

Tata and Saln

Readers' Theatre

By Melody Martin-Googoo

Educator Notes:

Netukulimk is a *lived* value, and it is taught to Mi'kmaq through their relationship with their Elders, their community, and the broader world around them. This Readers' Theatre, modeled after many real conversations with Mi'kmaw Elders in community, gives learners a chance to experience what the lived relationships (human and non-human) that help us understand netukulimk look and feel like.

For Mi'kmaw, our relationship with our Elders is so important in understanding who we are, and in passing on our identity to future generations. When the Mi'kmaq experienced Treaty Denial (see the Treaties section of RoR for more information), these relationships were harmed through trauma, and many Elders did not feel safe, or able, to share their knowledge with their own children when they were young. Many Elders report experiencing grief at this reality and are thankful that they are able to feel safe enough to share these teachings with their grandchildren now. *Tata and Saln* is also a love letter to those Elders who are healing, who are making up for lost time with their grandchildren, and even children, and helping to guide them as they strengthen their relationships with msit no'kmaq.



Tata and Saln

Character List:

Narrator 1	(13 lines)
Narrator 2	(11 lines)
Grandfather – Tata	(28 lines)
Grandson – Saln	(25 lines)

Vocabulary:

Kwis	a term used to describe son in Mi'kmaw, often used as a term of endearment
Tata	a term used to describe grandfather in Mi'kmaw, often used as a nickname
Mawio'mi	a gathering
Netukulimk	gathering what we need from the world around us to feed, clothe, shelter and do all the things we need to do to take care of ourselves. BUT, netukulimk also means that we take care of ourselves without harming the environment around in. In Mi'kmaw worldview, animals, plants and people are all related and we must respect those relationships.
Kisulk	Creator
msit no'kmaq	"all my relations" When Mi'kmaq people say "msit no'kmaq," it is a way of saying "I understand that we are all related and I am grateful to be tied together in spirit with animals, plants and all living beings." Many Mi'kmaq use this phrase during ceremonies to honour and thank the Creator for all life.
E'e	yes/ an affirmative



Notes of interest:

Adding "ji'j" to the end of a name: the suffix "ji'j" refers to something small in Mi'kmaw. To add that to the end of someone's name—usually a child's—means "little So and So" and is often a term of endearment.

The Mi'kmaw Ecological Calendar: while the Gregorian calendar consists of 12 months and tracks the amount of time it takes the Earth to orbit the sun, the Mi'kmaw Ecological Calendar consists of 13 moons—the amount of times the moon orbits the earth per year. This calendar tells time with moons, seasons, and indicator species (eg. When you hear frogs croaking in the spring, you know eel are running), and requires a recognition that we are connected to all our relations, as our relations are connected to us (msit no'kmaq).

Tobacco offering: For Mi'kmaw, offering tobacco, a sacred medicine, is a way of honouring spirits: of the lands, waters, and of course, our ancestors. Tobacco carries our messages right to them.

Saln uses his left hand to make a tobacco offering. Many Mi'kmaq offer tobacco with their left hand because it is closest to their heart.

An important part of Saln's learning journey in this Readers' Theatre is that he is using all of his senses to be aware of his environment. Elder Lillian Marshall taught that "observing, memorizing and comparing" what we experience in our environment is and was crucial to maintaining our relationship with msit no'kmaq.



Tata and Saln

– SCENE 1 –

A Middle School Somewhere in Mi'kma'ki

(approximately 15 minutes)

- Narrator 1: It is almost summer in Mi'kma'ki. The sun is shining, birds are singing, the trees are vibrant and bursting with energy.
- Narrator 2: A young boy, walks with his grandfather in the woods. The two are comfortable, relaxed and smiling, because the day is new and promises adventure.
- Grandfather: Saln, we're almost there. Let's stop here and take off our socks and shoes.
- Grandson: Chuckles to himself. I never stopped in the middle of the woods to take off my socks and sneakers before, but I trust you. I gotta warn you, my feet probably stink.
- Grandfather: Your feet stink? My feet are seventy eight years full of stink!
- Narrator 1: The Elder playfully messes up his grandson's hair. The two sit on a fallen log to remove their "stinky" socks and sneakers.
- Narrator 2: The boy zips open his back pack and helps his grandfather with his shoes and socks. He shoves the items into the bag and zips it closed again.
- Grandson: Takes a deep breath and sighs. It's peaceful here Tata.
- Grandfather: I used to play here when I was a boy. I know these woods like the back of my hand. I know every tree, brook, path... I wandered the woods with my friends all the time when I was your age.



Grandson: Wow. It must've been fun when you were a kid. I never go into the woods.

