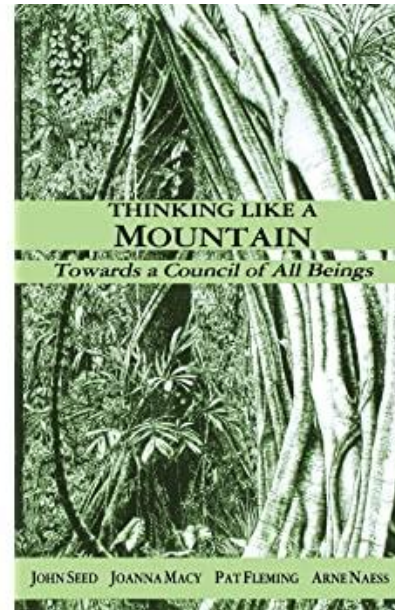


The Council of All Beings



Mother Earth is calling for bridge-building between Western and Indigenous worldviews (Hatcher, 2009). The Council of All Beings is an activity that is planned to bridge the gap between Western science and the indigenous worldview through ritual. The activity is described in the book “Thinking Like a Mountain” by John Seed and Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming and Arne Naess.

In the Council of All Beings, children select an animal that they would like to represent at the Council. The activity can be done by one class or by a number of classes in preparation for Earth Day or any celebration or gathering. Several grades in a school can become involved or just one. The Council can be held in the gym, a large open area, in a classroom or outdoors depending on the number of students involved and the weather



Each child represents an animal or a plant. The child attends the Council as the voice of that being and each living thing can be represented by one child. The child may make a mask to hold while they speak up on behalf of that animal or plant. The first choice of plant or animal goes to the primary or youngest class involved. A sheet is placed on a clipboard and started in the primary class by the principal or teacher-in-charge of the Council of All Beings.

For instance, if a child selects the tiger, no one else may choose that animal for the Council Meeting. This is an excellent Earth Day or any day activity. It has a bit of ritual and ceremony which brings reverence to the ecological niche that each living thing on the planet needs in order to survive. When a child speaks on behalf of another organism a special connection to that organism is forged. At our school Bella was asked to drum the participants into the school gymnasium to the heart beat of Mother Earth. This impacted the animals to be quiet and reverent in their roles representing their chosen animal.



Bella Googo a Young Mi'kmaw girl brought the Beings into the Council to the Heartbeat of Mother Earth, setting a reverend tone for the ceremony.



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Costumes can be done simply with paper plates and children can sit on the floor in a circle. A microphone is nice but not necessary. Sometimes we just pass a “Talking Stick” to signal that that “Being” has the floor and will speak next in the Talking Circle, an indigenous practice.

talking stick can help students to treat the event as something special in which the voices of all beings must be heard. They have the important job of speaking on behalf of that living thing. Sometimes older children are asked to speak on behalf of something that is endangered like the Right Whale or the Lady Slipper.

Something is placed in the centre of the circle, such as a globe or some candles, even an electronic candle will do if there are fire regulations to follow.

Council of All Beings

I am the _____.

I live in

I need

Please don't

Rationale:

In this simple activity ritual is used to develop a different relationship with the natural world. To truly indigenize education, it must be unfiltered by the Western Lens. The Council of All Beings was drawn together by environmental educators on three continents, John Seed, Joanna Macy and Arne Naess. They wrote the book **Thinking like a Mountain: the Council of All Beings** to bridge the gap between western science which links us to the head, the cognitive realm and other indigenous “ways of being” that link us to the heart (the affective realm) of the natural world, through ritual. Indigenous education teaches us of the importance that ritual plays in developing relationship. Many ceremonies of the Mi’kmaq bring the reverence and the sense of connectedness that is missing in Western Science. Both approaches have strengths. A combination of both has a greater strength than either on its own. Thinking like a Mountain provides a context for ritual identification with the natural world and can perform the important relationship building between community and the “other-than-human world” . The Mi’kmaq term, *Msit No'kmaq* is one of the most meaningful terms in the language because it alludes to a relationship to the other-than-human world that is missing in a western science approach. “The exploration of traditional American Indian education and its projection into a contemporary context is much more than just an academic exercise. It illuminates the true nature of the ecological connection of human learning and helps to liberate the experience of being human and being related at all its levels.” (Cajete, 2009)

The devastating impact of humans on Mother Earth can be seen as a result of the anthropocentric hierarchy which is evident in many Western Sciences. Mother Earth is calling for bridge-building between Western and Indigenous worldviews. This is a challenge for teachers because of the nature of Indigenous scientific knowledge. Eurocentric, or Western scientific knowledge is passed on as a package, using books, videos and multitudes of supports and props. Aboriginal, or Indigenous knowledge can be described as ‘ways of knowing’ and is acquired through a creative, participatory involvement with Mother Earth. There is an inherent trust in the learner and an intimate relationship between the learner and the ‘knowledge’, with an experienced guide to help. (Hatcher & Barrett, 2009).

References:

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- Seed, J. Macy, J. , Flemming, P. & Naess, A. (2007). *Thinking like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*, New Society Publishers. Gabriola Island. BC.

