



This activity will encourage students and teachers to focus their attention on our natural environment and to be aware of what is contributing to our wellbeing.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- To be thankful for our natural environment

DURING THIS ACTIVITY, STUDENTS WILL:

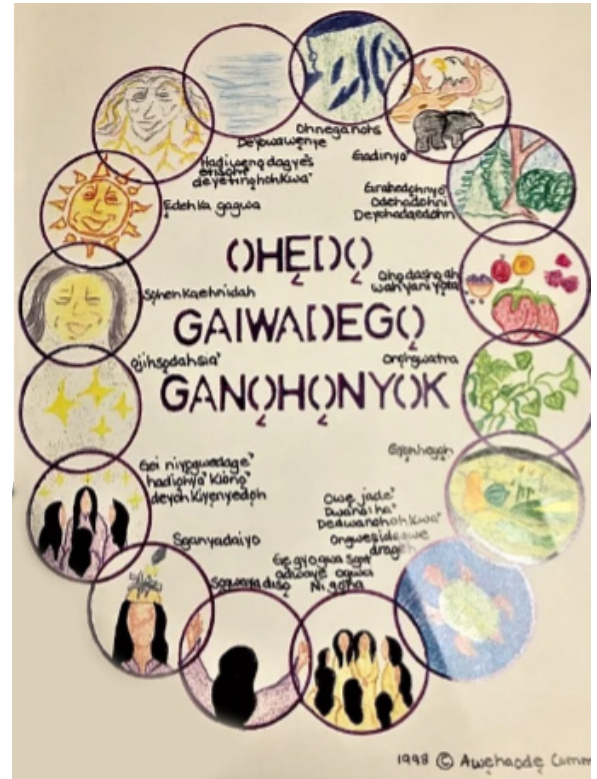
- Work in small groups to brainstorm what the different elements in nature provide for us human beings, and our ecosystem.
- Share their findings with others.

MATERIALS:

- Flipchart paper and coloured markers

Disconnection from nature is a growing concern. With the advancements with technology devices, social media platforms, and resulting mental health issues, more and more children are not enjoying the great outdoors. Students are highly entertained with video games, social media activities, and the internet, which is taking up a lot of their waking time.

It is customary for Haudenosaunee to begin their day with the Thanksgiving Address. The Thanksgiving Address is the foundational practice of the Haudenosaunee. It is a greeting to the elements of the natural world. This is a tradition that has been passed down through the generations since time immemorial. This is said to be the words that come before all else, meaning that these words will set the tone for the day.



GRADE LEVEL: K-6

Start it Up

Share an example with the students of an element in nature and talk about how that contributes to human wellbeing and ecosystem connections. For example, when thinking about trees, we can come up with many things that trees do for us humans and the environment. The trees provide fresh air, shade, and shelter for small creatures. They can be used to build our shelters, furniture, and fires to cook our food or to keep us warm.

Explain that the Haudenosaunee have a foundational practice called the Thanksgiving Address which is a greeting to the elements of the natural world. It is customary for Haudenosaunee to begin their day with the Thanksgiving address. The elements that are mentioned in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address include: People, Mother Earth, Waters, Fish, Plants, Food Plants, Medicine Plants, Animals, Trees, Birds, The Four Winds, Sun, Thunderers, Grandmother Moon, Stars, Heaven Guardians, and Creator.

Instructions

1. Explain to the students that they are going to work in small groups and brainstorm how an element from the list above contributes to human wellbeing and ecosystem connections. After, they will have 3 to 5 minutes to share their findings with the rest of the class. Let them know that they can prepare their findings anyway they want: write words, draw pictures, or be creative in any other appropriate way.
2. Divide students into small groups with up to 4 students in each group and have each group select an element.
3. Give each group a flipchart paper and a variety of coloured markers.
4. Have the groups separate to a space that provides them room to spread out their paper and to be able to sit and discuss their element they are focusing on. Give them about 20-25 minutes to do the activity.
5. Once reconvened, ask for a group to volunteer to go first, this helps with students having a sense of empowerment. When sharing their findings, ensure that all group members are standing with their group as this fosters teamwork. Once the group has finished sharing, clap and thank them, then ask if anyone would add anything to that group's findings before inviting the next group up to present.

Discussion

Building off one of the two videos listed below, talk about important points: e.g., that the Thanksgiving Address is the most important part of the Haudenosaunee culture, it is giving thanksgiving to the natural environment, our relationship to the universe, it lets us bring our minds together, it reminds us we are dependent on all of nature, etc.

Ask questions to the students, e.g., Why would that be important? Why should we be thankful for our natural environment? How do we feel when we talk about being thankful?

Keep it up

Invite the students to start to think about gratitude and how it makes us feel good. Let them know that this is something they can do every morning, as soon as they open their eyes. It is a practice that is taught to children at a young age. When they wake up, they are welcomed with a 'good morning', then the parent will start to talk about things in nature and why we are thankful for those things, just like the activity above.

Invite students to practise this when they wake up in the morning. Before their feet hit the floor, they can think about why they are thankful for whatever it is they think of or notice in nature first. Maybe it is the sun shining, or the rain coming down, or the birds singing.

Resources

Videos:

[Skä·noñh - Great Law of Peace Center - Thanksgiving Address](#) (Onondaga Historical Association, YouTube, 2016, 4:18)

In this video, for an older audience, speakers explain the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address and giving thanks to different elements of the environment. It shares what being thankful is from a Haudenosaunee perspective.

[Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address](#) (Nysmuseum, YouTube, 2014, 3:51)

In this video, Whatweni·neh - Frieda Jacques, explains the history, purpose, and use of the Thanksgiving Address to a youth at the Onodaga Nation School. She also underlines how it changes depending on who is saying it.

Book:

Giving thanks by Chief Jake Swamp and illustrated by Erwin Printup Jr. (1995, Lee and Low Books, Inc).

"Each page of the text addresses one aspect of creation, beginning with the people and extending to all of creation, including the food plants, animals, plants, trees, water, birds, four winds, thunders, sun, moon, stars, and spirit protectors. Above all, the speech gives thanks to the Creator or Great Spirit for the wonderful gifts of Mother Earth." – [Goodminds.com](#)