



WHAT WILL WE LEAVE BEHIND?

GRADE: 9-12

TIME: 2 + learning blocks

THEME: Indigenous Knowledge

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

Environmental Science, Geography, English, Social Sciences, Civics

MATERIALS:

- Student journals or observation sheets
- Pencils
- Research materials
- Devices, if available
- Optional cameras
- Optional mapping tools
- Optional measuring tools appropriate to the investigation

LEARNING GOALS:

- investigate a local environmental or community issue through direct observation
- consider a place as a network of relationships rather than simply a site or resource
- identify ways past and present decisions have shaped a place
- consider who and what is affected by those decisions
- explore short- and long-term consequences of current choices
- connect ideas from Be a Good Ancestor to responsibility, care and future generations
- propose a realistic action that could contribute to the future wellbeing of the place

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

After listening to Leona Prince's presentation and reading of Be a Good Ancestor, students take the idea of responsibility to future generations into a place in their own community.

Rather than beginning only with an environmental problem, students investigate a local place and ask:

What have we inherited here, what are we changing, and what will we leave behind?

Through outdoor observation and research, students consider the relationships that exist within the place, the effects of human choices, who and what is affected by those choices, and what actions today could contribute to a healthier future.

This activity is not intended to teach Indigenous Knowledge independently of Leona Prince's presentation. Instead, it provides an opportunity for students to reflect on ideas raised through Be a Good Ancestor and consider how responsibility to people, other beings, place and future generations might influence their own choices.



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BEFORE GOING OUTSIDE:

After Leona Prince's presentation, return to the idea: Be a good ancestor.

Invite students to reflect on what they heard.

Ask:

- **What ideas from the presentation stayed with you?**
- **What might it mean to make a decision today while thinking about people who will live with its consequences in the future?**
- **Does responsibility extend only to people? What about other living beings and places?**

Then introduce the central question: **What will we leave behind?**

Explain that students are going to investigate a place in or near their school community through this question.

Rather than immediately identifying what is “wrong” with the place, begin by asking:

What is here that is worth noticing, understanding and caring for?

Students might investigate:

- a schoolyard
- forest or wooded area
- shoreline
- stream or wetland
- park
- garden
- vacant or undeveloped space
- neighbourhood green space
- heavily used outdoor area
- area affected by development
- habitat
- another accessible local place

Before leaving, students record what they already know or assume about the place.

They can return to these ideas after the investigation.

TAKE IT OUTSIDE:

Spend meaningful time at the chosen site.

Before collecting data or identifying problems, ask students to spend several minutes simply observing.

Encourage them to look beyond individual objects and notice relationships.

1. Notice what is here

Document:

- plants and other living things
- signs of wildlife
- water, soil and other physical features
- human-made features
- evidence of seasonal change
- sounds
- movement
- patterns
- evidence of human activity

Ask: **What would someone miss if they walked through here without paying attention?**

2. Look for relationships

Consider:

- What depends on this place?
- What provides food or shelter?
- How does water move through the site?
- How do people use the space?
- What organisms interact here?
- How might this place connect to areas beyond its boundaries?

Students can use sketches, maps, photographs and written observations to document these relationships.



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TAKE IT OUTSIDE:

3. Look for evidence of past and present choices

Students then investigate evidence of human decisions. They might notice:

- development
- trails
- landscaping
- restoration
- litter
- erosion
- habitat protection
- introduced or invasive species
- infrastructure
- tree removal or planting
- pollution
- accessibility features
- areas being actively cared for
- areas being allowed to regenerate

Ask: **What choices helped make this place what it is today?**

4. Look toward the future

Invite students to imagine standing in the same location:

- 5 years from now
- 25 years from now
- 100 years from now

Ask them to consider different possibilities rather than trying to predict exactly what will happen.

- **If current patterns continue, what might change?**
- **What might remain?**
- **What could be lost?**
- **What could recover?**
- **What would you hope someone standing here 100 years from now would find?**

Before leaving, ask students to identify:

One thing here that you believe is worth carrying forward.

BACK INSIDE:

Students combine their observations with additional research about the place or issue.

