

# Learning from Indigenous Perspectives

## Land-Based Learning in Early Years Settings



## Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the Land where this research project took place is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and is covered by Treaty #13. We would like to express our gratitude to them and to all the Indigenous peoples, past and present, who have lived on and cared for this Land. The members of the research team and the educators and children who participated in the project come from many places around the world, but we are all treaty people on this Land.

Our hope is that this project contributes to truth and reconciliation and to decolonizing education as we continue to learn about the histories, cultures, and knowledges of Indigenous Peoples and practice and share what we learn.

## Many Thanks!

Many thanks to all the staff, children, and their families in the childcare centres who supported this project. It was a gift to be able to learn with you and from you. Thanks also to my co-learners on the research team: co-researcher Nicola Maguire; advisor Lori Budge; consultant Haley Higdon; project coordinators Safra Najeemudin and Ana-Luisa Sales; and student researchers Meghan Beckwith, Jade Biggs, Somayya Bobat, Shevaun Burrell, Dana Gulley, Jennifer Jewson, Linjie Liu, Elise Patterson, Anisah Ramdeo, Kayla Ritchie, and Taylor Rowe.

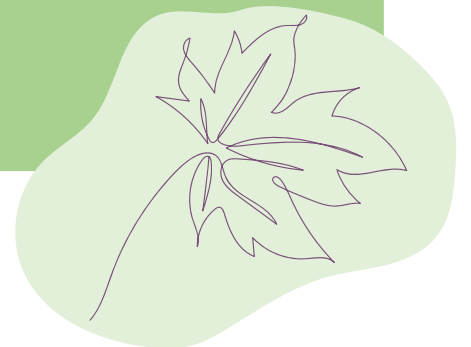
This document was developed as part of the SSHRC-funded research project, Designing and Implementing Environmental Inquiry Strategies in Urban Early Years Programs in Canada, 2020-2024. The project was based at The School of Early Childhood at George Brown College, Toronto, Ontario under the direction of Dr. Monica McGlynn-Stewart. ([mmcglynnstewart@georgebrown.ca](mailto:mmcglynnstewart@georgebrown.ca))

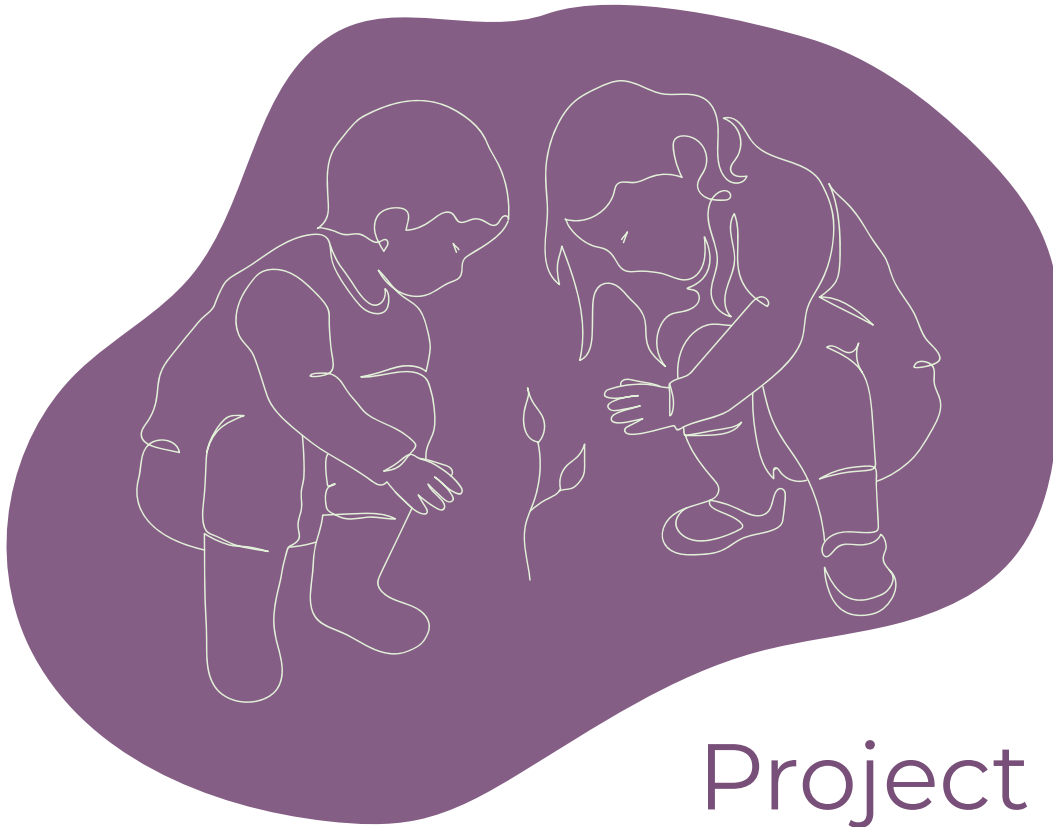
## A Definition of Land-Based Learning

Land-based education assumes an environmental approach to learning that recognizes the deep connection and relationship of Indigenous peoples to the Land. It seeks to offer education pertaining to the Land that is grounded within Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. Through this approach it is acknowledged that it is the cultivation and observation of the relationship between people and the Land that knowing and learning occurs (OISE Library News, Boon, 2018).

