

Traditional Algonquin Teachings



Hook: Heartbeat of Mother Earth

Read or listen to the audio clip: *The Heartbeat of Mother Earth*. Audio clip is available at www.thealgonquinway.ca; click on E-BOOKS and find *Heartbeat of Mother Earth*.

Discuss the role we each play in caring for Mother Earth and all who share our lives.

Discuss responsibility and reciprocity.

Discuss the fact that each culture has its own set of Teachings, some of which may be religious. Teachings are philosophies of life: ways of looking at and making sense of the world. Teachings help us find our way through life. Explain that today we are going to learn about some Anishinabe Teachings.

Classroom Activity: Making a Personal Medicine Wheel

Backgrounder

Many Algonquin see the Medicine Wheel as the most important healing tool known to man: it is a holistic guide to maintaining personal balance. Many First Nations people use the Medicine Wheel in combination with sacred ceremonies (ie: smudging, honouring the Creator) to ask for guidance in one's life. Anishinabe medicine refers to the properties or qualities associated with a plant, thing or person.

The circular form of the Medicine Wheel represents the wholeness of a traditional Algonquin lifestyle. It is balanced, yet embraces movement and change – like the cycles of Mother Nature. The Medicine Wheel has no top, bottom, length or width.

For the Algonquin, the Medicine Wheel addresses one's spiritual, emotional and physical needs. Those who meditate on the teachings of the Medicine Wheel bring unity, peace, harmony and courage into their lives, and the lives of those around them.

Meditation is another name for what many cultures traditionally call prayer.

Activity

1. Using the Backgrounder notes, introduce the concept of the Algonquin Medicine Wheel. If possible, invite an Algonquin or other First Nation person to come in and discuss these teachings. Ask the students to define the Teaching which best reflects their current life-stage.
2. Tell the students that they are each going to create a personal Medicine Wheel. It will be a pictorial representation (mural) of the people, challenges, spiritual gifts and traditional symbols that define their world.
3. Have students think about the challenges in their lives, and write down the top three or four points.
4. For homework, they should speak with their siblings, parents and grandparents about the challenges in their lives. Ask them to summarize these challenges for each age group in their family (Child, Youth, Adult and Elder). If someone's Medicine Wheel is incomplete because they have no one close to them in each of the life-stages, this too presents challenges.

Age range: 9 to 11 years

Time: 90 minutes

Resources:

- class-set *Guide to Creating My Medicine Wheel and Mègwetch Song (Thank You)* song sheet
- Bristol board (black, red, white, yellow), glue, paint, and markers
- 7 smooth stones per student

Learning Outcome:

Students will be introduced to traditional Anishinabe teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfathers.

Anishinabe is the name chosen by the First Nation people; it means "the people" or "the good beings".

Algonquin is a name given the First Nation people by the French.

Anishinabe consists of three First Nations bands: Algonquin, Cree and Ojibwe. Each Nation shares a similar language base, with many differences (similar to how the English, French and Spanish share Latin as their base).

5. Provide each student with *Guide to Creating My Medicine Wheel* worksheet and ask them to follow the detailed instructions.
6. Have students present and share their Medicine Wheels with their classmates. This part of the class can be opened and closed with the singing of the *Anishinabe Kwe Song*. Melody downloads are available at: www.thealgonquinway.ca; click on E-BOOKS and find *Algonquin Language Song Book*.

Discussion

- Has creating your personal Medicine Wheel helped you better understand the other people in your family?
- When you look at your Medicine Wheel for a while, in a quiet space, does it help you reflect on your life stage?

Extension

Study your personal medicine wheel after six months then one year; have you moved to a different lifestage on the wheel?

NAME: _____

Guide to Creating My Medicine Wheel



1. From a sheet of Bristol board cut a large circle and divide into four equal sections. Trade your pieces with classmates so you end up with one piece of Black, Red, Yellow and White. Tape these sections together from the back to form a complete circle: the basis of your Medicine Wheel.
2. Create a collage in each section incorporating images, text and found objects based on the following Medicine Wheel teachings.
3. Label each section by the name of its Spirit Keeper. As a class, learn how to pronounce and spell these four names.



WABANONG / wah-buh-noong is Spirit Keeper of the East:

Life Stage: include names and images of the CHILDREN in your family

Challenges: list 3 or 4 CHALLENGES faced by the CHILDREN in your family

Place: SPIRIT – time of new beginnings

Colour: make the background of this section YELLOW representing the sun, a new day

Add images to this section of the following:

Season: SPRING – new birth, creation

Plant Medicine: TOBACCO – used when asking something from Mother Earth; provides clarity

Animal: EAGLE – flies high and sees the big picture; gives inspiration to begin

Food Staples: MAPLE SYRUP, FRESH GREEN FOOD, EGGS

SHAWANONG / shah-wuh-noong is Spirit Keeper of the South:

Life Stage: include names and images of the YOUTH in your family

Challenges: 3 or 4 CHALLENGES faced by the YOUTH in your family

Place: EMOTION– time to feel our heart and play

Colour: make the background of this section RED representing strength and protection

Add images to this section of the following:

Season: SUMMER – time of growth, abundance and trust

Plant Medicine: SAGE – cleanses and holds positive energy when used as a smudge

Animal: COYOTE (the trickster), MOUSE (examines), PORCUPINE (trust). There are many ways of learning.

