

Dialogue with the Land, Dialogue with Each Other Tuesdays (Biweekly) 1:00 – 3:00 pm on [Zoom](#)

Fall 2020 Co-Curricular Syllabus

“There will always be things we do not and probably never will entirely understand about one another...but these moments of...uncertainty...can be the moments when the most beautiful mysteries of human and other-than-human experience can be recognized and honored for themselves, not for what they reflect of ourselves.”

- Daniel Heath Justice, *Cherokee*, (2016). “A Better World Becoming.”

“To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences.”

- bell hooks (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*.

This is a 6-session, sustained series of dialogues. Intergroup and Intragroup Dialogue (IGD) are practice and theory-based programs, typically in higher education, to foster justice-oriented communities. Through dialogue (not merely discussion nor debate—points we will talk about in these sessions), we move through relationship-building, gaining trust, identifying common ground, navigating discomfort and ensuring safety, and learning about systemic and institutional inequities that shape our social locations and subsequent positionalities—i.e. our identities in relationship to one another.

In Nehiyaw (Cree) worldviews as in many Indigenous worldviews, we are not ourselves alone, but only in relationship to others (including the land). Dialogue is therefore a perfect mechanism for thinking through our ever-changing relationship to land as Indigenous people and other people of color. When we say relationships, we also mean responsibility. In Nehiyaw worldviews, *wahkotowin* and *miyo wicetowin* (having and being in right relationships through reciprocity and responsibility) are central natural laws. They do not merely indicate that because we are all related/in relationship that we suddenly get along; relationships carry *responsibility* and our unique relationships each carry uniquely different responsibilities. Our responsibilities to each other may look different than others’ responsibilities to us, others’ responsibilities to others, the land, etc. In these sessions, we may approach some difficult conversations, but mostly we are going to try to build tools (strategies, approaches, etc.) to understanding our responsibilities and to navigating dialogue safely and confidently so that we can achieve good, responsible relationships with one another—*miyo wicetowin*.

OBJECTIVES:

- To engage in dialogue across difference centering Indigenous experience and teachings of the land and colonialism.
- To better understand settler colonialism's role in the construction of land, gender and also in anti-Blackness, white supremacist racism, and other forms of injustice.
- Utilize Indigenous place-based teachings to inform questions and reflections on land-based activities and on dialogic materials (i.e. readings, podcasts and videos, etc.).
- Center and focus the experiences of Indigenous womxn and Two Spirit/trans* and non-binary communities' while recognizing that these communities have been historically and contemporaneously pushed to the margins even in justice-oriented and decolonial work.
- Cultivate relationships and build sustainable communities to work toward actionable, systemic, and decolonial change, particularly focusing on gender and racial justice that center land as relative and not as merely property or resource.
- Learn about the different constructions of land through Western/Eurocentric and Indigenous worldviews to think of land as relative with its own animacy, history, and experiences.
- Use time on the land as a form of reprieve from the challenges and sometimes discomfort of being in community across difference. Reflect on our relationships with the land as a way of reflecting on what it means and looks like to be in community and inform how we interact with the land and each other.
- Identify tools that help navigate being in community across difference more manageable, to navigate the discomfort of dialogue and community-based work across difference, and that help us heal our relationships to ourselves, each other, and the land.
- Create action plan(s) related to this work that moves us toward decolonial gender and racial justice and supports relationship-building with the land, particularly for Black and Indigenous individuals as well as for other folks of color and others with marginalized identities.

Colonization is an ongoing process in the lives of Indigenous people. Post-colonialism does not exist for the colonizers never left. There is nothing "post" about colonization on Turtle Island (predominantly the U.S. and Canada and other parts of North America). While many efforts have been made to resolve it, because colonization exists within the land, the land requires healing in order to achieve decolonization. Land is often taken up in social justice spaces as an entity that needs preservation and a lack of human interaction, which is often counter to Indigenous concepts of land.

Land is relative. Because land is relative, to not interact with it at all is to cut out a loved one; interaction is affection. We can also, however, interact with any entity we love too much. When we think of pollution or deforestation, we can certainly see plenty of examples of this. We can also interact with it too little, however. Forest fires raging in California are often because the "pristine" and "preserved wilderness" areas, something that was never a part of Indigenous concepts prior to colonization, are left alone. The Paiute and Indigenous nations in the Sierra Nevada region, for example, engaged in controlled fires since time immemorial to preserve the land and ensure that wildfires do not occur. Sweetgrass grows best when it is harvested. Land is meant to be a space of interaction. It carries DNA, mechanisms for communicating, and even

a culture, all rooted in Indigenous science (Gregory Cajete's [2000] *Native Science*), some of which western science is slowly beginning to demonstrate.

