

The background is a stylized illustration. In the upper left, a large sun is depicted with a yellow-orange upper half and a red lower half, separated by a diagonal line. Below the sun, a river flows from the bottom left towards the right, rendered in shades of blue and green with wavy patterns. On the left bank of the river, there are several tall, thin, brown reeds or grasses. On the right bank, there are green plants with red berries, resembling raspberries, and some smaller yellow flowers. The overall style is a mix of traditional Indigenous art patterns and modern graphic design.

Starting from the Heart:

**GOING BEYOND
A LAND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**



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It is the goal of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario to work with others to create schools, communities and a society free from all forms of individual and systemic discrimination. To further this goal, ETFO defines equity as fairness achieved through proactive measures that result in equality, promote diversity and foster respect and dignity for all.

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Note: There is an English and a French digital version of the [*ETFO Human Rights Statement*](#).

ETFO LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario acknowledges that we are gathered today on the customary and traditional lands of the Indigenous Peoples of this territory.

Note: A digital version of the [*ETFO Land Acknowledgement*](#) is available for Ontario, use as a guide to create your own. There is one for Toronto as well.

ETFO FNMI EDUCATION WEBSITE

ETFO First Nations, Métis and Inuit education resources are available at etfofnmi.ca.



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ETFO AND THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION CALLS TO ACTION

ETFO understands that it is integral for educators to move forward into reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. In 2015, ETFO endorsed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) [*Calls to Action*](#). It is our hope to educate and inform ETFO members on the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, provide information on the complex historical and current relationship between Canada and Indigenous nations, and provide for dialogue to dispel common myths and misconceptions of Indigenous Peoples. To support ETFO members in their learning and instructional practices to integrate First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) perspectives, worldviews and content in a positive approach, ETFO works with FNMI ETFO members, allies and Indigenous Peoples to develop authentic and relevant resources and professional learning opportunities. This resource respectfully acknowledges #62 and #63 of the *Calls to Action* (2015, p. 7).



“Together, Canadians must do more than just talk about reconciliation; we must learn how to practise reconciliation in our everyday lives - within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.”

Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 21.





INTRODUCTION

Each of us has a relationship with the natural environment; the land, water, earth, the habitat and ecosystems. Land acknowledgements provide us an opportunity to offer recognition and respect to the original inhabitants of the regions that we live in and work on. There are many things that we can do to [*go beyond simply reading a land acknowledgement*](#) script. To make it more meaningful, we need to consider that we are in fact acknowledging, not only the ancestral lands, but also the historical and complex intersections of [*settler*](#) impacts on Indigenous histories, economies, ecologies, livelihood, well-being and governance structures. A territorial acknowledgement is not an end-point in the journey of [*reconciliation*](#). Actions create conditions for true reconciliation and create a foundation for restoring, renewing or developing a new [*relationship with Indigenous Peoples*](#).

When creating and fostering any relationship, it is important that the foundation include respect and a commitment to always nurture the relationship with good intention and action. This commitment can be extended to the land. This would provide an opportunity to demonstrate honour for the land while respectfully acknowledge the original inhabitants who have been the stewards, of the place we all call home, for thousands of years. Acknowledging the land and the abundance of gifts and nutrients it provides to humankind reminds us that we are all stewards and have a responsibility to protect the natural environment.

This document was developed to provide you with information, ideas and resources that promote further learning while supporting you in your reconciliation journey. It will invite you to acknowledge your own values, your relationship with family, the community and the land. It will also explore our collective responsibility to protect the natural environment. As you go through the resource, you will be invited to engage in the activities and to examine the importance of nurturing relationships with the Indigenous communities in your region.

To further support your learning, there are many hyperlinked resources for you to review which have been interwoven throughout the document. At the heart of this resource is you, and in the spirit of reconciliation, we wish you a good journey in your learning.



