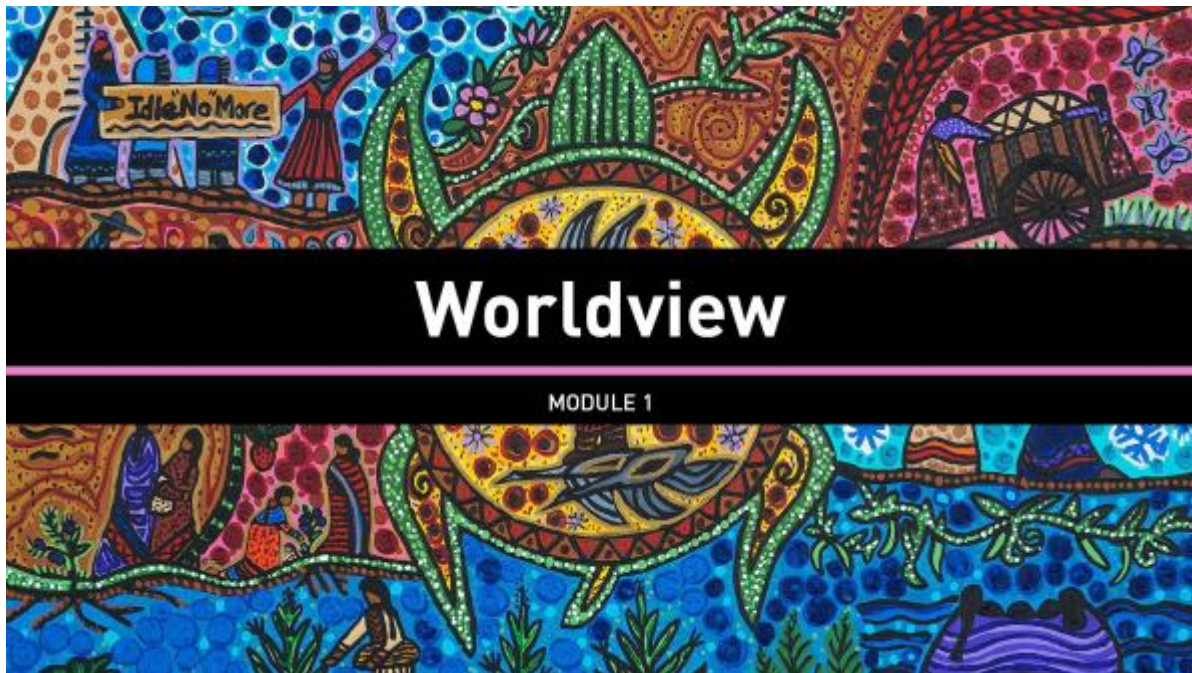




UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF NATIVE STUDIES

# Indigenous Canada: Looking Forward/Looking Back



Cover Image: Artwork by Leah Dorion

*The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory and respects the history, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our institution.*

Copyright © 2015 University of Alberta

All material in this course, unless otherwise noted, has been developed by and is the property of the University of Alberta. The University has attempted to ensure that all copyright has been obtained. If you believe that something is in error or has been omitted, please contact us.

Reproduction of this material in whole or in part is acceptable, provided all University of Alberta logos and brand markings remain as they appear in the original work.

## Course Introduction

---

**Indigenous Canada** is a twelve-module course that explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada. From an Indigenous perspective, this course explores issues important for understanding past and current relationships between Indigenous and settler societies. As a survey course, it is not possible to explain in detail the past and current relationships between Indigenous and settler societies over a large and varied geography.

Topics for the next twelve modules include the fur trade and other exchange relationships, environmental impacts, legal systems and rights, political conflicts and alliances, Indigenous political activism, and contemporary Indigenous life, art and expressions. Also, the modules explore key issues facing Indigenous peoples today from a historical and critical perspective highlighting national and local Indigenous-settler relations.



Figure 1 Big Bear Trading, 1884; Credit: O.B. Buell/Library and Archives Canada

## Table of Contents

<b>Course Introduction .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Module 1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Section One: Creation Story .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Stories are Enduring .....	4
A Creation Story .....	5
<b>Section Two: Storytelling .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Transmitting Knowledge.....	7
<i>Connection Between Generations .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Acknowledging Change Over Generations .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Moral Guide and Social Mechanisms.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Transmission of History and Culture.....</i>	<i>8</i>
Sky Woman Creation Story .....	9
<b>Section Three: Indigenous Worldviews.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Complexity of Worldviews .....	11
Worldviews of Four Nations .....	11
<i>Indigenous Worldview Commonalities .....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>North: Inuit Understandings.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Ancestral Naming.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>South: Plains Nehiyawak Understandings .....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>East: Kanien:keha'ka Understandings.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>West: Tlingit Understandings.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Tlingit Clans .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>19</b>

## Module 1 Introduction

---

Module 1 explores different Indigenous worldviews. Remember that this course is not designed to cover all of Indigenous Nations in Canada. This course has a general focus of four nations of the four directions to demonstrate how nations can differ from place to place. These distinct perspectives will help students to develop an understanding of the interactions between Indigenous peoples and settler newcomers. Note that the language and words used when talking about Indigenous peoples are not neutral. The classification and naming of Indigenous peoples has been a key tactic used in colonization.