Food Staples: BERRIES, FISH, FRUITS

SHA'NGABI'HANONG / shahn-guh-bee-han-noong is Spirit Keeper of the West:

Life Stage: include names and images of ADULTS in your family

Challenges: 3 or 4 CHALLENGES faced by the ADULTS in your family

Place: PHYSICAL – time of maturity, experience, expertise; time to review our life paths

Colour: make the background of this section BLACK representing goals, achievements and inner strength

Add images to this section of the following:

Season: AUTUMN – harvest, abundance, beauty

Plant Medicine: CEDAR – protection and grounding

Animal: BEAR – from whom healing, strength and protection come

Food Staples: CORN, RICE, VEGETABLES, FISH, MEAT

KEEWATINONG / key-weh-di-noong is Spirit Keeper of the North:

Life Stage: include names and images of ELDERS in your family

Challenges: 3 or 4 CHALLENGES faced by the Elders in your family

Place: MIND, THINKING, WISDOM – time of giveaway of the gifts of experience; return to the good life or second childhood

Colour: make the background of this section WHITE representing truth, completion and purity

Add images to this section of the following:

Season: WINTER – rebirth, understanding

Plant Medicine: SWEETGRASS – whose teaching is kindness because it bends without breaking and attracts wisdom of the elders

Animal: DEER (strength in gentleness), MOOSE (self esteem), BUFFALO (abundance, gratitude)

Food Staples: MEAT, FISH, DRIED FOODS

Outdoor Activity: Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers

Backgrounder: The Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers

When time began there were Seven Grandfathers who led our people. Before they left us to cross over to the spirit world, each of them offered teachings by which the people should live. These teachings, some of which were mentioned in the Sacred Tree, are what western society would call values: honesty, humility, respect, courage, wisdom, love and truth.

Although they are listed in a linear order here, these values do not build upon one another in a progressive way. Rather, all are important, and all should be integrated into our way of being at the same time.

For every positive value, you will find its opposite also visible in our world. The Grandfathers taught us to strive for the positive aspect, but you cannot make much progress toward it until you acknowledge how its negative side plays out in your present life.

Honesty

Most of us prefer honesty if we had the choice, right? But just how honest are you? Can you always look yourself squarely in the eye and say that you are being honest in all aspects of your life with others, and most of all, with yourself? When our grandmother, Kokomis, is full, she reflects the light of the sun and sees all. Can you face her with straight eyes? Or do you carry on a life of **deceit**?

Humility

It is not easy to be truly humble. In the English language it gets confused with being worthless, but it's more about being gentle and calm, and realizing that we are not worse, or better, than anyone else. At the same time, it demands that you use the gifts that you were born with for the reasons they were given to you, instead of doing whatever is cool. All too often we succumb to our **Ego**, which tells us that those gifts make us better than others. Western thinking works on our **Pride** factor, and gets us to compete for first place, often at the cost of hurting others.

Respect

Respect means 'to feel or show honour or esteem for someone or something; to consider their well-being, or to treat someone or something with deference or courtesy.' Showing respect is a law of life. It applies to how you treat others, providing us with rules of conduct and courtesy, but it also applies to how you treat yourself. Would you treat anyone else like that?

If you treat yourself with **contempt**, by not honouring the gifts bestowed upon you by the Creator, then it will be difficult for you to treat others with respect. You may spend your time despising others for what they have become or what they own or have accomplished, thinking that 'it should have been me', or that someone's got it out for you.

Courage

To risk our own wellbeing and safety in order to save or protect that of another is courageous. So is having the strength of mind and spirit to withstand danger, fear or difficult circumstances. It is facing life with integrity – doing what you know in your heart to be right.

On the other hand, courage has little to do with voluntary involvement in life-threatening activities, such as the extreme sports that are so popular today. These seem more like attempts to alleviate the numbness of a society raised by television.

Wisdom

Amassing huge quantities of knowledge might help you to become a millionaire, but it won't make you wise. Wisdom comes from internalizing that knowledge, from understanding its significance, and then determining when best to use it. It is a skill, so it does become better with practice.

Operating in this world without this sort of informed judgement makes you **naïve**, and perhaps vulnerable to those who would take advantage of your innocence.

Love

Altruistic love is not as common as you think. Too often love is limited to romance and passion, where we think that the object of our love is there to meet our needs and desires. But if our love is truly altruistic, then we are obliged to learn exactly what the object of our desire requires in order to become the best that they can be; and then we must make sure that they get it. This is relatively easy to deal with if you are talking about your favourite toy or rose bush, but it is quite a different situation when the object of your affection is a person.