COMMUNITY

A community is more than the land on which you live, work and play. There are many things from your own communities, culture, identity and upbringing that have shaped who you are today, and who you will be tomorrow. Take a moment to reflect. Think about the people, the [*languages*](#), the [*cultures*](#), the land ([*geography*](#)), the [*shared stories*](#) and customary practices and celebrations that have influenced you in your life. These are integral components of how a community helped create your story and shape your identity, your beliefs, your traditions and your worldview. Each community member should feel a sense of belonging, pride and empowerment. Ask yourself: “[*Where do you come from?*](#)” Where you come from is more than just a location on a [*map*](#); it is also a part of your story and helps to form your cultural identity and your relationship to the land and to all living things (humans, animals, insects, plants, water).

Due to [*Western colonial practices*](#), policies, laws and a long [*history of discrimination*](#) that were intentionally inflicted on Indigenous Peoples, many First Nations, Métis and Inuit were negatively impacted. The [*effects of colonization*](#), including the Residential School system, are immeasurable and have left [*intergenerational impacts*](#). However, the strength and perseverance of Indigenous Peoples is incredible and the power of the collective unification in healing and standing for justice is also prevalent. The [*mindset of domination*](#) over land and people is not a new construct and has created an imbalance in relationships with one another and with the land. There is a need for restoration and balance. Collectively, we can work together by recognizing the historical and current relationship between Canada and the Indigenous Peoples, and work towards creating communities that embrace shared responsibilities of caring for the land and each other.

Indigenous [*worldviews on health and wellness*](#) includes that each member of the community, young and old, has a role to play and a responsibility to take care of one another and the environment. For instance, [*Traditional Knowledge Keepers*](#) (Elders, Métis Senators and Knowledge Holders) are respected members of any age who have been chosen by the community for their ability to impart profound and useful knowledge for the betterment and livelihood of their people and the environment. They are responsible for healing the community and connecting the past to the present and the future. The community grows stronger through the sharing of knowledge, stories and histories of the land. To keep the [*community healthy*](#), each member must promote healing and wellness by learning to take care of self, of family, of community, and most importantly, the land on which all in the community live, work and play.



A strong and healthy community relies on relationships built on mutual trust and respect. These relationships start with self then extend outwards to others and the land, including the [water](#), the [plants](#) and the animals sharing the land. It is an individual and collective responsibility to develop and maintain a healthy relationship with the land. The land gives us everything we need to survive and to create a healthy community. It is that relationship to land that centres the culture of community. Going beyond a land acknowledgment is to honour our communities. Look within, acknowledge where you've come from and the rich history and worldviews that have shaped you into who you are today. Creating meaningful relationships with the Indigenous Peoples in your region is one way to acknowledge the collective strength of the community and our [shared responsibility](#) to protecting the land. Knowing where we come from and where our ancestors have walked before us helps us better understand our role and responsibility to the community. Through our relationships with others, we build healthy communities and reaffirm our responsibility to maintain a loving and respectful relationship with the land. By examining our relationship to the land on which we live, learn and play, we learn our responsibility to take care of the land. We do this for future generations by building more sustainable, loving, nurturing, safe, healthy, diverse and thriving communities that are imbued with respect for the land.

Activity 1: Getting to the Heart of the Community

To explore what a healthy community is and how we are all [connected](#) to the land.

Instructions:

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Invite each group to collaborate and create a definition of what community means.
3. Use the following prompts to initiate group discussion:
 - Who lives in the community?
 - What actions, events, celebrations or values do members in the community share?
 - How do members interact to form their community?
4. Each group will write their definition on paper and verbally share with the class.
5. After each group has shared, invite students to respond to the following questions:
 - What makes a healthy community?
 - What words or ways do community members support one another?
 - How does the community rely on the land (natural environment)?
 - What relationships do humans share with non-humans?
 - How do people show respect to the land and others?
 - What makes you healthy (mind, body, spirit)?

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- What can you do to support healthy communities?
 - How do you celebrate the diversity of people in your community?