Three groups of Aboriginal peoples recognized by the Constitution of Canada are Indian, Métis, and Inuit. Today in Canada, the term First Nations is preferred to the term Indian. The terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Native are often used interchangeably; however, certain terms may be applied within specific contexts. In the context of constitutional rights, the term Aboriginal is appropriate. Non-Indigenous people are referred to as settlers, and Canada, for example, could be referred to as a settler society. Sometimes the names of Indigenous groups commonly used are not the same as the names that people use to refer to themselves. This course respects and honours these names by using the words people use to refer to themselves as much as possible. For example, Cree people refer to themselves as Nehiyawak, and so they are referred to as Nehiyawak in this course.

Canada, located in the northern hemisphere and a large part of the North American continent, has been inhabited for more than 40,000 years by Indigenous peoples. Extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans and northward to the Arctic Ocean and covering almost 10 million square kilometres, Canada is the second largest country, by area, in the world. Credible estimates of the population of Canada and the United States prior to sustained European contact suggest the total population was in the range of 2 million people (Thornton 2005; also see Daniels 1992).



In Canada there are eleven different groups of languages, which are usually referred to as language families and describe the way languages are related. For example, Nehiyawewin is a language that is part of the family of Algonquian languages. In total there are over fifty different languages that are indigenous to Canada.

