

MAY 2021, ISSUE NO. 28

OUR VIRTUAL REALITY

INDIGENOUS AWARENESS



What's in this issue

Indigenous People in Canada: Clearing Misconceptions

Indigenous Traditions of Oral Storytelling

Indigenous Histories and Cultures

Recommended Books by Indigenous Authors

Mango Panna Cotta Recipe

Sunscreen And Environment

Click to follow us on



EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear residents,

Hope you all are staying safe and taking care of your mental and physical health.

This issue is very special to our team as it explores the rights and traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. I have learned a lot while putting this issue together but I acknowledge that there is still a lot about Indigenous histories and cultures that I do not know. However, I believe that admitting this is the first step to learning. Let's play our part in respecting the Indigenous communities and advocating for Indigenous rights. We hope that we can increase your knowledge about this important issue.

If you would like share your knowledge or stories about this issue, please feel free to get in touch with us and we would love to share it with the rest of the community.

-Amynah Reimoo

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN CANADA: CLEARING MISCONCEPTIONS

By Katherine Shackleton

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.



In recent years, more Canadians have become aware of the violence committed – both historically and currently – against the Indigenous inhabitants of this land. For example, there are very few Canadians who have not heard about the residential school system.

The residential school system was a federal policy, in place from the 1840s to the 1990s, which aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into “white” children by taking them away from their families and isolating them from their culture and language. Students at the schools endured unspeakable abuse, and many died.

Nowadays, the Canadian government is committed to reconciliation (a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants of Canada that is based on mutual respect, a shared understanding of the past and a willingness to right historical wrongs). Despite the increased awareness of Indigenous experiences here in Canada, there are still many common misconceptions about Indigenous Peoples. In this article we will try to clarify some of the myths about Indigenous Peoples so that you can be more aware in your daily life and help others become informed.



Wampum belts are an important part of the culture of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (the Lake Ontario region)

1. MISCONCEPTION: Indigenous peoples are one group



The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, located a few steps north of Spadina-Bloor, near the U of T campus

REALITY: The term Indigenous does not describe a single, unified group of people. In Canada, the term describes Inuit, Métis and First Nations Peoples. There are 634 distinct recognized Nations which fall into the “First Nations” category, The important thing here is that not all Indigenous Peoples are the same. They have unique cultures, languages and historical experiences

2. MISCONCEPTION: All Indigenous Peoples live on reserves

REALITY: Reserves are sections of land which are reserved for specific First Nations to live on. Reserves are usually in rural areas. Many Canadians assume that all Indigenous Peoples either live on reserves or in remote areas, but this is not true. In Ontario, 85% of the Indigenous population live in urban areas - including 40 000+ in Toronto itself!



TRY OUT TEA N BANNOCK: an indigenous restaurant

3. MISCONCEPTION: Indigenous Peoples live for free and do not pay taxes



The Tyendinaga Mohawk Reserve near Belleville, Ontario.

REALITY: The federal government does provide registered First Nations with certain services such as education, but the quality of these services is often incredibly low. Access to these services is difficult if one lives off-reserve. Aside from the specific services provided by the government, Indigenous Peoples are responsible for their own expenses. On reserves, residents do not pay taxes, but this is because they do not actually own the land or have the right to sell it (unless they are selling through the government). Off-reserve and non-status First Nations persons pay taxes like everyone else. Inuit and Métis individuals always pay taxes.

4. MISCONCEPTION: Residential Schools happened a long time ago

REALITY: The last residential school closed in 1996. The effects of residential schools are a problem of the present, not just the past. For example, children who grew up in residential schools did not know what it meant to have a healthy and loving family. As a result, when they had children of their own, their family life was often very difficult. So, the effects of residential schools are passed down to the descendants of survivors in a process called intergenerational trauma. Residential schools are actually one of the main reasons behind the higher-than-average rates of substance abuse and mental health issues amongst Indigenous communities.



The Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brantford, Ontario..

INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS OF ORAL STORYTELLING

By Subhi Jha

Indigenous cultures share stories in many ways – orally, in song, in drumming, with pictographs, and through medicine wheels and tipi rings. Traditionally, stories are told by elders – known as Knowledge Keepers or Historians in some nations – as well as community members who have earned the title of Storyteller.

Stephen J. Augustine, the Hereditary Chief and Keptin of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council beautifully described what the tradition of Oral Storytelling often looked like. He narrates how the community would sit in a large circle around Elders to excitedly learn about a "piece of the knowledge puzzle". With an underlying understanding that learning is a life-long quest, the Elders of a community spoke individually and told uninterrupted tales that had both true and exaggerated elements. The moral of each story acted as a compass for the community that would guide them throughout their lives.