Activity 2: Building Trusting Relationships

To examine aspects of healthy relationships and the importance of establishing trust.

Instructions:

1. Share with students that community members support one another to meet a goal, develop communication and promote co-operation.
2. Facilitate the following trust activities in the classroom community. Once finished, invite students to discuss how the activity made them feel and the importance of teamwork and trust.
 - [Trust Walk](#)
 - [Ten Interesting Trust Building Activities for Kids](#)

The following are additional resources for you to explore concepts of building trusting relationships:

 - [Play Your Part \(Right to Play\)](#)
 - [8 Quick Relationship Building Activities](#)
3. Next, students can explore the relevance of value systems that many Indigenous Peoples have in their societies: [Seven Sacred Teachings](#), [Inuit Societal Values](#), [Haudenosaunee Values](#) and/or the [Métis Core Values](#) and how these teachings are relevant in their lives and how these could help build healthy and trusting relationships. You may also invite students to develop their own individual list of values (with their family and/or community).
4. Invite students to add new thoughts to their definition of community.

Activity 3: Making Community/Heart Connections

To acknowledge the gifts of the community we belong to and how we're all interconnected.

Instructions:

1. Provide each student with three sheets of coloured construction paper, string, tape or glue.
2. Have the students draw hearts on each sheet of paper and cut them out (three hearts each).
3. Invite students to reflect on the communities they belong to (town or city, rural, reservation, clubs, sports, arts, religious/spiritual organizations, scientific, environmental, school, and classroom). Encourage students to also think about what community events or celebrations that they participate in.

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4. Ask students to think of three special things that they would like to acknowledge about their community and how it feeds their heart. They will write one idea on each heart. Optional - Students can use string or glue to connect the three hearts.
 5. Invite students to share what they wrote.
 6. Post the hearts on a wall or hang from a window or create a space on the floor. Ask the student how all these connect everyone in the classroom community.
 7. Once they see the big picture, ask the students the following questions. They can write a response or share verbally.
 - How does community impact you in a positive way?
 - How do the various examples of communities contribute to the larger community?
 - How does the land play a role in these communities?

Activity 4: Establishing Relationships with Indigenous Peoples (for Educators)

To develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of Canada and Indigenous Peoples.

Instructions:

1. The following are suggestions on what you can do to further your own learning.
 - Consult the Indigenous education lead or department at your local school board to get a list of Indigenous education resources for your instructional practice, to learn more about the land acknowledgement, to learn about cultural protocols, or how to include more Indigenous content.
 - Do an online search to identify the [*Indigenous group\(s\)*](#) that are from your region.
 - Include [*books written by Indigenous Peoples*](#).
 - Invite an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper to the classroom (after consulting local school board protocols).
 - Work with Indigenous artists, authors, academics, land-based teachers, oral historians, treaty teachers and [*dynamic/engaging speakers*](#) in the class.
 - Identify [*First Nations*](#), [*Métis*](#) and [*Inuit*](#) organizations and service providers in your region and consult with Indigenous professionals that may be able to visit you and your students.
 - Research events that happen throughout the year and attend; talk to people.
 - Explore [*culturally relevant teaching*](#) practices (also check out ETFO's [*Respond + Rebuild: The ETFO guide to culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy*](#)).
 - [*Engage learners through play*](#) (ETFO FNMI resource).
 - Become an active, informed, contributing member of one of your local [*Friendship Centres*](#).



