

# LESSON PLAN

## SKY WOLF'S CALL THE GIFT OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

by Eldon Yellowhorn and Kathy Lowinger



**Genre:** Non-fiction

**Themes:** Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous traditions, Indigenous conservation practices, Indigenous storytelling

**Suitable for:** Grade 6+

**Guided Reading Level:** Fountas and Pinnell S

**Lexile:** 1060L

**Common Core standards:** RL.5.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9

W.5.1.1a.1b.1c.1d.1e.3.3a.3b.3c.3d.3e.4.5.6.7.8.9.9a.10

L.5.1,1a,1b,1c,1s,1e,2,2a,2b,2c,2d,3,3a,4,4a,4b,4c,,5,5a,5b,5c,6

SL.5.1,1a,1b,1c,1d,2,3,4,5,6

### Summary:

From healing to astronomy to our connection to the natural world, the lessons from Indigenous knowledge inform our learning and practices today.

How do knowledge systems get passed down over generations? Through the knowledge inherited from their Elders and ancestors, Indigenous Peoples throughout North America have observed, practiced, experimented, and interacted with plants, animals, the sky, and the waters over millennia. Knowledge keepers have shared their wisdom with younger people through oral history, stories, ceremonies, and records that took many forms.

In *Sky Wolf's Call*, award-winning author team Eldon Yellowhorn and Kathy Lowinger reveal how Indigenous knowledge comes from centuries of practices, experiences, and ideas gathered by people who have a long history with the natural world. Indigenous knowledge is explored through the use of fire and water, the acquisition of food, the study of astronomy, and healing practices.

Please remember that the suggested questions and activities within this lesson plan are meant to serve as a starting point. They should be tweaked and/or reformatted to best fit your students, context, and community to ensure equity and inclusion.

## CHAPTER 1: SKY WOLF'S CALL

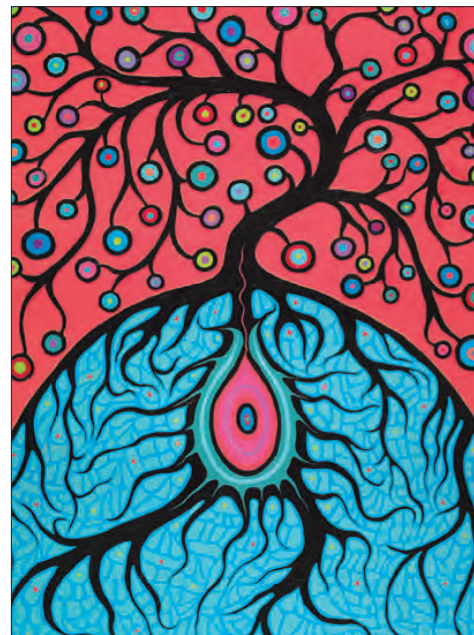
The first chapter of *Sky Wolf's Call* discusses that the earth is a gift and that we must take care of it. Students will learn about interconnectedness and how Indigenous people have passed down this knowledge through generations of learning from the natural world. For example, one small change in the environment can have huge effects, such as how the simple act of a squirrel collecting pecans helps the pecan trees thrive and that without the squirrels, the pecan trees would overcrowd and die out. In today's world, this knowledge is irreplaceable and much needed to help us navigate issues of climate change and sustainability.

### Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:

- What are some ways that your household or your school are taking care of the environment?
- What do you know so far about the term “sustainable?” What does it mean to you?
- Think about your own knowledge regarding the natural world. Can you identify five species of plants or trees in your school yard? Do you know what the plants around you need to survive?
- Think about what your community may have looked like prior to colonization. How much land has been used for “development,” and how much has remained forested or natural?

### Activities to do after reading the chapter

- On page 9, students learn about the seventh generation principle. This is a part of many Indigenous values where we must look seven generations into the future before making a decision. Ask students whether the world would be different if everyone used the seventh generation principle to guide their decisions.
- Ask students to think about an environmental issue they care deeply about and research a company that may be harming the environment. For example, Coca-Cola and Nestlé have been known to be some of the worst producers of plastic. If they had been using the seventh generation principle, how might their company practices be different? How would this potentially affect the environment and people? Once students have chosen their companies, ask them to write a paragraph expressing their thoughts on the issue and how they might use Indigenous knowledge, such as the seventh generation principle, to be a better ally and to be a better company for the future.



