

The Indigenous Visual Vocabulary Collection

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1 Introduction

This guide recognizes the importance of the orality of Indigenous languages. The symbols in this collection are common to many Indigenous visual vocabularies and can be used for graphical user interfaces and text documents designed for Indigenous audiences. The visual tokens described here are derived from Indigenous pictographic, ideographic, and cultural symbols. They are used in conjunction with the English orthography to represent the Indigenous voice within Western formats and structural contexts. The following symbols could also be adapted to classify and categorize knowledge or applied to primarily English or Western-based written materials.

2 About this Collection

Each icon in this collection comes in eight styles and are available in vector (SVG) formats and raster (PNG format) with five different resolutions – 60px, 125px, 250px, 500px, 600px. The eight styles, as seen in Figure 1, are as follows:

- Two borderless with transparent backgrounds—white, and black.
- Three round border – black on white, white on black, and color.
- Three square border – black on white, white on black, and color.

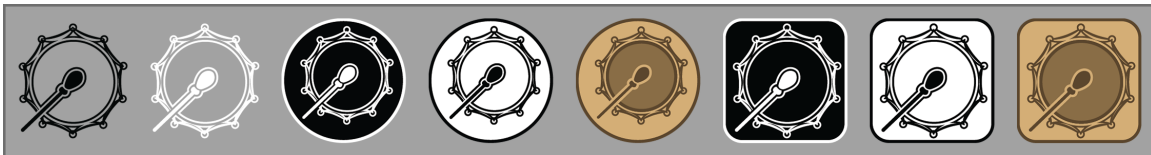


Figure 1: An example of the eight styles of each icon on a grey background.

Note that the colors used are either associated with colors on the medicine/teaching wheel OR by the physical feature of the symbol itself. However, these colors can be modified to suit your own needs and aesthetics. For the best results in changing a symbol's color, load




the colored version of the desired SVG file into a design program like Photoshop, Illustrator, GIMP, etc... and change the appropriate layer there.




This collection is available for download from GitHub at:


<https://github.com/jon-corbett/indigenous-visual-vocabulary>

3 Symbols

The following table showcases each symbol and its meaning(s) based on my understanding of my nehiyaw-Métis cultural background. The “Suggested Uses” and examples found in the following sections are only suggestions. Indigenous cultures have many similarities in teachings, but they also have numerous differences. Therefore, how you choose to implement these symbols should be done from your understanding of your cultural background.

	<p>Smudge Icon. Smudging is a ritual where one (or more) of the sacred earthly medicines (tobacco, sage, sweetgrass, or cedar) are burned to help release oneself from negative energies. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes used interchangeably with the sage icon.• Use at the start of a document.• Use before writing about culturally specific teachings or before instructions.
	<p>Rising Sun. This symbol represents the Eastern direction, and for many Indigenous communities, it symbolizes the source of knowledge. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use to identify text with ceremony and spiritual connection.• Use where Indigenous knowledge is an essential component of the text being discussed.• Use as a way to highlight Elder quotes. (i.e., our source of knowledge is passed on to use through Elders).
	<p>Turtle Shell. The shell symbol is a reference to “Turtle Island.” Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use to identify land-based knowledge.• Use in relation to discussion about the Earth Mother.• Identify anything living, organic, or ecological.

	<p>Feathers. The feathers symbol. This symbol is one of honor and respect. It is often used in ceremonies like Sharing Circles (i.e., pass the feather). It can also represent strength, courage, wisdom, and connection to the Creator. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This icon works well as in indicator that there is additional knowledge (documents, templates, electronic tools etc...) available outside of this document. Use a linking image in HTML. • Use for "Settings" or referencing "linked ideas." • Use as an icon for the "About" section of an application or website.
	<p>Bear Print. The bear print symbol signifies land, particularly hunting and trapping. Additionally, it can also represent courage, bravery, play, and how to face our fears and overcome challenges. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anything related to pathfinding. (i.e., directions, recipes, GPS) • Tracking usage and statistics. • An icon for finding/searching – as in web search. • A symbol for play/recreation. • A symbol for challenging activities. For example, physical development (sports), mental strengthening (like puzzles), spirit building (prayer), or emotional growth.
	<p>The Drum. The drum symbol represents connection and relationships to all of creation. It is a wholistic symbol of balance, equality, harmony, and a tool to carry our voice to the spirit world. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify music or audio. • Use as a symbol for a ceremony. • Use as a symbol for a special event or gathering.

	<p>Sacred Fire. The sacred fire symbol is one of healing. It represents the bond and strength of the community and our nature to help others in times of need. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as a symbol for community gathering. • Use as a symbol for health.
	<p>Lodge (open). An open lodge is the spirit and body of women in my culture. When the lodge is open, it symbolizes community and family and the values we learn through their teachings. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as an open file button in a user interface. • Use as an icon for data decryption or decoding. • Use as an in-text symbol highlighting values or family teachings.
	<p>Lodge (closed). The lodge covering (i.e., the hide) represents “ultimate protection,” symbolizing warmth and protection. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as a close or save button in a user interface. • Use as an icon for data encryption or encoding.
	<p>Sage Bundle. The sage bundle is one of four sacred medicines used to “purify” an individual and prepare for ceremony. Suggested uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used interchangeably with the smudge icon. • Use at the start of a document. • Use as a UI symbol for preparation, settings, or user required actions.

4 About the Author

Jon Corbett is a nehiyaw-Métis computational media artist and professional computer programmer. He holds a BFA from the University of Alberta in Art and Design, an MFA from the University of British Columbia in Interdisciplinary Studies, and is currently a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of British Columbia. His doctoral research crosses the domains of Indigenous Studies and Digital Humanities and focuses on creating digital tools for Indigenous artists and nehiyawewin learners. His research products thus far include a nehiyaw-based programming language, physical hardware designs for the nehiyaw syllabic orthography, and software/application solutions that use Indigenous Storywork as design tools. In addition to being showcased in several books and articles, his artwork has been featured at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, NY, and at the Biennale d'art contemporain autochtone / Contemporary Native Art Biennial (BACA) in Montreal, QC.

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