11E ANNÉE

FRANÇAIS : DÉCOUVRIR LES VOIX CONTEMPORAINES DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS, DES MÉTIS ET DES INUITS

QUESTION STRUCTURANTE :

Les textes culturels tels que les vêtements et les costumes, les histoires, les chansons, la musique, les danses et les pratiques culturelles incarnent des significations sociales et culturelles en relation avec leur utilisation dans des contextes contemporains et historiques.

DURÉE :

7 jours ou plus

ATTENTES GLOBALES :

A1. Exploration : explorer les thèmes liés aux identités, aux relations, à l'autodétermination et à la souveraineté ou à l'autonomie des Premières Nations, des Métis et des Inuits, tels qu'elles apparaissent dans les textes créés au Canada, en formulant des questions et en comparant les points de vue afin de stimuler un échange d'idées raisonné sur ces sujets.

A2. Déconstruction : démontrer une compréhension de la façon dont les représentations des personnes, des communautés et des cultures des Premières Nations, des Métis et des Inuits dans les textes créés au Canada sont influencées par des perspectives liées ou façonnées par la période historique, le contexte culturel et les conditions et événements sociaux et politiques, y compris les perspectives liées au genre et au rôle des femmes.

A3. Reconstruction : démontrer une compréhension du rôle des textes contemporains et historiques créés au Canada pour représenter la diversité des vies, des cultures et des visions du monde des Premières Nations, des Métis et des Inuits, et évaluer l'impact sur la société canadienne des efforts déployés pour remettre en question les points de vue colonialistes et les représentations incomplètes ou inexactes.

RESSOURCES PÉDAGOGIQUES :

Guides d'introduction, *Cartographie de l'amour décolonial* (2013) de Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Tresser les herbes sacrées* (2015) de Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Remarque au sujet des leçons : Il est important que ces activités soient réalisées dans l'ordre, car elles s'appuient les unes sur les autres. Bien qu'elles soient intitulées « leçons », les explorations peuvent se dérouler sur plusieurs périodes ou plusieurs jours. Elles peuvent également servir de point de départ à des recherches plus approfondies et à l'acquisition de connaissances. Même si les activités sont rédigées sous forme de « plans de cours », il est important d'être à l'écoute des idées, des questions, des idées et des conceptions erronées des élèves au fur et à mesure de l'apprentissage. Il est préférable que vous vous positionniez en tant que co-apprenant·e, tout en ayant conscience de votre pouvoir et de votre responsabilité en tant qu'éducateur·rice dans la salle de classe, afin de perturber les idées, le langage et les préjugés racistes ou oppressifs qui peuvent surgir.

Comme l'auto-identification est confidentielle, il se peut que vous ne sachiez pas qui sont les élèves autochtones dans votre classe. Il est important de créer un environnement qui tient compte du bien-être des élèves lors de l'apprentissage de contenus sensibles ; il faut donc respecter le droit des élèves autochtones de ne pas y prendre part. Informer tous les élèves et toutes les familles du sujet dont vous allez traiter peut aider les apprenant·es en classe. Il peut être nécessaire de prendre des mesures d'adaptation pour éviter de placer les élèves racisé·es dans des situations qui causent un malaise ou sont traumatisantes. Pour obtenir des conseils sur la façon d'aborder cette question avec respect, veuillez contacter l'équipe pédagogique des Premières Nations, des Métis et des Inuits de votre conseil scolaire, ou consultez le document suivant de l'Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres : Trauma Informed Schools

REMARQUE : Ces leçons fournissent simplement un cadre assurant que les connaissances, les systèmes de connaissances et les droits autochtones fassent partie intégrante du programme ontarien de NBF3U.

L'occasion serait excellente d'inclure la visite d'un membre de la collectivité, d'un·e gardien·ne du savoir ou d'un·e aîné·e de vos partenaires de traité dans le contexte de ces explorations.

LEÇON 1 : RELATIONS AVEC LE TERRITOIRE

L'objectif de cette leçon est d'encourager les élèves à entrer en contact avec le monde naturel qui se trouve juste à l'extérieur de leur école et à réfléchir à ce qui s'y trouve. Écoutez ce qu'Isaac Murdoch (Ojibwé, Première Nation de Serpent River) a à dire aux éducateur·rices sur l'importance d'amener les élèves à l'extérieur pour apprendre et s'instruire.

SOURCE : ressource Lessons From the Earth de la First Nations, Métis & Inuit Education Association of Ontario.

Décidez d'un endroit où vous emmènerez les élèves. Il peut s'agir d'un étang, d'un parc ou d'une zone boisée près de l'école. Il peut aussi s'agir de la cour de récréation de l'école. Cet exercice peut être réalisé n'importe où à l'extérieur. Consultez la ressource *How to Teach Nature Journaling* de John Muir Laws pour plus d'idées sur la manière d'intégrer les explorations en plein air dans les sciences humaines.

Matériel requis : Du papier et de quoi écrire

- **Rassemblez** la classe à l'extérieur, dans l'espace que vous avez choisi d'explorer.
- **Encouragez** les élèves à explorer l'espace à l'aide de la question d'orientation : Où voyez-vous des relations ?
- **Invitez** les élèves à prendre le temps d'explorer l'espace, d'observer attentivement et de dessiner soigneusement les relations qu'ils et elles voient dans l'environnement naturel. Encouragez-les à utiliser des étiquettes, des chiffres et des détails dans leur journal de la nature. .
- Une fois que les élèves ont eu suffisamment de temps pour explorer et faire des croquis, invitez le groupe à s'asseoir ensemble. Engagez la classe dans une discussion sur ce qu'ils et elles ont remarqué et encouragez les élèves à s'appuyer sur les idées des un·es et des autres. Documentez ce que les élèves partagent. .
- Quelles connexions émergent dans les relations issues de traités ? Voir le *Guide d'introduction : Les relations issues de traités et la chaîne d'alliance.*

LEÇON 2 : L'HISTOIRE D'UN ENDROIT

Cette leçon vise à centrer les identités et les expériences vécues de chaque élève en les invitant à partager leurs propres histoires liées à un lieu.

Cette exploration pourrait se déployer au-delà d'une période de cours.

- **Disposez** la classe en formant un cercle « intérieur/extérieur ». La moitié du groupe se trouve dans un cercle intérieur, face à l'extérieur. L'autre moitié du groupe est disposée autour du cercle intérieur, en cercle extérieur, face au groupe du milieu. Chaque personne a un·e partenaire devant qui elle se tient, dans le cercle opposé au sien.
- **Demandez** aux élèves d'avoir une conversation avec la personne qui se trouve devant eux et elles. Demandez ensuite au cercle extérieur de se déplacer d'une personne sur sa gauche et d'avoir une conversation différente avec la personne qui se trouve maintenant devant eux et elles.

  Voici quelques exemples de sujets que vous pouvez encourager les élèves à aborder pour susciter des conversations : Quelle est ta saison préférée et pourquoi ? Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire à l'extérieur ? Raconte un moment où tu as ressenti de la joie dehors. Dis une chose qui ressort de notre exploration et de notre discussion d'hier. Pourquoi le territoire est-il si important dans les relations issues de traités ?
- À ce moment-là, les élèves peuvent s'éloigner du cercle et trouver un endroit dans la pièce qui leur convient.
- **Invitez** les élèves à répondre à l'amorce suivante : « Raconte-moi une histoire sur un lieu ou un territoire avec lequel tu as des liens ». L'endroit peut être n'importe où dans le monde. Les élèves peuvent répondre à cette amorce de différentes manières, par exemple par l'écriture, le croquis, la représentation artistique, l'utilisation de pièces détachées ou à l'oral.
- Trouvez un moyen qui convient à vos élèves pour partager ces histoires s'ils et elles se sentent à l'aise de le faire.
- Cet exercice peut être développé de manière à ce que les récits des élèves et les lieux et territoires auxquels ils et elles sont liés puissent vivre dans la classe d'une manière ou d'une autre

Sources autorisées, centrées sur les connaissances et les histoires autochtones de ce territoire :

- Douglas Sinclair, Première Nation ojibwée d'Onigaming – *Our Relationship and Responsibilities to the Land*
- Wilfred Buck, Première Nation crie d'Opaskwayak – *Significance of Indigenous Knowledge*
- Ray John fils, Première Nation Oneida of the Thames – *The Land As Teacher*

Pendant que les élèves écoutent ces extraits, invitez-les à faire des croquis ou à noter ce qui les rejoint. Ces questions d'orientation peuvent être utilisées pour cibler leur écoute :

– Qu'est-ce qui résonne en toi ?
– Quels liens peux-tu établir ?
– Qu'est-ce que tu te demandes ?
– Où entends-tu le langage du traité ? Qu'est-ce que tu apprends sur les rôles et les responsabilités issus des traités en écoutant ?

- En écoutant, qu'apprends-tu sur les impacts du colonialisme sur le territoire et les systèmes de connaissances autochtones ?
- **Billet de sortie :** Pense à nos explorations des deux derniers jours, notamment l'observation attentive des relations à l'extérieur, la construction de connaissances à laquelle nous nous sommes livrés, le partage de nos propres histoires sur les lieux auxquels nous sommes liés et, enfin, l'écoute et la réflexion sur les connaissances des Premières Nations sur ce territoire de Douglas Sinclair, Wilfred Buck et Ray John fils.

  Réfléchis à la façon dont ta pensée a évolué, changé, été remise en question ou été approfondie par ces expériences et les voix des Premières Nations que tu as écoutées. Réponds à l'amorce :
  Avant, je pensais… Maintenant je pense…

LEÇON 3 : LA GRAMMAIRE DU VIVANT

L'objectif de cette leçon est que les élèves s'engagent dans la lecture d'un texte plus long, en continuant à développer les connaissances acquises au cours des deux derniers jours. Cet extrait de « Tresser les herbes sacrées » de Robin Wall Kimmerer se concentre sur le lien intime entre les connaissances et les langues autochtones.

Cette exploration pourrait se déployer au-delà d'une période de cours.

- Pour établir le contexte de la lecture, commencez par écouter Rick Hill, Tuscarora, parler de ce qu'est le savoir autochtone, dans *What is Indigenous Knowledge*, et Douglass Sinclair, Ojibwe, parler de l'importance de la langue, dans *The Significance of Language*
- Une fois de plus, **encouragez** les élèves à prendre des notes visuelles autour de ce qui résonne en eux et elles, des liens qu'ils et elles peuvent établir, des questions et des grandes idées qui font surface.
- **Demandez** aux élèves de lire le chapitre Apprendre la grammaire du vivant dans l'ouvrage *Tresser les herbes sacrées* de Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi). *Certains termes utilisés par Robin Wall Kimmerer qui sont spécifiques aux expériences des peuples autochtones aux États-Unis et que les élèves doivent connaître : p. ex., Tribu aux États-Unis = Nation au Canada.
- Au fur et à mesure que les élèves lisent, **encouragez-les** à rendre leur réflexion visible en codant le texte et, s'ils le souhaitent, en prenant des notes assorties de croquis.

