

Koqwe'l Net A'tukwaqnn?: Educators' LE Support Guide

Overview:

Begin preparing for this LE by watching the Mi'kmaw History Month Poster Reveal Video:

<https://vimeo.com/1121878271?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Then, read the following short article:

Prune Harris, Cheryl Bartlett, Murdena Marshall and Albert Marshall, "Mi'kmaq Night Sky Stories; Patterns of Interconnectiveness, Vitality and Nourishment," *Communicating Astronomy with the Public Journal* 4, no. 2 (September 2010): 14-17. <https://capijournal.org/articles/82/mikmaq-night-sky-stories-patterns-of-interconnectiveness-vitality-and-nourishment>

Key points to consider:

- A'tukwaqnn (Mi'kmaw stories) are living knowledge. They are a primary teacher for Mi'kmaw people. Through a'tukwaqnn, Mi'kmaq carry deeply rooted traditional and ancestral knowledge to future generations.
- A'tukwaqnn are rich, multi-layered and deeply interconnected. It may take time to fully grasp how everything comes together. This is why a'tukwaqnn are meant to be told over and over again.
- The listener is just as important in the relationship with a'tukwaqnn (a story) as the a'tukowinu (storyteller) is. They are meant to develop a relationship with the spirit of the a'tukwaqnn.
- With a'tukwaqnn, listeners have a responsibility to "listen and reflect" (Albert Marshall).

In this LE, and with all a'tukwaqnn, it isn't just the a'tukowinu who is doing active work by sharing with a passive listener. The listener's job is just as important. As Elder Murdena Marshall teaches us in the article, every a'tukwaqnn has a living spirit. A'tukwaqnn are relatives too! When you listen to a'tukwaqnn and reflect on it, you're helping take care of it, respecting it, and building, or strengthening a relationship with it.

But just like a relationship with a human friend or relative, you can't build a strong relationship with anyone with just a single meeting. The more you meet, the more time you spend with one another, the stronger your relationship becomes. It's the same thing with a'tukwaqnn: the more you listen to a'tukwaqnn, the more time you spend with them, the more you experience, the more you'll understand what a'tukwaqnn have to teach you. As Elder Albert Marshall says: "Traditionally, nothing was taught as black and white. Everything was story...where you have the responsibility to listen and reflect. This is a much more profound way of learning because you have the opportunity for a relationship with the knowledge." (17)

This Learning Experience takes these words to heart. Part of the activity is certainly to demonstrate how truth is shared through a'tukwaqnn in Mi'kmaw culture, but it is not about finding the "right" answer, or doing "well" on an assignment—this is why it is important to share with learners that there are very few ways to be "wrong" when they share their experience with a'tukwaqnn. It is meant to provide an



opportunity to approach learning through a Mi'kmaw worldview, through relationship with a'tukwaqnn and the knowledge they must share.

As Elder Murdena explains in the article, "Stories...are heard many times so the participating listener can develop a relationship with the spirit of the story and thus deepen her or his experience and understanding as the story is told" (17). A'tukwaqnn are meant to be revisited, and as a person lives their life and observes and interacts with the world around them, a'tukwaqnn may reveal more as their understanding deepens. This is part of the reason why a'tukwaqnn are living knowledge—they're always teaching us.

In this way, educators introducing this activity to learners may want to reinforce the idea that to build a relationship to a'tukwaqnn isn't to listen to it with the goal of finding the right answer or mining for facts. It's about listening to a'tukwaqnn as it is, letting the relationship with it build as they begin their learning journey. This is why this LE asks educators to share the Mi'kmaw History Month a'tukwaqnn multiple times.

