LEARNING MATERIALS

WECKUWAPOK
(The Approaching Dawn)

By Jacob Bearchum, Taylor Hensel, Adam Mazo, Chris Newell, Roger Paul, Kavita Pillay, Tracy Rector, and Lauren Stevens
Reciprocity

The way of life that centers mutual exchange and sharing amongst all beings — past, present, and future, seen and unseen — and the Earth
ARTISTS

A balanced perspective of what reciprocity means to our people

ARTISTS’ STATEMENT

“Just before the sun peaks over the horizon, weckuwapok, the approaching dawn, has magical power. We believe that moment is full of promise, possibility, and power; a gift about to be given. This is what we celebrate in our film: reverence for our awareness of dawn breaking and an opportunity for the pomawsuwinuwok — standing bears, the human beings — to reconnect with the energy that gives us all life. Wabanaki languages are manuals for sustainability if we take the time to listen and share. Gathered at Moneskatik for weckuwapok, we welcomed the day with stories and music wishing we could all be together, so this film is our gift to bring the magic to you.” — Jacob, Taylor, Adam, Chris, Roger, Kavita, Tracy, and Lauren

BIO

Weckuwapok was made by a collective of storytellers with a shared affinity for all beings and uplifting Indigenous voices. We are seven people creating story together. We are Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Wolastoqey, Cherokee, multicultural, and settler. Supporting us is a marvelous and diverse group of educators, program managers, advisers, editors, artists, and more who collectively make up the Reciprocity Project team. Our names are (alphabetically): Jacob Bearchum, Taylor Hensel, Adam Mazo, Chris Newell, Roger Paul, Kavita Pillay, Tracy Rector, and Lauren Stevens
FILM SYNOPSIS

“Sing up the sun”

Wabanaki people along with friends and relatives are joined by internationally-acclaimed cellist Yo-Yo Ma and honored by the presence of Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland in a ceremony to “sing up the sun,” an ancient tradition in Ckwaponahkik.
Caring for the Land, Nurturing the Language

A HALLMARK OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES

As the films in Season One of the Reciprocity Project demonstrate, the concept of reciprocity is a hallmark of Indigenous cultures throughout the world. The category of people referred to as “Indigenous” is a designation that arises in countries where histories of colonial domination define the relationships between people who have lived on those lands for millennia and those who are more recent arrivals. This is especially true for those of European origin stemming from the so-called “Era of Discovery,” beginning in 1492.

As Original Peoples, the ancient land tenure of Indigenous peoples makes them creators of wholly and fundamentally sustainable societies because they have learned how to live in harmony with their ecosystems. Along with the kind of reciprocity that defines those ecological relationships comes the intertwined values of reverence, respect, and responsibility.

This sense of responsibility is abundantly clear in the Wabanaki ceremony of singing up the sun, which extends to all human and other-than-human beings. This is reflected when Roger Paul shares a story in Peskotmuhkate (the Passamaquoddy language) about a little boy who tells the Knowledge Keeper he has come to sing in order to “raise up the sun for all the people.”

A GIFT TO THE REST OF THE WORLD

Indigenous peoples' worldviews are what distinguishes them from the societies that have grown up around them. In a world that revolves around private property and accumulation of wealth, for many people (and certainly their governments), it is inconceivable that an orientation to the world that rests on the values of relationships, reciprocity, responsibility, respect, and reverence is a viable way to live.

Yo-Yo Ma gestures toward this when he says that what everyone shared at the gathering was filled with meaning. He acknowledges that by thinking seven generations into the past and seven generations into the future, Indigenous people give a gift to the rest of the world that everyone can learn from. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland echoes this idea when she reflects on her role as a Pueblo woman and her sense of obligation to care for the land and the people on it, despite Pueblo histories of fighting colonization, famine, and drought.

Overall, what’s being described is an ethic of care that isn’t limited to certain people in certain places but is expansive enough to encompass all of life on Earth.
**Questions**

**Discussion Questions**

**How did you feel** watching Weckuwapok (The Approaching Dawn)? Is there a moment that stands out for you? If so, why do you think it gripped you?