In this dialogue, we are going to think about land as relative, spend time on the land (which will include both landscapes that are "pristine" as well as other spaces that are not as "pristine"). We are invited to think about the land as relative using prompts to reflect on the root of the word "relative": "relate." How do we relate to the land? How do we perceive it relating to us? If it has a culture, what do we notice about it? Is it resilient? What even *is* land? As we start to think about these questions, we will also begin to think about how we relate to land (and land relates to us) in the same way that we relate to each other. Does it tell us anything about how we treat each other? Does it show us how we think of certain types of bodies or people?

Moving outward, colonialism has interrupted Indigenous relationships to land and constructed land as an entity to be owned rather than a relative to cherish, love, and be responsible to as the land is responsible to us. Does this tell us anything about our justice work? Does this help us think through how to engage in that work differently? What is missed in our work toward change if we miss centering these ideas and Indigenous experience?

Land is also a place for reprieve from the hard work we are about to do. Dialogue is messy, challenging, and often uncomfortable. If you begin to feel that way, good. It is supposed to be. What it is not supposed to be is unsafe. Anti-Black hate speech will not be tolerated and any form of hate speech will be interrupted. Erasure of Indigenous experiences by talking over will also not be tolerated. Sometimes these can be tricky to navigate and, under colonization, it would be almost impossible to create an entirely safe space, but we are moving toward that and will use our time to create and hold each other to collaborative agreements to minimize safety issues.

Time on the land, therefore, will serve as a space to think of how we learn to relate to each other as human beings. Time alone on the land should also be used as a space for finding reprieve from the messy work of dialogic activity to gain strength and learn relationship strategies to (re)engage in it again.

Colonization is violent. Let us together create the space we want outside of that to foster learning and growth, beauty and safe comfort, and a strong community with relationships that can help nurture future generations.

CONTENT:

All reading and audio/visual material is available at this shared [Google Drive](#). Please email the facilitator at mescully@syr.edu if you need any additional accommodations or have difficult accessing, etc.

An additional [document](#) is located in the drive with links to social media accounts, resources, and ideas/suggested locations for place-based activities, etc.

CONTENT CONT'D....

- Habtom S. & Scribe, M. (2020) "[To Breathe Together: Co-Conspirators For Decolonial Futures](#)" from *Yellowhead Institute*
- Kimmerer, Robin. (2020). "[Greed Does Not Have to Define Our Relationship to Land](#)" in *Dear America: Letters of Hope, Habitat, Defiance, and Democracy*.
- Konsmo, Marie. & Recollet, Karyn. (2019). "[Meeting the Land\(s\) where they are at](#)" in *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*.
- Knott, Helen (2017). "Peace River Rising." YouTube [video](#).
- John, K. D. & Brown, K.W. (2020). "Settler/Colonial Violences: Black and Indigenous Coalition Possibilities through Intergroup Dialogue Methodology" from *American Indian Culture & Research Journal*
- Mays, K.T. "[The Souls of White Indians](#)" from the 90% website
- [Media Indigena Podcast Episode 112](#).
- Nelson, Melissa K. (2008). *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*.
- Orange, Tommy. (2019). *There There*.
- Wesakecahk [story online \(1\)](#)
- Wesakecahk [story online \(2\)](#)
- Whitehead, Joshua (2019). *Johnny Appleseed*.
- Wilson, A. (2015). *Our Coming-In Stories* [lecture](#) online.

Suggested materials (not available on shared google drive or for mailing to participants):

- Cajete, Gregory (2000). *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*.
- Justice, Daniel Heath (2016). *A Better World Becoming in Critical Indigenous Studies: Engagements in First World Locations*.
- Kimmerer, R.W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

OTHER MATERIALS:

- Pick up your hydration backpack and button at the Native Student/Intergroup Dialogue Program Office:

[113 Euclid Avenue](#)
[Syracuse, NY 13244](#)

***We will discuss details of this in the first session.*

Session 1: Introductions

Sept 1

- Introductions, Overview and Objectives
 - Definitions & Collaborative Agreements
 - Break and Discussion of Onondaga Nation's Vision for a Clean Lake and Habtom & Scribe's (2020) "[To Breathe Together: Co-Conspirators For Decolonial Futures](#)"
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Session 2: Land as Wilderness, Land as Relative: Disrupting Purity Narratives of Bodies of Land, Water (and Humans)

Sept 15

- Read:
 - o Gray, Leslie. (2008). “Where is the Holy Land?” In *Original Instructions*
 - o Martinez, D; Salmon, E. Nelson, M. (2008). “Restoring Indigenous History and Culture to Nature.” In *Original Instructions*.
 - o Kimmerer, Robin. (2020). “[Greed Does Not Have to Define Our Relationship to Land](#)” in *Dear America: Letters of Hope, Habitat, Defiance, and Democracy*.