Interestingly, many Indigenous cultures' traditions of oral storytelling included more than morally guiding folktales. They also included things such as historical documents. For instance, many communities keep records of their histories in complex, creative ways like drumming and performative dancing. This connects

the performers and speakers to the listeners in a journey of uniting the past and present in order to build a future. Stories are frequently told to pass along local or family knowledge to family members. They can also be told more formally, in ceremonies such as potlatches, to validate a person's or family's authority and prestige. Some stories are told only during certain seasons, at a particular time of day, or in specific places.

Similarly, some stories are meant to be heard only by specific people. Such stories often teach important lessons about a given society's culture, the land, and the ways in which members are expected to interact with each other and their environment. Narrators adjust a story to place it in context, to emphasize particular aspects of the story, or to present a lesson in a new light, among other reasons. Through multiple tellings, a story is fleshed out, creating a broader, more comprehensive narrative. In that way, the story itself becomes an enterprise of the community as the members not only listen but also perceive and contribute.

However, as a result of colonization, many Indigenous communities began to use written method for the sole purpose of being considered valid. The oral tradition of passing down stories to keep records of any document was used to categorise the Indigenous communities as "people without culture" who had "no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles" (Justice Allen McEachern). The most beloved Indigenous traditions were used as weapons against them to demean their communities, which is why the perseverance of these traditions holds so much significance. It is all the more important to remember all the stories that were destroyed, lost, or forcefully translated to languages they did not belong to.

Stories rely on our existence. They reduce tragedies and build bridges that serve as reminders that we are able to understand, feel, see, and love each other. Most importantly, stories protect our history, our values, and beliefs, our communities, and ourselves.



RECOMMENDED BOOKS BY INDIGENOUS AUTHORS

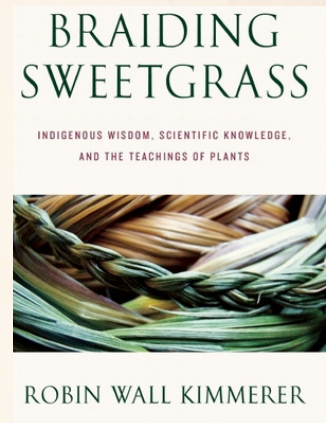
By Marko Berrak-Tinaz

With the extension of the Ontario Province Wide Lockdown Order and third wave, there might be more time to nuzzle under the covers and get into a really good book. We wanted to take this opportunity to recommend some really great reads by Indigenous authors to make this spring something to look forward to. We've got books that are perfect for both adults and kids to enjoy!

For adults we are recommending...

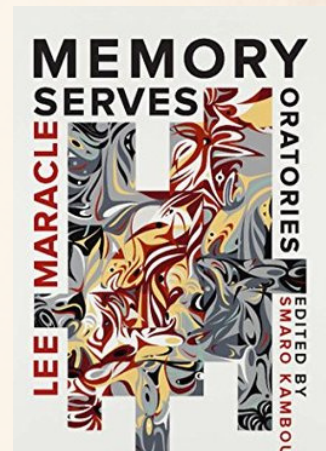
1. Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

This book recounts the author, Robin Wall Kimmerer's life experiences as she travels between two different epistemological systems, Indigenous and Western. She explores how these two epistemologies informs her understandings of current environmental problems and life. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a member of the citizen Potawatomi Nation, decorated professor at SUNY college of Environmental Science and Forestry, and botanist, cleverly distinguishes the uniqueness between Indigenous Knowledge and Western Knowledge in a way that is organic, humbling, and tasteful.



2. Memory Serves by Lee Maracle

This book is written by U of T's very own Lee Maracle. Lee is a lecturer at the University of Toronto in the Centre for Indigenous Studies. She is also a member of the Sto:lo Nation and of Salish and Cree ancestry born in North Vancouver, British Columbia. Lee Maracle is acknowledged as one of the first Indigenous peoples to be published in the early 1970s. Lee Maracle is not only a Canadian award winning poet and novel writer but a world renowned author. Her book, *Memory Serves* is a collection of her personal oratories over the span of twenty years. Throughout the book Maracle shares her knowledge of Sto:lo history, memory, philosophy, law, spirituality, feminism and the colonial condition of her people with the oratory style of the Salish peoples specifically from the Sto:lo Nation.



And for kids we are recommending...