  Des codes que vous pourriez inviter les élèves à utiliser :

  ? - question

  R - relation avec d'autres sources faisant autorité ou avec des idées qui ont émergé dans la communauté de la classe.

  ! - surprenant, important

  ★ - idée principale

  ♥ - j'aime cette partie, cela résonne en moi

- Une fois que les élèves ont lu le texte, mettez-les par groupes de trois ou quatre. Encouragez les élèves à avoir une discussion autour du texte au sein de leur groupe. Les élèves peuvent partager leurs réflexions les un·es avec les autres. Encouragez les groupes à établir des liens et des réflexions sur la base de la construction des connaissances qui s'est déroulée en classe jusqu'à présent.

- Les élèves doivent savoir qu'ils et elles ont la responsabilité d'apporter des réflexions, des idées, des questions ou des liens au cercle de connaissances. *(Il serait préférable que le cercle de connaissances ait lieu à la période de cours suivante, afin que les élèves aient un peu plus de temps pour réfléchir à leur lecture et consolider leur réflexion avec les autres sources faisant autorité qui ont été entendues.)*

- Les élèves se rassemblent en *cercle de connaissances*. Ils et elles doivent apporter le texte et leurs notes. Vous trouverez ci-dessous différentes questions qui peuvent être utilisées pour provoquer une discussion entre les participant·es.
  – Comment le langage façonne-t-il nos relations avec le monde qui nous entoure ? Réfléchissez aux paroles de l'arrière-grand-mère à la page 50 : « Ce ne sont pas seulement les mots qui seront perdus. La langue est le cœur de la culture ; elle renferme nos pensées, notre façon de voir le monde. C'est trop beau pour que l'anglais puisse l'expliquer. »

  – Quel est l'impact d'une langue ancrée dans les verbes par rapport aux noms ? (Page 53)

  – À quoi pourrait ressembler ta communauté scolaire si les êtres humains s'adressaient aux êtres non humains comme à une famille ? (Page 55)

  - En consultant le *Guide d'introduction : Les relations issues de traités et la chaîne d'alliance*, comment les relations issues de traités comme la chaîne d'alliance sont-elles imprégnées de la grammaire du vivant ? (Page 55)

  - Que se passe-t-il lorsque l'autonomie et la parenté sont retirées du monde ? D'un traité ? (Page 55)

  - Pourquoi penses-tu que le système canadien des pensionnats a ciblé les langues autochtones avec l'intention de les faire disparaître ? (Page 57)

- **Billet de sortie :** Réponds à l'une des questions suivantes :

  – Qu'est-ce qui résonne en toi à la suite du cercle de connaissances ?

  – Quelle est une chose que tu voulais contribuer à la conversation, mais que tu n'as pas trouvé l'occasion d'exprimer ?

  – Quelle est la question ou l'interrogation qui te reste à la suite du cercle de connaissances ?

  – Quelles autres idées aimerais-tu partager avec moi ?

LEÇON 4 : L'EAU

L'objectif de cette exploration est que les élèves se livrent à une réflexion guidée maintenant qu'ils et elles ont construit des connaissances ensemble dans le cadre d'une enquête soutenue.

- Pour établir le contexte de la lecture, écoutez d'abord *Indigenous Water Law* du *Decolonizing Water Project* et Lorraine Liberty, de la Première Nation Nippising, parler de *Importance of Water*.

- Une fois de plus, **encouragez** les élèves à prendre des notes avec des croquis autour de ce qui résonne en eux et elles, des liens qu'ils et elles peuvent établir, des questions et des grandes idées qui remontent à la surface.

- Ouvrez la discussion avec les élèves sur ce qui a résonné pour eux et elles, et invitez-les peut-être à partager certaines de leurs propres histoires autour des étendues d'eau auxquelles ils et elles sont lié·es ou dont ils et elles ont connaissance.

- **Demandez** aux élèves de lire *Le travail d'une mère* dans *Tresser les herbes sacrées* de Robin Wall Kimmerer.
  – Trouve des exemples où Robin Wall Kimmerer entremêle le langage scientifique et la grammaire du vivant pour caractériser sa relation avec l'étang.
  – Comment la relation de Kimmerer avec l'étang peut-elle être considérée comme une métaphore de la maternité ? (Voir l'enseignement de Kimmerer selon lequel les femmes potawatoms sont les gardiennes de l'eau, page 94).

– **Sujet de réflexion :** Comment la relation de Kimmerer avec l'étang reflète-t-elle une relation fondée sur un traité ? (Voir le «*Guide d'introduction : Les relations issues de traités et la chaîne d'alliance*») Exemples à étudier : relation, réciprocité, équilibre et amour familial. Indice : le processus de Kimmerer pour éliminer les algues et réhabiliter l'étang (à partir de la page 86).

- Kimmerer mentionne le lac Onondaga (page 95). La nation Onondaga tient à jour un site Web détaillant la santé de son lac sacré à l'adresse *www.onondaganation.org/land-rights/onondaga-lake*.
  – **Sujet de réflexion :** Kimmerer termine le chapitre avec l'enseignement suivant : *tout le monde vit en aval*. Que signifie cet enseignement pour toi ?

- **Regarde** la vidéo de Carolyn King : « *Story About Crossing the Credit & Not Seeing Herself in her Territory.*» (Histoire de la traversée de la rivière Credit et du fait de ne pas se voir dans son territoire).
  – En réfléchissant aux enseignements trouvés dans *Le travail d'une mère*, quelle est la signification, en termes de relation de la chaîne d'alliance, du fait que l'aînée Carolyn ne se voit pas dans son territoire, ainsi que de la déconnexion des Mississauga de Credit du lac Ontario ?

LEÇON 5 : MNOOMIN (RIZ SAUVAGE)

L'objectif de cette exploration est d'acquérir des connaissances sur la façon dont le projet colonial a empêché les connaissances traditionnelles autochtones d'être transmises aux générations futures. La résistance et la survie des Autochtones sont au cœur de cette discussion. Deux communautés différentes de la Nation Mississauga (Curve Lake et Alderville) font l'objet de cette exploration. Le mnoomin (riz sauvage) est à la base de la vie de chaque communauté. Cette leçon s'appuie sur l'article 26 de la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones.

- À l'aide de Google Earth (vue satellite), ainsi que de la vidéo «*Vintage Scenes of Rice Lake, Ontario*», demandez aux élèves de prendre des notes sur leurs observations du rivage du lac Rice.

- **Répartissez** les élèves en groupes de trois. Encouragez-les à noter leurs réflexions, soit sur un tableau blanc, soit sur une feuille de papier affichée dans la salle de classe.
  Questions d'orientation : Qu'est-ce que tu remarques ? Qu'est-ce que tu en penses ? Quelle est l'histoire racontée en regardant la vue satellite et la vidéo ?

- **Montrez** maintenant à la classe les *provocations* suivantes que Dave Mowat, de la Première Nation d'Alderville, a bien voulu partager avec le projet. **Il y a des images et une vidéo – vous pouvez imprimer les images pour que chaque groupe les regarde.** Les groupes documentent leur réflexion sur une autre section du tableau blanc.

  Questions d'orientation : Qu'est-ce que tu remarques ? Qu'est-ce que tu en penses ? Quelle est l'histoire ?

- **Écoutez** cette baladodiffusion de *Sunday Magazine* sur CBC. Encouragez les élèves à noter ou à faire des croquis de ce qui résonne pour eux pendant qu'ils et elles écoutent. Une fois qu'ils ont écouté, invitez les élèves à retourner à leur tableau. À l'aide de ces informations, encouragez-les à partager ce qui leur plaît dans la baladodiffusion. Une fois de plus, encouragez les groupes à documenter leur réflexion sur le tableau blanc ou le papier graphique.

  Questions d'orientation : Maintenant que tu as eu le temps d'explorer les provocations et d'écouter des sources faisant autorité à travers la baladodiffusion, réfléchis à cette question : quelle est l'histoire ?

- **Réunissez-vous** en *cercle de connaissances* pour discuter des provocations qui leur ont été présentées aujourd'hui.

LESSON 6: JIIBAY OR AANDIZOOKE

Cette leçon s'appuie sur l'exploration précédente. Le texte est un extrait de *Cartographie de l'amour décolonial* (jiibay ou aandizooke) de Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Mississauga de la Première Nation d'Alderville.