Grandfather: Salnji'j, when was the last time you ever explored the woods?

Grandson: Never! Unless you count that 5km Zombie run I did with mom one year. I got a wicked medal for finishing that one. Oh ya! And a new running shirt too.

Narrator 1: Grandfather shakes his head to himself, and stares up into the trees. He looks around and takes a minute to observe what he sees.

Narrator 2: The grandson reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone. He touches the screen and presses buttons. He lifts it up into the air and then spins it from left to right, then back again.

Grandfather: Talukwen (Dull-loo-gwen)? What are you doing?

Grandson: No Wi-Fi...my phone's not workin.

Grandfather: You don't need your phone. Put that thing away. We never had those when we were kids. You want Wi-Fi? Look around you, you see these trees? Their roots? That's Wi-Fi. That's nature's communication network right there.

Grandson: What do you mean? Trees are just trunks with branches and leaves.

Grandfather: What the?!

Grandson: I'm just kiddin Tata (Da-da). I know what you're talkin about. I remember you telling us about that stuff. I just forgot a bit.

Grandfather: Salnji'j, you are my youngest grandson. I'm seventy-eight years old and Creator could call me to the spirit world at any time.

Grandson: Tata, did you take my father into the woods and share these things with him?



Narrator 1: The grandfather is silent. He doesn't seem to answer his grandson's question, but his grandson understands the silence. The two, continue walking along the mossy trails in the woods.

Narrator 2: Grandfather gently removes branches so that they do not slap Saln in his face. Saln carefully walks alongside his grandfather, so as to keep with his pace. He is careful and does not want to disrespect his elder.

Grandson: Hey Tata (Da-da)! Check out that bird's nest over there. Let's go check if there are eggs in it.

Grandfather: It's egg laying time, and there are probably eggs in it. But we are going to let it be. We do everything out of respect for nature, for the environment. Saln, you remember that, as a young Mi'kmaw man, you need to know the importance of cycles.

Grandson: Cycles? What do you mean?

Grandfather: Look up at the sun, can you see it through the trees? Observe the position of it in the sky. The cycle of the seasons, summer, fall, winter and spring...those cycles reflect the earth's journey around the sun. Tonight, look up at the moon, observe its position in the sky. The moons of the year, reflect what is going on in our lives during that time with the environment-- how our people, our ancestors, the Mi'kmaq, gathered food and survived off the land.

Grandson: Did your grandfather teach you this?

Grandfather: Yup, and his grandfather taught him and so forth. And so, now I am teaching you.

Grandson: So, it's spring, and there are eggs in birds' nests, and I need to remember that. How did our ancestors know all of these cool things?

Grandfather: Well, for starters, our Mi'kmaw ancestors spent a lot of time in the woods. They observed, they memorized and they compared everything they remembered from the season or year before. After doing that over and over, they became experts of the woods, the sky, the water, the world around them.

Grandson: I wanna be an expert of the woods.



Grandfather: You, my grandson, are an expert of the woods. You know how I know? You are connected to the cycle.

Grandson: I learned this in school, when Gerald came to visit my class! He said that we live in a cycle and that we're responsible for anything that we do to the planet or to animals or bugs or plants and the water and stuff like that.

Grandfather: Oh yes, that's right. I remember Gerald when he was a young boy! His grandmother, Viney, used to pick mayflowers and sell them in these little birchbark cones up there in Halifax. She taught him well.

Grandson: So, Tata (Da-da), I never really thought about the sun before. Kiju (gi-joo) likes to watch the sunrise and she took me to the sunrise ceremony during the mawio'mi last week. I was right tired getting up so early, but I was glad I went.

Grandfather: The sun and the moon are important to our understanding of the cycles and seasons. We have thirteen moons in one year right? Well, every one of those moons is named after something that goes on in our environment. It's part of the ecological calendar...

Grandson: Ecological...Eco..E..Ecological is a big word, but I know it! It's like being part of the web of life or something, eh?

Grandfather: What I tell you? You're already an expert. So, those moons give us months and it gives us four seasons. It tells us where to be, when to be there, in order to harvest the material or food sources we need in order to survive.

Grandson: Our ancestors were so smart! But we don't need to know that stuff today. I can just look it up online or use an app or something, eh?

Grandfather: What the?! You can't depend on robots to tell you what your ancestors knew. That's why I am teaching you these things. This is what builds your identity as a Mi'kmaw, our deep knowledge of Netukulimk.



Like my old friend, Lillian always said; our ability to observe the world around us, to compare and memorize what we know is our way of exploring and knowing science.

Grandson: You're smart Tata and that's why I love being with you all the time.