**A deep connection**

In the film, Roger Paul, a Passamaquoddy and Wolastoq educator who is a language keeper, speaks of gratitude as he shares a story of a boy and an elder who sing up the sun. Wabanaki are stewards of the earth and theirs is a sacred task to help the sun rise. The sun gives warmth and light so the people can know they are cared for and loved, and so the world can be enlightened. The tradition of welcoming the day is an effort to put behind troubles of the past and focus on creating a better future. In what ways does Roger’s comment point to a deep connection between Wabanaki people and the natural world?

**Responsibilities**

In 2020, Maine celebrated 200 years of statehood (Maine separated from Massachusetts in 1820). Passamaquoddy educator, Chris Newell, offers a different point of reference: since the retreat of an ancient glacier 12,000 years ago, Wabanaki ancestors have been on this land welcoming the sun with music. He adds, “We are meant to do this.” What is your reaction to his statement? Are there responsibilities of a similar magnitude that are carried forward by other people that you can think of and name?

**Elders and youth**

Lauren Stevens, who sings The Humbling Song, expresses gratitude for the older generations of Wabanaki knowledge-keepers and language speakers. She highlights how beautiful it is to be around tribal elders, to learn songs, to just be present with them, and she underscores the importance of Wabanaki youth getting to see adults they know “taking space, holding space, unapologetically,” on their land.

If you consider the history and struggles Wabanaki people have faced, including the fact that they have been barred by the National Park Service and other authorities from being on their ancestral homelands and prevented from practicing their traditional ways, what is the significance of Wabanaki youth seeing their adults and elders taking and holding space, without apologizing when they do so?
Discussion Questions

**A UNIQUELY POSITIONED GUEST**

In 2021, Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna and a 35th generation New Mexican, became the first Native American cabinet secretary. Before her appointment by President Biden to be Secretary of the Interior, Haaland was a member of Congress.

Secretary Haaland came as a guest to Wabanaki homeland to meet with tribal leaders and Maine government officials. In the film, she says, “I feel very committed to embracing my obligation as a Pueblo woman to care for this earth and to care for the people on it. When I think about what my ancestors went through — fighting famine and drought, trying to live through colonization, holding on to the land because that’s what gives us life — we can’t ever give up.”

How would you describe the struggle to which Secretary Haaland refers? In her role as United States Secretary of the Interior, in what ways is she uniquely positioned to support the needs and demands of tribal communities, given her tribal affiliation and experiences as a Native woman? How might her statement encourage you to think differently about your commitments, responsibilities, and obligations?

**A CALL TO ACTION**

In the film, Passamaquoddy Elder, Wayne Newell, challenges those at the sunrise gathering when he says, “We’re all here to not just listen to people but what follows is perhaps the most powerful thing. We have to take those things into consideration seriously. If we leave here feeling good temporarily, then we have wasted our time. I see a lot of optimism because I see the generation to follow me. I see the next generation working their damndest. We have a lot of work to do. They have a lot of work to do. Woliwon.” How is this statement a call to action for Wabanaki people and for all people? What are the unmet needs that must be addressed in your community?

**SOUND AND MUSIC**

When reflecting on the sunrise gathering, Chief Maggie Dana of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik said, “Yo Yo Ma’s cello rendition of one of our oldest traditional welcome songs moved my spirit and I wondered if my Passamaquoddy ancestors were awakened out of curiosity. This unique new sound flowed with Lauren’s graceful voice while producing an amazing version of our Welcome Song. The two sounds became a sound never heard from our ancestors and they danced together beautifully.” In what ways might sound and music inspire you to feel connected to your own spiritual and cultural traditions?
**KEEP LEARNING**

**Additional Learning Resources**

- Passamaquoddy Maliseet Language Portal
  - [https://pmportal.org/](https://pmportal.org/)