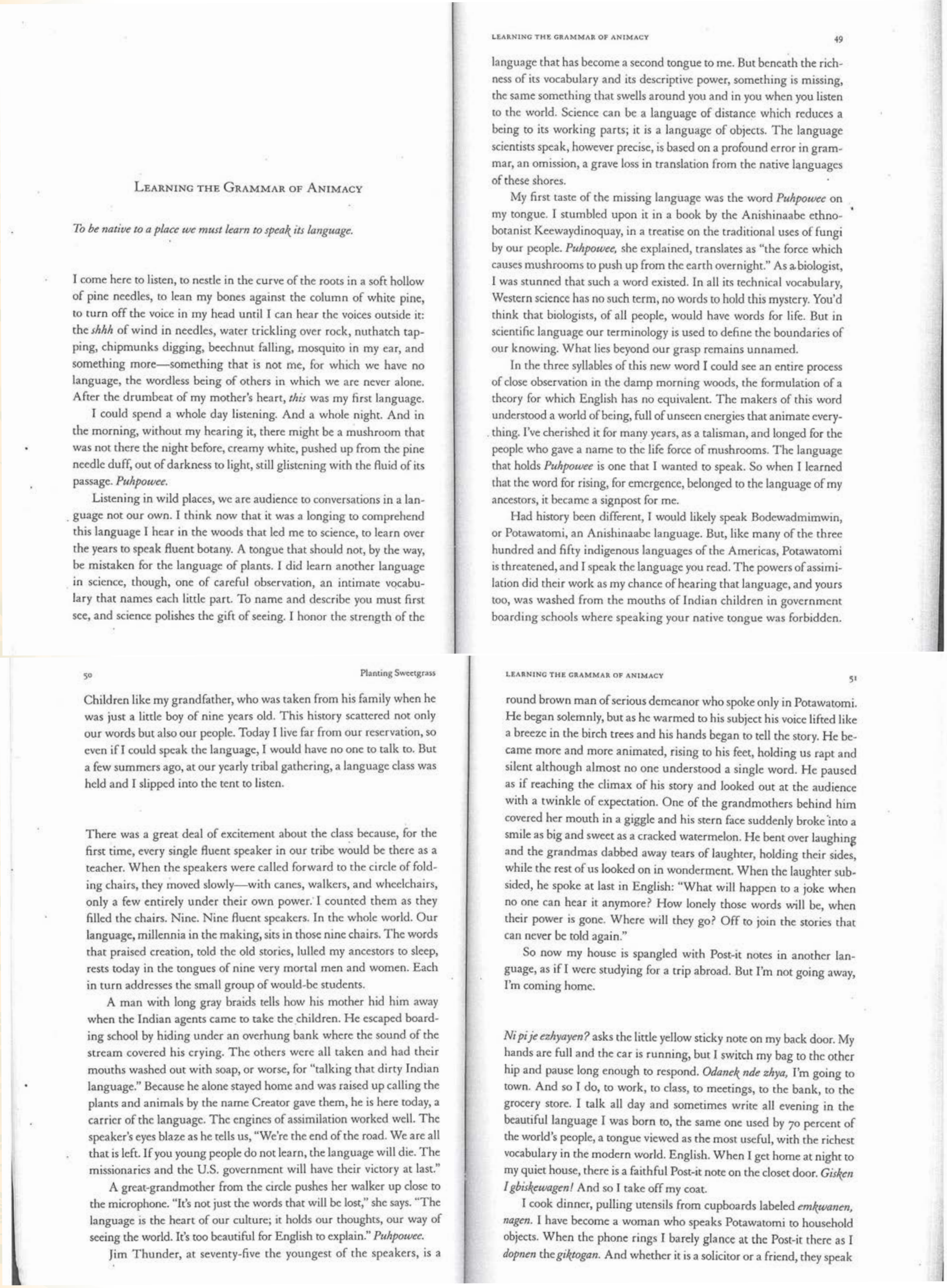
- **Invitez** les élèves à travailler par groupes de trois. Chaque groupe reçoit une copie du texte, collée au milieu d'une grande feuille de papier. Les élèves s'engagent dans le texte sous la forme d'une discussion exposé-craie-tableau. Ils et elles écrivent ou dessinent leurs idées sur le poème. Des lignes peuvent être tracées pour montrer quel mot ou quelle phrase du poème a enflammé leur réflexion.
- **Lisez** le poème à haute voix pendant que les élèves sont assis·es dans leurs groupes. Une fois que tout le monde a lu le poème, donnez aux élèves les amorces suivantes :
  – Quelles parties résonnent en toi, et pourquoi ?
  – Quels liens peux-tu établir ?
  – Je pense que…
  – Je me demande si…
  – En m'appuyant sur…
- Une fois que les élèves ont terminé leur propre document, demandez aux groupes de changer de place. Les élèves relisent la façon dont le groupe précédent a réagi au texte et ajoutent d'autres idées ou s'appuient sur ces idées. Ce processus peut être répété.
- Les élèves retournent à leur document d'origine pour voir comment la réflexion qu'ils et elles ont commencée a été complétée ou développée par les autres.
- **Engagez** une conversation avec les élèves autour de leur réflexion.
- **Encouragez** les élèves à considérer l'apprentissage des derniers jours autour du mnoomin et maintenant de jiibay ou d'aandizooke.
- En guise de réflexion personnelle relative au texte, les élèves sont invité·es à répondre aux questions suivantes (routine de réflexion : *dévoiler des histoires*) :
  – Quelle est l'histoire ?
  – Quelle est l'histoire humaine ?
  – Quelle est l'histoire du monde ?
  – Quelle est la nouvelle histoire ?
  – Quelle est l'histoire qui n'est pas racontée ?
- Encouragez les élèves à penser à leurs acquis, à leurs schémas et aux discussions auxquelles ils et elles ont participé pendant le cours pour répondre aux amorces. Une variété de modes d'expression est encouragée. Les élèves peuvent choisir d'écrire, de faire des croquis, de dessiner, de produire des œuvres d'art ou d'enregistrer vocalement leurs réponses.
- **OCCASION : Cette exploration se prête à une enquête plus approfondie sur les droits autochtones, les gardien·nes de la terre et de l'eau, le retour au territoire.**

LEÇON 7 : L'IDENTIFICATEUR DE MOCASSIN COMME ACTE DE SURVIE

- **Activité de consolidation :** Les élèves sont invité·es à choisir un espace de leur communauté qu'ils et elles marqueraient d'un identificateur de mocassin.
  – En utilisant l'identificateur de mocassin comme provocation, les élèves composent ensuite une œuvre (dans un style de leur choix ou relative au programme scolaire en cours d'exploration) en s'inspirant des questions et des amorces des leçons précédentes.

  – Les éléments que les élèves doivent prendre en compte pour leur œuvre :
  • L'utilisation d'un langage/d'une imagerie qui évoque les relations issues des traités, notamment la chaîne d'alliance.
  • Quelles histoires et quelles relations existent (à la fois visibles et invisibles) dans l'espace qu'ils et elles ont choisi ? (Il faut considérer à la fois les humains et les autres que les humains).

- L’emploi des leçons de *La grammaire du vivant* de Robin Wall Kimmerer.
- La manière dont l’identificateur de mocassin constitue un acte de survie autochtone. (Une exploration de la signification de ce mot peut être utile aux élèves.) Les élèves peuvent se rappeler la vidéo de Carolyn King « Histoire de la traversée de la rivière Credit et du fait de ne pas se voir dans son territoire » et/ou le jiibay ou aandizooke de Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.



LEARNING THE GRAMMAR OF ANIMACY

To be native to a place we must learn to speak its language.

I come here to listen, to nestle in the curve of the roots in a soft hollow of pine needles, to lean my bones against the column of white pine, to turn off the voice in my head until I can hear the voices outside it: the *shhh* of wind in needles, water trickling over rock, nuthatch tapping, chipmunks digging, beechnut falling, mosquito in my ear, and something more—something that is not me, for which we have no language, the wordless being of others in which we are never alone. After the drumbeat of my mother's heart, *this* was my first language.

I could spend a whole day listening. And a whole night. And in the morning, without my hearing it, there might be a mushroom that was not there the night before, creamy white, pushed up from the pine needle duff, out of darkness to light, still glistening with the fluid of its passage. *Puhpowee.*

Listening in wild places, we are audience to conversations in a language not our own. I think now that it was a longing to comprehend this language I hear in the woods that led me to science, to learn over the years to speak fluent botany. A tongue that should not, by the way, be mistaken for the language of plants. I did learn another language in science, though, one of careful observation, an intimate vocabulary that names each little part. To name and describe you must first see, and science polishes the gift of seeing. I honor the strength of the

language that has become a second tongue to me. But beneath the richness of its vocabulary and its descriptive power, something is missing, the same something that swells around you and in you when you listen to the world. Science can be a language of distance which reduces a being to its working parts; it is a language of objects. The language scientists speak, however precise, is based on a profound error in grammar, an omission, a grave loss in translation from the native languages of these shores.

My first taste of the missing language was the word *Puhpowee* on my tongue. I stumbled upon it in a book by the Anishinaabe ethnobotanist Keewaydinoquay, in a treatise on the traditional uses of fungi by our people. *Puhpowee,* she explained, translates as "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight." As a biologist, I was stunned that such a word existed. In all its technical vocabulary, Western science has no such term, no words to hold this mystery. You'd think that biologists, of all people, would have words for life. But in scientific language our terminology is used to define the boundaries of our knowing. What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed.

In the three syllables of this new word I could see an entire process of close observation in the damp morning woods, the formulation of a theory for which English has no equivalent. The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything. I've cherished it for many years, as a talisman, and longed for the people who gave a name to the life force of mushrooms. The language that holds *Puhpowee* is one that I wanted to speak. So when I learned that the word for rising, for emergence, belonged to the language of my ancestors, it became a signpost for me.

Had history been different, I would likely speak Bodewadmimwin, or Potawatomi, an Anishinaabe language. But, like many of the three hundred and fifty indigenous languages of the Americas, Potawatomi is threatened, and I speak the language you read. The powers of assimilation did their work as my chance of hearing that language, and yours too, was washed from the mouths of Indian children in government boarding schools where speaking your native tongue was forbidden.

Children like my grandfather, who was taken from his family when he was just a little boy of nine years old. This history scattered not only our words but also our people. Today I live far from our reservation, so even if I could speak the language, I would have no one to talk to. But a few summers ago, at our yearly tribal gathering, a language class was held and I slipped into the tent to listen.

There was a great deal of excitement about the class because, for the first time, every single fluent speaker in our tribe would be there as a teacher. When the speakers were called forward to the circle of folding chairs, they moved slowly—with canes, walkers, and wheelchairs, only a few entirely under their own power. I counted them as they filled the chairs. Nine. Nine fluent speakers. In the whole world. Our language, millennia in the making, sits in those nine chairs. The words that praised creation, told the old stories, lulled my ancestors to sleep, rests today in the tongues of nine very mortal men and women. Each in turn addresses the small group of would-be students.

A man with long gray braids tells how his mother hid him away when the Indian agents came to take the children. He escaped boarding school by hiding under an overhung bank where the sound of the stream covered his crying. The others were all taken and had their mouths washed out with soap, or worse, for "talking that dirty Indian language." Because he alone stayed home and was raised up calling the plants and animals by the name Creator gave them, he is here today, a carrier of the language. The engines of assimilation worked well. The speaker's eyes blaze as he tells us, "We're the end of the road. We are all that is left. If you young people do not learn, the language will die. The missionaries and the U.S. government will have their victory at last."

A great-grandmother from the circle pushes her walker up close to the microphone. "It's not just the words that will be lost," she says. "The language is the heart of our culture; it holds our thoughts, our way of seeing the world. It's too beautiful for English to explain." *Puhpowee.*

Jim Thunder, at seventy-five the youngest of the speakers, is a

round brown man of serious demeanor who spoke only in Potawatomi. He began solemnly, but as he warmed to his subject his voice lifted like a breeze in the birch trees and his hands began to tell the story. He became more and more animated, rising to his feet, holding us rapt and silent although almost no one understood a single word. He paused as if reaching the climax of his story and looked out at the audience with a twinkle of expectation. One of the grandmothers behind him covered her mouth in a giggle and his stern face suddenly broke into a smile as big and sweet as a cracked watermelon. He bent over laughing and the grandmas dabbed away tears of laughter, holding their sides, while the rest of us looked on in wonderment. When the laughter subsided, he spoke at last in English: "What will happen to a joke when no one can hear it anymore? How lonely those words will be, when their power is gone. Where will they go? Off to join the stories that can never be told again."

So now my house is spangled with Post-it notes in another language, as if I were studying for a trip abroad. But I'm not going away, I'm coming home.

Ni pi je ezhyayen? asks the little yellow sticky note on my back door. My hands are full and the car is running, but I switch my bag to the other hip and pause long enough to respond. *Odanek nde zhya,* I'm going to town. And so I do, to work, to class, to meetings, to the bank, to the grocery store. I talk all day and sometimes write all evening in the beautiful language I was born to, the same one used by 70 percent of the world's people, a tongue viewed as the most useful, with the richest vocabulary in the modern world. English. When I get home at night to my quiet house, there is a faithful Post-it note on the closet door. *Gisken I gbiskewagen!* And so I take off my coat.