Romantic love cannot occur without risk – you cannot guarantee that the object of your love will return your love. Opening your heart in this way involves encountering **fear**: fear that you are not good enough; fear that they don't love you; fear that they might leave you alone again. However, regardless of the risk, love survives: it is as perennial as the grass.

Truth

Universal laws exist. The scientific axiom that says that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, is not very different than the old sayings: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' and 'What goes around, comes around'. It is wise to recognize these truths and accept them into our lives, thereby learning to work with them.

Instead, however, modern society seems focused on **corruption** – continuously trying to defy the truth through improper conduct. We all know people who are continuously trying to get something for nothing. These are the ones who see what they can get away with behind our backs. These are the ones who know how to work the system. For their impaired judgment, we all pay.

View: Talking stick images by visiting www.thealgonquinway.ca. Click on CULTURAL SYMBOLS, then CEREMONY, then CEREMONIAL.

The base of this above was an oral universal teaching given to our Circle by Elder Lillian Pitawanakat in June of 1997. We have expanded our understanding of these values from life experiences. Reproduced from Anishnabe 101 published by The Circle of Turtle Lodge 2008.

Activity

1. In preparation for this activity:
 - Make seven flash cards, each labeled with one of the Teachings.
 - If unavailable in the schoolyard or woodland, ask students to bring in seven small smooth stones. Stone is usually selected for how it feels: polished or worn smooth by water, perhaps with indentations that feel comforting to rub with your fingers. The type of stone might also be specifically selected. For example, rose quartz would be particularly good to use for a Healing Ceremony.
 - If you choose to do the Extension, ask students to bring in a stick, feather or stone.
 - Practice singing the *Mègwetch Song (Thank You)*.
2. If weather permits, gather in a quiet shaded area of a playground or woodland. If available, ask each student to gather seven small smooth stones.
3. Reference Backgrounder notes: *Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers*. Gather in a circle and discuss each Teaching in detail with the class. As you present a Teaching to the class, lay the corresponding flash card on the ground and weigh it down with a stone.
4. Ask each student to use paint or markers to write one Teaching on each of their stones to create a set.
5. Once again gather the class into a sitting circle. Introduce the concept of the talking stick, feather or stone. Traditionally when engaging in a group discussion, the Anishinabe sit in a circle and pass around a talking stick. The person holding the talking stick is invited to speak and all others must focus attention on what that person is saying.
6. Passing around the talking stick, have each student choose the Teaching that is most important to them, and share their understanding of why it resonates with them. They should provide an example of how the Teaching relates to their daily life.
7. Close your discussion by singing *Mègwetch Song (Thank You)*. Melody downloads are available at: www.thealgonquinway.ca; click on E-BOOKS and find *Algonquin Language Song Book*.

Discussion

- How do the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers compare to virtues promoted by other cultures?
- Why are such Teachings important to the social fabric of a society?
- What does the Talking Stick teach us about sharing, listening and diplomacy?

Extension

Students make a talking stick or feather decorated with leather laces, beads, ribbons and features.

The Heartbeat of Mother Earth



There is no greater thing we as peoples can do for our Mother Earth and for our children of the future than to preserve our rich heritage and relationship with this land. All things have responsibilities. The Little Bonnechere River has always had from the Creator a responsibility to run each day. It runs each day to cleanse the Earth, be home to many creatures and provide drink to all things. If it did not meet its responsibilities each day none of us would be here today. Recognise this and smile when you see running water because it is running for you and me.

The culture and heritage of the Algonquins and other First Nations peoples includes among many things the drum. It is said that the beating of the drum is the heartbeat of Mother Earth. In the stories of Aboriginal people it is our responsibility from the Creator to keep alive our traditions including the drum. The stronger our practice of our responsibility including the drum, the stronger will the heart and soul of Mother Earth be. The drum is symbolic of our whole culture. It is said that if we leave the drum, we forego our responsibility to our Mother the Earth whose heart would stop beating. In recognition and thanks for that we will carry the drum to this day.

One of the responsibilities that all people have each day like the Little Bonnechere is to maintain our rich heritage and special relationship with the land around us. An important part of that relationship is to recognize that while the land is there for us each day we too are here for the land. We have responsibilities to let the trees live and the waters flow. Do not let them disappear. The survival of the environment for our future generations alone will stand as testimony as to the strength and richness of our heritage yesterday and today. Our ancestors have all done the job to the best of their ability to preserve the land we as their children now enjoy. We owe it to our children and the Earth itself to do no less. We must make sure there is always room for the land and all its creatures. For the day there is no room for them is the day there is no room for us.

Robert Whiteduck, Golden Lake First Nation, 1998

Mègwetch Song (Thank You)

Transcription by: L. Davis



Flute

(Chorus) Oh way ya hey ya hey ya ho Oh way ya hey ya hey ya ho Oh

6

way ya hey ya hey ya ho - - - Chi Meeg-wetch, Mi - sho - mi-suk Chi Meeg-wetch -

12

Ko-ko-mi-suk Chi Meeg-wetch - din way muk a nuk Oh way ya hey ya hey ya ho

Sing four times through.