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## Project Context

The Land-Based Learning research project was a four-year project running from 2020 to 2024. The project took place in mainstream preschool rooms at 10 childcare centres across Toronto with two educators from each for a total of 20 educators. None of the educators identified as Indigenous. The research team was mostly non-Indigenous. We were grateful to learn from our advisor and team member, Lori Budge, who is a member of the Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation and faculty member at George Brown College, as well from our workshop speakers who brought teachings from different First Nations: Lori Budge (Ojibwe and Odawa teachings), Dr. Hopi Martin (Ojibwe teachings), Carolyn Crawley (Mi'Kmaq teachings), Natasha Bascavan (Anishinaabe and Métis teachings) and Emma Greenfield (Mohawk teachings). Throughout the project, our understanding of Indigenous Knowledge regarding cosmology, pharmacology, environmental science, spirituality, and education evolved through our weekly gratitude circles, and through listening, reading, viewing, discussing, and

consulting with Indigenous writers, educators, and Knowledge Keepers. We also learned from the children as they developed relationships with the natural world around them. We shared our learning and provided resources for busy working early years educators and this new learning informed the way they spoke and acted with the children outdoors. This in turn impacted our understanding of what we were seeing and hearing in the centres.

During the research project, the educators (and the research team!) grew in their understanding of Indigenous world views in which humans are connected to the rest of nature in a web of interrelationships and responsibilities. Typically, early years educators in Canada are well versed in Western pedagogical strategies, principles of education, and observation and reflection frameworks; however, the strengths of learning from and with Indigenous perspectives on Land-Based Learning have received little attention. To benefit from the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, we need to learn

new teaching/ learning strategies, new ways of understanding our relationship to the world, and new ways of observing and documenting learning. To read more about what we learned about Indigenous perspectives on Land-Based Learning, see our article in the journal, Learning Landscapes:



***Learning From Indigenous Perspectives: Wellbeing in the Early Years***

McGlynn-Stewart, M., Maguire, N., Budge, L., Sales, A.-L., & Patterson, E.



Two children looking at the puddle to see their reflection

We hope that this resource will support educators as they begin to incorporate the worldview and pedagogies of Indigenous Land-Based Learning alongside Western views and pedagogies. Elder Albert Marshall reminds us that the goal is not to choose one over the other, or to blend the two, but to value the strengths of each:

**“Two-Eyed Seeing** refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and to using both of these eyes together”

Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall,  
2012, p. 335

This resource contains a list of suggested activities for supporting children’s Land-Based Learning and connection to nature. It is intended to be a guide that educators can adapt in ways that support their children’s needs, interests, and contexts. The goal of these activities is not to promote children’s

objective observation of nature or their acquisition of scientific knowledge for its own sake; rather they are meant to support the development of positive relationships with the rest of nature as well as learning about and from our non-human relatives. We recommend that early learning centres reach out and establish relationships with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or educators for advice and support on this learning journey.

The guiding themes that run throughout these activities are:

- Greeting and acknowledging nature
- Learning how to recognize and show gratitude for the gifts of nature
- Reciprocating these gifts by giving back and caring for nature
- Understanding our interdependence with non-human beings

The order of activities is also intentional as they begin with noticing and acknowledging the Land around the playground, then move on to encouraging expressions of gratitude for nature, and finally to learning about and caring for nature, our non-human relatives.

## Indigenous Pedagogies

According to Mitchell Huguenin, Indigenous pedagogy specialist at Trent University, Indigenous pedagogies have the following four principles:

Indigenous pedagogies stem from pre-colonial approaches to teaching and learning which emphasize:

- The development of the learner as a whole person
- Learning through experience
- Learning through the Land
- Recognizing the important role that Elders and Traditional Peoples have in passing on knowledge.



### *What is Indigenous Pedagogy?*

Trent University

When thinking about working with young children specifically, we were very moved by a video entitled, “What is Land-Based Learning? A Digital Forum” (Brass et al., 2020).

In it, Willie Ermine, a Cree Elder, Knowledge Keeper and Ceremonialist from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan speaks about introducing young children, aged 2-5 years, to Land-Based Learning.



### *What is Land-Based Learning? A Digital Forum*

Willie Ermine



Two children turning a log over to find insects while other children look on

Elder Willie Ermine encourages adults to respect children’s perspectives and responses to the natural world, and to resist imposing adult perspectives. After bringing children out to a natural area he recommends that adults:

- Encourage children to observe nature closely: Ask them, “what do you see?”
- Encourage children to connect emotionally with nature: Ask them, “how do you feel?”
- Encourage children to engage with all their senses playfully and follow their lead.
- Value children’s intuition.
- Learn from the children. (Brass et al., 2020)

Non-Indigenous educators may be unsure of which Indigenous Knowledges and practices are appropriate to include in mainstream early learning settings. This guide developed by Lori Budge may be helpful:

## How Can Educators Support Appreciation and Avoid Appropriation of Indigenous Cultures?

These ideas were developed as part of the research project, *Designing and Implementing Environmental Inquiry Strategies in Early Years Programs 2020-2024* under the guidance of team member Lori Budge, a member of the Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation.