I cook dinner, pulling utensils from cupboards labeled *emkwanen, nagen.* I have become a woman who speaks Potawatomi to household objects. When the phone rings I barely glance at the Post-it there as I *dopnen* the *giktogan.* And whether it is a solicitor or a friend, they speak

English. Once a week or so, it is my sister from the West Coast who says *Bozho. Moktthewenkwe nda*—as if she needed to identify herself: who else speaks Potawatomi? To call it speaking is a stretch. Really, all we do is blurt garbled phrases to each other in a parody of conversation: How are you? I am fine. Go to town. See bird. Red. Frybread good. We sound like Tonto's side of the Hollywood dialogue with the Lone Ranger. "Me try talk good Injun way." On the rare occasion when we actually can string together a halfway coherent thought, we freely insert high school Spanish words to fill in the gaps, making a language we call Spanawatomi.

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:15 Oklahoma time, I join the Potawatomi lunchtime language class, streaming from tribal headquarters via the Internet. There are usually about ten of us, from all over the country. Together we learn to count and to say *pass the salt.* Someone asks, "How do you say *please* pass the salt?" Our teacher, Justin Neely, a young man devoted to language revival, explains that while there are several words for *thank you,* there is no word for *please.* Food was meant to be shared, no added politeness needed; it was simply a cultural given that one was asking respectfully. The missionaries took this absence as further evidence of crude manners.

Many nights, when I should be grading papers or paying bills, I'm at the computer running through Potawatomi language drills. After months, I have mastered the kindergarten vocabulary and can confidently match the pictures of animals to their indigenous names. It reminds me of reading picture books to my children: "Can you point to the squirrel? Where is the bunny?" All the while I'm telling myself that I really don't have time for this, and what's more, little need to know the words for *bass* and *fox* anyway. Since our tribal diaspora left us scattered to the four winds, who would I talk to?

The simple phrases I'm learning are perfect for my dog. Sit! Eat! Come here! Be quiet! But since she scarcely responds to these commands in English, I'm reluctant to train her to be bilingual. An admiring student once asked me if I spoke my native language. I was tempted to say, "Oh yes, we speak Potawatomi at home"—me, the dog, and the Post-it notes. Our teacher tells us not to be discouraged and thanks us every time a word is spoken—thanks us for breathing life into the language, even if we only speak a single word. "But I have no one to talk to," I complain. "None of us do," he reassures me, "but someday we will."

So I dutifully learn the vocabulary but find it hard to see the "heart of our culture" in translating *bed* and *sink* into Potawatomi. Learning nouns was pretty easy; after all, I'd learned thousands of botanical Latin names and scientific terms. I reasoned that this could not be too much different—just a one-for-one substitution, memorization. At least on paper, where you can see the letters, this is true. Hearing the language is a different story. There are fewer letters in our alphabet, so the distinction among words for a beginner is often subtle. With the beautiful clusters of consonants of *zh* and *mb* and *shwe* and *kwe* and *mshk,* our language sounds like wind in the pines and water over rocks, sounds our ears may have been more delicately attuned to in the past, but no longer. To learn again, you really have to listen.

To actually *speak,* of course, requires verbs, and here is where my kindergarten proficiency at naming things leaves off. English is a noun-based language, somehow appropriate to a culture so obsessed with things. Only 30 percent of English words are verbs, but in Potawatomi that proportion is 70 percent. Which means that 70 percent of the words have to be conjugated, and 70 percent have different tenses and cases to be mastered.

European languages often assign gender to nouns, but Potawatomi does not divide the world into masculine and feminine. Nouns and verbs both are animate and inanimate. You hear a person with a word that is completely different from the one with which you hear an airplane. Pronouns, articles, plurals, demonstratives, verbs—all those syntactical bits I never could keep straight in high school English are all aligned in Potawatomi to provide different ways to speak of the living world and the lifeless one. Different verb forms, different plurals, different everything apply depending on whether what you are speaking of is alive.

No wonder there are only nine speakers left! I try, but the complexity makes my head hurt and my ear can barely distinguish between words that mean completely different things. One teacher reassures us that this will come with practice, but another elder concedes that these close similarities are inherent in the language. As Stewart King, a knowledge keeper and great teacher, reminds us, the Creator meant for us to laugh, so humor is deliberately built into the syntax. Even a small slip of the tongue can convert "We need more firewood" to "Take off your clothes." In fact, I learned that the mystical word *Puhpowee* is used not only for mushrooms, but also for certain other shafts that rise mysteriously in the night.

My sister's gift to me one Christmas was a set of magnetic tiles for the refrigerator in Ojibwe, or Anishinabemowin, a language closely related to Potawatomi. I spread them out on my kitchen table looking for familiar words, but the more I looked, the more worried I got. Among the hundred or more tiles, there was but a single word that I recognized: *megwech,* thank you. The small feeling of accomplishment from months of study evaporated in a moment.

I remember paging through the Ojibwe dictionary she sent, trying to decipher the tiles, but the spellings didn't always match and the print was too small and there are way too many variations on a single word and I was feeling that this was just way too hard. The threads in my brain knotted and the harder I tried, the tighter they became. Pages blurred and my eyes settled on a word—a verb, of course: "to be a Saturday." *Pfft!* I threw down the book. Since when is *Saturday* a verb? Everyone knows it's a noun. I grabbed the dictionary and flipped more pages and all kinds of things seemed to be verbs: "to be a hill," "to be red," "to be a long sandy stretch of beach," and then my finger rested on *wiikwegamaa:* "to be a bay." "Ridiculous!" I ranted in my head. "There is no reason to make it so complicated. No wonder no one speaks it. A cumbersome language, impossible to learn, and more than that, it's all wrong. A bay is most definitely a person, place, or thing—a noun and not a verb." I was ready to give up. I'd learned a few words, done my duty to the language that was taken from my grandfather. Oh, the ghosts of the missionaries in the boarding schools must have been rubbing their hands in glee at my frustration. "She's going to surrender," they said.

And then I swear I heard the zap of synapses firing. An electric current sizzled down my arm and through my finger, and practically scorched the page where that one word lay. In that moment I could smell the water of the bay, watch it rock against the shore and hear it sift onto the sand. A bay is a noun only if water is *dead.* When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to *be* a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. "To be a bay" holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. *This* is the language I hear in the woods; this is the language that lets us speak of what wells up all around us. And the vestiges of boarding schools, the soap-wielding missionary wraiths, hang their heads in defeat.

This is the grammar of animacy. Imagine seeing your grandmother standing at the stove in her apron and then saying of her, "Look, it is making soup. It has gray hair." We might snicker at such a mistake, but we also recoil from it. In English, we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed to any person, as *it.* That would be a profound act of disrespect. *It* robs a person of selfhood and kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing. So it is that in Potawatomi and most other indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family.

To whom does our language extend the grammar of animacy? Naturally, plants and animals are animate, but as I learn, I am discovering that the Potawatomi understanding of what it means to be animate diverges from the list of attributes of living beings we all learned in Biology 101. In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of the inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people. Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say, "*What* is it?" And we answer *Dopwen yewe.* Table it is. But of apple, we must say, "*Who* is that being?" And reply *Mshimin yawe.* Apple that being is.

Yawe—the animate *to be.* I am, you are, s/he is. To speak of those possessed with life and spirit we must say *yawe.* By what linguistic confluence do Yahweh of the Old Testament and *yawe* of the New World both fall from the mouths of the reverent? Isn't this just what it means, to be, to have the breath of life within, to be the offspring of Creation? The language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world.

English doesn't give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy. In English, you are either a human or a thing. Our grammar boxes us in by the choice of reducing a nonhuman being to an *it,* or it must be gendered, inappropriately, as a *he* or a *she.* Where are our words for the simple existence of another living being? Where is our *yawe?* My friend Michael Nelson, an ethicist who thinks a great deal about moral inclusion, told me about a woman he knows, a field biologist whose work is among other-than-humans. Most of her companions are not two-legged, and so her language has shifted to accommodate her relationships. She kneels along the trail to inspect a set of moose tracks, saying, "Someone's already been this way this morning." "Someone is in my hat," she says, shaking out a deerfly. Someone, not something.

When I am in the woods with my students, teaching them the gifts of plants and how to call them by name, I try to be mindful of my language, to be bilingual between the lexicon of science and the grammar of animacy. Although they still have to learn scientific roles and Latin names, I hope I am also teaching them to know the world as a neighborhood of nonhuman residents, to know that, as ecotheologian Thomas Berry has written, "we must say of the universe that it is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects."

One afternoon, I sat with my field ecology students by a *wiiḵwegamaa* and shared this idea of animate language. One young man, Andy, splashing his feet in the clear water, asked the big question. "Wait a second," he said as he wrapped his mind around this linguistic distinction, "doesn't this mean that speaking English, thinking in English, somehow gives us permission to disrespect nature? By denying everyone else the right to be persons? Wouldn't things be different if nothing was an *it?*"

Swept away with the idea, he said it felt like an awakening to him. More like a remembering, I think. The animacy of the world is something we already know, but the language of animacy teeters on extinction—not just for Native peoples, but for everyone. Our toddlers speak of plants and animals as if they were people, extending to them self and intention and compassion—until we teach them not to. We quickly retrain them and make them forget. When we tell them that the tree is not a *who,* but an *it,* we make that maple an object; we put a barrier between us, absolving ourselves of moral responsibility and opening the door to exploitation. Saying *it* makes a living land into "natural resources." If a maple is an *it,* we can take up the chain saw. If a maple is a *her,* we think twice.

Another student countered Andy's argument. "But we can't say *he* or *she.* That would be anthropomorphism." They are well-schooled biologists who have been instructed, in no uncertain terms, never to ascribe human characteristics to a study object, to another species. It's a cardinal sin that leads to a loss of objectivity. Carla pointed out that "it's also disrespectful to the animals. We shouldn't project our perceptions onto them. They have their own ways—they're not just people in furry costumes." Andy countered, "But just because we don't think of them as humans doesn't mean they aren't beings. Isn't it even more disrespectful to assume that we're the only species that counts as 'persons'?" The arrogance of English is that the only way to be animate, to be worthy of respect and moral concern, is to be a human.

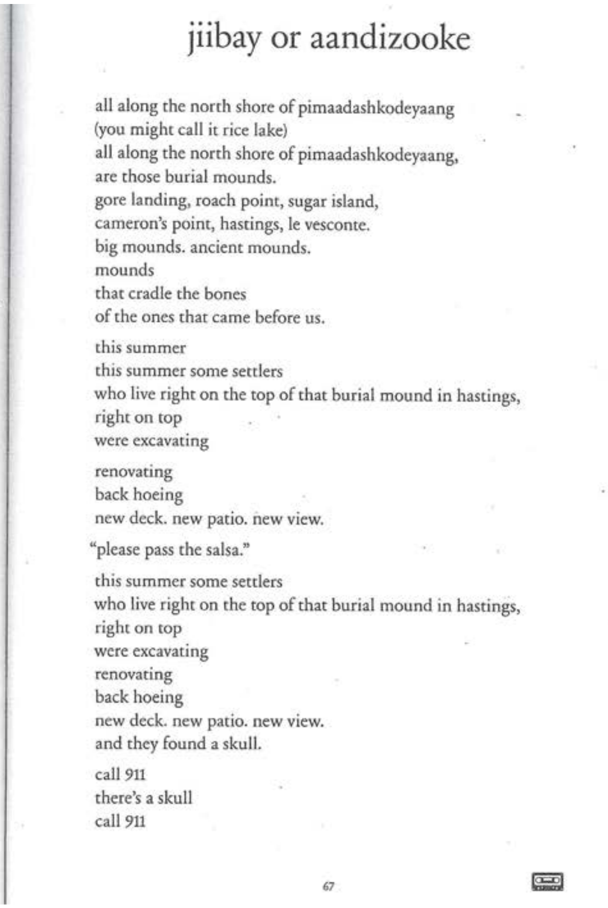
A language teacher I know explained that grammar is just the way we chart relationships in language. Maybe it also reflects our relationships with each other. Maybe a grammar of animacy could lead us to whole new ways of living in the world, other species a sovereign people, a world with a democracy of species, not a tyranny of one—with moral responsibility to water and wolves, and with a legal system that recognizes the standing of other species. It's all in the pronouns.