- On page 12, students learned about “two-eyed seeing.” This is a strategy that many Indigenous people have adopted to live in our colonial society. It incorporates their traditional ways of knowing and being and their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), alongside the knowledge of science. For this activity, ask students to draw two big eyes on a blank page. In one eye they can draw a piece of Indigenous knowledge they learned from this chapter (sustainable harvesting of trees, the use of the Cacao trees, Indigenous architects and the use of spirituality in home design, etc.). In the other eye, ask them to draw something related to their previous drawing, but with a more scientific view. For example, in one eye students might draw Inuit and their close relationship with their sled dogs which they rely on for transportation. In the other eye I might draw a veterinarian working with one of the dogs. Both provide expert knowledge about sled dogs.
- Ask students to think about the Blackfoot story of the sky wolves. This is a story rooted in the intimate knowledge Indigenous people have about the plants and animals around them. Indigenous people across Turtle Island learned many things from different species of animals. Wolves hunt in a pack, and they take care of each member of the pack from wolf pups to wolf elders. They are able to work together with skill in order to feed their packs. Ask students to create a poster of an animal that they admire. In the poster, ask them to show what people can learn from that animal. Students can use a mixture of words and images for this activity.

## CHAPTER 2: WATER KNOWLEDGE WAYS

In this chapter, students learn about the sacredness of water as well as how Indigenous people have and will always protect this valuable resource. They have learned how water is life and about the many battles of protecting this resource. Unfortunately, water is always under threat, but the book profiles many incredible Indigenous people protecting and fighting for water.

### **Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:**

- Can you think of anything on our planet that can live without water?
- What are some of the ways that water is polluted?
- Do you have clean drinking water in your taps at home? At school? How would not having access to clean water affect you?

### **Activities to do after reading the chapter**

- On page 18 and 19, students learn about Beaver’s lesson and how he was given the power to control the flow of water. The story describes the connection between beavers, water, and humans. When beavers create dams, they often create homes for other animals as a by-product. Their dams have the ability to change where water flows and to flood or dry

out certain areas. Ask students to create an infographic explaining how beavers keep our ecosystems healthy. Students can use a variety of images and text to do this, and use this website to dig deeper into the importance of beavers: <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pnnp/mb/riding/nature/animals/mammals/castors-beavers>

- Indigenous people around the globe have had a strong relationship with water, as many of them used water as their main source to travel. On page 21, students learned about the Mi'kmaq and how they used birch bark canoes and extensive knowledge of the water ways to travel and source the majority of their food. Ask students to draw a boat design that uses only things from nature, thinking of boats they are familiar with—sailboats, motorboats, and pontoon boats.

Students can take some time to research different types of boats if needed, and how they might be able to use natural items to create that boat (i.e. What could you use as a sail? Is there a way to make a propeller in nature? What could be used as “pontoons?”). Consider that the boat must carry 6–12 people, steer and move easily, and be able to maneuver in large waves and rough seas! Ask students to write one paragraph describing how their boat works and what they would use to combat these challenges.

- Starting on page 25, students learned about the challenges some Indigenous communities face when they don't have clean drinking water. Over the years, many elected officials have promised to get access to clean water for all Indigenous communities, but so far most of these efforts have failed. Ask students to write a letter to the current prime minister that explains the importance of clean water and why all people should have access to it. As a class, students can choose to mail these letters to elected officials and help Indigenous people fight for clean water in all communities.
- On page 29, the book introduces Autumn Peltier, an Anishnaabe water protector with the message “The water is sick, and people need to fight for the water.” Ask students to think of an action-based way that their schools can help protect water. These are some questions that students could consider:
  - a.) Are there threats facing the water systems around your community?
  - b.) If you don't know of any, you can do a bit of research and see if you can find some. If not, think about the animals that live in your community—do any migrate?
  - c.) Do they use other waterways which may be under threat?
  - d.) Ask students to create a plan in groups of 3–4 that outlines something tangible that their class or school can do to help protect the water and all those who rely on the water to survive. They can either create a poster or PowerPoint presentation that explains what the threat is and what their solutions are.



## CHAPTER 3: FIRE AND SMOKE KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, students learn about the gift of fire and smoke, and how Indigenous people have many uses for fire and smoke and the deep spiritual connection that comes with them. They will learn about how Indigenous people have been managing wildfires and using fire to work with the environment in different ways for thousands of years. Just like water, fire is sacred.

### **Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:**

- What are some words that come to mind when you think of fire?
- How does your family use fire at home?
- What are some fears people might have about fires?
- What are the ways that people fight forest fires or house fires?