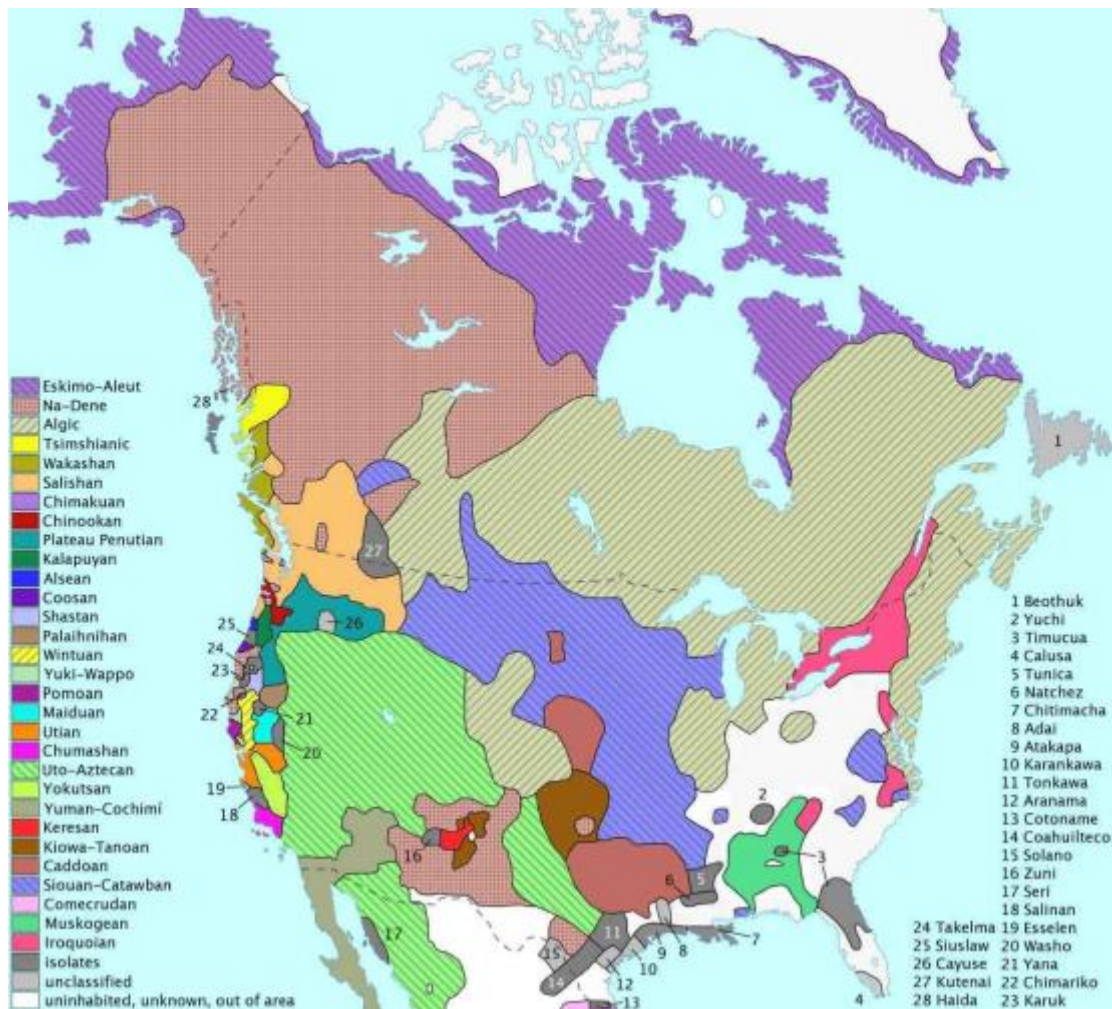


Figure 2 Indigenous languages across North America; Credit: Ish ishwar

*Did you know?* The name “Canada” comes from a St. Lawrence Iroquoian word “Kanata”, which means village or community (Elliot, 1888).

## Section One: Creation Story

---

“If the legends fall silent, who will teach the children of our ways?”

*Chief Dan George (1974)*



Figure 3 A talking circle; Credit: Leah Dorion

### **Stories are Enduring**

Stories are powerful pedagogical tools that help learners understand their history and the environment in which they live (Kovach 2010; Iseke and Brennus 2011). The teachings from stories allow listeners to come to their own decisions and conclusions. They help demonstrate that there are many different ways of looking at problems and solutions to those problems (Iseke and Brennus 2011). Storytelling has been and continues to be a central part of Indigenous identity as people and as nations (Belanger 2010; Iseke and Brennus 2011; Johnston 1999; King 2003).

There are two types of Indigenous storytelling (Kovach 2010). The first type consists of personal stories that include observations, accounts of places, and experiences. These stories evolve over time and are influenced by the needs of and relevancy to the population (Johnston 1999; Kovach 2010). The second type consists of creation or teaching stories, sometimes called myths or legends. Many of these stories, which are spiritual in nature, remain unchanged over time (Kovach 2010). The story in the next section, the Wisakejak creation story, is an example of this type. Spirits or the Creator gave these sacred stories to the people, which have been passed down from generation to generation (Belanger 2010).

## **A Creation Story**

The following is a creation story of the Nehiyawak, who are also known as the Cree.

Kayas\*, all the creatures that walked, flew, crawled and slithered lived peacefully together on Turtle Island. (Turtle Island was the name for North America, because it sat on the back of a giant turtle.) The swimming creatures swam around in the deep blue ocean. All was well, and the Creator smiled to see such harmony.

This story has a character named Wisacejak (wee-sak-ee-jack), who is a being that the Nehiyawak have many stories about. Wisacejak has no gender and often gets into trouble through his trickster antics.

Now the Creator had given powers to Wisacejak to take care of the first people and to make sure everyone lived in harmony. But Wisacejak became lazy, and the great peace and friendship did not last. The creatures of Turtle Island began to disrespect each other, and there was much fighting and killing. The Creator warned Wisacejak that if he did not obey the Creator and keep Turtle Island clean and peaceful, he would take all Wisacejak's power away. The Creator would take away the land, forests, mountains, everything. Still, Wisacejak did not believe the Creator's words, and the fighting became so prevalent that Turtle Island became red with blood.

Then it began to rain. The Creator decided to begin anew, to take everything away and wash the ground clean. The flooding did not harm the swimming creatures of course, but as the water rose higher and higher, all other creatures were drowned. In a world entirely filled by water, there were only four survivors.

Wisacejak, Beaver, Otter, and Muskrat sat together on a large tree floating in the middle of the ocean. Wisacejak was inconsolable as he wept at his stupidity and his laziness. He wept at the thought of all those lost lives. Beaver, Otter, and Muskrat looked sadly at Wisacejak and asked if there was anything that they could do. At these kind words, Wisacejak took courage, and he began to think of a plan.



Wisacejak knew that if he could get a little bit of the old earth from underneath the water, he could use what was left of his power to make a little island to live on. Fortunately for Wisacejak, he was sitting in the company of three incredible swimmers. He asked Otter if she could dive down to bring up a bit of the old earth from beneath the water. Otter was a strong swimmer and dived down deep. When she came up gasping for breath, her paws were empty of any dirt.