Andy is right. Learning the grammar of animacy could well be a restraint on our mindless exploitation of land. But there is more to it. I have heard our elders give advice like "You should go among the standing people" or "Go spend some time with those Beaver people." They remind us of the capacity of others as our teachers, as holders of knowledge, as guides. Imagine walking through a richly inhabited world of Birch people, Bear people, Rock people, beings we think of and therefore speak of as persons worthy of our respect, of inclusion in a peopled world. We Americans are reluctant to learn a foreign language of our own species, let alone another species. But imagine the possibilities. Imagine the access we would have to different perspectives, the things we might see through other eyes, the wisdom that surrounds us. We don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us. Imagine how much less lonely the world would be.

Every word I learn comes with a breath of gratitude for our elders who have kept this language alive and passed along its poetry. I still struggle mightily with verbs, can hardly speak at all, and I'm still most adept with only kindergarten vocabulary. But I like that in the morning I can go for my walk around the meadow greeting neighbors by name. When Crow caws at me from the hedgerow, I can call back *Mno gizhget andushuḵwe!* I can brush my hand over the soft grasses and murmur *Bozho mishḵos.* It's a small thing, but it makes me happy.

I'm not advocating that we all learn Potawatomi or Hopi or Seminole, even if we could. Immigrants came to these shores bearing a legacy of languages, all to be cherished. But to become native to this place, if we are to survive here, and our neighbors too, our work is to learn to speak the grammar of animacy, so that we might truly be at home.

I remember the words of Bill Tall Bull, a Cheyenne elder. As a young person, I spoke to him with a heavy heart, lamenting that I had no native language with which to speak to the plants and the places that I love. "They love to hear the old language," he said, "it's true." "But," he said, with fingers on his lips, "You don't have to speak it here." "If you speak it here," he said, patting his chest, "They will hear you."



jiibay or aandizooke

all along the north shore of pimaadashkodeyaang
(you might call it rice lake)
all along the north shore of pimaadashkodeyaang,
are those burial mounds.
gore landing, roach point, sugar island,
cameron's point, hastings, le vesconte.
big mounds. ancient mounds.
mounds
that cradle the bones
of the ones that came before us.

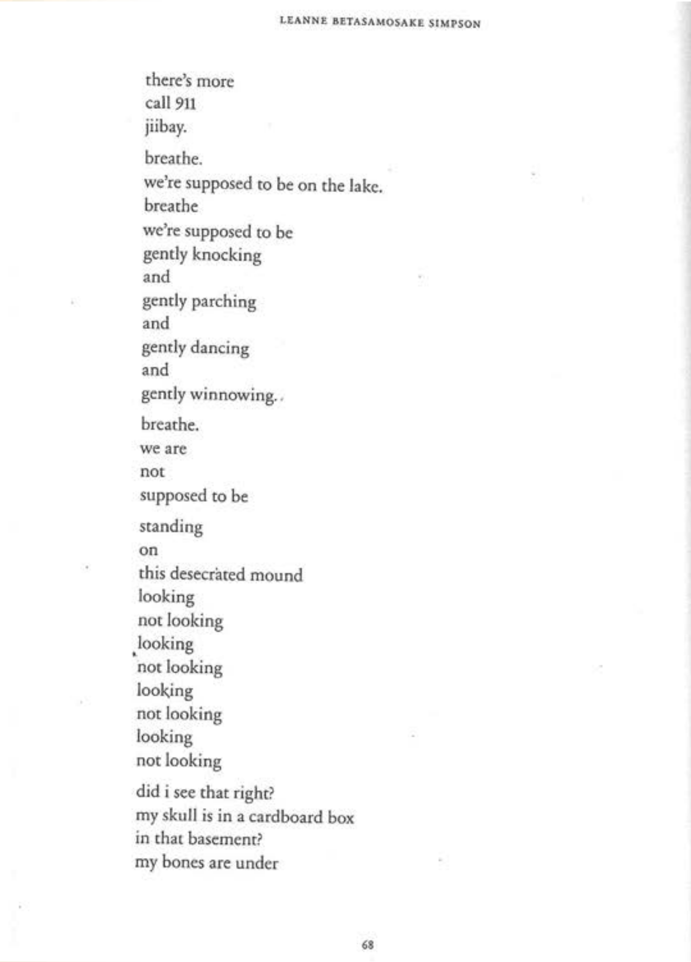
this summer
this summer some settlers
who live right on the top of that burial mound in hastings,
right on top
were excavating

renovating
back hoeing
new deck. new patio. new view.

"please pass the salsa."

this summer some settlers
who live right on the top of that burial mound in hastings,
right on top
were excavating
renovating
back hoeing
new deck. new patio. new view.
and they found a skull.

call 911
there's a skull
call 911



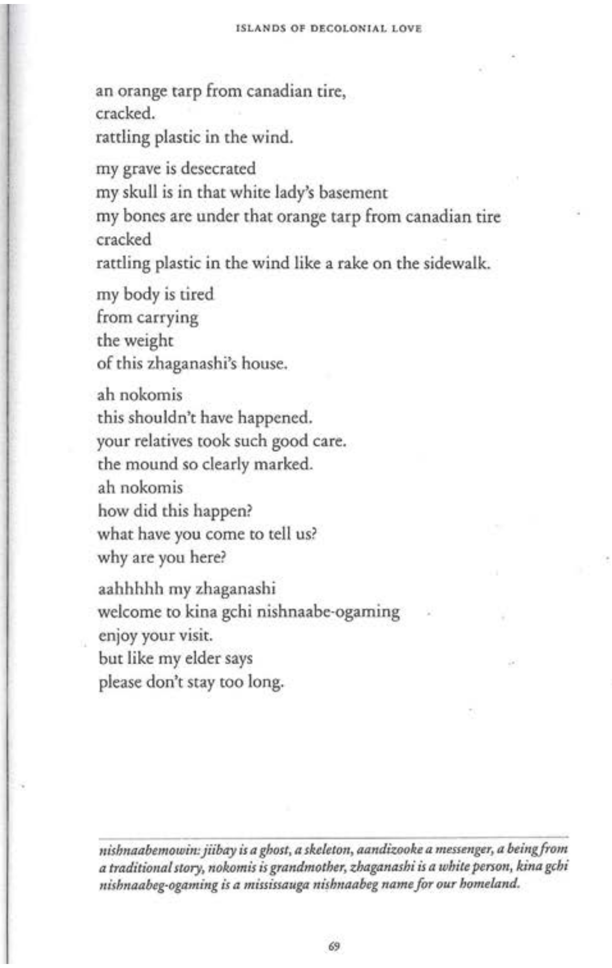
there's more
call 911
jiibay.

breathe.
we're supposed to be on the lake.
breathe
we're supposed to be
gently knocking
and
gently parching
and
gently dancing
and
gently winnowing.

breathe.
we are
not
supposed to be

standing
on
this desecrated mound
looking
not looking
looking
not looking
looking
not looking
looking
not looking

did i see that right?
my skull is in a cardboard box
in that basement?
my bones are under



an orange tarp from canadian tire,
cracked.
rattling plastic in the wind.

my grave is desecrated
my skull is in that white lady's basement
my bones are under that orange tarp from canadian tire
cracked
rattling plastic in the wind like a rake on the sidewalk.

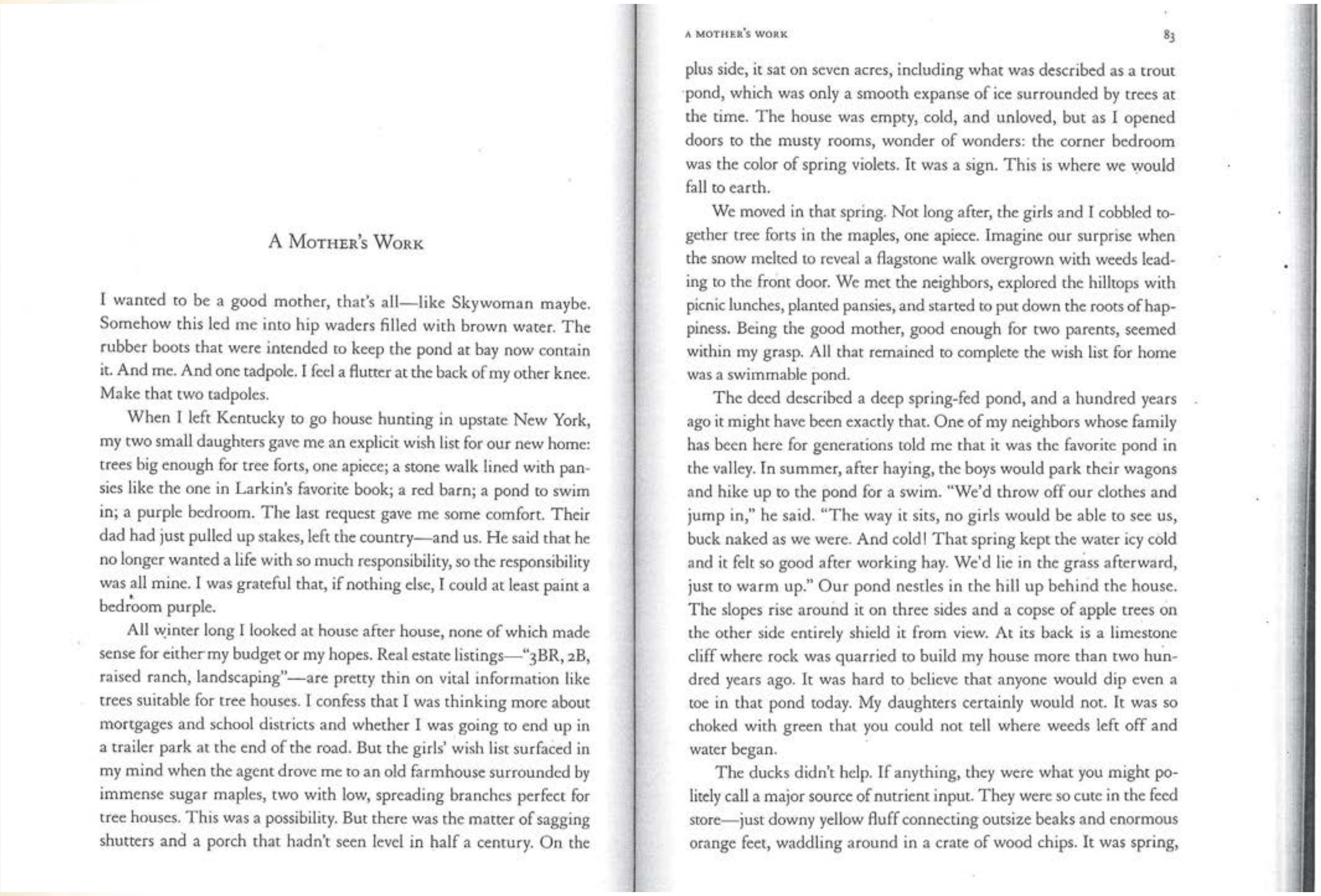
my body is tired
from carrying
the weight
of this zhaganashi's house.

