

# **Living Report: Aboriginal Learning From Place**

## **Aboriginal Learning and Knowledge Centre Animated Theme Bundle 1**

**Administrative Organization: Canadian Council of Learning**  
**Caretaker Organization(s): Red Crow Community College and FNAHEC**

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**Concept 1 – Kitaowahsinnoon** (*Our Nourishment*)

Naato'si, Kokomiki'somm, Iipisowaahs, Paahtsiipisowaahs  
Ihkitsikamiksi, Miohpokoiksi  
Sspommitapiiksi, Ksaahkommitapiiksi, Soyitapiiksi  
Naatoyitapiiksi, Akaitapiiksi, Aamato'simaiksi

**Concept 2 – Aitapissko** (*Place With Presence*): the understanding that spiritual presence(s) can occupy a particular place, such that we can communicate reciprocally with them toward the development or renewal of mutually beneficial, social relationships.

**Concept 3 – Aoksisawaato'p** (*Dialog*): a descriptive for our activities in place that assume the valid nature of the aitapissko concept, such that we regard spiritual presence(s) as we would any respected elder, and conduct ourselves in their proximity as we would in visiting an elder's home. Through aoksisawaato'p, we gain experiences and learning which are qualitatively different from those that can be acquired through mainstream approaches to cultural sites (i.e. activities framed by conceptions of inanimacy and linear history).

**Concept 4 – Aokakio'ssin** (*Awareness*): the conscious attempt to expand our familiarity with all that is happening in our environment. This is a complex practice, with

both practical and philosophical implications. In one sense, aokakio'ssin is very simply the skill requisite of any hunter and/or gatherer, who must seek to embody an ever-more-nuanced knowledge of regional and local ecologies so as to ensure successful subsistence and the avoidance of hazards. Philosophically, however, aokakio'ssin is based in an understanding that our abilities to perceive events in our surroundings – or otherwise stated, to receive and respond to various forms of communication – are both augmented and constrained by “what we think we know” and by the habits that accompany such knowledge. Instead of allowing our preconceptions to mislead us, rendering us unobservant or inflexible, we must humble ourselves to concede that our knowledge is neither empirical nor comprehensive, but rather connected to specific lineages of intellectual exchange within limited social groups. Moreover, because there is much going on around us that we can't see, we should try to be aware of absences as well as presences. In this manner, we may remain open to knowledge exchanges with all other social beings (including places, plants, animals, spirits, etc.) in our environment. To do otherwise is considered dangerous, as it may cause us to be unresponsive to opportunities that would engender our continued survival.

**Concept 5 – Innaihtsiyssin (Co-Existence):** many of the monuments of kitawahsinnoo – including certain cairns, tipi rings, or geographic features - mark the origin sites of alliances established to ensure mutual benefit between different societies sharing a single territory. For instance, Soyoohpawahko (otherwise known as Blackfoot Crossing) is recognized as the place where Treaty Seven was made. Similarly, Paahtomahksikimi (Inner Lake) is where the Blackfoot people first accepted transfer from the animals of kitawahsinnoo, in exchange for our acknowledgement of their right to live without interference, and our promise not to abuse them. Each monument to innaihtsiyssin carries important lessons for the maintenance of our socio-ecological order, and each comprises a tangible presence that, when revisited and the stories retold, functions to sustain and renew the relationships that are most vital to our continued existence.

**Concept 6 – Ainna'kootsiyo'p (Mutual Respect):** this concept derives from a Blackfoot-specific conservation ethics, ainna'ki'p, which is itself anchored in the recognition of cyclicity and the need for conscientious acts of renewal. Imagine a barrel for catching and containing rain that is to be used as drinking water. In this scenario, one must attend very carefully to the water that is caught. If too much is used before the next rain, thirst will result. If too little, one would not be able to replenish the barrel when new rain arrived. Similarly, care should be given to assure that no contaminants are introduced to the supply, and an awareness of the barrel's condition maintained to safeguard against leaks. This is ainna'ki'p, the Blackfoot understanding of conservation; the preservation of a quality resource requires measured use, timely renewal, and vigilance. When applied toward relationships between living beings, the same approach becomes ainna'kootsiyo'p, a condition that might be described as mutual respect. For instance, since human beings are meant to be sustained by the nutrition of berries and deer meat (among other things), those plants and animals to be taken will

present themselves to us. It is our obligation, in return for their respectful assistance, never to entirely refuse such a food offering, nor to take more than we will use. In fact, all surplus of such gifts should be given away to others in need, rather than hoarded or wasted. The same ethics can also be applied toward knowledge resources: children, elders, sacred places, stories, ceremonies, songs, animals, stars, etc. In relation to all of these beings, we should maintain an awareness of, and act upon, both our need for their continued nourishment and the reciprocal responsibilities we bear for accepting their help.