Next, Wisacejak asked Beaver if he could dive down and bring up a piece of earth. Beaver was a great swimmer also, with a flat, strong tail to help him swim. Beaver dove down deep and was gone a long time. He stayed down so long that he came back almost lifeless and still his paws were empty. Wisacejak had lost all hope. His two best swimmers had nearly died trying to get the old earth and had failed. A small voice spoke up. "I can get some earth for you, Wisacejak," said Muskrat. At this comment, Beaver and Otter broke out into hysterical laughter. "You, Muskrat?" they said. "How can one so little and small do what we could not?" As Beaver and Otter laughed at Muskrat, Wisacejak bent down and picked Muskrat up in his two hands. He looked into her little brown eyes and said, "Do you really think that you can do this, Muskrat?" Looking over at her laughing companions, Muskrat mustered up all of her courage and said, "Watch me."

Muskrat dove into the water and stayed down for a long time. When she came up, Wisacejak looked in her paws, but no earth was to be found. "Muskrat!" Wisacejak exclaimed, "I can smell earth on your paws. You are very close, very close!" Sensing Wisacejak's excitement and hope, Muskrat took a deep breath and dove back into the water. Wisacejak, Beaver, and Otter watched the water for signs of Muskrat, but there was nothing. A long time passed and Beaver and Otter began to mourn for their friend. They regretted laughing at Muskrat.

Wisacejak stared at the surface of the water and at last he saw some bubbles coming up. Up from the bottom of the ocean, Muskrat swam. She barely had the strength to make it back to the log. Wisacejak had to reach way down and scoop up little Muskrat's nearly lifeless body. Almost dead, Muskrat opened her paws to reveal a tiny piece of the old earth.

Immediately, Wisacejak took the earth and blew his power into it, expanding it and creating an island. Some say that the Creator took pity on Wisacejak and his friends and made all things again; others say Wisacejak used the log and some bones to recreate everything again.

One thing is for sure, Wisacejak never enjoyed the same powers again, for the Creator limited him to tricks of flattery and deceit. After that, Wisacejak became a famous trickster, leading others into mischief and mayhem. But those are stories for another time.

\*Kayas = a long time ago

## Section Two: Storytelling

---

### Transmitting Knowledge

Through stories and storytelling, Indigenous societies transmit essential knowledge critical to survival and provide a cultural framework for promoting happy, healthy communities (Kovach 2010). In this way, stories hold a lot of power. They can elicit strong emotions from humans, making us cry, laugh, and experience feelings such as anger, relief, empathy, and love (Johnston 1999).

Humans enjoy both telling stories and listening to them. Wherever and whenever people meet and gather, there are stories being told. Outsiders tend to see these stories as legends, fiction, folklore, myths, or fairy tales. But for many Indigenous peoples, these stories function in essential and thoughtful ways (Kovach 2010). They

work to instruct and educate on how to behave properly. They also act as

guides for how to live and engage with the world. Each nation has a creation story and its own distinct oral tradition. There are four general components of storytelling for Indigenous peoples: connection between generations; acknowledging change over generations; moral guide and social mechanisms; and transmission of history and culture (Dumbrill and Green 2008).



Figure 4 First Nations Woman Demonstrates Drum;  
Credit: Mark Klotz

### ***Connection Between Generations***

Indigenous stories are able to connect the past to present and future generations. For example, there are many versions of the Wisacejak creation story, but the meaning remains the same as it is told from great grandmothers to their great grandchildren.

Stories are gifts to be shared and handed down generation to generation. A Nehiyaw'iskwew (Cree woman) can be reassured that while she may not have met her great great grandmother, the Wisacejak story transcends time and connects her to her ancestors. The story she hears from her grandmother is the same one told by her great grandmother, her great great grandmother, and so on. These stories allow present generations to communicate with future generations in the same way ancestors communicated with them (Iseke and Brennus 2011).

### ***Acknowledging Change Over Generations***

While the sacred stories may not change much over time, the personal, everyday stories do change. They integrate new information and new knowledge (Iseke and Brennus 2011). They may evolve with the changing surroundings, food source supply and movement, landscape reconfiguration and new encounters with foreign populations. It is important to know that even though Indigenous stories may be thousands of years old, some of the stories change to bring the past forward to the present day. They change and evolve based on the needs of the population.

### ***Moral Guide and Social Mechanisms***

Although stories may sometimes be entertaining, they are also messages instructing people how to live and behave. Indigenous storytelling operates as a moral guide and a socializing mechanism (Iseke and Brennus 2011). Stories teach the next generation how to behave and reinforce roles and responsibilities. For example, in the Wisacejak creation story, Muskrat's heroic action of diving for earth demonstrates a lesson of perseverance and courage, while Wisacejak's laziness in keeping a peaceful community shows the consequences of being irresponsible.

### ***Transmission of History and Culture***

Storytelling is a way to transmit the history of the land and cultural knowledge to the next generation. Many creation stories include specific geographical boundaries such as rivers, lakes, and mountains to define territorial lines. For example, Nehiyawak describe how Wisacejak made the land come to be. In some Wisacejak creation stories, features

of the landscape describe the traditional territories of the Nehiyawak. The natural surroundings of the land become the history book.