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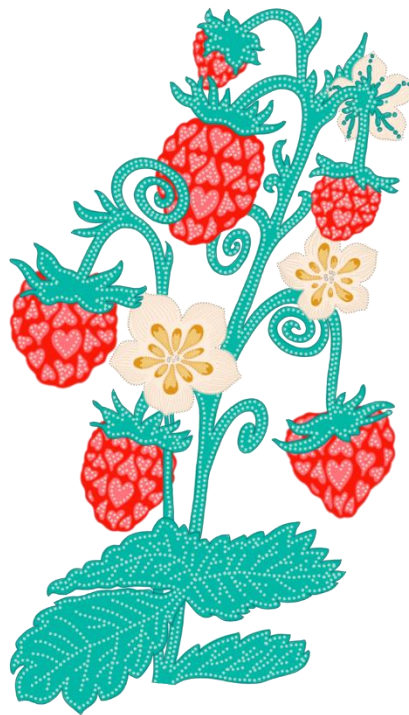
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THE LAND

“Reducing Indigenous perspectives to simplistic terms is problematic; even leading Indigenous Elders, scholars, and knowledge keepers cannot be expected to always agree on particulars. However, with this in mind, commonly agreed on qualities of most, if not all, Indigenous perspectives include: A strong sense of spirituality; deeply rooted sense of place; recognition that everything is related; and an emphasis on reciprocity” (Anderson, Chiarotto & Comay, 2018, pg. 6).

When you step outside your door each day to interact in the natural world, do you consider who may have walked this land before you and who will walk this land after you are gone? Do you acknowledge your personal relationship to the land? Do you think about how the land supports your health and well-being, and that of your family, community and all non-human entities within the web of life? It is through these relationships to land that we come to understand that everyone has a role to play in taking caring of the land. Being an [environmental steward](#) is everyone’s responsibility. How we [honour the land](#) and maintain its health so that it can nurture future generations is up to each of us.

Being outside on the land has a direct impact on mental well-being, where even a short walk tends to make a person feel better. According to McCormick (2017), access to natural environments can benefit children in various ways, including improvements in confidence, social interactions, cognitive development, academic achievement and emotional health. Taking classes outside can be beneficial to both the students and the teacher. For Indigenous Peoples, the [meaning of the land](#) and how one interacts with it includes the [interconnectedness humans](#) have with the environment and the holistic benefits to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

It is important to consider the ways we feel connected to the land when [thinking about territorial land acknowledgements](#). What thoughts come to mind when we think about land? What do you envision? In your mind’s eye do you see images of the woods, lakes, rivers, mountains, a playground, a field, a garden, a farm or a cityscape?

How each of us conceptualizes and interacts with the land is dependent on our cultural traditions and worldviews of the land. There are significant differences between the Western and Indigenous [worldview of land](#). “[Aboriginal Title](#)” to land in Canada is still an ongoing dialogue on land ownership and access to lands. In the western worldview, however, land is abstracted and viewed for transactional purposes and accorded monetary exchange value. For that matter, fixed political and geographical [borders and boundaries](#) are a concept imposed



upon Indigenous Peoples without their consultation and without acknowledging the Indigenous worldviews and territorial ‘boundaries’ between nations. No matter how diverse Indigenous Peoples are, there are [*shared perspectives*](#) about land and connection to it. The land is alive and has conscience and therefore she and her incalculable multitude of living inhabitants cannot conceivably be ‘owned’.

There is a belief in [*kinship to the customary lands*](#) that Indigenous Peoples share globally. Indigenous Peoples are supported by this kinship with the land as the Earth is viewed as the first mother. For Indigenous Peoples, the [*bond*](#) between themselves and the land is unbreakable; it is tied to their culture and language. In the [*Indigenous worldview of land*](#) it includes the respect and sharing of resources, as it is it provides everything needed to survive for both humans and our non-human relations. In this sense, land is sacred and must be respected and cared for by all. For Indigenous Peoples, the [*land is not separate*](#) from all life that resides upon it. This connection to land is also a part of other non-Indigenous beliefs and values. Land acknowledgements are a critical first step to placing this essential kinship once again at the forefront of our collective priorities.

For the [*Haudenosaunee*](#), recognition of the land and the natural world is part of their daily routine, and this is acknowledged through the [*Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkhwen*](#) (The Opening Address). It is also sometimes called [*The Thanksgiving Address*](#) and “it teaches mutual respect and responsibility to understand that what is done to one part of the Web of Life, we do to ourselves.” Everything in the [*natural world*](#) is thanked, beginning with our mother; the earth (Yethinihsténha tsi Ohwentsy`a:te) and everything on the earth and above the earth.