To be inclusive and to work toward decolonization and reconciliation, you should teach about Indigenous cultural practices. However, it is important not to mimic Indigenous cultural practices, clothing, or objects. It is not appropriate to practice or perform them yourselves if you are non-Indigenous or are not being led by an Indigenous person.

For example, you can prepare a discussion, read a book by an Indigenous author, or show a video of Indigenous dancing, drumming, and singing and tell the children that these are important practices for Indigenous people to communicate things such as gratitude, healing, or to celebrate being together after a long absence. Then, non-Indigenous people can adapt these concepts, for example gratitude for the gifts of the earth, and create their own songs or dances or other ways of expressing gratitude.

However, these experiences will not be the same as they are for Indigenous people because they have a special relationship with the earth through these ceremonies. The idea is to provide a context where you make your own meaning about what you are doing. This ensures that you are not mimicking or appropriating Indigenous culture. Non-Indigenous educators should not refer to these activities as if they are doing “Indigenous dancing” or “Indigenous drumming”.

Regalia (traditional clothing) and cultural objects are sacred to Indigenous Peoples and need to be treated with respect. Just as educators would not promote children playing with objects or practices that have sacred significance for some Christians, such as crucifixes or rosary beads, or pretending to serve communion, it is not appropriate to play dress up with clothing that is meant to look like regalia or use Indigenous cultural objects like replica totem poles as props in games or lessons.



# Activity Ideas

## Outdoor Land-Based Learning

With these pedagogical principles in mind, we offer the following activity ideas that were developed as we learned with the children and educators about how to incorporate Land-Based Learning in the early learning centres. In addition, we have included quotes from Indigenous authors, links to picture books and videos by Indigenous authors, and quotes from some of the early years educators who participated in our research project.

### Gratitude

We have experienced that the Indigenous perspective of gratitude for the gifts of the Land leads to curiosity and relationship building, which in turn leads to a desire to care for and give back to Mother Earth. When adults focus on expressing gratitude for the gifts of the natural world and affirm and support children's natural curiosity and interest in the natural world, everyone becomes more attuned to and

engaged with the world around us. This results in a new awareness, feelings of connection and joy, and a sense of responsibility to our fellow creatures. Gratitude is a key component in all of the suggested activities below.



A child watering the flowers they have in their playground

## 7 Greeting Trees and Plants in the Environment

Encourage/support the children to notice the trees and plants in your playground. Encourage/support the children to greet the trees and plants and to use their names if known (simply “hello tree” or “hello maple tree”). Encourage/support the children to think of the gifts that the trees and plants bring to the world.

They may say things like:

- Shade
- Homes for birds or squirrels
- Food for animals, birds, and humans
- Trees provide wood and paper
- Beautiful to look at and listen to (e.g., wind in the leaves, crunching dry leaves)

Encourage/support the children to thank the trees and plants for these gifts. Ask the children how we can give back to the trees and plants.

They may say things like:

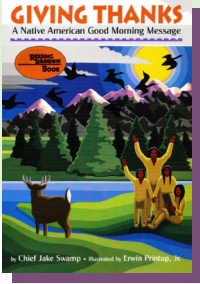
- Water the plants/trees
- Don't leave garbage on the ground around them
- Be gentle with them

Here is an opportunity to explore the Indigenous teaching of All My Relations and the animacy of all beings as described by Cherokee author, Thomas King:

“Interconnection is a central core of First Nations, Inuit and Métis worldviews and ways of knowing. Some First Nations sum this up with the phrase “**All My Relations**”. This mindset reflects people who are aware that everything in the universe is connected. It also reinforces that everyone and everything has a purpose, is worthy of respect and caring, and has a place in the grand scheme of life. First Nations relationships fully embrace the notion that people and their families are strongly connected to the communities they live in, their ancestors and future descendants, the land they live on, and all of the plant, animal and other creatures that live upon it. They know they are stewards of the Earth and have traditionally lived in harmony with their environment for millennia. Their traditional practices boast amazing sustainability, ecological awareness and knowledge, and a strong scientific understanding of the earth, weather, cycles of the seasons, medicinal and food sources, marine foods and harvesting, and creating everything they need from nature’s bounty.”  
(Kaminski, n.d.)



Children exploring the tree by climbing, walking along the exposed roots, and hugging the tree.