Stories have power, and they embody complex worldviews associated with a particular Indigenous culture. For instance, Nehiyawak storytellers will only tell the Wisacejak stories in the wintertime. Their worldview and belief systems are illustrated by this fact. Nehiyawak storytellers believe that because so many creatures and spirits hibernate and sleep in the winter, it is safer to tell certain stories. Invoking this trickster's name, Wisacejak, in the summer is just asking for trouble.

## **Sky Woman Creation Story**

The Sky Woman creation story is one that both the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples across Eastern Canada and the United States share. There are many ways to tell this particular story, and some versions of this story can take weeks, or even years, to tell. A shortened version is as follows.

A long time ago and before Turtle Island was formed, there was an island that floated in the sky, and this is where the Sky people lived. One day Sky Woman was hungry and went out to look for something to eat. She hoped she would find berries or plants that would suit her craving. She found a good tree and began digging around to find some roots. This tree was a good tree. In fact it was very special, and it was called the Tree of Life.

As Sky Woman was digging, she noticed that the hole under the Tree of Life opened up into a vast open space. She was warned by the animals around her to stop digging. This was not a place to find food, and if she kept digging, she was certain to fall through the hole. But Sky Woman was extremely hungry, and she did not know this at the time, but she was pregnant with twins. Her hunger did not allow her to listen to the animals' warnings, and she kept digging. Soon the hole was big enough for her to fit through. She was so mesmerized by the swirling darkness and shimmering lights that as she leaned in to take a better look, she fell through the hole.



Figure 5 Turtle with Sky Woman creation ceremony; Credit: Leah Dorion

Down, down, down Sky Woman fell into another world. The water creatures in this other world looked up at the hole in their sky and saw Sky Woman falling down towards them. The creatures worried that her fall might upset the balance of water in their world, so they decided it would be wise to catch her. A heated discussion ensued about who would catch this strange falling woman and how they would catch her. In the end, the geese were chosen to catch her fall. The geese joined wings and caught Sky Woman in a soft feathery net. Now that the catching part had been taken care of, the creatures realized that Sky Woman needed a place to go or she would drown. She was not a water creature, nor could she fly. Everyone decided that she needed a spot to stand, and that the best thing for her would be land. So, one of the smallest water creatures dove down into the vast waters and came back with a bit of earth. The turtle offered to have the earth placed on top of her back, and when it was, it grew bigger and bigger until it became the whole world. Sky Woman then had her twin boys, and they went about the business of creating everything in the world we know today.

\*\*\*

### Section Three: Indigenous Worldviews

---



Figure 6 Artwork by Leah Dorion



## **Complexity of Worldviews**

It is difficult to fully explain the concept of worldview, including Indigenous worldviews, because they are so diverse and complex, and there is a multitude of ways to understand the world. Despite this diversity, there are some similarities we can find amongst the many Indigenous worldviews. Indigenous ways of knowing are based on the idea that individuals are trained to understand their environment according to teachings found in stories. These teachings are developed specifically to describe the collective lived experiences and date back thousands of years (Settee 2011).

The collective experience is made up of thousands of individual experiences. These experiences come directly from the land and help shape the codes of conduct for Indigenous societies. A key principle is to live in balance and maintain peaceful internal and external relations. This is linked to the understanding that we are all connected to each other (Settee 2011). The hierarchical structure of Western worldviews that places humans on top of the pyramid does not exist. The interdependency with all things promotes a sense of responsibility and accountability. People respond to the ecological rhythms and patterns of the land in order to live in harmony (Settee 2011).

## **Worldviews of Four Nations**

While there may be some commonalities between Indigenous worldviews, there are great complexities and rich diversities within each nation. Sharing all the worldviews of every Indigenous nation is too lengthy for the scope of this lesson, which is instead limited to the worldviews of Inuit, Nehiyawak, Kanien:keha'ka (Mohawk), and Tlingit. After describing some commonalities between Indigenous nations, this lesson explores some of the ways the Inuit, Nehiyawak, Kanien:keha'ka, and Tlingit understand their place in the world and how these worldviews rationalize thoughts and actions.

### ***Indigenous Worldview Commonalities***

Foremost, Indigenous worldviews often have the philosophy of interconnectedness and belonging. This is the understanding that all people are related, connected to each other and to all life on Earth. The common phrase “all my relations” demonstrates that this relies on a respect for all living things. The governing principles of peace and harmony are often highly valued, and each person is expected to have accountability for their actions and words. Caring about the wellbeing of others is integral to one’s position in the community (Settee 2011).

Secondly, there is unity through collaboration. With the foundation that people are all related, every group member then becomes accountable for their actions. Each child, youth, adult and elder must have a role and each retain a responsibility to each other and to the community. Many Indigenous groups know that working together towards a common goal leads to thriving communities (Settee 2011).