Where appropriate, encourage them to investigate:

- the history of the site
- land use
- environmental data
- municipal or community plans
- restoration projects
- organizations involved with the area
- Indigenous Nation(s) whose lands the site is located on
- publicly available Nation-specific information about the land or relevant environmental issues

When using Indigenous sources, prioritize resources created or shared by the Nation or Indigenous organization itself rather than asking students to construct an “Indigenous perspective” from secondary sources.

Future of This Place Action Proposal

Students develop a proposal responding to: **What could we do today that someone in the future might be grateful for?**

Their proposal should address:

1. What is here? Describe the place and some of the relationships you observed.
2. How did we get here? Identify past or present decisions that have influenced the place.
3. Why does it matter? Explain what is valuable, changing, threatened or worth caring for.
4. Who and what are affected? Consider people, other living beings, habitats and future generations.
5. What could we do? Propose a realistic action.
6. What could that action make possible? Consider what the place might look like in 5, 25 or 100 years if people act with care.
7. What would we leave behind? Finish with a statement describing what you hope future generations might inherit.



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QUESTIONS TO PROMPT THINKING:

Place and relationships

- What is here?
- What relationships do you notice?
- Who or what depends on this place?
- How are people part of these relationships?
- What might we overlook if we think of this place only in terms of how humans use it?

Past and present

- What have we inherited?
- What decisions helped create the place we see today?
- Who made or makes decisions about this place?
- Whose knowledge and perspectives should be part of understanding it?

Connecting Back to the Presentation

- What ideas from Leona Prince's presentation influence how you now think about this place?
- Has the idea of being a good ancestor changed the questions you ask about environmental decisions?
- What would it mean to carry an idea from the presentation into action rather than leaving it as something we only discussed?

Responsibility

- What are we responsible for?
- Who or what will experience the consequences of today's decisions?
- What does care look like in this particular place?
- How might thinking beyond our own lifetime change a decision?

Future

- What is worth carrying forward?
- What could be lost?
- What could recover?
- What would you want someone standing here 100 years from now to experience?
- What kind of future are our current choices helping create?

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS:

Take Action

Where appropriate, move beyond the proposal and carry out one realistic action. This might involve:

- habitat improvement
- restoration
- waste reduction
- schoolyard stewardship
- community education
- advocacy
- continued environmental monitoring
- supporting an existing community initiative

Whenever possible, connect with organizations or communities already doing the work rather than assuming students need to create a new solution.

Share the Proposal

Students could present their work to:

- another class
- school leadership
- a school environmental committee
- a community organization
- municipal staff or another appropriate decision-making body

Students should consider not only what they want to say, but also:

Who is already involved in this place, and who should we listen to before proposing change?



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ADAPTATIONS & ACCESSIBILITY:

Students do not need to investigate a large natural area. A schoolyard, courtyard, street tree, garden, accessible trail, neighbourhood green space or small patch of land can provide a meaningful site for investigation.

Consider:

- selecting an accessible site
- allowing students to investigate from a stationary observation point
- providing maps or photographs to supplement direct observations
- assigning collaborative roles such as observer, photographer, mapper, recorder or researcher
- allowing audio, video, visual or written documentation
- providing multiple options for the final proposal
- allowing students to work individually, with a partner or in a small group

The goal is not how far students travel. It is how carefully they observe and think about the place.

TEACHER NOTE: CONNECTING RESPECTFULLY TO INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

This activity is designed as a response to **Leona Prince's presentation and Be a Good Ancestor**. It should not be presented as though students are learning a universal “Indigenous approach” to environmental decision-making.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples are diverse, and individual Nations and communities have distinct knowledge systems, teachings, histories and relationships with their lands.

Let Leona Prince's presentation provide the Indigenous voice at the centre of this activity. The outdoor investigation then gives students an opportunity to **listen, reflect and consider how the ideas they heard might influence their own responsibilities and actions**.

If educators choose to incorporate additional Indigenous Knowledge or perspectives connected to the place being investigated, use Nation-specific, community-authored resources and existing relationships whenever possible.

The goal is not for students to speak for Indigenous Peoples.

The goal is to ask:

After listening, what responsibilities do we recognize in ourselves, and what will we choose to leave behind?