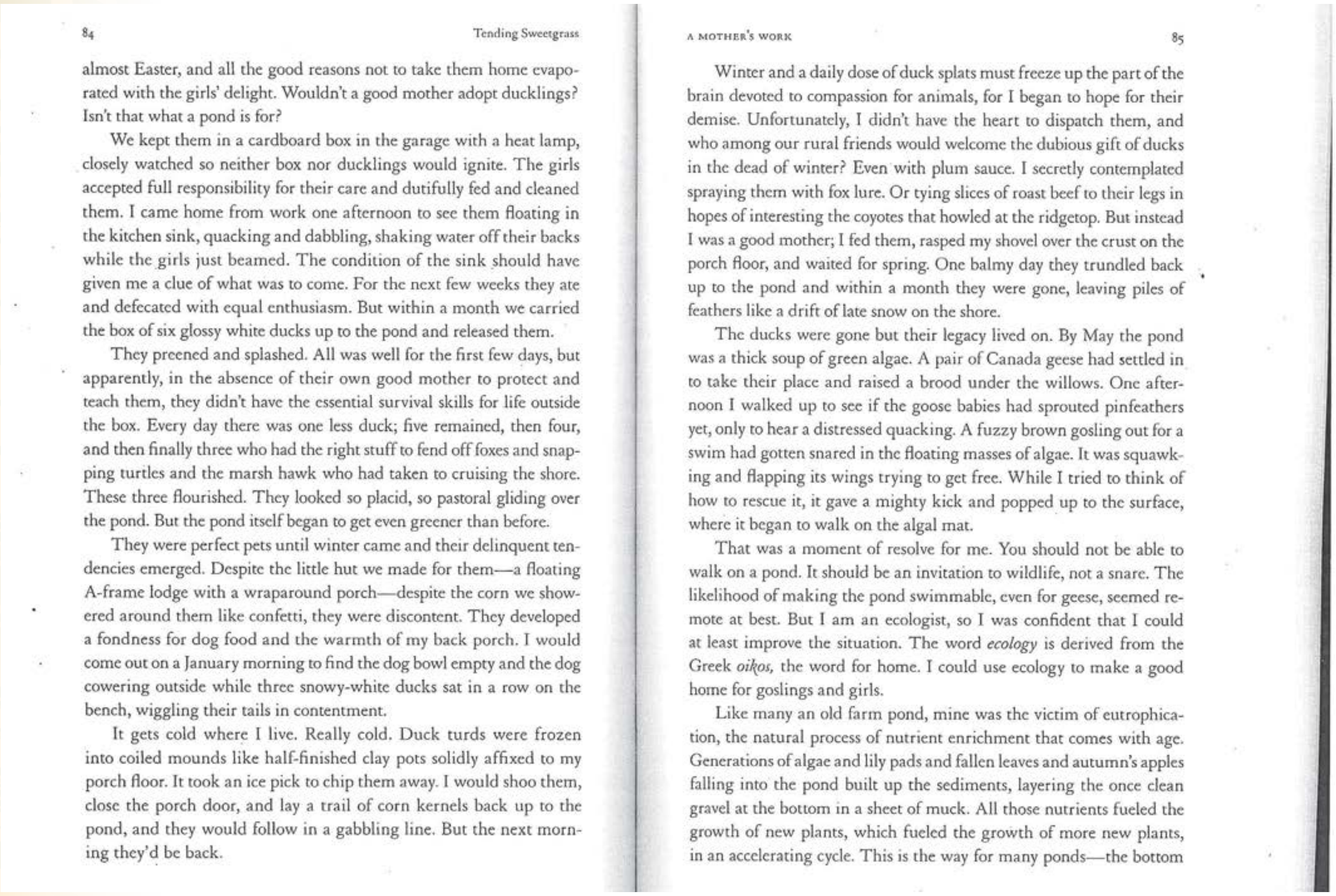
ah nokomis
this shouldn't have happened.
your relatives took such good care.
the mound so clearly marked.
ah nokomis
how did this happen?
what have you come to tell us?
why are you here?

aahhhhh my zhaganashi
welcome to kina gchi nishnaabe-ogaming
enjoy your visit.
but like my elder says
please don't stay too long.

---

nishnaabemowin: jiibay is a ghost, a skeleton, aandizooke a messenger, a being from a traditional story, nokomis is grandmother, zhaganashi is a white person, kina gchi nishnaabeg-ogaming is a mississauga nishnaabeg name for our homeland.





A Mother's Work

I wanted to be a good mother, that's all—like Skywoman maybe. Somehow this led me into hip waders filled with brown water. The rubber boots that were intended to keep the pond at bay now contain it. And me. And one tadpole. I feel a flutter at the back of my other knee. Make that two tadpoles.

When I left Kentucky to go house hunting in upstate New York, my two small daughters gave me an explicit wish list for our new home: trees big enough for tree forts, one apiece; a stone walk lined with pansies like the one in Larkin's favorite book; a red barn; a pond to swim in; a purple bedroom. The last request gave me some comfort. Their dad had just pulled up stakes, left the country—and us. He said that he no longer wanted a life with so much responsibility, so the responsibility was all mine. I was grateful that, if nothing else, I could at least paint a bedroom purple.

All winter long I looked at house after house, none of which made sense for either my budget or my hopes. Real estate listings—"3BR, 2B, raised ranch, landscaping"—are pretty thin on vital information like trees suitable for tree houses. I confess that I was thinking more about mortgages and school districts and whether I was going to end up in a trailer park at the end of the road. But the girls' wish list surfaced in my mind when the agent drove me to an old farmhouse surrounded by immense sugar maples, two with low, spreading branches perfect for tree houses. This was a possibility. But there was the matter of sagging shutters and a porch that hadn't seen level in half a century. On the plus side, it sat on seven acres, including what was described as a trout pond, which was only a smooth expanse of ice surrounded by trees at the time. The house was empty, cold, and unloved, but as I opened doors to the musty rooms, wonder of wonders: the corner bedroom was the color of spring violets. It was a sign. This is where we would fall to earth.

We moved in that spring. Not long after, the girls and I cobbled together tree forts in the maples, one apiece. Imagine our surprise when the snow melted to reveal a flagstone walk overgrown with weeds leading to the front door. We met the neighbors, explored the hilltops with picnic lunches, planted pansies, and started to put down the roots of happiness. Being the good mother, good enough for two parents, seemed within my grasp. All that remained to complete the wish list for home was a swimmable pond.

The deed described a deep spring-fed pond, and a hundred years ago it might have been exactly that. One of my neighbors whose family has been here for generations told me that it was the favorite pond in the valley. In summer, after haying, the boys would park their wagons and hike up to the pond for a swim. "We'd throw off our clothes and jump in," he said. "The way it sits, no girls would be able to see us, buck naked as we were. And cold! That spring kept the water icy cold and it felt so good after working hay. We'd lie in the grass afterward, just to warm up." Our pond nestles in the hill up behind the house. The slopes rise around it on three sides and a copse of apple trees on the other side entirely shield it from view. At its back is a limestone cliff where rock was quarried to build my house more than two hundred years ago. It was hard to believe that anyone would dip even a toe in that pond today. My daughters certainly would not. It was so choked with green that you could not tell where weeds left off and water began.

The ducks didn't help. If anything, they were what you might politely call a major source of nutrient input. They were so cute in the feed store—just downy yellow fluff connecting outsize beaks and enormous orange feet, waddling around in a crate of wood chips. It was spring, almost Easter, and all the good reasons not to take them home evaporated with the girls' delight. Wouldn't a good mother adopt ducklings? Isn't that what a pond is for?

We kept them in a cardboard box in the garage with a heat lamp, closely watched so neither box nor ducklings would ignite. The girls accepted full responsibility for their care and dutifully fed and cleaned them. I came home from work one afternoon to see them floating in the kitchen sink, quacking and dabbling, shaking water off their backs while the girls just beamed. The condition of the sink should have given me a clue of what was to come. For the next few weeks they ate and defecated with equal enthusiasm. But within a month we carried the box of six glossy white ducks up to the pond and released them.

They preened and splashed. All was well for the first few days, but apparently, in the absence of their own good mother to protect and teach them, they didn't have the essential survival skills for life outside the box. Every day there was one less duck; five remained, then four, and then finally three who had the right stuff to fend off foxes and snapping turtles and the marsh hawk who had taken to cruising the shore. These three flourished. They looked so placid, so pastoral gliding over the pond. But the pond itself began to get even greener than before.

They were perfect pets until winter came and their delinquent tendencies emerged. Despite the little hut we made for them—a floating A-frame lodge with a wraparound porch—despite the corn we showered around them like confetti, they were discontent. They developed a fondness for dog food and the warmth of my back porch. I would come out on a January morning to find the dog bowl empty and the dog cowering outside while three snowy-white ducks sat in a row on the bench, wiggling their tails in contentment.

It gets cold where I live. Really cold. Duck turds were frozen into coiled mounds like half-finished clay pots solidly affixed to my porch floor. It took an ice pick to chip them away. I would shoo them, close the porch door, and lay a trail of corn kernels back up to the pond, and they would follow in a gabbling line. But the next morning they'd be back.

Winter and a daily dose of duck splats must freeze up the part of the brain devoted to compassion for animals, for I began to hope for their demise. Unfortunately, I didn't have the heart to dispatch them, and who among our rural friends would welcome the dubious gift of ducks in the dead of winter? Even with plum sauce. I secretly contemplated spraying them with fox lure. Or tying slices of roast beef to their legs in hopes of interesting the coyotes that howled at the ridgetop. But instead I was a good mother; I fed them, rasped my shovel over the crust on the porch floor, and waited for spring. One balmy day they trundled back up to the pond and within a month they were gone, leaving piles of feathers like a drift of late snow on the shore.

