

# THE THANKSGIVING ADDRESS: GREETINGS AND THANKS VIDEO

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## *DIGGING IN: FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND ACTION*

### **KEY THEMES AND TERMS**

*Ohé:ton Karihwatéhkwen* (before, the matter that is set down), Thanksgiving Address, Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations, *Kanien'kéha* or Mohawk language, greetings, thankfulness, one mind, our sustenance, Four Directions, grandfathers, grandmother, Elder Brother, Handsome Lake, Four Beings, Creator, land acknowledgement.

### **CATALYZING CONNECTIONS**

#### **DECODING QUESTIONS**

- *Description:* What do you see, hear, and feel while watching the video? While listening to the Mohawk version?
- *Personal Connection:* How does the message of the Thanksgiving Address resonate with your personal experience or stories in your family?
- *Common Themes:* What are the social issues that emerge from sharing our personal stories? Are there common issues that are shared among us?
- *Social Analysis:* What are the historical and social processes that created this situation?
- *Planning for Action:* What kinds of actions are implied through the Thanksgiving Address? What are the actions we can take? How does this inspire me to change my actions?

#### **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

- What was your experience of listening to Ryan recite the Thanksgiving Address in Mohawk, one of the Indigenous languages of the Haudenosaunee? What meaning do you gather from it?
- As the different elements that sustain life were named, which ones were obvious to you? Which ones were a surprise?
- What elements do you identify with most strongly? Why? Are there elements that you don't connect with? Why not?

#### **HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES**

When the Legacies collaborators gathered at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory in Oshweken, Ontario in July 2019, Chandra engaged the group in making

connections between food and all of the elements acknowledged in the Thanksgiving Address. She distributed the drawings of the different elements that you see in the video and asked us to consider: “How is this one thing related to food?”

Divide into groups. Using the English translation provided of the Thanksgiving Address, ask each group member to select one of the elements and talk about how they see it connected to food. They could write their thoughts on the back of a drawing. Then ask them to share their interpretation with everyone. Finally, discuss how the sharing of perspectives has broadened your understanding of food.

Here are some examples from Legacies participants:

- Water (Dianne from rural Ontario): “Water is our most important food, we are 90% water, and all creatures rely on water.”
- Medicinal plants (Ángel from Yucatán, Mexico): “We don’t see medicinal plants and food as separate, they’re the same. For the Mayan people, the patios or gardens of the grandmothers were like pharmacies. If you had a stomachache or a fever, you went to a grandmother and she would tell you what plant you need. Then you needed to ask permission of the plant to cut it so it could cure you.”
- Insects (Leticia from Toronto, Ontario): “Bees, for example, provide us sustenance with food (honey) as well as helping to pollinate the fruits and vegetables.”
- Moon (Raquel from Costa Rica): “In agriculture, the moon tells us when to plant.”
- Sun (Adam from rural Quebec): “The sun melts the snow after our long winter and is critical for our short growing season.”
- Trees (Fulvio from Michoacán, Mexico): “There are many trees that give us edible fruits or nuts or medicine; some trees are also connected to animals or birds that we eat.”

## **INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

At the start of the video, Chandra offers what is called the “Edge of the Woods” ritual of welcome, offered to outsiders or guests coming to Iroquois territory:

“Imagine that I’m taking a soft piece of doe skin and that I’m wiping the tears from your eyes for any grief you may have accumulated, from any grief that you’re experiencing in your life. Imagine that I’m taking a soft feather and that I’m wiping any dust out of your ears so you may hear clearly now the words that are going to be spoken now. Then imagine that I’m giving you a cool drink of water to help clear the lump from your throat from any grief that you may be carrying.”

How does this prepare you to listen to Mohawk words that you don’t understand and to learn from the world view represented by the Thanksgiving Address? How might this ritual prepare us for any new situation or dialogue?

When Legacies collaborator Fulvio Gioanetto, trained in Europe as a scientist, first learned about the Thanksgiving Address from Chandra, he said: “I like how it talks about all beings as interconnected. It’s another kind of language; I can say the same thing in scientific language. It’s an honour to know the Mohawks, to listen to the same music but with different rhythms; it’s a tradition that gives you a way to interact with life.” How do you think western science and Indigenous knowledge might converge in understanding the interrelationship of all elements of the natural world?

## **INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Do you have any rituals for starting meetings or events that bring people together and acknowledge the interconnections? If not, what might you create that would serve that purpose with your group?

In Canada, since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued 94 recommendations in 2015, many schools and cultural institutions have initiated a “land acknowledgement” ritual – taking time to name the Indigenous groups who have been stewards of the land one is standing on and acknowledging our responsibility as guests to continue to care for the land.

In introducing the Thanksgiving Address to a University of Toronto class in 2019, Chandra said “this is the real land acknowledgement for the Haudenosaunee people.” It goes beyond a rote naming of Indigenous groups to reflecting a world view that both greets and gives thanks to all elements of nature, making connections with all our relations.

What Indigenous groups historically were and currently are stewards of the land you are living on? What would be an appropriate way to acknowledge their relationship to the land in the past, present and future?

Consider the question Robin Wall Kimmerer asks in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (112): What would it be like to be raised on gratitude, to speak to the natural world as a member of the democracy of species, to raise a pledge of interdependence?

## **CONNECTING TO OTHER PHOTO & VIDEO ESSAYS**

- [Knowledge Tensions](#)

# *DIGGING DEEPER: RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND ACTION*

## **VIDEOS**

Baroness von Sketch Show. (2019, Oct. 15). [Land Acknowledgement](#). CBC. Video.

Whose Land. (2017, Nov. 21). [Land Acknowledgement Poem by Lena Recollet](#). Youtube.

## **AUDIO**

Wilbur, Matika, and Adrienne Keene. (2019, July 2). [Can Our Ancestors Hear Us? All My Relations](#) Podcast.

## **BOOKS & ARTICLES**

George-Kanentiio, Doug. (2013, August 4). [Edge of the woods ceremony was the basis for the Two-Row Wampum: Commentary by Doug George-Kanentiio](#). Syracuse NY Local News.

Hill, Susan. (2017) *The clay we are made of: Haudenosaunee land tenure on the Grand River*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Kanien'kéha. (n.d). [Thanksgiving address: Giving thanks to the natural world](#). Kanien'kéha: An Open Source Endangered Language Initiative.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Koleszar-Green, R. (2018). [What is a guest? What is a settler?](#). *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry*, 10(2), 166-177.