

# Decolonizing Approaches to Ecosystem Education

## Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwantlen and all Coast Salish peoples and are grateful to have the opportunity to live, work and play as uninvited guests on these lands. Please take some time to learn more about the lands on which you reside. Visit: <https://native-land.ca/>

## Introduction

As educators interested in connecting our students with nature, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to contextualize this work within land-based pedagogies, Indigenous Science and the First People's Principles of Learning. In our restoration work in what is currently called Boundary Bay, the Friends of Semiahmoo Bay has worked in collaboration with local Indigenous groups and with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Now, taking an ecological narrative-based approach to our school programs, we are working to decolonize our practices as a volunteer-based non-profit society by finding and connecting educators to available resources.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to action and the BC curriculum requires teachers to consider and incorporate Indigenous voice, issues, resources and perspectives in their teaching. Teachers in BC are also reminded that the 9<sup>th</sup> Professional Standard for BC Educators

*Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.*

The video, Professional Standard 9 – Truth and Reconciliation, Moving Forward Together <https://bit.ly/4hpOdg0> offers a moving call to action.



Below is a small selection of Indigenous education-related resources that can help guide teachers in creating anti-racist lessons and activities that highlight the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. It is important to seek authentic, local resources and avoid 'pan-Indigenous' perspectives.

## First People's Principles of Learning:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

*\*Visit FNEESC (First Nation's Education Steering Committee) website to print or order the poster.*





# Decolonizing Approaches to Ecosystem Education


- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

The [First Nations Education Steering Committee](https://www.fnesc.ca/), <https://www.fnesc.ca/> is an organization that advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous history and cultures into the curriculum as well as the well-being of Indigenous students in British Columbia. They offer a plethora of resources for teachers to make use of in classrooms, including lesson-planning documents across subject areas.


## A few ways to get started:


- **Explore Seasonal Rounds** with your students. The Invasive Species Council has a lesson plan and linked resources aimed at elementary/intermediate aged learners. <https://bit.ly/42kEmgD> Connect what you find to the local environment you plan to visit. 
- **Incorporate Indigenous Language:** Learn the names of flora and fauna in local traditional languages. Finds some ideas and resources in the “Whose Names are These?” post in **the Scarfe Digital Sandbox blog** (UBC Teacher Education about **incorporating Indigenous language and resources as part of species ID or ‘animal classification’**). <https://bit.ly/40mkl6Z> contains links to several teaching resources including:
  - **Knowing Home, Braiding Indigenous and Western Science**, an open educational text authored by Gloria Snively and Wanosts’a7 Lorna Williams and shared by the Victoria School District’s Indigenous Education team. (<https://bit.ly/3Wv8BOh>)
  - **Printable Plant cards**, available on the SD68 (Nanaimo) include many plants found in Boundary Bay.  (<https://bit.ly/40LEAwn>)
  - **The Hulquminum Ecosystem Guide** is a comprehensive, illustrated, freely downloadable/printable guide to flora and fauna in and around the Salish Sea. (<http://bit.ly/42qrLIV>)
- **Storytelling - Include ‘Own Voices’:** Learning through oral tradition is one of the First People’s Principles. It is also seen by many in the scientific and journalistic communities as an essential way to engage learners (particularly girls) and help students become better science communicators.
  - Invite an elder or knowledge keeper (or Indigenous resource teacher) from the local community to come to your class to tell stories they are able to share. (Please investigate local protocols and consider focusing on forging connection and relationship rather than always/only ‘asking’ for something)

