

Activity 1: Orienting To a Place

“In these six directions is found everything needed for renewal, physical and intellectual growth, and harmony.” Frank Fools Crow, Oglala Lakota (Sioux)

Introduction: Many Native people living close to the land all over the world honor the power of the six directions – East, South, West, North, The Sky Above, and the Earth Beneath their feet. The Ojibway Nation tells a story* about how otter showed the people the true four directions. In the early days when the earth was young, a boy and an otter visited a village of people. The people were always fighting with each other and were not happy. The otter soon realized that the people did not know the true four directions and therefore they could not live in harmony with each other or the earth. Otter knew that once the people discovered the power of the true four directions, they could live in peace. So the otter entered the water of a nearby lake and swam to the middle. Then he swam to the East and returned to the middle again. Then he swam to the South and back to the middle of the lake. Then he swam to the West and went back to the middle again. For the last time, he swam to the North and then returned to the middle of the lake. As the people watched otter do this, they suddenly came to understand the importance of the four directions and they were able to live together peacefully from that day on. So that they would remember this important lesson, they always honored these four directions in their ceremonies.

Directions: Go outdoors and select a plant, rock, animal or other object to observe carefully. Look at from the four cardinal directions – East, South, West, and North. Then try to look at it from above and below. Each time you view it from a different direction, make a drawing or describe what it looks like using words. Be sure to label each direction.

1. Did that object look different from each direction?
2. If it did, explain how it was different by writing a paragraph on the other side of this paper. If it looked the same, explain this in a paragraph.

*From: *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* by Eddie Benton-Banai, (1988, Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications, Inc.) pages 64-66.

Activity 3: Understanding Yourself

“I belong to the land. I am rooted in my mother earth. Her deserts, canyons, and mesas encircle me. Her mountains, fields, and forests are a part of me. I am one with nature, and she is one with me.” Danny K. Blackgoat, Flagstaff, AZ

Introduction: There are seven principles of indigenous wisdom. These principles should guide people who live close to the land if it is to stay healthy. These principles are:

1. To understand the natural laws and to know that all things are interconnected
2. To understand energy flow and cycles
3. To use natural resources consciously
4. To promote a favorable environment for all living things
5. To create diversity for beneficial, symbiotic relationships among plants and animals
6. To cooperate with others and the natural world
7. To learn from and use natural designs, patterns, and rhythms

Directions: Find a special place to sit and write a paragraph describing what you find there. Then read what you wrote and write another paragraph about how you are like this place.

Paragraph About This Place:

Paragraph About How I Am Like This Place:

1. What did you learn about how you were like the land that you described?
2. How would harming this land harm you?

*Foreword from *Time Among the Navajo* by Kathy Eckles Hooker (1991). Santa Fe, NM: Museum of New Mexico Press.

Activity 4: Telling Stories

“‘Story’ among American Indians consists of at least five parts: time, place, character(s), event, and purpose. Together, they are the sum of an ‘experience’. Each part connects the other parts for the storyteller to weave his or her story in the art of storytelling that is poetry and fine entertainment and knowledge sharing in Indian communities”. Donald L. Fixico, (Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole) in *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, 2003, p. 25.

Introduction: Native stories are often rooted in real places. These places remind the storyteller of what happened there. When places are changed or destroyed, the stories are sometimes affected too.

Directions: Go outside and find a place that suggests or inspires an original story. Using your imagination and knowledge of the place, create an outline of a story about that place. Make sure that the story has a purpose. One purpose could be to teach others an important lesson about living on Mother Earth. Be sure that your story also includes a time, place, character(s), and an event.

My Original Story Outline:

1. How did being in that place help you write this story?
2. What was the purpose for telling the story?
3. What was the important lesson contained in your story?

Activity 5: Naming Places

“Most of the time, place-names are called upon to perform simple verbal chores: to indicate where one is going, for example, or to announce where one has been; to make plans for a forthcoming hunt, or to pinpoint the latest happening gleaned from local gossip. When place-names are used for ordinary purposes such as these, Apache speakers typically produce the names in shortened or contracted forms” Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 1996, p. 90).

Introduction: When most native people name a place, they must be there in order to experience that place. For example, the Kwakiutl people* living along the northwest coast of North America call one area of the ocean “Where salmon gather”. If there is a section of river too shallow for canoeing, they might name it “Insufficient canoe”. Their names show how people or other animals or plants might be connected to that place. The Apaches of southwestern United States name places describing what is happening there or what has happened there in the past. For example, some Apache names for places are, “Water Flows Inward Under A Cottonwood Tree”, or Water Flows Down on A Succession of Flat Rocks”, or “White Rocks Lie Above In A Compact Cluster”.

Directions: Go outdoors and find three places and name them using brief descriptions (a phrase or sentence for each place) that tell a story of what is happening or has happened there. Then share these names with others to see if they can guess where those places are and where you were standing when you named them.

Place #1

Place #2

Place #3

1. How do these place names show some of the connections that are happening there?
2. Do you know of any other places in your area that have similar kinds of names?

* Kim Stafford, “There are No Names but Stories” In McKenzie, Hart, Bai, & Jickling, *Fields of Green: Restorying Culture, Environment, and Education*, 2009, p. 40.

