

## Medicine Walk

A medicine walk is a way common to some First Nations Peoples' and Inuit Peoples' vision quests, Australian Indigenous Peoples' walkabouts, and other Indigenous Peoples' rites of passage. The medicine walk is meditation while journeying. The journeying can be metaphorical or an actual journey. It connects us to our own sources of guidance and support during times of transition. It helps provide answers to the basic questions: where am I going? What must I leave behind? What did I "know" that is no longer accurate or useful? What do I need to learn now? It may also be used as part of a healing or renewal. Medicine, here, refers to what you need in order to be whole, and what you have to offer others. Your medicine is both a gift from outside and a quality of your inner nature. A medicine walk sometimes sparks the realization that there is a need for a longer and more intensive vision quest or walkabout – metaphorically or in reality.

When one thinks about the process of a Medicine Walk, it is:

- place based, often nature based or involving journeying outside  
(but it can be an "inner journey")
- self-directed (or assisted by a trusted guide)
- inquiry based
- personalized
- sometimes in response to something, someone, an event, a change in circumstances, new knowledge
- experiential
- based on critical thinking and problem-solving
- creative and innovative
- intended to deepen understanding
- developmental – you learn what you are ready to learn – you realize and strengthen competencies that will take you forward

### **To begin, start first from within...take your own metaphorical "Medicine Walk"**

"This (the problem of education in the wake of Canada's history of residential schooling) is not an Aboriginal problem. This is a Canadian problem. Because at the same time that Aboriginal people were demeaned in the schools and their culture and language were being taken away from them, and they were told that they were inferior, they were pagans, that they were heathens and savages and that they were unworthy of being respected – that very same message was being given to the non-Aboriginal children in the public schools as well. As a result, many generations of non-Aboriginal Canadians have had their perceptions of Aboriginal people 'tainted' ". *Chief Justice Murray Sinclair*

### **Strive for authenticity.**

Listen deeply and learn perspectives through direct experience connecting with and doing things with Indigenous Peoples and with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities – or at the very least dialogue with and seek guidance from those people who have a connection and informed experience and knowledge. Don't base your understanding on unconfirmed sources on social media or websites.

Listen to storytellers. Read. Walk the land. Spend time on the water. Observe. Connect.

## Develop a personal, reflective process.

Learn about the constructs and discourses of racism that have been the subtle message and language used historically by colonizers, government officials, institutions, and the eventual “dominant society” in the formation and existence of “Canada”:

Learn about how the stances and ways of thinking in *terra nullius*, the Doctrine of Discovery, the Great Chain of Being, the Right of Conquest, Westphalian sovereignty, liberalism and self-indigenization have impacted attitudes over time and literally shaped how European explorers, newcomers, settlers, contemporary non-Indigenous Canadians and even immigrants from other parts of the world have viewed Indigenous Peoples in North America and elsewhere.

Read the various versions of “The Indian Act” over time (the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869). In 1876, these acts were consolidated as the Indian Act). Find analyses of the impact of these acts (for example:

<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-indian-act.html>

21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act – Bob Joseph

Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, & Inuit Issues in Canada – Chelsea Vowel

Read The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples

<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307458586498/1307458751962>

Read John Ralston Saul’s “ “The Comeback: How Aboriginals Are Reclaiming Power and Influence”.

Find out what Marie Battiste and Carol Anne Hilton have to say.

Find out what Murray Sinclair, Pam Palmater, Wab Kinew, Perry Bellgarde, National Chief RoseAnne Archibald, Chief Isadore Day, Chief Stewart Phillip, Chief Ed John, Chief Clarence Louie, Jody Wilson-Rabould, Carey Newman, Kevin Lamoureux and Tanya Talaga have to say.

Read Richard Wagamese, Thomas King, Richard Van Camp, Eden Robinson, Monique Gray Smith, Drew Hayden Taylor, Tomson Highway, Waubgeshig Rice, David A. Robertson, Daniel Heath Justice, Jesse Wenthe and the hundreds of other Indigenous people finding and offering their authentic voice through literature and non-fiction.

Find out the story behind “Jordan’s Principle” and Cindy Blackstock

Read “First Nations 101” by Lynda Gray

Read “Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Read “What Kind of an Ancestor Do You Want to Be?” Hausdoerffer et al, editors

Read “Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future by Patty Krawec

Then read the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

- Explore Canada’s stance on this declaration, historically and currently

As you work through,

- **Think not for or against, but *about*. Think not either/or, but *and*.**
  - **Distinguish between the manner (how the information is presented) and the matter (what is really being said).**
  - **Balance the reflection with dialogue, a meaningful interaction and sometimes even persuasion of others with both publicly available reference points and subtler languages.**
  - **In this reflection, pursue the higher ideals and ethics of authenticity.**
  - **Enliven the struggle through the work of finding accurate history and research.**
  - **Seek out mentors, seek out like minds, then seek out those who would offer you differing views.**
- To do this, understanding ourselves and others, absorb and even acquire rich languages of expression, in the broad sense, including that of the arts, of culture, of gesture, of love.**

Understand the (historical and current) reasons behind the differences in worldview about Indigenous cultural ways and the ways commonly accepted in broader Canadian society, and the reasons for fear if not anger or disdain that Indigenous Peoples hold towards formal federal and provincial institutions such as law enforcement, justice, social services, education, health, business...

Find out about the experiences and truths now known about Residential School, Day Schools and the Indian Boarding Home Program

Read “Shingwauk’s Vision”, Miller.

Look at “Where Are the Children” on line (<http://wherearethechildren.ca> ).

Read “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” and the “94 Calls to Action” in response to the Truths told.

Inquire about how Indigenous children and youth have been regarded in “modern” public schooling – as they emerged from Residential School into public school, up to today. Delve into First Nations, Métis and Inuit education issues as they pertain to Federal First Nations education programs and funding compared to the structures provided by the provinces in public schools (off reserve). Delve into health issues, socio-economic issues, rights issues...all of the barriers and factors which contribute to the present situation for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In the same way, remember the perspectives on Indigenous Peoples and their cultures you were given in school – and investigate more historical perspectives that Canadians were purposely taught, and sometimes purposefully not taught, in school. Read the now available writings of John A McDonald and Duncan Campbell Scott where their attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples – and their true intentions towards them – are clearly control, oppression, elimination...genocide.

Take part in a blanket exercise.

**Once you have begun understanding the foundation to the uneasy relationship between Indigenous Peoples and institutions in Canada, in BC, on the Sunshine Coast...**

**Ask: What is the voice of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit community and families in this area? What do various Indigenous Peoples hold as their vision for and values concerning culture, education, health, well-being, their lands and waters, living things, their economy?**

**Ask: What does a Land Acknowledgement really mean and how should it be done so that it is not just performative?**

**In small steps, practice the inclusion of Indigenous ways, perspectives and knowledge in your life. Let this practice become a “habit of mind”. Strive to consistently add meaningful and inclusive layers to what you are learning. Strive for equity and anti-racism.**

Kerry Mahlman 2023