The ducks were gone but their legacy lived on. By May the pond was a thick soup of green algae. A pair of Canada geese had settled in to take their place and raised a brood under the willows. One afternoon I walked up to see if the goose babies had sprouted pinfeathers yet, only to hear a distressed quacking. A fuzzy brown gosling out for a swim had gotten snared in the floating masses of algae. It was squawking and flapping its wings trying to get free. While I tried to think of how to rescue it, it gave a mighty kick and popped up to the surface, where it began to walk on the algal mat.

That was a moment of resolve for me. You should not be able to walk on a pond. It should be an invitation to wildlife, not a snare. The likelihood of making the pond swimmable, even for geese, seemed remote at best. But I am an ecologist, so I was confident that I could at least improve the situation. The word *ecology* is derived from the Greek *oikos,* the word for home. I could use ecology to make a good home for goslings and girls.

Like many an old farm pond, mine was the victim of eutrophication, the natural process of nutrient enrichment that comes with age. Generations of algae and lily pads and fallen leaves and autumn's apples falling into the pond built up the sediments, layering the once clean gravel at the bottom in a sheet of muck. All those nutrients fueled the growth of new plants, which fueled the growth of more new plants, in an accelerating cycle. This is the way for many ponds—the bottom gradually fills in until the pond becomes a marsh and maybe someday a meadow and then a forest. Ponds grow old, and though I will too, I like the ecological idea of aging as progressive enrichment, rather than progressive loss.

Sometimes the process of eutrophication is accelerated by human activities: nutrient-rich runoff from fertilized fields or septic tanks ends up in the water, where it supports exponential growth of algae. My pond was buffered from such influences—its source was a cold spring coming out of the hill, and a swath of trees on the uphill side formed a nitrogen-grabbing filter for runoff from the surrounding pastures. My battle was not with pollution, but with time. Making my pond swimmable would be an exercise in turning back time. That's just what I wanted, to turn back time. My daughters were growing up too fast, my time as a mother slipping away, and my promise of a swimming pond yet to be fulfilled.

Being a good mother meant fixing the pond for my kids. A highly productive food chain might be good for frogs and herons, but not for swimming. The best swimming lakes are not eutrophic, but cold, clear, and oligotrophic, or poor in nutrients.

I carried my small solo canoe up to the pond to serve as a floating platform for algae removal. I envisioned scooping up the algae with a long-handled rake, filling the canoe as if it was a garbage scow, emptying it on the shore, and then going for a nice swim. But only the swimming part worked out—and it wasn't nice. As I tried to skim the algae, I discovered that they hung like sheer green curtains through the water. If you reach far out of a light canoe and try to lift a heavy mat of algae at the end of a rake, physics dictates that swimming will occur.

My attempts at skimming were useless. I was addressing only the symptoms of scum and not the cause. I read as much as I could about pond rehabilitation and weighed my options. To undo what time and ducks had accomplished I needed to remove nutrients from the pond, not just skim the foam. When I waded in the shallow end of the pond, the muck squished between my toes, but beneath it I could feel the clean gravel that was the pond's original basin. Maybe I could dredge up the muck and cart it away in buckets. But when I brought my broadest snow shovel to scoop up the mud, by the time it reached the surface there was a brown cloud all around me and a mere handful of soil in the shovel. I stood in the water laughing out loud. Shoveling muck was like trying to catch wind in a butterfly net.

Next I used old window screens to make a sieve that we could lift up through the sediments. But the muck was far too fine and my improvised net came up empty. This was not ordinary mud. The organic matter in the sediments occurs as tiny particles, dissolved nutrients that flocculate in specks small enough to be bite-size snacks for zooplankton. Clearly, I was powerless to haul the nutrients out of the water. Fortunately, the plants were not.

A mat of algae is really nothing more than dissolved phosphorous and nitrogen made solid through the alchemy of photosynthesis. I couldn't remove nutrients by shoveling, but once they are fixed into the bodies of plants they can be forked out of the water with the application of biceps and bent back and carted away by the wheelbarrowful.

The average phosphate molecule in a farm pond has a cycling time of less than two weeks from the time it is absorbed out of the water, made into living tissue, is eaten or dies, decomposes, and is recycled back to feed yet another algal strand. My plan was to interrupt this endless recycling by capturing nutrients in plants and hauling them away before they could once again be turned into algae. I could slowly, steadily deplete the stores of nutrients circulating in the pond.

I'm a botanist by trade, and so of course I needed to know who these algae were. There are probably as many kinds of algae as there are species of tree, and I would do a disservice to their lives and to my task if I didn't know who they were. You wouldn't try to restore a forest without knowing what kind of trees you were working with, so I scooped up a jarful of green slime and took it to my microscope with the top screwed tightly to contain the smell.

I teased apart the slippery green wads into tiny wisps that would fit beneath my microscope. In this single tuft were long threads of *Cladophora,* shining like satin ribbons. Wound around them were translucent strands of *Spirogyra,* in which the chloroplasts spiral like a green staircase. The whole green field was in motion, with iridescent tumbleweeds of *Volvox* and pulsing euglenoids stretching their way among the strands. So much life in a single drop of water, water that previously looked like scum in a jar. Here were my partners in restoration.

Progress was slow with pond restoration hours squeezed between years' worth of Girl Scout meetings, bake sales, camping trips, and a more-than-full-time job. All moms have treasured ways to spend the few precious hours they have to themselves, curling up with a book or sewing, but I mostly went to the water, the birds and the wind and the quiet were what I needed. This was one place where I somehow felt as if I could make things right. At school I taught ecology, but on a Saturday afternoon when the kids were off at a friend's, I got to *do* ecology.

After the canoe debacle, I decided it was wiser to stand on the shore with a rake and stretch out as far as I could reach. The rake brought sticks draped in *Cladophora* like a comb matted with long green hair. Every stroke of the rake combed up another sheet from the bottom and added to a quickly growing mound, which I had to get out of the watershed by moving it downhill from the pond. If I left it to rot on the shore, the nutrients released in decay would return to the pond in short order. I flung the wads of algae onto a sled—my kids' little red plastic toboggan—and dragged it up the steep bank to empty it into the waiting wheelbarrow.

I really didn't want to stand in the mucky ooze, so I worked cautiously from the edges in old sneakers. I could reach out and dredge up heaps of algae, but there was so much more just beyond my reach. Sneakers evolved to Wellingtons, extending my sphere of influence just enough for me to know that it was ineffective, and thus Wellingtons came to waders. But waders give you a false sense of security, and before long I reached just a little too far and felt the icy pond rush in over their tops. Waders are darn heavy when they fill up, and I found myself anchored in the muck. A good mother does not drown. The next time I just wore shorts.

I simply gave myself up to the task. I remember the liberation of just walking right in to my waist the first time, the lightness of my T-shirt floating around me, the swirl of the water against my bare skin. I finally felt at home. The tickles at my legs were just wisps of *Spirogyra,* the nudges just curious perch. Now I could see the algael curtains stretched out before me, much more beautiful than dangling at the end of my rake. I could see the way *Cladophora* bloomed from old sticks and watch diving beetles swim among them.

I developed a new relationship with mud. Instead of trying to protect myself from it, I became oblivious to it, noticing its presence only when I would go back to the house and see strands of algae caught in my hair or the water in the shower turning decidedly brown. I came to know the feel of the gravelly bottom below the muck, the sucking mud by the cattails and the cold stillness where the bottom dropped away from the shallows. Transformation is not accomplished by tentative wading at the edge.

One spring day my rake came up draped with a mass of algae so heavy it bent the bamboo handle. I let it drip to lighten the load and then flipped it onto the shore. I was about to go for another load when I heard a wet smacking from the pile, the slap of a watery tail. A lump was wiggling in a frenzy below the surface of the heaped algae. I picked the threads apart, opening the weave to see what was struggling within. A plump brown body; a bullfrog tadpole as big as my thumb was caught there. Tadpoles can swim easily through a net that is suspended in the water, but when the net is drawn up by the rake it collapses around them like a purse seine. I picked him up, squishy and cold, between thumb and forefinger and tossed him back into the pond, where he rested, suspended for a moment in the water, and then swam off. The next rake came up in a smooth dripping sheet studded with so many tadpoles that they looked like nuts caught in a tray of peanut brittle. I bent and untangled them, every one.

This was a problem. There was so much to rake. I could dredge the algae out, slap it into piles, and be done with it. I could work so much faster if I didn't have to stop and pick tadpoles from the tangle of every moral dilemma. I told myself that my intention was not to hurt them; I was just trying to improve the habitat and they were the collateral damage. But my good intentions meant nothing to tadpoles if they struggled and died in a compost pile. I sighed, but I knew what I had to do. I was driven to this chore by a mothering urge, to make a swimmable pond. In the process, I could hardly sacrifice another mother's children, who, after all, already have a pond to swim in.

Now I was not only a pond raker, but also a tadpole plucker. It was amazing what I found in the mesh of algae: predaceous diving beetles with sharp black mandibles; small fish; dragonfly larvae. I stuck my fingers in to free a wiggle and felt a sharp pain like a bee sting. My hand flinched back with a big crayfish attached to my fingertip. A whole food web was dangling from my rake, and those were just the critters I could see, just the tip of the iceberg, the top of the food chain. Under my microscope, I had seen the web of algae teeming with invertebrates—copepods, daphnia, whirling rotifers, and creatures so much smaller: threadlike worms, globes of green algae, protozoans with cilia beating in unison. I knew they were there, but I couldn't possibly pick them out. So I bargained with myself over the chain of responsibility and tried to convince myself that their demise served a greater good.

Raking a pond provides you with a lot of mental free space for philosophizing. As I raked and plucked, it challenged my conviction that all lives are valuable, protozoan or not. As a theoretical matter, I hold this to be true, but on a practical level it gets murky, the spiritual and the pragmatic bumping heads. With every rake I knew that I was prioritizing. Short, single-cell lives were ended because I wanted a clear pond. I'm bigger, I have a rake, so I win. That's not a worldview I readily endorse. But it didn't keep me awake at night, or halt my efforts; I simply acknowledged the choices I was making. The best I could do was to be respectful and not let the small lives go to waste. I plucked out whatever wee beasties I could and the rest went into the compost pile, to start the cycle again as soil.

At first I hauled carts of freshly raked algae, but I soon realized that trundling hundreds of pounds of water was hard work. I learned to heap the algae on the shore and watch it dribble moisture back to the pond. In the following days the algae bleached in the sun into light papery sheets, easily lifted into the wheelbarrow. Filamentous algae like *Spirogyra* and *Cladophora* have a nutrient content equivalent to that of high-quality forage grasses. I was hauling away the equivalent nutrient load of bales of good dairy hay. Load after load of algae domed up in the compost pile, on its way to making good black humus. The pond was literally feeding the garden, *Cladophora* reborn as carrots. I began to see a difference in the pond. A span of days would go by when the surface was clear, but the fuzzy green mats always returned.