Activity 7: Comparing

“Ideas about the habitat are frequently set forth in elaborate similes and metaphors which equate disparate objects in a fashion that at first seems quite unfathomable. Yet once these tropes [figures of speech] are uncovered, it can be seen that they rest upon firm assumptions about the workings of nature which, though different from our own, fit together intelligibly” Paul Radin describing the Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] Indians of the Great Lakes in 1916 in *The Winnebago Tribe*, p. 137).

Introduction: Native people often speak in similes and metaphors when they compare what the Creator gave to them as gifts. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two things using the words, like or as. For example, the moss is like a green carpet covering the ground. A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two things directly. For example, the cloud is a floating pillow in the sky. In order to write similes and metaphors you might compare what you are sensing to something that may not be there at that moment. To do this you must be able to understand one thing as being or being like another thing using your imagination. To paraphrase Aristotle’s definition of a metaphor, you must perceive the similarities in two things that are dissimilar. The creation of similes and metaphors often reveals what you believe about yourself and the places that surround you.

Directions: Select two things in your place and create one simile and one metaphor. Then find a third thing and create either a simile or metaphor. Write them in the spaces below.

Simile:

Metaphor:

Simile or Metaphor:

1. Do you find it easier to create a simile or a metaphor?
2. Did writing these figures of speech help you understand them better?

Activity 9: Listening to the Landscape

Gary Snyder, writer and poet, tells a story about a Crow elder who said, “You know, I think if people stay somewhere long enough – even white people – the spirits will begin to speak to them. It’s the power of the spirits coming up from the land. The spirits and the old powers aren’t lost, they just need people to be around long enough and the spirits will begin to influence them” (Gary Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, p. 39)

Introduction: Traditional native people believe that Mother Earth speaks to them with many voices. Vine Deloria, Jr., Sioux author, lawyer, and professor, believed that “American Indians hold their lands – places – as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind” (*God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 1994). They often take time to listen to the landscape to learn some important lessons about how to live with respect for all of creation. Some people think “language is the very voice of the trees, the waves, and the forests” (Merleau-Ponty, In Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996, p. 74).

Directions: Go outside and listen to the language of the landscape. This language might be coming from humans and other-than-human parts of nature. Can you recognize any words from our human languages? What lessons can you learn from the land? In the spaces below, answer the questions about listening to the land.

What words or parts of words do you hear from the wind, water, trees and other plants, and animals?

Even if you don’t hear words from your surroundings, is nature trying to communicate with you? If so, what are some of the messages you hear?

Would listening to and understanding the language of the land be harder to do if you didn’t believe that the sounds coming from the earth are the spirits speaking to you?

Did you feel embarrassed when you were answering any of these questions? If so, why do you think you did?

Activity 11: Feeling and Being Felt

“The surroundings are aware, sensate, personified. They feel. They can be offended. And they must, at every moment, be treated with the proper respect” (Koyukon Indians of Alaska, reported by Richard Nelson and quoted in Abram, 1996, p. 69).

Introduction: Many traditional native people believe that all living things on Mother Earth must be respected. They also believe that these parts of the earth – animals, plants, clouds, rocks, waters, soil, air, and others – can feel you and have feelings. Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota author and teacher, believed “the old Lakota was wise. He knew that man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too.”

Directions: Go outdoors and find a tree or other plant. Touch it gently with respect. Try to feel the plant touching you. Find other parts of the earth and touch them in the same way. In the spaces below write about your experiences touching things and being touched by them.

Plant

Air

Rock

Soil

Water

1. Were you aware of these parts of the earth touching you?
2. Do you believe that the things you touched could be offended if you did not respect them?

Activity 19: Using Adjectives and Nouns (this worksheet is slightly different than, but complementary to, the activity described in the article)

“One of the things about Indigenous languages is that they have a way of preserving knowledge in the language. The language would tell you things that you might want to know, or you might need to know to survive. The knowledge in the language was often responsible for life and death.” John Mohawk, Turtle Clan Seneca, In Nelson, M. K. (Ed.). (2008). *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company. P. 173.

Introduction: No one knows exactly how human language began. Language probably was invented because it was needed to cooperate with each other for survival. Early humans lived close to nature and they may have imitated the sounds they heard around them. If it snowed, they noticed that all snow was not the same. Some snows have large flakes and others have small flakes. Some snows crunch when you walk and others are silent. Some snows can be packed into snowballs and others can't.

Directions: Go outside and observe something moving such as water, animals, smoke, clouds, plant leaves and branches, paper and plastic trash, and dust. What you see moving will be nouns. Write the names of these things on a piece of paper. Now describe these things using at least three words called adjectives. For example, if you write the noun “clouds” you can describe them using three words like icy, fluffy, and gray.