### **Activities to do after reading the chapter**

- On pages 33 and 34, students will learn about how Naapi gets reckless with fire. Oral traditions and storytelling are the core ways that Indigenous people pass down their knowledge and teachings to future generations. Ask students to create a comic of the Naapi story. Students should ensure that the reader can understand the story and the lesson behind it.
- On page 41, students will learn about the use of controlled burns—a centuries-old approach to helping control forest fires. Ask students to pretend that their communities are going to have a controlled burn and create a poster that might be used in communities to help people understand what a controlled burn is and how it will benefit the land.

### **Questions for students to answer in their journals:**

- In this chapter, students will learn about the sacredness and importance of smudging. On page 37, Clayton Shirt speaks to the importance and the healing properties of smudging. In your own words explain how Clayton uses the “two-eyed seeing” method in his work.
- What does the word medicine mean to you? Indigenous cultures focus on healing all aspects of ourselves (mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical). How does this differ from western or colonial views of medicine? Has your view of medicine changed since learning about some of the sacred medicines in Indigenous cultures?

## CHAPTER 4: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND FOOD SECURITY

This chapter discusses Indigenous food sovereignty, the many traditional foods across Turtle Island, how food systems have changed, and how our relationship with food must change as well. Many traditional foods are at risk or have been depleted, and many people are fighting to save them. We learn oral histories of certain foods and how food is sacred.

### **Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:**

- Think about your own families. Do you have any family recipes that have been passed down?
- Think about your family background and culture. Are there any foods that stand out to you?
- Think about the last thing you ate. Do you know what the ingredients were? Do you know where they came from?

### **Activities to do after reading the chapter**

- Ask students to choose one of the traditional foods spoken about in this chapter. They can do a mini-research project that answers the following questions:
  - Is this food easily available?
  - Is this food at risk? If so, what are some of the risks it faces?
  - Find one recipe that includes this food.
  - Where can one find this food in the natural world?
  - Which Indigenous people rely on this food source?
- Ask students to create a picture that depicts the story of the first wild strawberry. They should do some research and write 3–5 point-form sentences about the health benefits of strawberries.
- Ask students to think about how our relationship with food has changed, how we harvest food, and what foods we eat. Then, ask them to write a response to the following question:
  - How has our relationship with food changed and how does that relationship affect us?



## CHAPTER 5: HEALING KNOWLEDGE WAYS

This chapter discusses Indigenous ways of healing and techniques that Indigenous people have and continue to use today to help their communities and their people. Students will also learn about different aspects of being healthy. In order for individuals to be healthy, the environment needs to be as well. A part of this chapter speaks to the health of all our animal and plant relations and the health of our earth.

### **Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:**

- What does healing mean to you?
- What are some things that people might need to heal from?
- What are some things our planet might need to heal from?
- What are some ways to heal our planet?

### **Activities to do after reading the chapter**

- Ask students to create their own medicine wheel. A medicine wheel is a traditional piece of knowledge that helps people stay healthy. It includes four parts: mental health, spiritual health, physical health, and emotional health. Within the four quadrants, have students draw something that they can do to stay healthy in that area. For example, smudging is one of the ways Indigenous people maintain their mental health by releasing negativity, or playing hockey is a great way to keep physically healthy. Ensure that students have at least one drawing in each quadrant, and remember sometimes we do things that can go in more than one quadrant—that is okay! Students should pick the quadrant that best fits them; there is no wrong answer in what makes people healthy.
- Ask students to create a food chain to help visualize that when one animal or plant is sick, it can affect everything within that animal's food chain. For example, if a fish eats a lead hook, it could get lead poisoning and die, but it doesn't stop there. An eagle might eat that fish and become sick, a bear might then eat the sick eagle, and so on.
- Ask students to choose one of the "Champions for a Healthy Earth" projects. They can pretend that they are part of the project and create a brochure to help recruit others. They should explain what the project is, what it does, and what a day working on the project might look like for anyone wanting to volunteer.

# CHAPTER 6: SKY KNOWLEDGE

This chapter looks at Indigenous sky knowledge: traditional knowledge of the stars, planets, and night skies. We will look at how this knowledge is not only sacred but incredibly useful to Indigenous people around the globe and others navigate the world.

## Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:

- What do you know about the night sky?
- How good are you at giving directions? What are some ways that we use today to find our way?
- What time is it right now? How did you know the answer?
- Do you know of any constellations or legends that come from the sky?

