

Native Teachings: Nature

Native Views of The Land

- More than geographic territory
- It's a sacred, living, entity, with it's own cycles and rhythms (ie. seasons, night & day...)
- People are sensitive to these rhythms and they heed signs in nature (global warming?)
- Land reflects the peoples way of life and their spirituality
 - Provides sacred places where wisdom, power, and the meaning of life are granted by the spiritual world
- Land is closely linked to the peoples identity and destiny

The Land and Survival

- First Nations and Inuit cultures depend on nature for their survival
- *“Without the land and animals our spirits will die. Non-natives sometimes think we are being romantic when we talk about these things. This is not about romance. This is about reality and survival.”*
 - Norma Kassi , *Gwich'in Nation*

Responsibilities to Nature

- In the teaching of the four colours of humans – the Creator has given each group responsibility for different parts of nature
- White people – responsible for taking care of the **air**
- Black people – responsible for taking care of the **water**
- Yellow people – responsible for **fire**
- Red people – responsible for taking care of the **earth**

Human's Responsibilities

- As the last to be created, humans were assigned the roles of **servants and caretakers** for all other creations
- This notion contrasts sharply with the Judaeo-Christian belief that humans have
 - *“dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the Earth” (Genesis 1:25)*

Medicine Plants

- **Sage:**
 - Is seen as a women's medicine, and offers strength, wisdom, and clarity of purpose. It is used to symbolize the life-giving power of women. Sage is often braided into three strands, similar to Sweetgrass, and hung within one's home.

Medicine Plants

- **Cedar:**
 - Is used for purification and to attract positive energy, feelings, emotions and for balance. Cedar tea has been used as a healing medicine. It's high vitamin C content was essential to the prevention of scurvy, in a time when fruits and vegetables were unavailable during the long winter months. It was one of the first gifts of natural healing shared with the European peoples upon their arrival to Turtle Island (North America).

Medicine Plants

- **Sweetgrass:**
 - Is used by almost all Aboriginal peoples in North America. It is a ritual cleansing. The smoke rises, as our prayers rise above us to our Creator, the Grandfathers, and the Spirit World.
 - Sweetgrass was one of the four original "medicine plants" given by the Creator to the first peoples.

Medicine Plants

- **Sweetgrass:**
 - The lesson Sweetgrass teaches us is kindness.
 - When Sweetgrass is walked upon, it bends, but does not break. So one of the lessons of Sweetgrass is that when someone does us an injustice or hurts us, we are to return it with kindness, as does the Sweetgrass, by bending, not breaking when it is walked upon.
 - It is often referred to as the hair of our Mother, the Earth

Medicine Plants

- **Tobacco:**

- Is held as a sacred plant by all Native North American people. It is believed that Tobacco opens the door between the Worlds of Earth and Spirit and used in many ways by Aboriginal peoples
- If tobacco is offered and accepted, and a request made of the person accepting it, that promise is sacred. It is a commitment or promise not only between the people involved, but with our Creator and the Grandfathers of the Spirit World.
- Tobacco, or any smudge, may be burned in an earthen-ware bowl, large clam shell, in a fire or fireplace or other object during periods of prayer and meditation. As the smoke rises, so do our prayers rise to the Spirit World and the Creator.

Gift of Tobacco

- **Tobacco:**

- you take a gift, gather Sweetgrass, Cedar, Sage, birchbark, stones, herbs, you might leave Tobacco in the ground to honor the gift you are taking, returning energy and prayer to our Mother, the Earth, and thanks to the Creator
- Tobacco need not be smoked. In fact, it should be smoked only by certain people on specific occasions, for example, pipe carriers during ceremonies.
- Tobacco may be carried around and used as a means of thanking our Creator for his gifts. For example, if you enjoyed a sunset, rainbow, good weather, you might leave some Tobacco on the ground, and say thank you for the gift

Medicine Pouches

- **Medicine Pouches**
- Prescribed by an Elder, plant material can also be worn in a medicine pouch by a person seeking the mercy and protection of the spirits of the Four Directions.
- Elders caution Natives not to conceal any other substances in their pouches- To do so would make a mockery of their beliefs.

Respect for all things

- **Native Belief of Animism:**
 - The belief that all of creation is alive and that all things in the physical world have a spirit
- Therefore all things are to be respected