Thirdly, there is a distinct relationship with the land extending to environmental stewardship. The idea that land is a commodity to be exploited or owned is inconceivable. Land is borrowed from future generations. While Indigenous peoples utilize the land in many ways through agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing, gathering and living, for many Nations, land has a responsibility connected to it. This understanding of stewardship is based on the belief that land is the heart of Creation. Land is not merely a supplier for resources for the current generation, but an environment to be looked after for the next generations.

This lesson briefly looks at four distinct nations – the Inuit, Nehiyawak, Kanien:keha’ka, and the Tlingit. Their unique worldviews are often reflected by the land and territory that they occupy. The physical landscape influences the values and paradigms of each Nation’s worldviews.

### ***North: Inuit Understandings***

Inuit thrive in the Northern region of the globe. The term *Inuit Quajimajatuqangit*, or IQ, is used to explain Inuit philosophies and worldview. It means “that which Inuit have always known to be true” (Tagalik 2010, 1).

Although the Nunavut government has formally adopted this wording to describe Inuit worldview, it is important to realize that the Inuit occupy a large span of the circumpolar North, circumstances which necessitate variations in culture.

In Canada the four Inuit regions – Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunatsiavut, and Nunavik – are called Inuit Nunangat. The Arctic environment, which includes vast shelves of seasonal sea ice and marine waters, shapes Inuit worldviews (Freeman 1985). Therefore, a traditional homeland territory that includes sea ice and other marine water is integral to Inuit worldview.

Thriving in the harsh Arctic climate, Inuit people rely heavily upon each other for survival. Each person has value and contributes to their community (Tagalik 2010). This reliance has established codes of ethics and behaviours, or *maligait*. *Maligait* has many meanings and translations, but to elder Mariano Aupilaarjuk it means “a set way of doing things that had to be followed” (Oosten, Laugrand, and Mariano Aupilaarjuk. 1999, 16). Shirley Tagalik outlines four main principles (Tagalik 2010, 1):

1. Working for the common good
2. Respecting all living things
3. Maintaining harmony and balance
4. Continually planning and preparing for the future



Figure 7 Taktu cleaning fat from seal skin with an ulu; Credit: Rosemary Gilliat/National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque. Library and Archives Canada

### ***Ancestral Naming***

All of the characteristics of an ancestor, including the strengths and skills, are imbued onto the child. From the naming day forward, the child is expected to act in the manner of their respected namesake. In this way, each member of society would be enveloped in a system of accountability and responsibility to their community (Owlijoot and Flaherty 2014). The four expectations of the community including: work for the common good, respect all living things, preserve harmony and balance, and prepare for the future, are then realized through generations.

### ***South: Plains Nehiyawak Understandings***

Nehiyawak, a word meaning “the people”, are the largest population of any Aboriginal group in Canada. Many Indigenous Nations refer to themselves as ‘the people’ in their languages (Settee 2011). Nehiyawak traditional territories extend into BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and parts of the United States.

Like many Indigenous peoples, Nehiyawak are as intricately connected with place as they are with each other. For example, a Nehiyawak worldview embodies the words “all my relations” and is not just limited to their family or their community, but extends to every nation, every person (Settee 2011).

Because Plains Nehiyawak once travelled over vast distances in a largely mobile culture, it was important to know who your relatives were. As such, whenever greeting each other, Nehiyawak often ask, “Tante ohci kiya?” Separately, tante means “where”, ohci means “from”, and kiya means “you”. Put together, one might understand the words as “Where are you from?” However, taken within a cultural context



Figure 8 Nehiyawak traditional territory; Credit: Onlea

and considering the value of placed on kinship, it means “belly button”. What role does the belly button play in this? Well, “tante ohci kiya” within the Plains Nehiyawak worldview means that your belly button is literally the connection between you and your mother. It is the connection you share with all of your ancestors. Your metaphorical umbilical cord connects you to thousands of relatives. So, when you are asked, “Tante ohci kiya?”, you are being asked about who, not where, you come from.

The Plains Nehiyawak believe that each Nehiyaw are given gifts from the Creator when they are born – the physical gift of the body, the emotional, mental and spiritual. In this way, the Nehiyawak term “all my relations” can be seen as a way to live in the world.

### ***East: Kanien:keha’ka Understandings***

People of the Place of Flint, as the Kanien:keha’ka call themselves, are also known as the Mohawk Nation (Bonvillain 2001). Along with their creation story of Sky Woman, the Kanien:keha’ka of Kahnawa:ke also have come to utilize the concepts of the Seventh Generation, the Great Law of Peace, and the Two Row Wampum Treaty as the basis for forming their values and beliefs.