I began to notice other sponges for my pond's excess nutrients in addition to the algae. All along the shore, the willows reached their feathery red roots into the shallow water to troll for nitrogen and phosphorous to pull into their root systems to become leaves and willow withes. I came along the shore with my loppers and cut the willows, stem by swaying stem. Dragging the piles of willow branches away, I was removing storehouses of nutrients they had sucked from the pond bottom. The brush pile in the field grew taller, soon to be browsed by cottontails and redistributed far and wide as rabbit droppings. Willow responds vigorously to cutting and sends up long straight shoots that can tower over my head in a single growing season. I left the thickets away from the water for rabbits and songbirds, but those right at the shore I cut and bundled for making baskets. The larger stems became the foundation for garden trellises for pole beans and morning glories. I also gathered mint and other herbs along the banks. As with the willows, the more I picked, the more it seemed to grow back. Everything I took moved the pond a step closer to clear. Every cup of mint tea struck a blow for nutrient removal.

Cleaning the pond by cutting willows really seemed to help. I cut with renewed enthusiasm, moving in a mindless rhythm with my loppers—*snick, snick, snick*—clearing whole swaths of shoreline as willow stems fell at my feet. Then something, perhaps a movement glimpsed out of the corner of my eye, perhaps a silent plea, made me stop. In the last stem left standing was a beautiful little nest, a cup woven sweetly of *Juncus* rushes and threadlike roots around a fork in the tree, a marvel of homemaking. I peered inside and there were three eggs the size of lima beans lying in a circlet of pine needles. What a treasure I had nearly destroyed in my zeal to "improve" the habitat. Nearby, the mother, a yellow warbler, flitted in the bushes, calling in alarm. I was so quick and single-minded about what I was doing that I forgot to look. I forgot to acknowledge that creating the home that I wanted for my children jeopardized the homemaking of other mothers whose intents were no different from mine.

It came to me once again that restoring a habitat, no matter how well intentioned, produces casualties. We set ourselves up as arbiters of what is good when often our standards of goodness are driven by narrow interests, by what we want. I piled the cut brush back up near the nest in some semblance of the protective cover I had destroyed and sat on a rock, concealed on the other side of the pond, to see if she would come back. What did she think as she watched me come closer and closer, laying waste to the home she had carefully chosen, threatening her family? There are powerful forces of destruction loose in the world, advancing inexorably toward her children and mine. The onslaught of progress, well-intentioned to improve human habitat, threatens the nest I've chosen for my children as surely as I threatened hers. What does a good mother do?

I continued to clear out the algae, let the silt settle, and it looked better. But I went back a week later to a foamy green mass. It's kind of like cleaning the kitchen: you get everything put away, wipe off the countertops, and before you know it there are drips of peanut butter and jelly everywhere and you have to do it all over again. Life adds up. It's eutrophic. But I could see ahead to a time when my kitchen would stay too clean. I would have an oligotrophic kitchen. Without the girls to mess it up, I would be longing for leftover cereal bowls, for a eutrophic kitchen. For signs of life.

I pull my red toboggan to the other end of the pond and start to work in the shallows. Immediately, my rake gets stalled with a heavy load of weeds that I drag slowly to the surface. This mat has a different weight and texture than the slippery sheets of *Cladophora* that I've been dredging. I lay it down on the grass for a closer look and spread the film with my fingers until it stretches into what looks like a green fishnet stocking—a fine mesh network like a drift net suspended in the water. This is *Hydrodictyon.*

I stretch it between my fingers and it glistens, almost weightless after the water has drained away. As orderly as a honeycomb, *Hydrodictyon* is a geometric surprise in the seemingly random stew of a murky pond. It hangs in the water, a colony of tiny nets all fused together.

Under the microscope, the fabric of *Hydrodictyon* is made up of tiny six-sided polygons, a mesh of linked green cells that surround the holes of the net. It multiplies quickly because of a unique means of clonal reproduction. Inside each of the net cells, daughter cells are born. They arrange themselves into hexagons, neat replicas of the mother net. In order to disperse her young, the mother cell must disintegrate, freeing the daughter cells into the water. The floating newborn hexagons fuse with others, forging new connections and weaving a new net.

I look out at the expanse of *Hydrodictyon* visible just below the surface. I imagine the liberation of new cells, the daughters spinning off on their own. What does a good mother do when mothering time is done? As I stand in the water, my eyes brim and drop salt tears into the freshwater at my feet. Fortunately, my daughters are not clones of their mother, nor must I disintegrate to set them free, but I wonder how the fabric is changed when the release of daughters tears a hole. Does it heal over quickly, or does the empty space remain? And how do the daughter cells make new connections? How is the fabric rewoven?

Hydrodictyon is a safe place, a nursery for fish and insects, a shelter from predators, a safety net for the small beings of the pond. *Hydrodictyon*—Latin for "the water net." What a curious thing. A fishnet catches fish, a bug net catches bugs. But a water net catches nothing, save what cannot be held. Mothering is like that, a net of living threads to lovingly encircle what it cannot possibly hold, what will eventually move through it. But right then my job was reversing succession, turning back time to make these waters swimmable for my daughters. So I wiped my eyes and with all due respect for the lessons of *Hydrodictyon,* I raked it up onto the shore.

When my sister came to visit, her kids, raised in the dry California hills, were smitten with water. They waded after frogs and splashed with abandon while I worked at the algae. My brother-in-law called out from the shade, "Hey, who is the biggest kid here?" I can't deny it—I've never outgrown my desire to play in the mud. But isn't play the way we get limbered up for the work of the world? My sister defended my pond-raking with the reminder that it was sacred play.

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." Being a good mother includes the caretaking of water.

On Saturday mornings, Sunday afternoons, year after year, I would go to the solitude of the pond and get to work. I tried grass carp and barley straw, and every new change provoked a new reaction. The job is never over; it simply changes from one task to the next. What I'm looking for, I suppose, is balance, and that is a moving target. Balance is not a passive resting place—it takes work, balancing the giving and the taking, the raking out and the putting in.

Skating in winter, peepers in the spring, summer sunbathing, autumn bonfires; swimmable or not, the pond became like another room in our house. I planted sweetgrass around the edge. The girls and their friends had campfires on the flat meadow of the shore, slumber parties in the tent, summer suppers on the picnic table, and long sun-washed afternoons sunbathing, rising on one elbow when the gust of a heron's wings stirred the air.

I cannot count the hours that I've spent here. Almost without notice the hours stretched out to years. My dog used to bound up the hill after me and race back and forth along the shore as I worked. As the pond grew clearer, he grew more feeble but would always go with me, to sleep in the sun and drink at the edge. We buried him nearby. The pond built my muscles, wove my baskets, mulched my garden, made my tea, and trellised my morning glories. Our lives became entwined in ways both material and spiritual. It's been a balanced exchange: I worked on the pond and the pond worked on me, and together we made a good home.

One spring Saturday, while I was raking algae, there was a rally downtown in support of the cleanup of Onondaga Lake, on whose shore our city stands. The lake is held sacred by the Onondaga Nation, the people who have fished and gathered on its shore for millennia. It was here that the great Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy was formed.

Today, Onondaga Lake has the dubious reputation of being one of the most polluted lakes in the country. The problem at Onondaga Lake is not too much life, but too little. As I dredge up another heavy rakeful of slime, I feel also the weight of responsibility. In one short life where does responsibility lie? I spend countless hours improving the water quality of my half-acre pond. I stand here raking algae so that my kids can swim in clear water, while standing silent on the cleanup of Onondaga, where no one can swim.

Being a good mother means teaching your children to care for the world, and so I've shown the girls how to grow a garden, how to prune an apple tree. The apple tree leans out over the water and makes for a shadowy arbor. In spring a drift of pink and white blossoms send plumes of fragrance wafting down the hill and a rain of petals on the water. For years now I've watched her seasons, from frothy pink blossoms, to gently swelling ovaries as the petals fall away, to sour green marbles of adolescent fruit, to the ripe golden apples of September. That tree has been a good mother. Most years she nurtures a full crop of apples, gathering the energy of the world into herself and passing it on. She sends her young out into the world well provisioned for the journey, packaged in sweetness to share with the world.

My girls, too, have grown up strong and beautiful here, rooted like the willows and flying off like their windblown seeds. And now, after twelve years, the pond is nearly swimmable, if you don't mind the weeds that tickle your legs. My older daughter left for college long before the pond was clean. I recruited my younger daughter to help me carry buckets of pea gravel to pour ourselves a beach. Having become so intimate with muck and tadpoles, I don't mind the occasional green strand that wraps around my arm, but the beach makes a small ramp that lets me wade in and plunge into the deep clear pool at the center without raising a cloud. On a hot day it feels wonderful to submerge in the icy spring water and watch the pollywogs flee. Emerging with a shiver, I have to pluck bits of algae from my wet skin. The girls will take a quick dip to please me, but, in truth, I've not succeeded in turning back time.

It is Labor Day now, the last day of summer vacation. A day to savor the mellow sunshine. This summer is my last with a child at home. Yellow apples plop into the water from an overhanging tree. I am mesmerized by the yellow apples on the dark surface of the pond, globes of light dancing and turning. The breeze off the hill sets the water in motion. In a circular current from west to east and back again, the wind is stirring the pond, so gently you wouldn't see it but for the fruit. The apples ride the current, a procession of yellow rafts following each other along the shoreline. They move quickly from under the apple tree and follow the curve beneath the elms. As the wind carries them away, more fall from the tree so that the whole pond surface is stenciled with moving arcs of yellow, like a procession of yellow candles against a dark night. They spiral around and around in an ever widening gyre.

Paula Gunn Allen, in her book *Grandmothers of the Light,* writes of the changing roles of women as they spiral through the phases of life, like the changing face of the moon. We begin our lives, she says, walking the Way of the Daughter. This is the time for learning, for gathering experiences in the shelter of our parents. We move next to self-reliance, when the necessary task of the age is to learn who you are in the world. The path brings us next to the Way of the Mother. This, Gunn relates, is a time when "her spiritual knowledge and values are all called into service of her children." Life unfolds in a growing spiral, as children begin their own paths and mothers, rich with knowledge and experience, have a new task set before them. Allen tells us that our strengths turn now to a circle wider than our own children, to the well-being of the community. The net stretches larger and larger. The circle bends round again and grandmothers walk the Way of the Teacher, becoming models for younger women to follow. And in the fullness of age, Allen reminds us, our work is not yet done. The spiral widens farther and farther, so that the sphere of a wise woman is beyond herself, beyond her family, beyond the human community, embracing the planet, mothering the earth.

So it is my grandchildren who will swim in this pond, and others whom the years will bring. The circle of care grows larger and caregiving for my little pond spills over to caregiving for other waters. The outlet from my pond runs downhill to my good neighbor's pond. What I do here matters. Everybody lives downstream. My pond drains to the brook, to the creek, to a great and needful lake. The water net connects us all. I have shed tears into that flow when I thought that motherhood would end. But the pond has shown me that being a good mother doesn't end with creating a home where just my children can flourish. A good mother grows into a richly eutrophic old woman, knowing that her work doesn't end until she creates a home where all of life's beings can flourish. There are grandchildren to nurture, and frog children, nestlings, goslings, seedlings, and spores, and I still want to be a good mother.