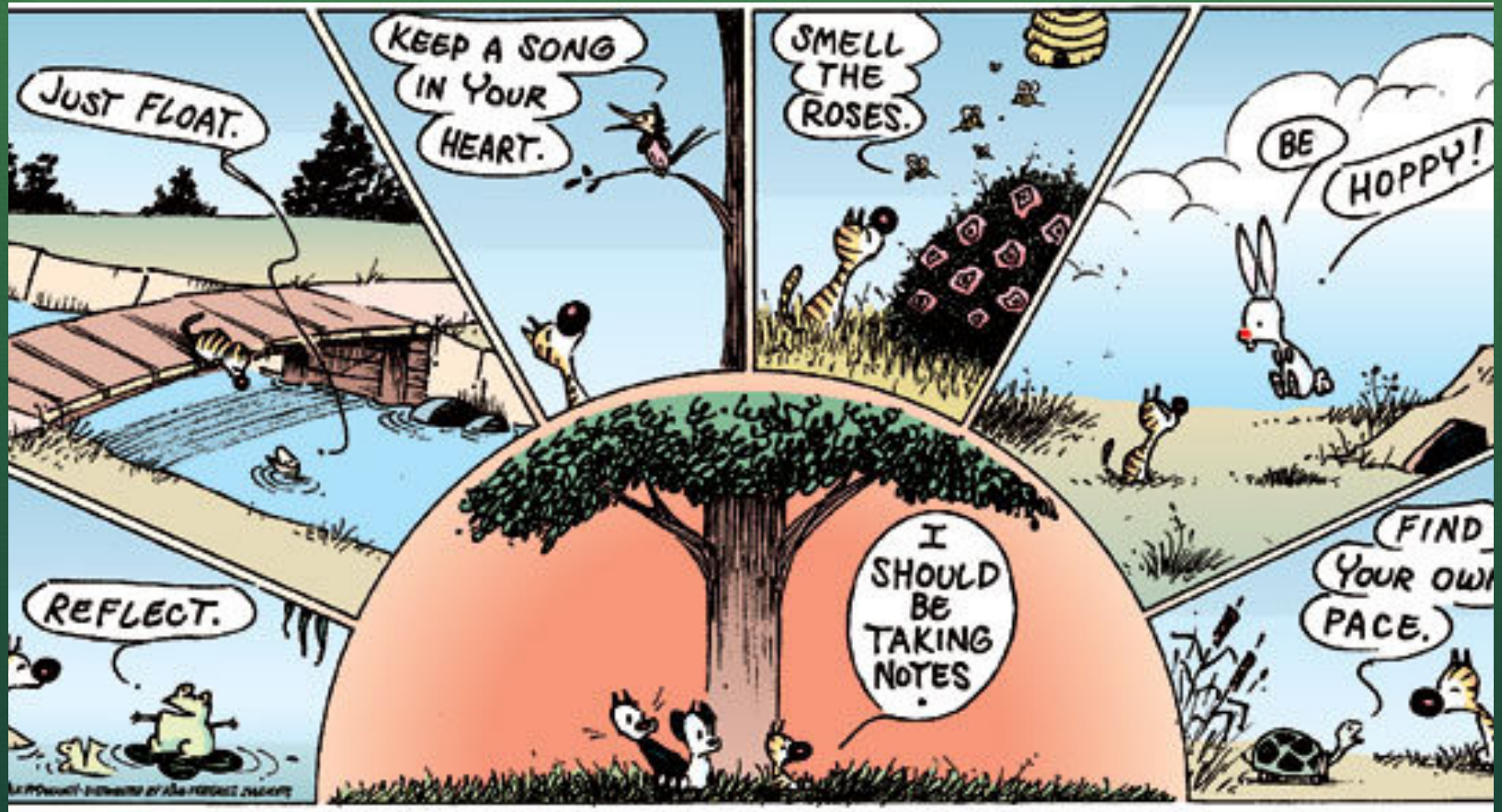
Respect for all things

- First Nations and Inuit peoples have great respect for the land, and all things of the land have spiritual significance to them
- To show their respect, they developed many spiritual practices
- **For example:**
 - When a deer was killed for food, the hunter laid down tobacco at the site of the killing as an expression of thanks to the spirit of the deer for giving up its life to nurture the hunter and his family
 - If the hunter offended the deer's spirit, he would face great challenges obtaining food in the future

Gifts from Nature

- Plants & Herbs – medicines, food
- Animals – food, skins, companion, symbols
- Sun – Fire, heat/warmth, light
- Earth – foundation, ground to grow food
- Water – nourish our bodies, cleansing
- Air – winds, breathing

Learning From Nature



Nature's Guardians: The Memekwesiw

- The Woodland Cree speak of the Memekwesiw
- Small people – size of 2 year old, no noses, live in caves, teach about nature and natural medicine
- Great concern over the fate of the environment
- http://www.virtualsk.com/current_issue/natures_guardians.html

Who are the Memekwesiw?

- What is their purpose?
- How did the Cree people connect with the Memekwesiw?
- Why are they only recently becoming more visible to more Cree people?

Getting Your Life in Balance

- Similar to the teachings of the Medicine Wheel – we must achieve balance in all aspects of our lives, as everything is interconnected
- If one aspect takes over, others will be compromised
- Too often Burnout, Depression and Poor Health are the price we pay for not balancing our lives
- Since Medicine wheel teachings are best left to First Nation's Elders and facilitators, we will adapt the concept of the Medicine Wheel into creating our own "Balance-of-Life Wheel"
- See page 20

The Wheel of Life

- Read assignment on Pages 20-21 of text
- Complete Wheel of Life exercise yourself
- **handout exercise*