There has been debate about [*authenticity of land acknowledgments*](#). It is important to be reflective of why you do one. Making a territorial acknowledgement that comes from the heart is a good start and through your actions of learning and inclusive instructional practices, is a good practice in demonstrating your commitment to the land, respect for the Indigenous Peoples and to continue your reconciliation journey. The land sustains all life and everyone must recognize the values of the Indigenous Peoples who respected and cared for this land long before the arrival of Europeans. Borders and boundaries can be opened up, at least conceptually, and we can be more inclusive by connecting with others and welcoming them into our respective communities. In your journey, learning about or creating relationships with Indigenous Peoples in your area provides an opportunity to appreciate the larger community that you are a part of.



Activity 1: Relationship with the Land

To reflect on and acknowledge our relationship with the land.

Instructions:

1. Find a variety of [photos of landscapes](#) or [videos](#) to share with students. Alternatively, you can invite students to share photos of landscapes or places that are important to them or provide time to draw a landscape of some place special to them.
2. Use the following prompts to generate discussion:
 - In what ways do you use the land? Think of the many ways the land provides for you daily (from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep).
 - How does it make you feel? What does it do for your mind, body or spirit?
 - How do you show appreciation for the land?

Activity 2: Views on Land Acknowledgements

To generate classroom discussions on differing perspectives on land acknowledgements.

Instructions:

1. Use the following background articles to create a discussion on why going beyond a land acknowledgement is important.
 - [*Are Indigenous land acknowledgements a step forward or an empty gesture?*](#)
 - [*What are land acknowledgements and why do they matter?*](#)
 - [*Here's why land acknowledgements are both meaningless and patronizing.*](#)
 - [*'I regret it': Hayden King on writing Ryerson University's territorial acknowledgement.*](#)
 - [*What is the significance of acknowledging the Indigenous land we stand on?*](#)
 - [*Reconciliation more than land acknowledgements Indigenous groups say.*](#)
 - [*Canada's impossible acknowledgement.*](#)
 - [*Questioning the usefulness of land acknowledgements.*](#)
 - [*Indigenous land acknowledgments alone won't advance reconciliation.*](#)



Activity 3: Quotes to Generate Discussion

To generate discussions about Indigenous perspectives on land.

Instructions:

1. Read the quotes and have an open conversation about what each means and share personal connection to the quote.

“.... One thing our people could not surrender was the meaning of land. In the settler mind land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, and the source of all that sustained us. It was a gift not a commodity.”

(Wall-Kimmerer, 2015, p.17)

“And we are all a part of the earth. The earth governs us, we don't own the earth, we don't govern it. Everything has an impact, there is no such thing as it doesn't matter.”

(Wes Fineday, Virtual Museum)

“Among our Potawatomi people, women are the Keepers of Water. We carry the sacred water to ceremonies and act on its behalf. ‘Women have a natural bond with water, because we are both life bearers,’ my sister said. ‘We carry our babies in internal ponds and they come forth into the world on a wave of water. It is our responsibility to safeguard the water for all our relations.’”

(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 94)

Activity 4: Write a Letter to the Land

Think about how the land has provided for your well-being and write a personalized letter to the land expressing your appreciation.

Instructions:

1. Invite students to share their personal responses to the following prompts:
 - What does the land provide to you (e.g. food, stress release, physical and emotional nourishment, energy, brain food, education, growth, leisure activities, a home, resources)?

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- How does the land support your health? How does being outdoors contribute to your [*physical and mental health*](#)?
 - Does being on the land make you happier? Which of your five senses are involved?
 - How has land contributed to the well-being of your family, community, all of humanity?
2. Talk about [*what makes a good letter*](#).
 3. [*Write a letter to the land*](#).
 4. Additionally, students could also [*make their own paper*](#) from scraps of paper. The process is easy and teaches sustainability by reusing scraps of paper to which you can add elements from the land (flower petals, dried seaweed/kelp, leaves that have fallen, orange zest, herbs, or pieces of plants from your backyard).