***Giving Thanks***  
By Chief Jake Swamp



***We Give Our Thanks***  
By Sara General



***The Honourable Harvest***  
Four-minute video by Robin Wall Kimmerer

“When we step outside and when we immerse ourselves in nature, it is a reminder and it really places us in this vast web of life in which we are not in control, in which we follow. We are made by that system. It wasn’t made by us. So, I think it re-positions us in a really important way that can evoke both awe, and connection, and in the right way, humility”

Early years educator, spring 2023

## Gratitude Activities

- Morning gratitude circles  
Prompt: What are some gifts of nature that you are thankful for?
- Creating a gratitude tree  
Use a real tree branch. Tie paper strips to the tree branch on which children have written or drawn their expressions of gratitude.
- Spontaneous expressions of gratitude  
Encourage children to express their gratitude on a regular basis. Model expressing gratitude for the natural world throughout the day.



Two children hugging a tree in their playground



Three children collecting water on their mittens and expressing gratitude for the water while naming the gifts that water provides

“So, it’s just a deeper appreciation and understanding. Like that connection in terms of emotional and spiritual connection to the Land and how we treat it. I think it’s really important that children are being mindful of that”

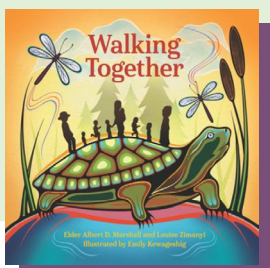
Early years educator, spring 2023



Children placing leaves in a bowl and saying what they are grateful for

## 2 Exploring Trees and Their Gifts

1. Encourage the children to explore the trees around using their senses. (ex. Touch, smell, sound, sight). What can the children describe about the trees? How does hugging a tree feel? Do different trees feel different? Smell different?
2. Investigate different types of trees. What are the differences between their leaves/ bark/shape? Try using the biodiversity sheets (<https://arboretum.uoguelph.ca/educationandevents/id-sheets>) to identify different trees.
3. Explore how trees provide food for animals through their seeds. What can you discover about the relationships between trees and animals/insects?
4. What gifts do trees give to us? How can we show gratitude and care for the trees?



### *Walking Together*

By Elder Albert Marshall  
and Louise Zimanyi



A child using their hands to feel the bark

“We've definitely taken more of an appreciation towards nature, things that we may have taken for granted before. We're showing appreciation and we're actually giving or feeling appreciation for what the tree provides, for the warmth that the sun provides, just for all of those things”

Early years educator, spring 2021

### 3 Exploring Pinecones and Their Gifts



A child exploring the roots and bark of the tree in their playground

1. Can you find some pinecones in the playground or surrounding area? Collect pinecones with the children if possible. Bring some in from the area if there aren't any close by.
2. Discuss how the weather (cold and warm) changes the pinecones. How do these changes fit into the purpose of the pinecone? The lifecycle of the tree?
3. Discuss the appearance of the pinecones. They often come in many shapes, sizes, and textures.
4. Support representative (e.g., cooking) play with the pinecones. Supplement with other local natural materials such as acorns, sand, and stones.
5. Encourage children to look at trees in their environment to identify which ones have

cones. Can you tell which cones are from which trees?

6. What gifts do pinecones offer? How can we show gratitude for the gifts of the pinecones? Engage with the concept of interrelatedness of all beings.



A child who created a squirrel house with sticks, pine needles, pinecones, and rocks

“When it’s raining, we go outside to a little hut in our playground, and we stand there, and we say “Thank you” to the rain. “Thank you for feeding the grass, thank you for feeding our fruits and vegetables so we can eat, thank you for washing our cars!” [laughing] “Thank you for letting us splash in the puddles!”

Early years educator, spring 2021

## 4 Honouring the Birds

Encourage/support the children in the gratitude and reciprocity cycle: notice the birds, greet them (by name if known), think of the gifts they bring, thank the birds, think of how we can give back to the birds.

Provide opportunities to learn more about the birds they see. They may be seeing some of the following:

- Sparrows
- Blue Jays
- Cardinals
- Chickadees
- Dark-eyed Juncos

You may also see geese flying south during December as the water in rivers and creeks start to freeze. You can use reference books, the internet, or free apps such as Merlin as sources of information.



***Merlin App***

Cornell Lab of Ornithology



***We All Play***

By Julie Flett



A child looking through binoculars to get a closer look at the birds in their tree in the playground

children can identify them. What part of the day do the birds visit? What areas of the playground do they come to when they visit?

3. Continue this observation and discussion over a number of days/weeks. Think with the children about concepts such as All My Relations – what gifts do birds give to us? How can we show gratitude for the birds?
4. Give children an opportunity to offer gratitude and give back to the birds by making a pinecone bird feeder. If you don't have access to pinecones on site, you can ask staff or families to collect some and bring them to your outdoor space. Cover the pinecones with vegetable shortening or coconut oil and sprinkle with birdseed. Ideally, hang them where the children can see them from indoors as well as outdoors.



