LEARNING MATERIALS

SŪKŪJULA TEI
(Stories of My Mother)
By David Hernández Palmar and Flor Palmar (Wayuu lipuana)
MEANING

Reciprocity
The way of life that centers mutual exchange and sharing amongst all beings — past, present, and future, seen and unseen — and the Earth
“This film shares a memory of my mother’s childhood, and I adapted it to recreate a parable of reciprocity through an everyday encounter of Wayuu people, visually inspired by the stories of Ramón Paz Ipuana, a great Wayuu writer. The mise-en-scene embraces the simplicity of everyday life with hints of Indigenous futurism that suggest that our future is a return to a community aesthetic. I feel that the camera is like a spirit that was also visiting the set. “Making this film reaffirms that Indigenous peoples can make movies and tell their own stories even under adverse conditions. When dreamers come together we can achieve a beautiful result.” — David

David Hernández Palmar is a filmmaker, independent curator and film programmer with recognized experience in the Latin American region. He has co-directed films such as ‘Owners of The Water’; ‘Wounmainkat’; and the short film ‘The Foreign Body’, which premiered in competition at the Toronto International Film Festival and which won First Prize at FICMAYAB (13th International Festival of Film and Communication of Indigenous Peoples). David is currently producing and co-directing numerous projects across Latin America and he continues to advise and curate Indigenous media initiatives around the world.

Flor Palmar is a leading figure in Venezuela’s effort to develop bilingual, multicultural education for the nation’s diverse Indigenous peoples. In addition to having worked in Venezuela’s Ministry of Education as coordinator of Programs in the Office of Bilingual Intercultural Education and serving as a member of the National Commission on Curriculum within the Ministry of Education, she has authored and co-authored international publications related to the history and practice of Indigenous education.

Simplicity of everyday life with hints of Indigenous futurism

ARTIST’S STATEMENT

David Hernández Palmar
Wayuu lipuana

Flor Palmar
Wayuu lipuana
FILM SYNOPSIS

Lessons about sharing and caring

Rosa, a wise Wayuu woman, travels to her sister Amaliata’s village for a long overdue visit. As she enters the village she encounters Amaliata’s children, upon whom she will impart important lessons about sharing and caring for each other. In the sisters’ conversations, viewers are introduced to common understandings of how reciprocity is enacted in Wayuu life.
Caring for the Land, Nurturing the Language

The Wayuu people are Indigenous to La Guajira peninsula in the northern regions of today’s Colombia and Venezuela.

Maps of the northern coast of the continent currently referred to as South America, highlighting the homelands of the Wayuu People and how the Colombian and Venezuelan borders were mapped on to La Guajira Peninsula on Wayuu land.

https://www.google.com/maps/@11.7080984,-72.3033154,202159m/data=!3m1!1e3

Like all Indigenous communities whose lives are shaped by five centuries of colonialism in the Americas, Wayuu people continue to experience severe cultural disruption due to the domination of state structures, policies, and an international border. These disruptions are simultaneously created and exacerbated by extreme poverty and education disparities, and help to explain a high rate of child mortality. At the same time, the intensification of climate change has resulted in increasing difficulty for Wayuu communities to maintain themselves in ways they are accustomed to. This includes the values of sharing and caring for each other even over great distances, as this film demonstrates.
Caring for the Land, Nurturing the Language (continued)

A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY
This film provides a glimpse into daily life of the Wayuu people while also imparting lessons on how reciprocity is embedded in the Wayuu way of life. This is perhaps most apparent when Amaliata and Rosa are talking about Rosa bringing her harvest, and Rosa notes the meagerness of the harvest due to low rainfall and worms ruining much of it. Even in the face of a food shortage there is still a sense of responsibility to share what little there may be. Solidarity is the foundation of reciprocity and also of Wayuu culture, and we see this mutual support between the sisters and their families, guided by love and compassion.