Noun Three Adjectives

Noun Three Adjectives

Noun Three Adjectives

1. How did using nouns and adjectives make you more aware of this place?

2. How does using adjectives help you communicate word meanings more clearly?

Activity 14: Attending

One element or tool of Native science is observation. "Careful observations of plants, animals, weather, celestial events, healing processes, the structures of natural entities, and the ecologies of nature" (Cajete, 2000, *Native Science*, p. 67)

Introduction: Observation takes advantage of all of our senses. When traditional native people concentrate on being with nature, they carefully attend to the earth. Gregory Cajete, Tewa Indian from Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, states, "Attention in the Indigenous sense, has to do with the focus of all senses. Seeing, listening, feeling, smelling, hearing and intuiting are developed and applied in the Indigenous perspective of attention" (Cajete, 1994, *Look to the Mountain*, p. 226). Cajete adds a sense that is not considered much, -- intuition. Intuition involves knowing something from inside the heart without using the other senses or reasoning powers. When people live close to the land and depend directly upon it for survival, they often develop their deeper internal wisdom.

Directions: Go outside and pay attention to your surroundings. Attend to your place by focusing all of your senses at once. Is it possible to use all of your senses together or do you have to concentrate on them one at a time? When you blend or overlap more than one sense, it is called synaesthesia. First consider combining several of your senses; then use them separately. Explain how each way of sensing feels to you.

Combine two or more senses:

Seeing:

Hearing:

Touching:

Smelling:

Tasting: (Make sure you wash what you taste, before putting it in your mouth to avoid poisons.)

1. Which sense is easiest for you to use?
2. Were you successful in combining two or more senses?
3. Did you try using the sense of intuition? What was that like?

Activity 21: Finding Patterns

“Many [Navajo] farmers planted crops by beginning in the middle of the field, spiraling out toward the boundaries. This practice suggested the strength inherent in cyclical continuity.” (P. 139) Lawrence Shorty, Navajo Health Educator, In Cajete, G. (1999) *A People's Ecology*.

Introduction: Many Native people are very aware of Nature's patterns and designs. They use these as teaching symbols to learn how to live a good life in harmony with all living beings. If you observe carefully outdoors, you may be able to find patterns and designs that will help you live a better life.

Directions: Go outside and look for different patterns and designs in nature. Look for spirals, meanderings, branchings, circles, cylinders, and spheres, explosions from the center, triangles, cones, squares, and rectangles, stars, and closely packed designs. Keep a record of what you find and where you find these patterns and designs. Be sure to label each pattern and design you find.

What I Found and Where I Found It:

1. How many different patterns and designs did you find?
2. How could each one be a symbol for helping you live a better life?

Activity 22: Giving Back

“Just imagine this corn pollen. We use this as an offering. Maybe the Great Spirit doesn’t need it, but for us it’s just the thing” David Kindle, Navajo elder. In Beck, Walters, & Francisco, *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life*, 2001, p. 40.

Introduction: Traditional native people believe it is important to give something back in thanks for the gifts they receive from the Creator. They offer prayers and sometimes give physical symbols such as corn meal or pollen, prayer sticks, feathers, tobacco, or burn plants like sweetgrass, cedar, and sage. Sometimes human hair is given too. Showing gratitude for gifts received by giving something back is called reciprocity. The Ojibway people tell this story about reciprocity: “When the badger is alive he eats this herb. Whatever herb the badger introduces is especially good. Some consider his medicine stronger than that of the bear, as he digs deeper and farther into the ground. Eagle Shield said that he buried a little tobacco as an offering to the badger whenever he dug any of these roots” (Densmore, 1918, p. 266, In V. Deloria, Jr. 2006, p.2).

Directions: Go outdoors and select a plant that you think is important. Make sure that the plant is not rare so you can pick some parts of it without threatening its survival. (Don’t pull it up by the roots.) Maybe you will pick some leaves, seeds, or flowers from the plant. Be sure to say thank you to the plant for giving you this gift. Use this plant to show your gratitude for three gifts you will receive.

Gift Number 1: A Beautiful View

Gift Number 2: A Special Rock or Stick

Gift Number 3: A Comfortable Place to Sit

1. Does giving something back when you receive a gift help you feel more thankful for it?
2. Is this way of showing thanks something you would like to continue doing?

Activity 25: Recognizing Interdependence

“On this land between these mountains we strive for unity and balance. When all is in balance with our Earth Mother, our Sky Father, and the People, then there is hozho, or harmony.”

Danny K. Blackgoat, Flagstaff, Arizona*

Introduction: There are seven principles of indigenous wisdom. These principles should guide people who live close to the land if it is to stay healthy. These principles are:

1. To understand the natural laws and to know that all things are interconnected
2. To understand energy flow and cycles
3. 3. To use natural resources consciously
4. To promote a favorable environment for all living things
5. To create diversity for beneficial, symbiotic relationships among plants and animals
6. To cooperate with others and the natural world
7. To learn from and use natural designs, pattern, and rhythms

Directions: Find a place that calls you there. Listen carefully to the language of the land for a message to guide you. Sit down with this guide sheet and a pen or pencil and fill in the blanks.

List four ways that you are related to this place:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

List three ways that other things in this place are related to each other”

- a.
- b.
- c.

1. How does this awareness affect what you might do here?

2. Are any other indigenous principles related to what you learned here? If so, which?

From the Foreword to *Time Among the Navajo* by Kathy Eckles Hooker, (1991)