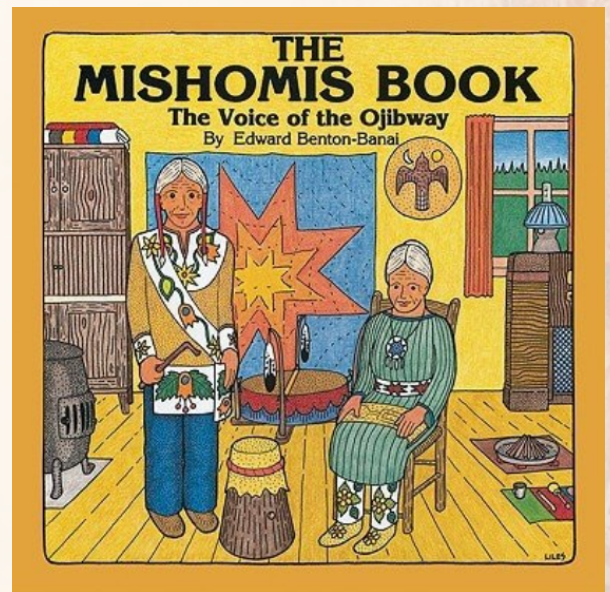


1. Sweetest Kulu by Celina Kalluk

This book is written by Inuit-Canadian author Celina Kalluk. Kalluk was born and raised in Resolute Bay, Nunavut. Her book *Sweetest Kulu*, is a story of a mother speaking to her own little “Kulu”, an Inuktitut term of endearment often bestowed upon babies and young children, about the gifts all the arctic animals give to newborn babies. Kalluk says that this book is dedicated to all the mothers and fathers of this earth and to all the wonderful children.

2. The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway by Edward Benton-Banai

This book is written by Anishinaabe Ojibwe author Edward Benton-Banai. Edward was born on the Lac Courte Oreilles reservation in northern Wisconsin. His book, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*, explores the history, philosophy and teachings of the Ojibway peoples as normally passed down through generations. Mishomis, an Ojibway word meaning grandfather tells the stories and traditions of Ojibway people by first starting with the creation story.



We hope you enjoy these selected reads as much as we have and that they bring you and loved ones enlightenment as we all try to stay safe and healthy through the pandemic.



INDIGENOUS HISTORIES AND CULTURES

By Juliana Melino

We hope that this newsletter has inspired you to take initiative and learn more about the rich and important histories of Indigenous peoples. Below are some resources to get you started - no matter how old you are, there is something for everyone!

Children/Families

It is sometimes assumed that children are too young to understand Indigenous histories -- that just isn't true! These resources are a fun and engaging way to introduce your children to various Indigenous topics.

- [Free "culturally connected" colouring pages designed by Indigenous artists](#)
- [Kids' comic books that focus on Indigenous cultures and teachings](#)
- [Kids' picture books by Indigenous authors](#)
- [Learn about Orange Shirt Day with CBC kids](#)

Adults

If you want to dive deeper into various Indigenous topics, these papers, seminars, and events are a great place to begin.

- [Indigenous Education Week at UofT](#) (Runs every October/November and includes speakers, workshops, and seminars geared towards both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students)
- [UofT First Nations' House Magazine Archive](#) (Articles written by Indigenous students, Elders, and faculty)
- [Indigenous Research Database from UofT Libraries](#)

Support for Indigenous Students of All Ages

[UofT's First Nations' House](#) is always hosting incredible events and activities specifically for Indigenous students. They also offer academic advising, support, and guidance.



MENTIS BANNOCK RECIPE

Mentis Bannock is a type of bread that originated in Scotland and was introduced to indigenous people in the 18th or 19th century by Scottish traders. However it is believed that indigenous people had their pre-colonial version of bannock which was made with starch or flour of bracken rhizomes. There are now a variety of methods used for the making of Bannock and we're sharing one of the best one with you today!

Ingredients:

- 3 cups all-purpose flour (or whole wheat flour)
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup margarine (or butter or shortening)
- 3/4 - 1 cup milk (or water)



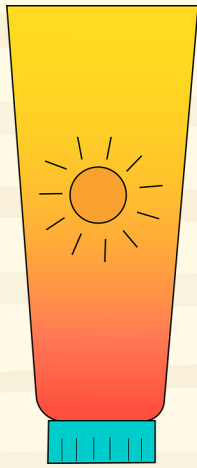
Instructions:

- Mix flour, baking powder, sugar and salt.
- Work in the margarine using hands until you make a nice crumble. If you have Olivina margarine in your area, I find this make for the best bannock.
- Gradually mix in enough milk to make soft but not sticky. Knead.
- Shape into a ball, place on a greased baking sheet, then flatten into a circle about 1 inch thick.
- Bake at 425°F (220°C) for 25 minutes or until lightly browned.