A HUMAN VALUE
This film conveys that there is nothing particularly unusual about what reciprocity means in Wayuu communities. While it may be accurate to state that what sets Indigenous values apart from those of dominant colonial societies is the centrality of reciprocity, reciprocity is ultimately a value common to all human societies in some form. The Indigenous difference lies simply in the level of importance reciprocity is accorded in community interactions. In this way, Indigenous practices of reciprocity serve as a reminder to other communities and societies who may have become complacent about what sharing and caring looks like as an everyday community practice.
## Discussion Questions

**Filmmaker's Intent**

The film opens with these words:

> Tradition is like a wise elder,
> as she sits on the road of days,
> she tells future generations what she has lived.

Now that you've watched SŪKŪJULA TEI (Stories of My Mother), what do you think the filmmaker is signaling to us with these words?

**How Did You Feel**

How did you feel watching SŪKŪJULA TEI (Stories of my Mother)? Is there a moment that stands out for you? If so, why do you think it gripped you?

**Assumptions**

When we meet Rosa during her journey to bring food to her sister, she is protecting her skin from the sun's harmful UV rays with Paypay, which is a sunscreen made from the earth. How did you react when you first saw her face in the opening scene? What, if any, assumptions did you make? What, if any, questions do you have about this practice?

**Opening Scene**

What is the significance of the two children wrestling with the yosu (cactus fruit) in the film's opening scene? What does the grandmother teach the children?

**Challenges**

There is a drought in the region and worms destroyed some of Rosa's crops. Despite these environmental challenges, how do Wayuu people respond?

**Relationships**

Viewers meet two female elders and four children. The words ‘aunt’ and ‘grandma’ are used interchangeably. What does this demonstrate about relationships and family structure in Wayuu culture?

**Describe**

How would you describe the way Amaliata and the children live?

**Rosa's Life**

Did you yearn to see a glimpse of Rosa's life in her village or were you satisfied with what the filmmaker chose to reveal?
KEEP LEARNING

Additional Learning Resources

Indian Subjects: Hemispheric Perspectives on the History of Indigenous Education, edited by Brenda J. Child and Brian Klopotek
- https://sarweb.org/indian-subjects/

Wayuu author, Ramon Paz Ipuana

Wayuu author, Miguel Ángel Jusayú

Minority Rights Group International — Wayuu
- https://minorityrights.org/minorities/wayuu/

International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs
Production Crew

Flor Palmar, David Hernández Palmar, Duiren Wagua, Mabel Vanegas, Yelver Yesid Florez, Juan Pablo Nuñez, Jesús Acosta, Ernesto Acosta Cepeda

"Jasai" being filmed for a scene in SÜKÜJALA TEI. Photo by: Ernesto Acosta Cepeda

David Hernández Palmar giving direction to the crew and "Jasai." Photo by: Ernesto Acosta Cepeda

Film crew in action as "Kushematai" tries to knock down a cactus fruit. Photo by: Ernesto Acosta Cepeda

David Hernández Palmar (wearing dark blue t-shirt) and crew filming "Amalata" and "Rosa." Photo by: Ernesto Acosta Cepeda
The Reciprocity Project embraces Indigenous value systems that have bolstered communities since the beginning of time. To heal from the climate crisis, we must recognize that we are in relationship with Earth, a place that was in balance until the Industrial Age. This short film series and multimedia platform, made in partnership with Indigenous storytellers and their communities worldwide, invites learning from time-honored and current Indigenous ways of being. https://www.reciprocity.org/

Nia Tero is a US-based non-profit working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and movements worldwide with a mission of securing Indigenous guardianship of vital ecosystems. Nia Tero is committed to an antiracist and inclusive culture centering Indigenous rights, wisdom, practices, worldviews, and protocols. https://www.niatero.org/

Upstander Project encourages decolonization and upstander behavior through compelling documentary films and learning resources. Upstander Project's goals are to overcome indifference to social injustice, develop the skills of upstanders, and contribute to action-oriented campaigns in response to vital social issues. https://upstanderproject.org/

Recreational Equipment, Inc. also known as REI, is an American retail and outdoor recreation services corporation. It is organized as a consumers' co-operative and dedicated to outdoor education. Across films, podcasts, and editorial programs, REI Co-op Studios develops and produces stories that entertain, enrich, and explore the power of time spent outside, while complementing the co-op's broader climate and racial equity, diversity, and inclusion commitments. https://www.rei.com/newsroom/article/rei-co-op-studios