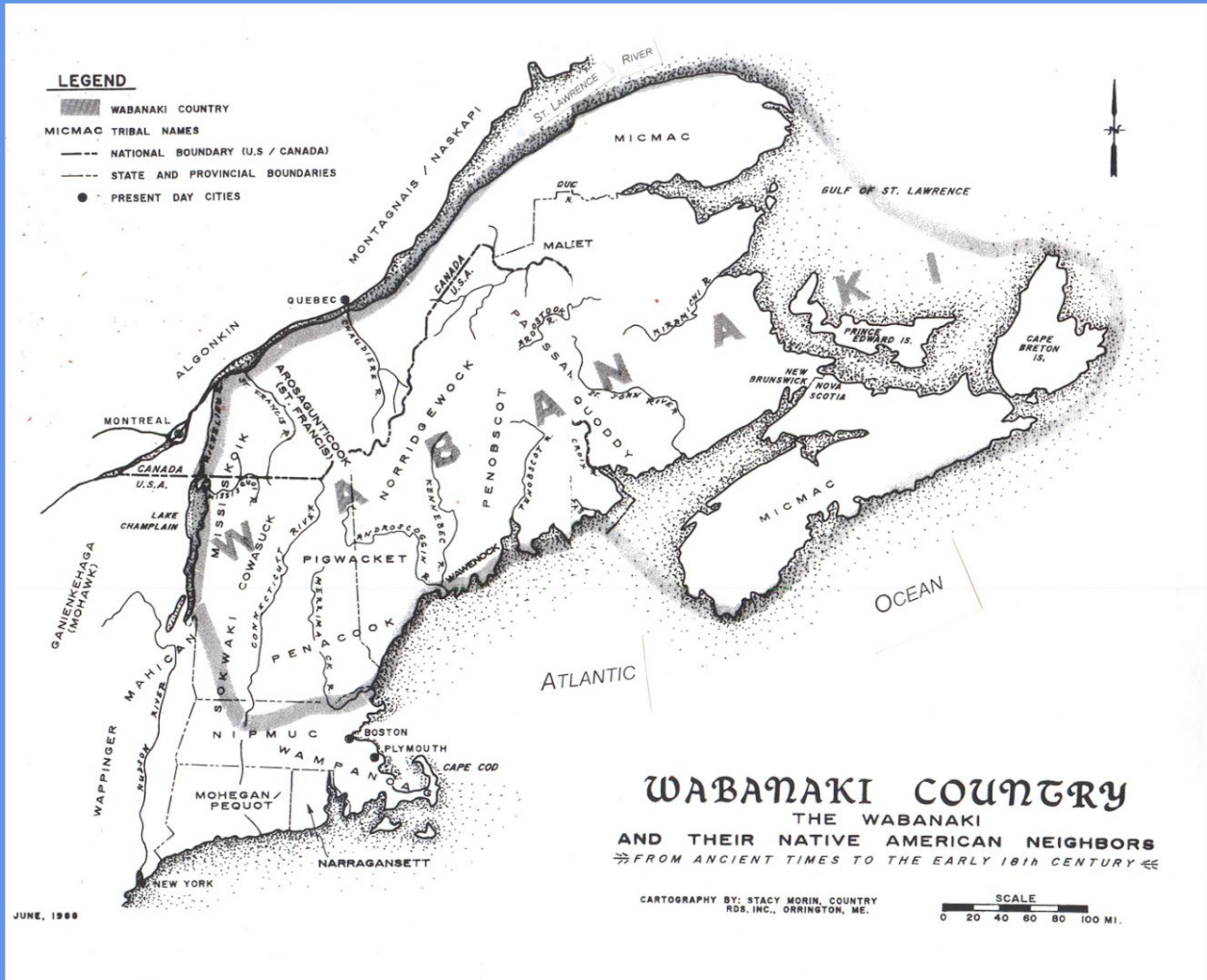
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NOTE: Caylin and Landere have shared some of their stories of putting the ideas outlined in this document into practice within their programs as Tracks Forest School & Outdoor Learning, which you can view at www.fb.com/tracksforestschool

We are in the Homeland of the Wabanaki

Map cartography by Stacy Morin

The Wabanaki Confederacy – The Dawnland



We suggest that the Wabanaki Confederacy be reaffirmed as a cultural organization. The member nations would decide whether it is to be conceived as a single confederal nation like the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, or as an inter-national organization—like the Silver Covenant Chain—with each Nation retaining their own separate representation in global cultural forums. The Wabanaki nations include the:

- * Abenaki Nation
- * Mi'kmaq (Micmac) Nation
- * Penawapskewi (Penobscot) Nation
- * Pestomuhkati (Passamaquoddy) Nation
- * Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet or Malicite) Nation