

# Decolonization Learning Journey

A four-part Learning Journey with Mi'kmaw Elders and knowledge sharers.

## Community Sector Council of Nova Scotia

Decolonization Learning Journey – Resource document

Webinar #1- June 2, 2020

### Hosting team:

- Elder Jane Meader, Elder, BACS & MEd
- Mary Beth Doucette, Assistant Professor and Purdy Crawford Chair in CBU's Shannon School of Business
- Nicole Cammaert, Associate Executive Director, CSCNS

### Guest speaker:

Stephen Augustine, Hereditary Chief on the Mi'kmaw Grand Council; Associate Vice President, Indigenous Affairs and Unama'ki College at Cape Breton University

### Topic:

The Mi'kmaw Creation Story and pre-contact way of life

### Highlights

- Reading of the unceded territory statement. Why do people include unceded territory acknowledgements in their opening statements? Acknowledging Indigenous territory and unceded land shows recognition of and respect for Indigenous Peoples. It is recognition of their presence both in the past and the present. Recognition and respect are essential elements of establishing healthy, reciprocal relations between nations. While acknowledging territory is very welcome, it is only a small part of cultivating relationships with First Nation communities. Acknowledging territory should take place within the larger context of genuine and ongoing work to forge real understanding, and to challenge the legacies of colonialism. Territorial acknowledgements should not be included as a formality before getting on with the “real business” of the meeting; they must be understood as a vital part of the business of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>
- What is the importance and the role(s) of a Mi'kmaw Elder? Elders are Knowledge Holders and spiritual and political leaders – teachers of Indigenous Knowledges, language, Mi'kmaw ways of knowing and learning. Elders are understood as key in fostering development of their community members at all levels, including identity development at the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual level.<sup>2</sup> Elders chart the path forward and as such, they are essential to include in all aspects of reconciliation

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the meaning behind land acknowledgements and how to approach writing one for your organization: <https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>

<sup>2</sup> This definition is sourced from the research of Gillian Austin and Ann Sylliboy: [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:THgCr3zocCj:kinu.ca/sites/default/files/doc/2017/Jul/you\\_cant\\_get\\_an\\_elder\\_in\\_an\\_app\\_final\\_june\\_26\\_2017.pdf+&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:THgCr3zocCj:kinu.ca/sites/default/files/doc/2017/Jul/you_cant_get_an_elder_in_an_app_final_june_26_2017.pdf+&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca)

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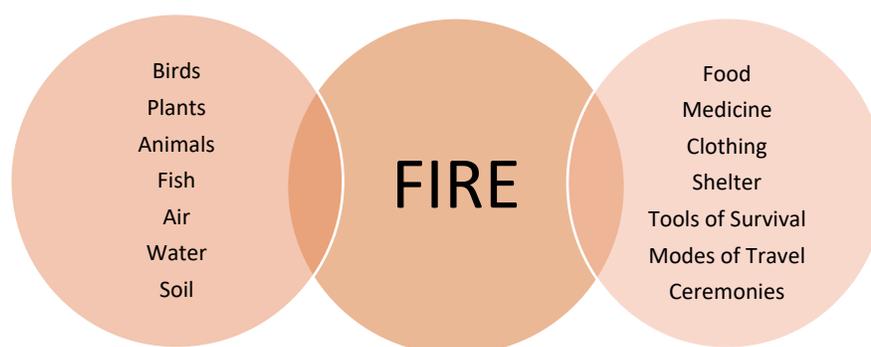
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work. Their lifetime of wisdom and understanding of culture provides necessary context that is vitally important for non-Indigenous Canadians to listen to and learn from.

- The Mi'kmaw language. It has been said that one of the most important cultural aspects to the identity of any people is their language, and as such, so it is for the Mi'kmaq. With the exception of hieroglyphics, the Mi'kmaw language is of an oral tradition – a spoken language that remains so today. Hundreds of years of colonialism, racism, and oppression has threatened most of Canada's Indigenous languages. Mi'kma'ki (colonially known as PEI, NFLD, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and parts of eastern Quebec and the northeastern coast of the United States) is the home of the Mi'kmaw language, which has likewise suffered a loss of speakers over generations. The foundation of Mi'kmaw culture is in its language, which is why speaking Mi'kmaw, learning the language (non-Indigenous people should learn, too!), and supporting Mi'kmaw language initiatives is paramount in efforts to preserve Mi'kmaw culture.<sup>3</sup>

## The Mi'kmaw Creation Story

The L'nu or Mi'kmaw Creation Story describes the creation of the world. The Creation Story establishes the morals, principles, and values between the Mi'kmaq and their environment. For Mi'kmaq, it provides guidance surrounding their relationship with the natural world and how to negotiate their survival with these elements through ceremonies, which are expressed through songs, stories, drumming, and dancing. There are 52 different Indigenous languages in Canada, and each carries its own story about the creation of the world. Their stories explain the natural environment surrounding them and their relationships that govern their lives.



The Mi'kmaw Creation Story explains the significance of land, water, fire, wind, and air in how life began for all things. These lessons are important in understanding how L'nu survived before

<sup>3</sup> For Mi'kmaq lessons, vocabulary, helpful posters, books, and songs, visit <http://firstnationhelp.com/ali/>

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European contact; however, they also play a significant role in how L'nu interact with the natural world today. The animals represent important spirits to Kluskap when he peeled himself off the earth, and he then continued to build relationships with all living things. These principles, morals, and values continue to guide how L'nu today interact with fellow L'nu, the birds, plants, animals, fish and the world.

There are seven levels involved in the Creation Story. The levels include 1) Giver of Life; 2) Grandfather Sun; 3) Mother Earth; 4) Kluskap; 5) His Grandmother; 6) His Nephew; and 7) His Mother.

1. Kisu'lkw	GREAT SPIRIT CREATOR	above
2. Niskam	GRANDFATHER SUN	within
3. Wskitqamu	MOTHER EARTH	below
4. Kluskap	LEADER	east
5. Nukami	GRANDMOTHER	south
6. Netawansom	NEPHEW	west
7. Nikanaknimkusi'skw	MOTHER	north

L'nu spiritual ceremonies and medicines are sacred. Ceremonies and medicines are connected to, interact with, the environment. When harvesting medicines ceremonies are used for smudging/cleansing the spirit of living entities and offerings are made to mother earth. The spiritual ceremonies are present in the everyday lives of Mi'kmaw people in healing, prayer, the distribution of resources, and in more structured ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and sharing circles at their mawiomis.

Read the Creation Story: <http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/mikmaq.pdf>

Watch an extended version of the Creation Story: <https://vimeo.com/359368259>