## Activities to do after reading the chapter

- Ask students to look up some constellations. Constellations are like images in the sky. Some cultures have stories of great monsters or creatures that make up these constellations, others see people while others see animals. These stories live in the skies from the images they create in our minds. After they have found a constellation that interests them, they can use black construction paper, white-out, or a white pastel to map out their constellations. Students can then use pastels to create northern lights or smaller stars around it, making sure the constellation stars are the largest so they stand out clearly. Students can write 2–3 sentences about what the constellation is, what it means, and then glue it to the back for people to read.
- Students should do some research on how animals use the night sky to navigate. They can choose one that interests them and answer these questions:
  - Which animal did you choose?
  - How far does it travel and how often?
  - How does it navigate its journey?
  - What is the purpose for its travels?
- Within this chapter, students learn that Indigenous people used the night sky to travel thousands of kilometers. Ask them to create a list of things they would need if they were going to travel on such a journey today. They should describe how the journeys would be similar and how they would be different. Students can do this creatively as a fictional story or as an informative paragraph.





## CHAPTER 7: KEEPING THE KNOWLEDGE

This chapter explores how Indigenous people and their knowledge are well and alive today. Indigenous systems of knowledge are thriving and helping to make a difference in all corners of the world, and most importantly, for their own people. Indigenous people are reclaiming their culture, stories, language, and knowledge.

### **Before embarking on this chapter, ask students the following discussion questions:**

- What are some ways that people learn?
- How have important lessons been taught to you?
- Think about when you are studying for a test—are there any tricks to help you remember information?
- What role do stories have in your learning or in your life?

### **Activities to do after reading the chapter**

- On page 95, students learn about the power of stories and how tying stories to places is a good way to remember them. On a blank piece of paper, ask students to create a map of a place that they know well. This can be their school yard, home, or even their community. On the map, they should highlight important places where they have stories and memories. They can think about how these memories help them to remember those places. The map should have 3–5 places drawn on it. On the back, students can create a legend for their maps that explains in a sentence or two about what the places and the memories they have of them.



- There are many ways to remember things or to pass on knowledge you don't want people to forget. One of the ways to pass on knowledge is through petroglyphs. Ask students to research a petroglyph from anywhere in the world. On a piece of paper, they should draw that petroglyph and write one paragraph about what they have learned—it can be what is depicted in the image, the story behind it, the people who created it, etc.
- Indigenous languages are truly at the heart of the culture. Language is how we tell stories, how we share with each other, and how we connect. Ask students to consider how Indigenous people have come to lose much of their language and the battles to protect and reclaim many of them. Ask students to visit the site <https://www.firstvoices.com/> and explore some

of the Indigenous languages. Ask them to find a word that resonates with them, and either create an acrostic poem or a visual aid to help people understand what the word means in English. For example, I might create a poem for the word Nibi which means water in Anishnaabemowin. It would look like this:

- N - Need it to survive
- I - Irrigation
- B - Bubbles
- I - Ice is made from it

## CHAPTER 8: SKY WOLF'S CALL

This last chapter titled “Sky Wolf’s Call” marks the end of our journey. It is a call-to-action to follow in the wolf’s footsteps and live in harmony with nature, with the skies, and with each other. This world is a gift and we must protect, love, and cherish it. We are given many gifts throughout our lives for which we can show gratitude. To finish off this book, ask students to think of all of the knowledge that the world has learned from Indigenous people. Indigenous people have had their languages, their knowledge, and their land stolen from them, yet still protect the environment and waters for everyone. Ask students how they can be a better ally to Indigenous communities and what small things they can do to help Indigenous communities fighting for clean water or standing up against oil extraction. According to the World Wildlife Fund, Indigenous people make up only 5 percent of the world’s population but protect 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity. Why are Indigenous communities some of the only places where the natural world is still flourishing? Ask students to consider how their knowledge and ways of being are making the difference, and why the western and colonial world is still harming Mother Earth. Ask students to think of what they are grateful for and about the gifts that have been given to you.

### **Action-packed learning project**

As a final project from the book, encourage students to do an action-packed learning project. They can seek inspiration from Indigenous communities nearby and ask how they can support them and amplify their voices.

Some potential projects include:

- Organizing fundraisers for MMIWG2+ or clean water projects
- Writing letters to elected officials about the barriers Indigenous people face and why they should care
- Hosting a walk for an Indigenous cause
- Bringing an elder or knowledge keeper into the classroom to share their knowledge firsthand