- Kitaisstakatohpinnaan ()
- Kitayisooksspinnnaan ()
- Kitaottakooksspinnnaan ()
- Kitaopiinomooksspinnnaan ()
- Kitaikamotsiipioksspinnnaan ()

**Concept 7 – Ikkitstaan ():**

**Concept 8 – Aatsimihka’ssin (*Reconciliation*):** this is one of the most important aspects of our current proposal. For a number of decades after the enactment of Treaty Seven, members of our community were restricted to the boundaries of the Blood Reserve and coerced - by starvation, theft, physical and psychological terrorism, and the separation of child from parent or elder - to discontinue a way of life that included the practices described above. As a result, there has been a tremendous impact on the renewal of our relationships (or *family-arities*) with many of the significant places of kitawahsinnoon. While we may not be responsible for creating this condition, it is important to recognize its existence and act accordingly. In order to do this we rely upon aatsimihka’ssin, gestures that are meant to demonstrate our respect for these places and our recognition of their importance in our lives. The expression of aatsimihka’ssin may take the form of gifts, as when we present food or tobacco to aitaipisko. But even more important is simply *being in place*, visiting, aoksisawaato’p, sharing with place our celebrations, our spiritual ceremonies, and the education of our youth.

## 2.3 Feeding The Bundle

### Continuous Visiting Practice

Role In Place-Based Programs: BEAHR Program (BTEST); Lethbridge Aboriginal Employment Centre; Chinook Edge School District; University of Lethbridge; University of Calgary; University of Alberta.

Introducing Professional Organizations to Kitawahsinnoon: HEG (Human Environment Group); Parks Canada; FNMI.

Knowledge-Exchange With Blackfoot Community College: collaborative site visits.

Knowledge-Exchange with University of Montana (Missoula): collaborative site research; ongoing discussions regarding Lewis and Clark.

Negotiating Repatriation of Site Data with Province of Alberta, Historical Resources Office:

Developing A Presence-In And Partnership With Parks Canada: Waterton reintroduction of bison and controlled burning practices.

Knowledge Exchange And Relationship Building With Inuit:

Knowledge Exchange And Relationship Building With Pomochi Maya:

Aboriginal Learning From Place Dialog, Aisinai'pi (1-2 Nov 07):

Lac St. Anne Knowledge Exchange Event (Partnership With Blue Quills College):

Partnership With Galileo Project:

Development Of Blackfoot Digital Library Under Lois Hole Initiative: place as an interface to knowledge access.

Presentation Of Itsinikssiistsi Case Study, Blackfoot Influences on Abraham Maslow: Archives of the History of American Psychology (University of Akron); Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP); University of Montana.

Presentations Of Theme Bundle: ABLKC Annual Meeting; Blackfoot Confederacy Cypress Hills Event; Pacific Northwest Canadian Studies Consortium (PNCSC).

Kahsinnooniksi Film Production and Distribution (SSHRC)

Partnership With Arrow Archaeology

Supervision Of Master's Thesis Regarding Stories And Place

### 3. Literature on Aboriginal Learning From Place

#### 3.1 Literature Review Chronicle

#### 3.2 Identifying Themes of (Mis)Representation

Theme 1 – Superior Human Evolution

Theme 2 – Primitive Wilderness to Civilize

Theme 3 – Virgin to Ravage

Theme 4 – Wandering Tribes

Theme 5 – Shaper of Cultural Traits  
Theme 6 – Deceased Elders  
Theme 7 – Pieces of the Puzzle  
Theme 8 – Extraterrestrial Monuments  
Theme 9 – Mother to Respect  
Theme 10 – Repository for Wisdom

### 3.3 Identifying Gaps in the Literature

Gap 1 – Ecology of Co-Existence  
Gap 2 – Rule of Non-Interference  
Gap 3 – Places with a Living Presence  
Gap 4 – Attached Descriptions

### 3.4 Need To Re-Define “The Literature”

A Literacy Of Place

## 4. Place-Based Aboriginal Educational Programs

4.1 Identifying Place-Based Programs

4.2 Surveying Place-Based Programs

4.3 Synthesis of Findings

4.4 Need to Transcend “Education” and Accept “Learning”

## 5. Appendices

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