**Sweetest Kulu**  
By Celina Kalluk

## 5 Honouring, Learning from, and Caring for Birds

1. Start with observing birds that are in and around the playground. Encourage the children to watch for birds visiting the playground.
2. Get familiar with the bird visitors. Which birds come to the playground? See if the



A child looking through binoculars to see the birds visiting a tree



A child picking a great spot to place their bird feeder on the tree

Doug Anderson, Metis author and educator, describes our responsibility to give back in reciprocity for all that we have been given:

“We are responsible to all things around us, not out of superiority to them, but because we are part of them, and cannot be safely disconnected from them. Our lives need to be an expression of this truth: whenever we take something – and we are always taking something- something should be given back”

Anderson et al., 2017, p. 134

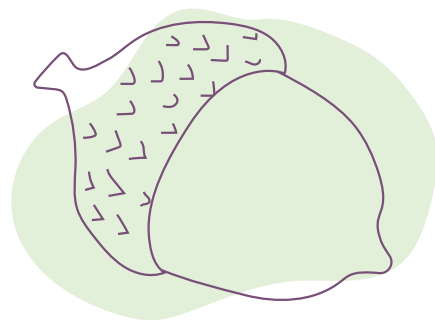
## 6 Respecting and Protecting Water

### 1. You can begin by:

- Observing/listening to the children if they remark about water or if they play with water.
- Drawing attention to water and facilitating conversations about water.

### 2. Prompts:

- Talk about the different states of water and where we find/use water (snow, rain, ice, water from the tap).
- Water is everywhere. For example: in food, we drink it, our bodies are made up of water, etc.
- What are the gifts of water? How do we use water everyday? For example: we need water to live, the plants and animals need water to live, the rain waters the plants, we use water to clean things and ourselves, the rain can cool us off after hot weather, etc.
- How can we reciprocate the gifts of water? For example: conserving water when we use it, not littering to help keep the water clean, etc.



## 16 Learning from Indigenous Perspectives

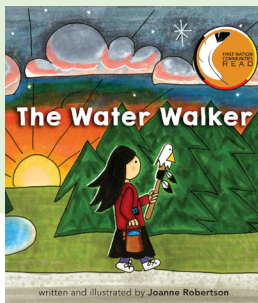
3. Take opportunities to explore the properties of water in any season (water in summer/spring/fall, ice/snow in winter/fall).
4. Encourage gratitude for water; take care to speak in positive terms with the children when it rains or snows to show appreciation, instead of framing this as “bad weather”.



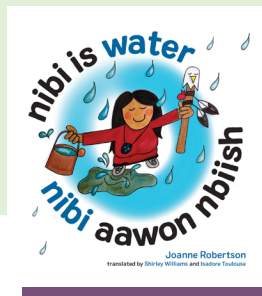
Three children engaging with a puddle and recognizing that they can see their reflection



Two children exploring and engaging with the puddles during their walk around their childcare centre. They were also heard thanking the rain for the puddle



*The Water Walker*  
By Joanne Robertson



*Nibi is Water*  
By Joanne Robertson



*Joanne Robertson Reads  
her Book 'Nibi is Water'*  
Video on youtube.com



Three children making mud soup using natural materials and water from the puddle



Three children exploring the puddle they found on their nature walk

## 7 Honouring the Sky

1. You can begin by:

- Observing/listening to the children if they remark about the sky (sunset, clouds, etc.).
- Drawing attention to the sky and facilitating conversations about why the sky is different every day, comparing from day to day.

2. Talk about the cycles of the day (morning to night).

3. Repeat the experience over a number of days.

4. Take photographs of the sky (different times, different days) to compare. Have children take photographs of the sky.

5. Show the children the photographs on the subsequent days and prompt them to remember their experiences. How is the sky different? The same? Think about weather and time of day.

6. Share gratitude for the sky (What are we thankful to the sky for?).

7. Try to stay outside long enough and watch the sunset with the children in winter.

**“Before I thought it's just play... Land-Based is how we play in the playground. But now it's incorporating nature and taking care of nature. What we have, we are giving back to nature as well. Before it's just taking**

everything to ourselves. Now it's time for us to give back to nature instead of taking everything”.

Early years educator, spring 2022



Children looking up and being grateful for the beautiful sunset in their playground

- Drawing attention to insects found in the playground and facilitating conversations about what is found.



A child holding a worm they found during outdoor time

## 8 Honouring, Respecting, and Protecting Insects

This activity can be an opportunity to encourage children to observe closely and examine with their senses, to appreciate similarities and differences, and wonder about the gifts some of our smallest non-human relatives give to us.

1. You can begin by:

- Observing/listening to the children if they remark about the insects in the playground.

2. Join the children on their searches for insects. Search under logs and rocks using sticks. Make sure to remind the children to be gentle and caring. For example, discuss how the logs and rocks are the insects' homes, and they should leave them in their homes.

3. Explore the types of insects that you find. What do they look like? Where do you find them? Can you identify what kind of insect they are? You can use the magnifying glasses and biodiversity sheets to help you identify the insects.

4. Encourage discussion about topics such as migration, hibernation, and survival. For

example, where do insects go in the winter? How do they survive? What do insects eat?

5. Think with the children about how we are connected to insects. What gifts do insects give to us? (ex. Pollinators, worms provide nutrients in the soil). How can we show gratitude for insects?



An educator holding a snail in their hand while children look closely



Two children looking closely at snails they found on a rock in their playground

“When we took the fly outside, they were like, oh is it going to be OK out there? Is it missing its mommy?” So, we started talking about different potential reasons that this poor fly would be sad.”