Activity 5: Book Club (for Educator)

Consider organizing a book club with friends or colleagues to further your learning. Here's a resource to get you started.

- [*Whose Land Is It Anyway? A Manual for Decolonization*](#) (Peter McFarlane and Nicole Schabus, 2017).

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RESPONSIBILITY

Once we have defined the relationships that we have to our own communities and others who share the land, an important next step is to reflect on our responsibilities to each other and to the land.

When you think about the word *responsibility*, what comes to mind? Take a moment to reflect how responsibility roles in your own life have impacted your life. What does responsibility look like and feel like in terms taking care of yourself, your family, your community? Now let's shift the focus to our professional role. When it comes to [reconciliation](#) and [education](#), as educators we have been given a responsibility that we're just learning how to fulfill, especially in how we can respond to the [Calls to Action](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ([TRC](#)) of Canada. The [Calls to Action](#) give room for Canadians to act on responsibilities towards the land and restoring relationships with Indigenous Peoples. How can we do this? A good place to start is to listen to what Indigenous Peoples have to say. As Indigenous writer Selena Mills offers, "[w]e can effect real change by pushing ourselves to engage in conversations with each other" (Mills, 2019).

What might this look like in our work on land acknowledgements? One way to start is by doing some research. Many excellent articles have been published in the past few years that include the [perspectives of Indigenous Peoples](#). Our research can also include meeting people and learning from people in our region. We can learn about Indigenous Peoples by connecting with local First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations and [Friendship Centres](#). School boards may have resources that will help us bring in families of our students - both Indigenous and non-Indigenous - to be part of this learning. We can invite our students to learn with us by taking part in conducting their own research. There is no need for us to be experts; we need only to have open hearts, a humble approach and continue the journey of learning, as [allies](#).

Our work to develop a respectful and meaningful land acknowledgement is an important [first step](#) toward fulfilling our responsibilities as learners and teachers. This can also be a valuable learning opportunity to build [relationships](#) with Indigenous Peoples. This approach will ensure that our land acknowledgement is not just a [simple gesture](#) or "check-box" item, but rather it will be a reflection on our responsibility to the land and the community. Learning and building new relationships where we see each other with empathy, humility, courage, honesty and open hearts is a good start.



Once relationships are established, it is possible to co-operate to work towards fulfilling the *Calls to Action* and in keeping with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). Due to government policies and practices inflicted on Indigenous Peoples, cultures, languages and economies, this would also support the restitution of [Indigenous self-determination](#). How can land acknowledgments allow us to assume the responsibility of creating alliances with Indigenous communities to help forward the *Calls to Action* regarding the restitution of self-determination to Indigenous Peoples? What role can each of us take?

Activity 1: Exploring Resources

To examine resources that will help in making connections to your learning and instructional practice and *responsibility*.

Instructions:

1. Explore the following resources and think about how you can use or adapt these as a springboard to suit your instructional practices.
 - ["I Am" Project](#) originally started as a language arts class project for individual students to shatter the stereotypes they felt have been placed on them. Over time, it became an exploration that made staff and students see others from a different perspective.
 - [Project of Heart](#) is an inquiry-based, hands-on, collaborative, intergenerational, artistic journey of seeking truth about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
 - Reconciliation Canada's [Community Action Toolkits](#) are intended to provide some guidelines and ideas on how to start the reconciliation conversation.
 - [Walking Together: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum](#) is an online digital resource that includes diverse perspectives on important issues including the land. Classroom discussion guides are included.
 - The ETFO First Nations, Métis and Inuit education website (etfofnmi.ca) is a repository for a collection of Indigenous education resources. These materials support your learning, planning and teaching.
 - The National Film Board (NFB) of Canada: [Indigenous Voices and Reconciliation Channel](#) is the home of the collection of NFBO works about issues important to, and created by, Indigenous Peoples.