- Passamaquoddy People: At Home on the Ocean and Lakes
  - [https://www.passamaquoddypeople.com/](https://www.passamaquoddypeople.com/)

- Wabanaki Collection
  - [https://www.wabanakicollection.com/](https://www.wabanakicollection.com/)
  - [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/acad/wabanaki_peoples_voll.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/acad/wabanaki_peoples_voll.pdf)

- Asticou's Island Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island 1500-2000
  - [https://www.mainewabanakireach.org/](https://www.mainewabanakireach.org/)
  - [https://www.abbemuseum.org/core-exhibit](https://www.abbemuseum.org/core-exhibit)
  - [https://dawnlandvoices.org/](https://dawnlandvoices.org/)
  - [http://www.danielnpaul.com/WeWereNotTheSavages-MikmaqHistory.html](http://www.danielnpaul.com/WeWereNotTheSavages-MikmaqHistory.html)
  - [https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Life_and_Traditions_of_the_Red_Man.html?id=dLsBYZ4viUMC](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Life_and_Traditions_of_the_Red_Man.html?id=dLsBYZ4viUMC)
  - [https://www.nps.gov/acad/learn/historyculture/wabanaki.htm](https://www.nps.gov/acad/learn/historyculture/wabanaki.htm)

**In Association With** reciprocity.org
Traditions and History

Passamaquoddypeople.com is the Passamaquoddy Peoples’ Knowledge Portal, which provides a glimpse into the rich cultural traditions and history of Passamaquoddy people. Much of the site is bilingual, thanks to language preservation and revitalization efforts dating back to 1890 when Passamaquoddy wax cylinder sound recordings were made in Calais, Maine. The website is home to a vast digital archive that includes Passamaquoddy transcriptions and English translations, and serves as an intergenerational hub for the sharing of history and culture by the Passamaquoddy community. The site includes various collections, a digital heritage archive, a brief recounting of Passamaquoddy history, and traditional knowledge labels to help people understand the culturally appropriate future uses of the recordings.

CULTURAL LIFE:
https://passamaquoddypeople.com/digital-heritage/category/cultural-life

HISTORIC EVENTS:
https://passamaquoddypeople.com/digital-heritage/category/historic-events

SONGS:
https://passamaquoddypeople.com/digital-heritage/category/songs
Production Crew

Filming Lauren Stevens (Passamaquoddy), Chris Newell (Passamaquoddy), and Roger Paul (Passamaquoddy) at Moneskatic (Schoodic Point, Maine). Photo by: Sipsis Peciptaq Elamoqessik

Sipsis Peciptaq Elamoqessik (Passamaquoddy) photographing community members and invitees at the sunrise gathering. Photo by: Adam Mazo

Filming community performances and conversations at the sunrise gathering. Photo by: Adam Mazo

Lee Francis (Penobscot) and Roger Paul (Passamaquoddy) with Yo-Yo Ma. Photo by: Sipsis Peciptaq Elamoqessik

In Association With

reciprocity.org
In Association With

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

For More Information

Resources

Request an educational screening or someone to speak online to your class.

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=yy-qfpxcGOUSMaTA-9leOrOAI9-BpifWhZJnpPNUkUJTEjFWjNKMlQyVJPTDBPrJ2GNNaNy4u

Watch a post-screening conversation between Reciprocity Project filmmakers about the making of WECKUWAPOK.

https://vimeo.com/733981194/43f5dfbfe

WECKUWAPOK is the fifth of seven episodes in the Reciprocity Project, Season One. In the next episode, viewers can see Ma’s House, about Shinnecock photographer Jeremy Dennis’s quest to turn his family’s home into a community gathering place for a new generation of diverse artists.

This discussion guide was written by Dina Gilio-Whitaker and Mishy Lesser, Ed. D. in consultation with the filmmakers and Reciprocity Project producers.

Contributioning Organizations

In Association With

Reciprocity Project

Nia Tero

Upstander Project

In Association With

REI CO-OP STUDIOS

reciprocity.org