Early years educator, spring 2021



Two children looking for insects under the log in their playground



## 9 Learning About our Relatives Through Biodiversity Sheets and Animal Tracks

1. Provide the materials: biodiversity sheets, magnifying glasses.
2. Encourage the children to match the animal tracks to the animals on the biodiversity sheets. Have the children spotted any of these tracks and animals in the playground? (ex. squirrel tracks, bird tracks)
3. Encourage discussions about who visits the playground. Who do you share the playground with?



### ***Biodiversity Sheets***

University of Guelph Arboretum

“The children recognize different things [outside]. They recognize the birds. They recognize the sky. They recognize small aspects of the environment that we normally don’t pay attention to. So, they’re using it to support their play in all different aspects. The building aspect, creating stories about different things in their pretend play. It’s really supporting the children to just kind of deep dive into their minds, their body, their senses, all of it into their play”

Early years educator, spring, 2021



Children comparing the footprints they found in the snow to the biodiversity sheets

## 10 Playful Creations with Natural Materials

1. Collect natural materials with the children if possible. What could you use from the playground environment? (e.g., sticks, leaves, pinecones, rocks)
2. Provide a natural “canvas”. For example, a log with a flat top or big wood cookies. Both are great for representing a face or as a surface for a sculpture.
3. Encourage the children to make faces and other representations using these materials.
4. Refrain from painting or glueing the natural elements so children can appreciate their natural beauty and complexity.
5. Document the children’s creations by taking photographs or have the children take photographs.
6. Return the leaves, sticks, rocks, etc. to the Land.

Some questions you may ask yourself are: how can you and the children express gratitude for these natural materials? How can the Indigenous teaching of the **Honourable Harvest** guide your gratitude?



### *The Honourable Harvest*

Video by Robin Wall Kimmerer



A “soup” a child made with natural materials including pinecones



A face a child made using natural material and a log

## 77 Introducing the Topic of Treaties

The following activity guide is meant to support children in learning about the history and relationship between Indigenous people and settlers through the exploration of treaties. These question prompts and activity ideas have been adapted from curriculum provided by the **Moccasin Identifier Project**, which seeks to educate children about the First Nations of this land and the responsibilities settlers on this land have as Treaty People.

### 1. What is a good friend?

- What does a good friend do?
- How does it feel when a good friend shares with you? Or helps you? Or plays with you?
- You can use art materials or construction materials to show what a good friend is.

### 2. A Classroom of Friends.

- What does a classroom of friends look like?
- What does a classroom of friends sound like?
- What does a classroom of friends feel like?
- What agreements do we need to make to each other to be a good classroom of friends?
- Help the children make an agreement that they can recite each day.

### 3. A Treaty as another word for promise.

- Remind children of the agreement they made. Explain that this is like a promise.
- How do you feel when someone breaks a promise?

- What can you do when you or someone else breaks a promise?
- A treaty is a promise between nations to live together in peace and friendship.
- As a class or in small groups create a symbol or drawing (without words) that represents the ideas in your class promise.

### 4. Connecting the Dots to Treaty

- Read *Alex Shares His Wampum Belt* by Kelly Crawford
- Make connection between Wampum Belts and treaties to the class promise and images the class created.
- All of us who live on treaty land, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are treaty people. The Indigenous nation this Land is connected with is the Mississaugas of the Credit. We all have a role to play in honouring treaty promises to share and care for the land.



*Alex Shares His Wampum Belt*

By Kelly Crawford



*Treaty Baby*

By Sara General



### ***The Moccasin Identifier Project***

Educational Experience created by Carolyn King, former Chief of MCFN

## 12 Building Our Relationships with Our Non-Human Relatives

1. Choose one of the **biodiversity sheets** and let the children see you matching a leaf to a picture on the sheet or trying to find a picture of a bird that you see near the playground. They will likely be curious and want to find leaves and birds that are on the sheets.



A child observing squirrel and bird nests in a big tree



A child conversing with a squirrel that came to visit their playground

2. Use the names of the birds, butterflies, plants, and animals that you are learning to greet them when you see them (Hello Blue Jay! Hello Maple Tree!). The children will soon follow your lead.
3. Use a magnifying glass to look at a stick or leaf or stone. Make observations or ask yourself questions out loud (There are so many bumps on this stick! I wonder why the stones are different colours?). The children will be eager to include many questions of their own.
4. Let the children hear you being thankful for gifts and lessons from nature (Thank you Sun for keeping us warm. Thank you Cardinal for reminding us to sing).