Activity 2: Fostering Heart-to-Heart Connections through Research and Reflection

To identify our own intentions can help us to prepare our minds and hearts to do work that is important in a relationship while going beyond a land acknowledgement.

Instructions:

1. Respond to the following questions:
 - Why do I wish to include land acknowledgements in my practice as a teacher?
 - Who are the Indigenous Peoples who live on the land you live and/or work on?
 - What is the historical relationship between [settler Canadians](#) and Indigenous Peoples?
 - Where will you find information about traditional lands, treaties and historical events?
 - What can you do to create a land acknowledgement with your students?

Activity 3: Indigenous Land Protectors

Research and learn about Indigenous Peoples who are protecting the natural environment.

Instructions:

1. Research a First Nations, Métis or Inuit [leader, activist or innovator](#) from the [past or present](#). You can also use [ETFO's poster](#) celebrating 21 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women who are change makers. Use the following prompts to get you started.
 - What issues are they working on?
 - Where does the issue or their work take place?
 - How do they help the natural environment?
 - How are those issues connected to the land around you?
 - What inspires you about their work?
 - Research one of the activist and find a quote they have said that inspires you.

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COMMITMENT

Many Indigenous Peoples make commitments by giving gifts. The exchange of a gift creates an agreement between the giver and the receiver, and establishes a meaningful commitment to one another. This could be represented by a handshake or by offering tobacco, food or a gift. Another way of giving gifts is through trading stories. When it comes to personal stories and narratives, each of us is like a book. All of our experiences, vocations and relationships shape our stories. In moving forward, how important is our commitment to writing a new chapter in our stories that focuses on taking care of and connecting with the land?

Going beyond a land acknowledgement means making personal connections. Reflect on your journey to this land. Who are the people that have been instrumental in your journey? How have the paths on which you've walked created your story? By sharing [*personal stories*](#) and connections to the land, we deepen our knowledge and understanding of historical and [*contemporary relationships*](#) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

How can we make a commitment to stories of the land beyond our own? European settlers renamed Indigenous communities, travel routes, waterways and other areas of significance (White, 2018). By revealing the [*Indigenous names*](#) for well-known places in your area or neighbourhood, we can share in honouring the generations of stories that have been told on the land and the First Peoples that are of that land. We can also look at the stories that have been a part of our families.

There is much intersection of stories, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to explore and celebrate. We are all on a journey and our connection is the land. Acknowledging and relating these stories opens the way to restitution of how we can all take care of the lands and waters. Respecting the natural environment; the land, can help to restore and renew a relationship between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples.

How will we journey forward and celebrate the stories in the classroom and beyond? When we [*share our learning*](#) about treaties, community and culture, and issues that jeopardize Indigenous People's rights and [*relationship to land*](#), we are acknowledging the hundreds of years of colonial history and our responsibility to renew relationships. Committing to these steps [*honours our homes*](#) and inspires our journey forward as acts of collective transformation. This commitment also honours [*Indigenous Peoples' resilience*](#) and the shared responsibilities of stewardship to this land.



Learning about who we are and where we are going is an ongoing journey. So too is the journey into reconciliation. There is only one earth and the land that you are on is home to you and many others, including species, ecosystems and Indigenous Peoples who have inhabited that area for thousands of years. Renewing or fostering new relationships takes time, but it also takes two. Be reflective in learning not only about others, but learning about yourself and who you are and where you've come from. The commitment to reconciliation and taking care of the land is a good start. As you've learned and continue to learn, there is more that needs to be done in reading a land acknowledgement. May your heart always be open to learning and may your journey take you beyond a land acknowledgement.

Activity 1: Taking Steps Forward

To acknowledge the land and the relationship one has with the land.