While Kanien:keha’ka worldviews do share some commonalities with other Indigenous peoples, their extensive agricultural work with the land had a great influence on their worldviews. For instance, Kanien:keha’ka women were responsible for and tended large plots of land for planting, cultivating, and harvesting (Bonvillain 2001). A distinct connection existed between the women’s strong leadership in this provider role and the development of a matrilineal clan system. Kanien:keha’ka lived in longhouses with a clan structure based on six animals, for example, the Bear, Wolf and Turtle. These clan systems



Figure 9 Kanien:keha;ka territory; Credit: Onlea



formed the basis of Kanien:keha'ka kinship (Bonvillain 2001). This kinship system is integral to the ways in which the Kanien:keha'ka see the world today. These kinship groups were linked together through marriage alliances. The woman, her husband, and her daughters would live in her family's longhouse along with her daughter's families and any unmarried sons. This system would ensure fair distribution and control of farmland and responsibilities (Bonvillain 2001).

Older, respected women were called clan mothers and often held critical roles in their clans due to the Kanien:keha'ka's story of creation of Sky Woman. Women were seen as having direct links to the fertility of the land and as such were responsible for the caretaking of the land (Bonvillain 2001). As well, clan mothers were responsible for selecting and installing clan chiefs.

This balance of power between the genders ensured strong ties of kinship and community. This particular worldview about roles and responsibilities structured everyday life and functioned to create a peaceful and thriving existence for the Kanien:keha'ka.

### ***West: Tlingit Understandings***

The Northwest Coast Indigenous nations share similar traits, practices, and worldviews. Even so, this area is brimming with diversity. For example, there are forty-five different Indigenous languages in this small region alone (Bonvillain 2001). The Tlingit are one of the many nations living along the Pacific coastline, and within the Tlingit there are twenty-one geopolitical groups or *Kwáan* (Thornton 2008).



Figure 10 Tlingit territory; Credit: Onlea

Unlike the Inuit and Nehiyawak, the Tlingit do not have village councils or confederacies to manage governmental affairs. Instead, like the Kanien:keha'ka, they have a well-developed clan system (Bonvillain 2001). Like with the other tribes, it was the land and the environmental dynamics that influenced the formation of Tlingit ways of seeing the world (Bonvillain 2001). For example, potlatches were utilized as a method for redistributing of resources amongst the community members and served to rank individuals hierarchically within the community as an aspect of governance (Bonvillain 2001).

### ***Tlingit Clans***

Due to the abundance of food and resources as well as the geographical area and temperate climate, the Tlingit often made and accumulated great stores of food and material items, such as Chilkaat robes, button blankets, vests, and masks. Sharing this richness of material wealth relied upon the redistribution of resources through the potlatch ceremony (Belanger 2010; Bonvillain 2001). General governing matters were determined by the chiefs and high-ranking community members who often held elaborate potlatches for social and economic relations. Potlatches were held for many reasons (Bonvillain 2001). For instance, a family celebrating a new chief or a naming ceremony would host the potlatch. They would be expected to feed everyone who attended, as well as give valuable gifts to each participant. This led to a redistribution of wealth, and in this way the celebration would be recognized and acknowledged with the giving of gifts. This way everyone had a warm home, clothing, and food to eat.

The twenty-one Kwáans of the Tlingit have distinct clan systems consisting of moieties, or sides. These are the Raven and Eagle or Wolf, depending on location (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators 2000). Connections to the land are demonstrated through the designs created on clothing articles, such as the Chilkaat robes and button blankets. These designs owned by each moiety reflect the landscape to which they belong. In this way, the land becomes an integral part of identity and social being, as the designs reinforce the belonging to a clan (Martindale 2008). Today the clan moieties remain the

same, but the structure of residing in traditional clan houses is not readily practiced everywhere. The Tlingit worldviews are still meaningful, as they remain spiritually and culturally linked with the land and sea.



Figure 11 National Aboriginal Day 2014; Credit: University of the Fraser Valley

## Conclusion

---

Through thousands of years of inhabiting North America, Indigenous nations have many different ways of looking at the world. For Indigenous people, storytelling is used to pass on lessons. The environment plays a large role in worldview, as well as kinships systems, such as clans and moieties. The differences and distinctiveness of groups, such as Inuit, Nehiyawak, Kanien:keha'ka, and Tlingit, are important when using classificatory terms, such as Indigenous or Aboriginal. These worldviews were challenged to the brink of annihilation once the newcomers started to arrive.

