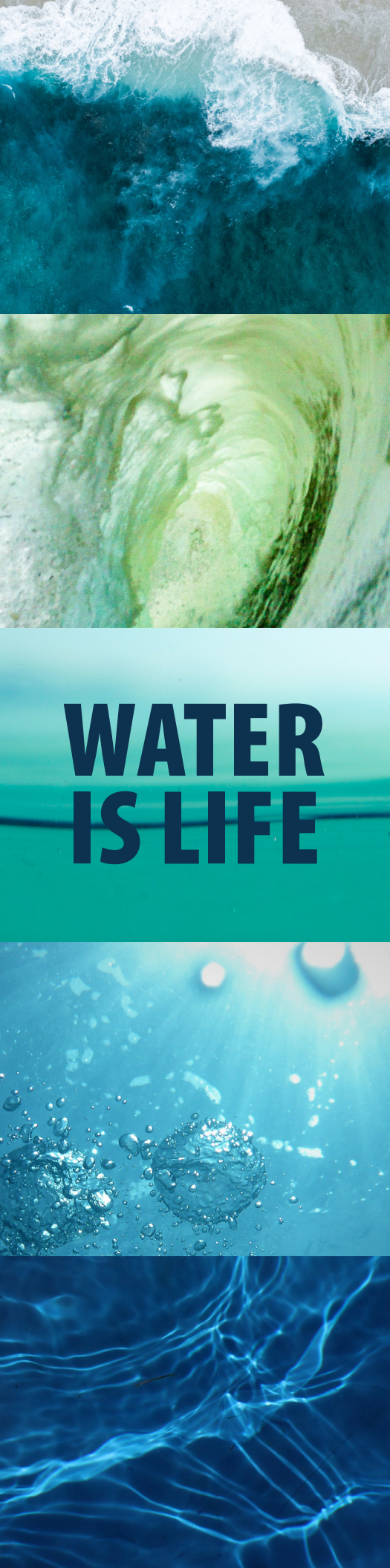


WATER IS LIFE





Introduction

INDIGENOUS CULTURES HAVE ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD

the value and importance of water as the basis for life itself. Water holds memory and shows generosity in its ability to sustain all living things. Water holds knowledge and has lessons to teach us about ourselves and how we live in relation to one another and the lands we are on. Water is our relation and, like Mother Earth, water shapes, creates and sustains us.

The following learning package has been created as an extension of the [Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map](#) learning activities. It was written by Jaime Black, an Indigenous educator, artist, and the founder of the REDress Project. The following four lesson plans draw on land-based learning, centered on women's teachings about, for, and from Mother Earth, with a specific focus on water and its connection to land and the Indigenous Peoples living on Turtle Island.

This activity guide can be used alongside the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada or as a stand-alone learning module in the classroom setting. The four lesson plans in this package can be used individually or as part of a unit. It is designed for students in grades 6-12 but can be adapted for younger students. Additional resources, guiding questions, images and activity ideas for deepening your students' learning have been infused throughout the lesson plans.

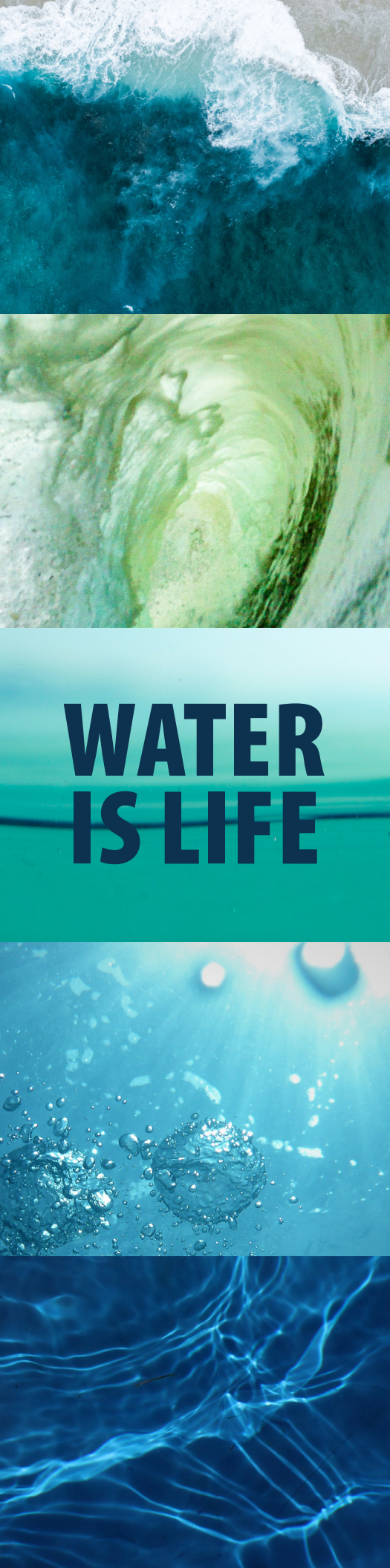


Table of Contents

1

WATER IS LIFE

This activity will help students connect with the role water plays in their lives and develop a relationship of respect, care and reciprocity with water.

2

THE SOURCE OF OUR WATER

This activity will encourage students to make a connection to their local water source and investigate how the water surrounding their community is connected to the land, other communities, and other water bodies.

3

OUR RIGHT TO WATER

Students will learn about and locate communities that do not have access to clean drinking water and discuss how they can get involved to help bring attention to the water crisis in Indigenous communities.