# Decolonizing Approaches to Ecosystem Education


- Look for video and lessons developed in collaboration & shared by local non-profits, schools or community groups. For example, Ocean Networks Canada offers a variety of Indigenous science lessons (<https://bit.ly/4jiPH7f>) such as “Experiencing the Beach and the Creation Story” (aimed at Grade 9) that includes a video telling of “Xeel’s the Creator” by Sqtuxulenuhw (George Seymour). 
- Find stories shared online for public or educational access. For example, Musqueam have published an Environmental Stewardship Newsletter where you can learn about practices including cultural practices to combat climate change <https://www.musqueam.bc.ca/newsletters/>
- Tell a nature story from your own childhood and encourage students to tell their own stories.
  - Look at some video or images of local flora and fauna (or look at examples in the field), bring natural objects to class and have students consider what stories they might tell. Invite students to bring objects of personal meaning.
  - Land-based learning Idea: what stories do footprints in the sand or mud or snow tell? Can you recreate those stories using stamps or drawing or painting in class?

## Science Resources:

• At a glance documents representing **implicit and explicit connections to each grade level and subject area** are part of the BC Ministry of Education’s Indigenous Education Resources “Knowledges and Perspectives” website (<https://bit.ly/42juHal>). 

• Visit the **Indigenous Ed resource page**, (<https://bit.ly/3WsHenT>) to find videos and a Resource Inventory to help teachers incorporate First Peoples Knowledge and Perspectives. Of particular interest at the bottom of the page is the **Framework for Designing Indigenous Science Resources** (a rubric to help create and evaluate resources that includes: Indigenous voice, language, diversity, protocols, relationship to the land, ways of learning and teaching.) 

• **FNESC** has a comprehensive PDF to assist grades 5 to 9 teachers looking to incorporate Indigenous Science in their classes:

<https://www.fnesc.ca/science-first-peoples/>. There is also a version for Secondary educators linked on the same page. 



Learning more about how to avoid cultural appropriation can provide a sense of confidence as we plan our lessons. **SFU’s Think before your Appropriate** resource (<https://bit.ly/4h56Qzz>) assists us on this path.

# Decolonizing Approaches to Ecosystem Education

## Cultural Maps, Language & Practices:

Learn more about the culture, language and practices of the Indigenous people's on whose land your school sits or learn about the traditional lands where you take your field trips. This may seem like a small step, but but it is essential to reconciliation.

- **Native Land** (<https://native-land.ca/>) is a website that maps out the ancestral lands of Indigenous peoples from around the world. The main feature of the website is an interactive map that can filter the lands by linguistic groups, territories, and treaties.
- **The First People's Map of BC**, (<https://maps.fpcc.ca/>) shares Indigenous language, art and heritage in an interactive format perfect for students seeking to learn more about local language and culture or connect with artists. You can even hear audio clips of native language speakers.
- **Local School Districts often have collaborated to develop authentic resources and/or have their own Indigenous Ed teams.**
  - SD61, Victoria shares some territorial maps and examples/lesson plans on how to incorporate them in their Social Studies Resource (<https://bit.ly/3CiHX4g>) area.
  - Langley School District has a FPPL 'elaborations' document that provides suggestions on how teachers can incorporate Indigenous perspectives and the First People's Principles. (<https://instructionalservices.sd35.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2020/10/First-Peoples-Principles-of-Learning-Elaborations-1.pdf>)
- **Local First Nations/Bands** often house valuable information about the local environment on their websites. For example, the Semiahmoo First Nation shares their values and a map of their territories:  
<https://www.semiahmoofirstnation.ca/land-research-resource-mgmt>



## Books for your class or library:

**Indigenous Storybooks** (<https://indigenoustorybooks.ca/>) is a repository of free openly licensed online stories written by Indigenous peoples in Canada. Inspired by, and utilizing, the open-licensed stories from Little Cree Books, this project aims to make the text, images, and audio of stories available in Indigenous languages as well as English, French, and some of the most widely spoken immigrant and refugee languages of Canada.



**Strong Nations** (<https://www.strongnations.com/>) is an online store and publishing house that sells authentic Indigenous-created art and literature from all over Canada.

*\*This document represents the learning and unlearning of volunteer educators at a fixed point in time (Winter 2025/25). We welcome feedback, suggestions, questions and contributions.*