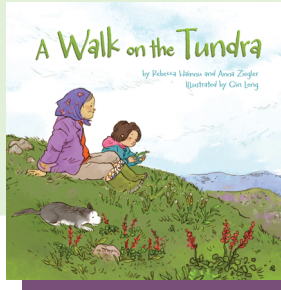


### ***Biodiversity Sheets***

University of Guelph Arboretum

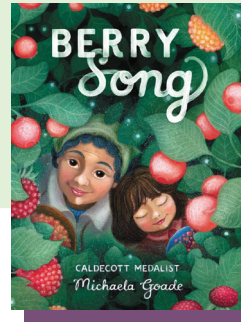


Four children looking through the fence at the geese



***A Walk on the Tundra***

By Rebecca Hainnu and Anna Ziegler



***Berry Song***

By Michela Goode



A goose who often visits the children outside of their playground fence



Children looking through the classroom window towards their playground to see a raccoon that came to visit

# 13 Gardening

Gardening can be a powerful experience that can bring adults and children closer to the gifts of nature, to help us understand how we are connected to the Land, and the responsibilities we have towards our non-human relatives.

Questions to ask before choosing a spot for a garden:

- Is this spot a low traffic area?
- Is this area sunny or shady?
- Is this area covered? If so, will rain reach the garden?

Borders for your garden

- You can place borders around your garden or a single marker in the centre of the garden.
- You can add a little fence with sticks or string in order to make your garden more defined.

What could you plant in your garden?

- Edible plants such as fruit, vegetables, and herbs.
- Native plants.
- Medicinal plants/herbs.

Examples of edible native plants in Ontario

- Strawberries, raspberries, asparagus, and sunflowers.

Examples of other native plants in Ontario

- New Jersey tea, American Bittersweet, White Snakeroot, Oak fern.



## Companion Planting with The Three Sisters: Sister Corn, Sister Bean & Sister Squash

Isaac Crosby, Evergreen Canada

### The Three Sisters

This video explains how corn, beans, and squash (or sunflowers, beans, and squash) when planted together, help each other grow. This is an example of how Indigenous people use their knowledge of plant characteristics and embrace them to maximize harvests naturally, eliminating the need for pesticide use.

- You need a lot of sun, but not a lot of space. You can grow the Three Sisters in a planter box or even a bucket that has drainage holes.
- Plant seeds outdoors within the spring and summer planting periods (mid May to mid July)



A child watering their garden in their playground

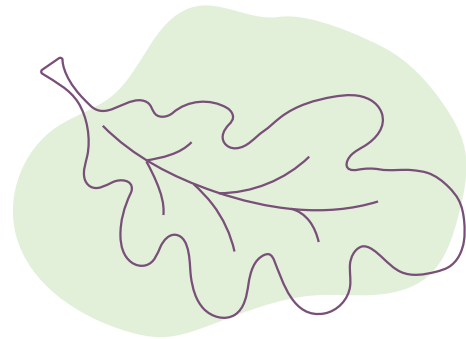
- Direct planting of seeds leads to stronger root systems.
- Corn should be planted first so it can grow tall above the others. After 2-3 weeks plant the beans, then a week after that, plant the squash.



A child demonstrating reciprocity by collecting rainwater so they can water the plants in their playground

**“It’s not just looking. But it’s now more of the involvement, being something sacred in the sense that plants - the importance of plants – the responsibility that follows in actually planting”**

Early years educator, spring 2021



### Connecting Gardening to Gratitude and All My Relations

Greet the plants daily, say “hello” and “thank you” to the plants for the gifts they provide (ex. edible plants provide food, plants provide oxygen etc.)

### Container Gardening

You can use:

- Milk crates, half barrels, pails, bags, pop bottles

Tips:

- Choose a container that allows for adequate drainage.
- Consider how much sunlight your container receives when choosing your plants.

# 14 Winter Activities

## Playground Activity Ideas When There is no Snow

- Create frozen bird feeders (Slice an apple or orange in half, carve out the centre, stuff with bird seed, freeze it, then hang it outside for the birds to eat.)
- Watch the birds that come to visit the playground. Keep a log/record of which ones you see and look for them on the biodiversity sheet.
- Watch for other animals coming to visit the playground, for example, squirrels.
- Discuss what the squirrels are doing (Questions: Do we see as many as we saw in the summer? Are they doing the same kinds of things? Which days are they out? Which days are they not out?)
- Place cups of water outside and watch them freeze over time.
- Collect natural materials such as leaves, pinecones, sticks and create ornaments



A child breaking a piece of ice from the ground of their playground

to decorate the indoor and outdoor space.

- Look for bird and squirrel nests up in trees. Ask questions such as where do the birds and squirrels live in the wintertime? How are birds thriving in the heat and cold?
- Collect sticks to form a fire pit and pretend to warm yourselves by the fire. Play an audio recording with fire crackling and other nature sounds. Tell stories!
- Pour warm water on an outdoor planter to defrost the mud. Children can dig or use the mud to “paint” with sticks or brushes on the ground.



A child inside the snow burrow they made in their playground

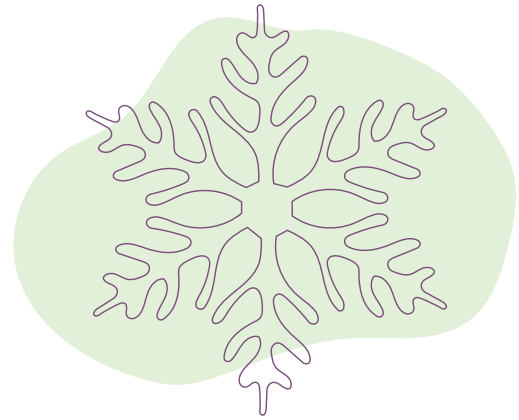
## Playground Activity Ideas When There is Snow

- Make molds with snow using milk crates, buckets, cups. Spray the snow with water once it is in the mold. The next day tap the snow out of the mold.
- Look for animal tracks and compare them to the biodiversity sheets.