Grandfather: I love being with you too Kwis. But, ohhh boy, my knees aren't as young as they used to be.

Grandson: Are you tired? Should we stop? You wanna go back? I don't wanna go back. I like it out here. I like listening to your stories.

Grandfather: If you listen carefully, the earth shouts out these stories. Saln, there are teachings in the trees, wisdom in the running brooks and knowledge in the stones...

Narrator 1: Saln looks up into the trees, scans the tree line and lets his ears search for the sounds of a running brook. He wants to understand the knowledge Grandfather promises.

Grandfather: I want to take you someplace my grandfather and grandmother would take me and my sisters when we were about your age. Saln, I'm proud of you, you know that? You made me proud to see you dance at the mawio'mi last week.

Narrator 1: Saln is shy when he hears his grandfather tell him he is proud, but it fills his heart with pride. He smiles to himself because he feels so loved. It feels good to hear kind things.

Grandfather: You need to go out into the woods Kwis. You and your friends shouldn't be afraid to run through the mossy ground, jump into the rivers and brooks, climb trees and observe nature. The woods are healing. When you spend less time in the woods, your senses narrow. You lose touch with healing.

Grandson: The moss is soft under my feet. It feels right cool walkin' with no shoes and I like it.

Grandfather: Let your feet feel the earth. You're healing your bond with nature. Saln, you ever lay in a field and watch the clouds? Listen to the wind? That's healing, your bare feet on the ground is connecting you to everything around you, the trees, the leaves, the birds, the plants, the animals--even our ancestors.



Grandson: How do my feet connect to our ancestors?

Grandfather: Let's walk a little bit up this way, and I'll show you.

Narrator 2: The two continue to walk a bit deeper into the woods. The Grandfather knows where he is going, and the two walk along. The woods open to a small and open grassy clearing.

Narrator 1: But, in the middle of the small and open clearing there is a tree.

Narrator 2: Not just any tree. A big, round maple tree. The tree is so big that probably Saln, his grandfather and a few of his cousins could fit around it. It was that big.

Narrator 1: Saln stops in the middle of his tracks and he looks way up to the top of the tree.

Grandson: Wwwwow (whispers to himself)

Grandfather: You see that tree Saln? I used to play by that tree when I was your age. That tree is probably over four hundred and fifty years old. I'm sure it's seen a lot in its lifetime.

Narrator 1: Saln walks around the tree and reaches his hand out to touch the bark. The bark is rough and bumpy.

He is in awe. This tree is as old as the dinosaurs.

Narrator 2: Old as the dinosaurs? Dinosaurs are like super-duper old. The tree is old, but not as old as dinosaurs.

Narrator 1: Okay, the tree is as old as a four hundred and fifty year-old tree.

Narrator 2: The grandfather reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a pair of leather moccasins. They belong to Saln.

Grandson: You brought my moccasins?

Grandfather: Yes, and I thought it would be nice to dance for our ancestors.

Grandson: But, I'll feel funny dancing. There's no music. There's no one here.



Grandfather: Oh, our ancestors are here. You need to honour them. This tree has seen me as a boy, it has seen my grandfather and his grandfather before that. And now, after all of these years, it's time to show them your strength.

Narrator 1: Grandfather opens up a worn leather pouch and places the tobacco into Saln's left hand. Grandfather loses his eyes, holds up his hands, and whispers prayers to Kisulk. Saln follows what his grandfather does and completes his own offering.

Narrator 2: Saln puts on his moccasins and stares at the maple tree. He looks way up to the top and sees the leaves vibrant against the big blue sky. He feels the wind on his skin. He is quiet and still.

Grandfather: Saln, close your eyes, listen for the grandfathers...feel the beat of the drum.

Narrator 1: The grandson closes his eyes and is silent. He begins to hear the beat of the drum. It's quiet at first, but then it beats louder. Is it his heartbeat? Is it the beat of a drum? Saln begins to move his feet, up and down to the beat. He moves faster, pounding gently on the grass, he slowly moves in a circle, making his way around the tree.

Narrator 2: Grandfather opens his own eyes and smiles. It makes him happy to see his grandson confident and proud. Suddenly he looks up and there above the tall and grand maple tree, are three eagles, soaring majestically.

Narrator 1: Saln slows to a still. He opens his eyes and sees his grandfather. Grandfather is smiling proudly. He looks like a young boy. Saln has honoured the ancestors.

Grandson (Saln): (whispers softly) Msit No'kmaq (m-sit, no-guh-mah)

Narrator 2: Grandfather takes a deep breath and smiles, he nods his head...

Grandfather: E'e (ehh-ehh)... msit no'kmaq (m-sit, no-guh-mah)