 - Spend a minimum of 1 hour on “pristine” land (“wilderness” park setting)
This can include sitting quietly and looking at still images or video of similar settings, such as National Park and State Park tours. Exert whatever physical activity is appropriate for you. If possible, try to have some medicines or a plant and sit by an open window if you engage in a video-land-based activity.

 - Journal your experience, informed by this week’s readings, and be prepared to share with the group (some or all of it)
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Session 3: Urbanity, Land Extraction, and Violence *content warning*

Sept. 29

- View: Helen Knott’s [Peace River Rising: The link between violence against Indigenous women and violence against the land](#) on YouTube.
 - Read
 - o Koonsmo, M. & Recollet, K. (2019) “Meeting the Lands Where they are At.” In *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*.
 - o Read Tommy Orange’s Prologue in *There There* (starting with page 9-16).
 - o Read Chapter III (pp. 23 up to pp. 24) in *Johnny Appleseed*.

 - Spend a minimum of 30 minutes on “heavily extracted” land (more “congested” park setting, urban or suburban areas, etc.)

 - Journal your experience, informed by this week’s readings, and be prepared to share with the group (some or all of it)
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Session 4: Storytelling and Indigenous Peoples’ Day

Oct 13

- Read the following chapters in *Johnny Appleseed*:
 - o Chapter VIII (pps. 34-35)
 - o Chapter LI (pps. 204-207)
 - o Read Chapter LIII-LIV (pps. 212-219)
 - o Optional: Chapter XVII (pp. 69-71) *content warning*: some graphic content
 - Spend time at an Indigenous People's Day event OR find a piece of news media to engage in if unable to attend an event
 - Craft a short story from your experiences to date (some or all of them, informed by your life experiences, these sessions and content, and these land-based activities). Be prepared to eventually workshop a draft of this.
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Session 5: Trickster Consciousness and Two Spirit/Indigequeer Land-Based Love

Oct 27

- View 3 short videos:
 - o The First Spring Flood – a Wesakecahk [story](#)
 - o Dr. Alex Wilson – Our coming in [Stories](#) (first 6 mins only necessary)
 - o Wisahcecahk and his scabs – a silly Wesakecahk [story](#)
 - Read: Melissa K. Nelson's (2008) "Mending the split-head society with trickster consciousness" in *Original Instructions*
 - Listen to: Media Indigena Podcast Episode #112: [Settler Sexuality's Slippery Slope](#)
 - Spend a minimum of 15 minutes on any land you desire (be prepared for weather/plan accordingly)
 - Revise your story and come prepared to discuss insights from your story.
 - Craft a revised version of your previous story (but do not delete previous story; identify differences in the two versions, even if changes are minimal).
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Session 6: Coalition or to Breathe Together: Heal the Land, Heal Each Other

Dec 15

- Revisit/read:
 - o Habtom S. & Scribe, M. (2020) “[To Breathe Together: Co-Conspirators For Decolonial Futures](#)” from *Yellowhead Institute*
 - o Mays “[The Souls of White Indians](#)”
 - o Optional:
 - John & Brown (2020). “Settler/Colonial Violences: Black and Indigenous Coalition Possibilities through Intergroup Dialogue Methodology” (*saved on Google Drive*)
 - Peruse Melanin Mvskoke on [Instagram](#) and/or [Twitter](#)
 - Spend a minimum of 15 minutes on any land you desire (be prepared for weather/plan accordingly)
 - Journal per reflection prompts provided
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Let us travel to meet one another. Let us not travel to take or become voyeurs in others’ lives. Rather let us travel so that we may bring the knowledges from the places we emerge as possible and feel comfortable being uncomfortable in the places that are not our homes. What do we learn in that discomfort? How do we learn to relate to each other in those spaces?

We may not all agree on the right ways to achieve justice, but let us aim to make this a growing, breathing space for knowledge, one that can change education outside of our community in high school and higher education spaces as well as broadly in the communities of which we are a part of directly connected to. Should we decide not to engage in change actions collaboratively, let us not forget our relationship and subsequent responsibility to these places and each other. Let us not forget where the work is done, who is doing it, how it has often been done. Should we choose to engage collaboratively, let us not forget to dialogue, In dialogue we can create the spaces colonization often will not allow for us. In dialogue, we can make sure our work does not fall stagnant. Colonization and oppression constantly change, shouldn’t our responses to it, also?

In all of this, let us remember that land in all its manifestations is teacher and relative. How we treat the land says a lot about how we treat ourselves and the most marginalized among us. Kinanâskomitin for being in this space and engaging in this work. Miyo mahcihowin.

ⁱ I use the term “womxn” here to highlight that while trans women are women (and therefore to say “women and trans women is a misnomer), their experiences need to be centered. I also use this term and the term Two Spirit to help talk about the ways in which gendered violence gets enacted on all kinds of bodies, not just binary women, when those bodies have been “othered” as non-heteronormative, not cis, not binary men, etc.