An educator and two children exploring the ice they found in their playground

- Shovel snow.
- Make hand, foot, and body prints in the snow.
- Collect snow in buckets and carry it to another place with a wagon or sled.
- Make snow forts.
- Make coloured water with natural materials such as turmeric, cinnamon, mustard powder or beets. Put the coloured water in spray bottles or squeeze bottles and paint on the snow.
- Create an enclosure for the children to use and discuss how animals hibernate in the winter. You can use the burlap and wrap it around a play structure, trees or other structures.



A child being curious about what happens to the plants during winter



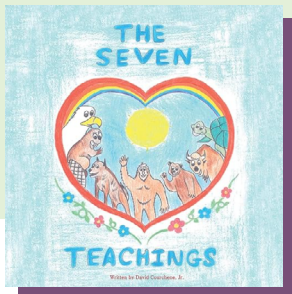
An educator and three children making handprints in the snow

# 15 Incorporating The Seven Teachings into your Program

In thinking about what we have been reading and viewing from Indigenous authors/creators, observations of the children, and in conversation with the educators, we have come up with the following activity ideas. Of course, it is up to you if, when, or how you choose to implement any of our suggestions.

## Preparing

- Read *The Seven Teachings*, picture book by David Courchene Jr. to remind yourself of the meaning of each teaching.



### *The Seven Teachings*

By David Courchene Jr.

- Have a special basket with the seven animal puppets or toys and the book.



### *Seven Animal Puppets and Book*

Strong Nations

- Put a poster up nearby to remind yourself and other adults of the teachings.



### *Seven Teachings Poster*

Indigenous Reflections

## Introducing the Teachings

- Use one puppet at a time to introduce a teaching and have a discussion with the children. For example, the eagle teaches us about love. You can ask the children, “Who do you love? Can you think of ways to show love?”.
- The next time you meet, ask the children if they remember what the eagle teaches us, then move on to introduce the buffalo and the teaching on respect.
- Over time the children will come to know the teachings of each animal.
- Have the puppets available for the children to interact with.
- Throughout the day you can comment on when the children (or you or your colleagues) are demonstrating the values of love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth.

These suggestions have been adapted from a webinar by Tara Myran, a member of the Long Plain First Nation.



### *Introducing Indigenous Philosophies to Little People Through Active Play and Storytelling*

Webinar by Tara Myran

## 16 Picture Book Activity Ideas

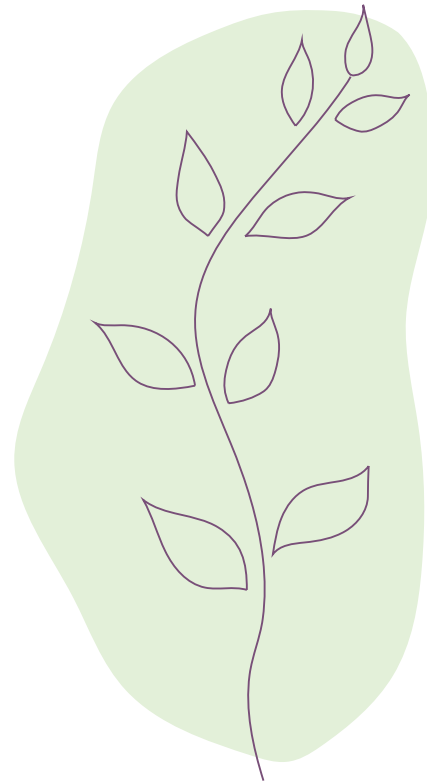
The book *Birdsong* by Julie Flett has many themes including the changing seasons, intergenerational relationships, and using art to express connections to the natural world. Here are some ways you could follow-up a reading of this book with young children.



*Birdsong*  
By Julie Flett

- Have a discussion with the children about the elders in their lives. Do they have grandparents or other older relatives, neighbours, or family friends? Katherena likes to help her neighbour with gardening. What do they like to do with their elders? What stories do they tell them?
- In the book, Katherena listens to the “hums and peeps and whistles and chirps” and “the spring birds singing their songs” and this helps her to connect to her new home. Ask the children to listen for the sounds the birds make outside. Ask how they can give back to the birds. As Doug Anderson tells us in *Natural Curiosity* (Anderson et al, 2017), children may want to sing back to the birds to show gratitude and build a spiritual connection.

- Provide opportunities for children to respond to the natural world through visual art. Katherena loves to draw birds and trees and plants. Provide table space or an easel outside with paints or drawing materials and suggest that children may want to represent the trees, plants, birds, and animals they see. Do this in each season and discuss how the natural world looks different in each season.



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