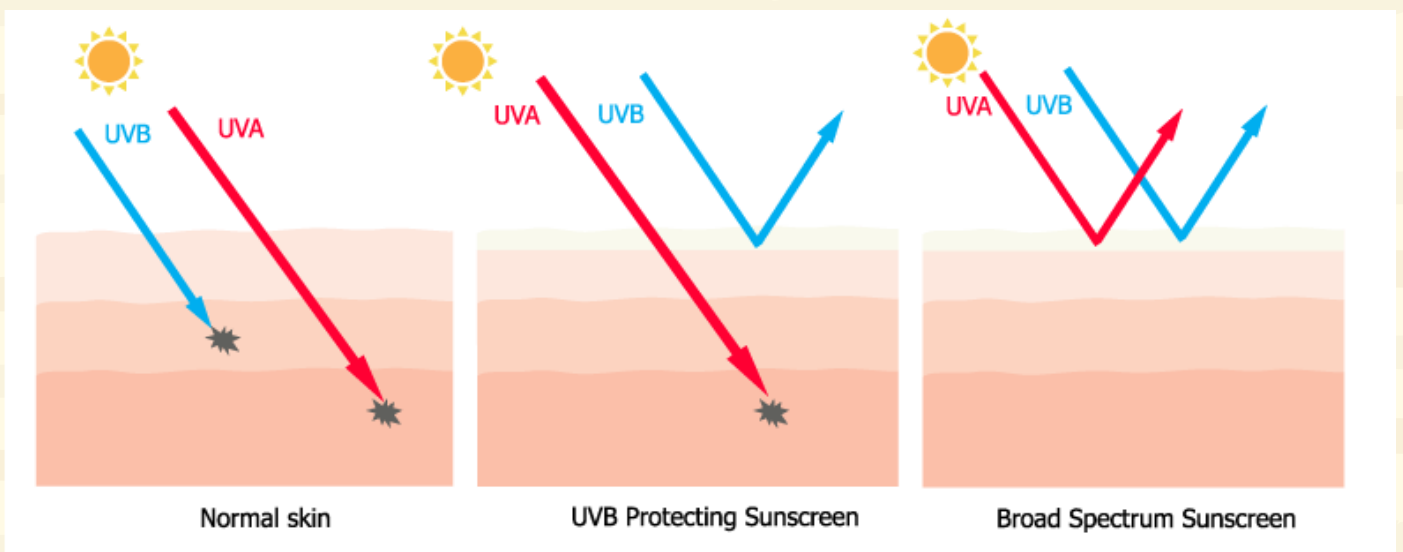


SUNSCREEN AND ENVIRONMENT

By Katherine Shackleton



As the weather starts to warm up and the pandemic continues to limit indoor gatherings, it seems we will be spending more and more time outside. Whenever we are outside in the warmer months, it is SUPER important that we wear sunscreen to protect ourselves from the sun's dangerous rays. Sunlight contains dangerous UVA and UVB rays that can lead to painful sunburns, increase your risk of skin cancer and cause the skin to age faster. Luckily, applying sunscreen - along with taking other precautions such as wearing a hat and staying in the shade - keeps us safe from the UVA/UVB rays. To secure the best protection, it is essential to use sunscreen that has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.



How sunscreen protects you from the sun (diagram taken from <https://skinkraft.com/blogs/articles/what-is-spf-how-does-it-work>)

Sunscreen is an essential product. Regardless of age, gender or race, we ALL need sunscreen. However, many people might not realize that sunscreen can actually have a significant impact on the environment. When we shower or go swimming, some of our sunscreen may leave our skin and enter our water system. The chemicals contained in some sunscreens can have a variety of negative effects on marine life. For example, they can disrupt the growth of green algae. This matters because green algae is one of the most important food sources for aquatic animals like whales, fish, turtles, seals, and lobsters. Also, green algae produces oxygen through photosynthesis.

In fact, scientists have estimated that green algae produces somewhere between 30 and 50% of the world's oxygen that is available for humans and other living things for breathing. Sunscreen chemicals can also damage the DNA of coral and deform and even kill young coral plants. In addition, sea urchins can be weakened by exposure to sunscreen chemicals. This is bad because sea urchins are critical in controlling algae growth. Actually, algae overgrowth is one of the main challenges facing endangered coral reefs. When coral reefs are at risk, all other marine animals who rely on coral as a food source are equally threatened. Lastly, the chemicals in sunscreen can make fish struggle to reproduce and this reduces population



Coral Reef

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOUR SUNSCREEN USE?

The environmental risk posed by sunscreen is NOT a reason to stop using sunscreen. Instead, it is a reason to carefully consider what type of sunscreen you use. The most problematic chemical commonly found in sunscreen is oxybenzone, so you should avoid this ingredient above all. Fortunately, there are a variety of environmentally-friendly brands of sunscreen on the market. For a complete list, visit [this link](#).



A Young Salmon

Reducing the amount of sunscreen used can also help lessen the environmental impact. You can do this without compromising on sun safety by purchasing clothing designed to provide UV protection. This option is also cheaper, since you can wear clothes over and over again (unlike sunscreen, which needs to be replaced often). To learn more about sun-protective clothing, check out [this link](#).

As summer approaches, remember to stay sun-safe, make environmentally-friendly choices, and - most of all - enjoy the warm weather!