### Credits

- Cover Image: Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- Figure 1. Big Bear Trading, 1884; Credit: O.B. Buell/Library and Archives Canada/PA-118768; Restrictions on use: Nil; Copyright: Expired; URL: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/portrait-portal/Pages/arprofile.aspx?ArchivalRecordKey=3159944>
- Figure 2. Indigenous languages across North America; Credit: Ish ishwar; License: CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>); URL: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langs\\_N.Amer.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langs_N.Amer.png);
- Figure 3. A talking circle; Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- Figure 4. First Nations Woman Demonstrates Drum; Credit: Mark Klotz; License: CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>); URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/markklotz/15669082918/>
- Figure 5. Turtle with Sky Woman creation ceremony; Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- Figure 6. Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- Figure 7. Taktu cleaning fat from seal skin with an ulu; Credit: Rosemary Gilliat/National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque. Library and Archives Canada, PA-146506; Restrictions on use: Nil; Copyright: Expired; URL: [http://collections.canada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3211014](http://collections.canada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3211014)
- Figure 8. Nehiyawak traditional territory; Credit: Onlea; URL: <http://www.onlea.org/>
- Figure 9. Kanien:keha;ka territory; Credit: Onlea; URL: <http://www.onlea.org/>
- Figure 10. Tlingit territory; Credit: Onlea; URL: <http://www.onlea.org/>
- Figure 11. National Aboriginal Day 2014; Credit: University of the Fraser Valley; License: CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>); URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ufv/14448020024/in/photolist-o1HSZw-o1GH25-nJjHR7-nJjT35-o1weUZ-uZB2tF-nJjskP-o3AoEg-nJjxUp-uXgE1G-o3AKFK-o1HfDL-nYLSz7-ci9bnb-o1w2zZ-nJjKmU-nJjYbw-nJjBFJ-n1HZSC-o1P3ze-u3ydxE-o1vPc2-o1GktW-95ijuo-u3KbGx-c6RQ1h-c6RS9m-cxbfQd-c6RPJQ-gmSvHy-bUtmwr-c6RRW7-uZ5mzA-eXj12u-95ijeW-cQJu4Y-c6Ryds-A8zQK-c6RVp1-py7pNE-9CZh24-9D3cjs-7acMEF-piE2g2-c6RSkq-bHfKar-9CZh4a-86ubRf-c6RKZY-86r6Mg>

## References

---

- Assembly of Alaska Native Educators. (2000). *Guidlines for respecting cultural knowledge* (pp. 1–31). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network. <http://ankn.uaf.edu/publications/Knowledge.pdf>
- Belanger, Yale Deron. 2010. *Ways of Knowing: An Introduction to Native Studies in Canada*. Toronto: Nelson Education.
- Bonvillain, Nancy. 2001. *Native Nations Cultures and Histories of Native North America*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Daniels, John D. 1992. "The Indian Population of North America in 1492." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 49 (2): 298–320. doi:10.2307/2947274.
- Dumbrill, Gary C., and Jacquie Green. 2008. "Indigenous knowledge in the social work academy." *Social Work Education* 27, no. 5: 489–503.
- Elliott, A. Marshall. 1888. "Origin of the Name 'Canada.'" *Modern Language Notes* 3 (6): 164–73. doi:10.2307/2918432.
- Freeman, Minnie Aodla. 1985. "Inuit." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia, Historica Canada*. Article published June 9, 2010. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/inuit/>
- George, Dan. 1974. *My Heart Soars*. Toronto, ON: Hancock House.
- Iseke, Judy, and BMJK Brennus. 2011. "Learning life lessons from Indigenous storytelling with Tom McCallum." In *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education* edited by George Sefa Dei, 245–261. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Johnston, Basil. 1999. "How Do We Learn Language?: What Do We Learn?" In *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*, edited by Murray Laura J. and Rice Keren, 43–51. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- King, Thomas. 2003. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press.
- Kovach, Margaret. 2010. *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.



- Oosten, J. G., Wim Rasing, Frédéric Laugrand, and Mariano Aupilaarjuk. 1999. *Perspectives on Traditional Law*. Iqaluit, NU: Language and Culture Program of Nunavut Arctic College.
- Owlijoot, Pelagie and Louise Flaherty. 2014. *Inuit Kinship and Naming Customs*. Iqaluit, NU: Inhabit Media.
- Settee, Priscilla. 2011 "Chapter Twenty-Eight: Indigenous Knowledge: Multiple Approaches." In *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education: A reader*, edited by George Jerry Sefa Dei, 434–50. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Tagalik, Shirley. 2010. *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Supporting Wellness in Inuit Communities in Nunavut*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. Retrieved from <http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/docs/fact%20sheets/child%20and%20youth/Inuit%20IQ%20EN%20web.pdf>
- Thornton, Russell. 2000. "Population History of Native North Americans." In *A Population History of North America* edited by Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, 9–50. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Thornton, Thomas F., and Institute Sealaska Heritage. 2008. *Being and Place Among the Tlingit*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.