Instructions:

1. Make an imprint of your footprint in dry/wet sand, snow, soil or paint. Take a photo of your footprint. Print the photo and place it on a larger background. Think of your home, school or favourite place nearby and the area around it.
2. Write a statement(s) in response to these questions to include with your footprint:
 - What do you love about the land around you?
 - How does the land help you?
 - What will you do to help the land?
 - What footprint do you want to leave behind on the land?
 - What are your responsibilities toward the living things on the land?

Activity 2: Personalized Greeting and Land Acknowledgement

To make a personal and meaningful connection to the land acknowledgement.

Instructions:

1. Use the following prompts to engage students to acknowledge their sense of identity (who they are, where they come from) and to dig deeper in learning more about Indigenous Peoples.
 - Sometimes you might not know how an Indigenous person identifies (in respect to terminology), one good practice is to first identify who you are before asking. If you were to introduce yourself to someone, how would you identify yourself?



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- Adapt the [ETFO land acknowledgement](#) to acknowledge specific Indigenous Peoples in your region.
 - Create your own land acknowledgement that honours the First Peoples of your region and the environment, and discuss ways that the learning continues in the classroom and at home. Try speaking from the heart, rather than from a script. Practice a personal “I am” statement, then say the acknowledgement together in a choral reading.
 - Learn to correctly pronounce the names of Indigenous groups. If uncertain, consult with an Indigenous language speaker.
 - Identify any treaties in your area. For more information, consult with your school board’s Indigenous education lead or connect with a local Indigenous organization.

Activity 3: Understanding the Land as Our Classroom

Explore how the land provides learning opportunities for everyone.

Instructions:

1. Bring your students outdoors and into nature. Here are a few prompts to get you started in your learning and connecting with the land.
 - What [other maps](#) exist for the [town, county or municipality](#) that you are in?
 - [What efforts](#) have been made to bring these pre-colonial names into our everyday lives?
 - What are [significant sites](#) in Indigenous history and how do we [find out](#) about them?
 - What is the meaning of [ceded](#) and [unceded](#) land? [Wiikwemkoong First Nation](#) and [Algonquins of Ontario](#) are two examples of unceded land in Ontario. Throughout Canada, unceded land makes up large areas of what is referred to as [Crown Land](#), a term that [many Indigenous Peoples object to](#).
 - What are contemporary names that students use to refer to neighbourhoods and gathering places near their schools or homes? How may they relate to Indigenous place names? [Indigenous Walks](#) and the [First Story Bus Tour](#) are two examples of initiatives that explore historical sites as well as landscape, architecture, art and monuments through an Indigenous perspective.
 - Write a personal commitment that you can make in respect to protecting the land and/or moving forward in reconciliation.



Activity 4: Indigenous Land and Water Stewardship

To explore new resources that support environmental stewardship.

Instructions:

1. Here are some active campaigns that may interest you and may help you on your journey.
 - [Moccasin Identifier Project](#): An initiative by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation to paint moccasin stencils on public sidewalks and remind people about Indigenous historical territories.
 - [Grassy Narrows First Nation](#) has worked for decades to deal with the community health impacts of mercury contamination due to Northern Ontario's forestry industry.
 - Since 2003, the [Mother Earth Water Walk](#) organized by [Anishinaabe](#) leaders has [raised awareness](#) about access to clean water and, more broadly, water pollution. Artists Christi Belcourt and Isaac Murdoch also [share their artwork](#) for community support of the global campaign called Water is Life.
 - Environmental group [Indigenous Climate Action](#) has numerous professional development resources on climate change and Indigenous rights.
 - [Autumn Peltier](#) has been named the chief water commissioner by the Anishinabek Nation. It is a political advocacy group for 40 First Nations across Ontario.

References

Vowel, C. (2016) *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Issues in Canada*. Winnipeg: Highwater Press.

White, E. (2018). ['Learning my own home'](#) - Indigenous geography making a comeback in northern Ontario. CBC News.



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