4

WATER PROTECTORS

Students will learn about Indigenous women who are water protectors and water walkers and learn how to implement their own water walk in their local community.

5

APPENDIX - IMAGES OF WATER BY JAIME BLACK

Students are encouraged to examine the images provided in this section, review the image descriptions, and learn about how people are connected to water and how water can be seen as sacred.

1 WATER IS LIFE

Learning objectives

In this activity, students will:

- Develop a relationship of respect, care and reciprocity with water.
- Develop emotional connections to water and appreciate the spiritual importance of water to many cultures around the world.
- Develop language and communication skills by writing about their connection to water.

Grades

6-12

Duration

Two 90-minute classes

Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective
- Spatial significance

Inquiry Process

- Formulate questions
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements

Background information

In land-based societies around the world, water is often considered to be sacred: it is the essence of life.

We are water and we come from water. Human beings are made up of approximately 60 per cent water. The brain and heart alone are composed of more than 70 per cent water. Before we are born, we spend nine months being carried in the water of our mother's womb. It is for this reason that many Indigenous cultures recognize women as "water carriers". This means that they have a special spiritual and physical interrelationship with water through the process of creating life.

Like the human body, the Earth is also primarily made of water. In fact, approximately 70 per cent of the Earth's surface is water. Many Indigenous cultures connect the sacred waters of Mother Earth to the water carried by women in their bodies.

Guiding questions

Use the following questions to introduce this topic to your students.

- What are some anthropomorphic (human-like) qualities we can ascribe to water?
- What can we learn from water?
- How do you feel when you spend time in or around water?
- What is our relationship to water?
- What does water do for us?
- What is our responsibility to water?

Lesson implementation

Activity #1: Connecting to water

As a class, or individually, read the poem "[From The First Water is The Body](#)" by Natalie Diaz. Ask students to explore the themes and ideas in Diaz's poem to the water. Ask students to reflect back on the guiding questions discussed at the beginning of the lesson about the connections humans have to water. Ask students if after reading the poem, they would want to change or modify any of their original answers.

Ask students how they feel after reading this poem. Have students think about a time when they were near water or a memory of being in the water. How did they feel? How would they describe their relationship and connection to the water?

Have students draw this memory or write a brief story or poem describing their relationship to the water. Allow time for students to share this with the rest of the class.

1

WATER IS LIFE

Activity #2: Photograph a nearby water source

As a class, make a list of all the types of bodies of water that can be found in Canada. Examples can include oceans, rivers, lakes, streams, and bays. Have students comment on the water bodies they have visited before and how they felt when they visited these places. Ask students if these feelings changed based on the type of water body they visited. For example, did students feel differently at the ocean versus visiting a stream? How did it make you feel differently? Why do you think that is?

Show students the photos attached to this guide in the appendix on page 15. Read through the captions connected with each photo and explain that these photos were taken by or conceptualized by the Indigenous artist Jaime Black to demonstrate and highlight the sacred connection women have with water. Ask students to read through the captions and examine the photos. Which photo stands out to them the most? What attracts them to this photo and why? An alternative would be for students to examine the photos first and discuss what they think is the message conveyed in each of the photos.

Next, arrange for students to visit a nearby water source. This can be as a class or individually with their families. Ask students to photograph the place they visit near the water. Photographs can include just the water source, anything inside the water source, the surrounding environment, a landscape photo, or a photo of the student in or near the water source. Explain to students that the purpose of this activity is for them to capture how they connect to this water source in one or two photographs.

Back in class, have students reflect on their experience. Ask students to write a letter, poem, or song to the water. Afterwards, display the letters or poems and any images students took of their water source as an art gallery in your school or in the community for people to see.

Using the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map

After completing the discussions and activities suggested above, set up the Giant Floor Map and allow time for students to explore the contents of the map. Afterwards, ask students about major bodies of water on Turtle Island, which is also referred to as Canada.

Ask students:

- How many oceans surround Canada?
- Can you name three different bays that are in Canada?
- What is the largest lake entirely located in Canada?
- Where are the Great Lakes situated?
- Walk along a river from its headwaters (beginning) to its mouth (end). What do you notice about where it begins, ends, and the territory through which it travels?

1

WATER IS LIFE

Next, ask students to break up into small groups, select a location on the map, and sit down at that location. Ask students to explore the information on the map and to identify the Indigenous communities near their chosen location, as well as the bodies of water near the communities. Have students consider the following questions as they are exploring:

- What relationship do you think the communities have with the nearby water sources?
- Which communities might share a connection with the same body of water?
- How do you think water is connected to the everyday lives and culture of the people in the communities?

Allow time for students to share their thoughts with the class. If time allows, encourage students to do further research about these communities to learn more about their relationship with the land and with the water.

Taking action

Reach out to Indigenous organizations near your community to learn more about their cultures, connections to the land and their relationship with water.

2

THE SOURCE OF OUR WATER

Learning objectives

In this activity students will:

- Learn more about their local water source.
- Create a map of their local community to learn about the size and breadth of their local water source.
- Learn about how water sources connect and overlap from community to community.

Grades

6-12

Duration

Two 90-minute classes

Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective
- Spatial significance

Inquiry Process

- Formulate questions
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements
- Technology

Background information

Water is the provider of life. Not only does it keep us hydrated, it is used in cooking our food, cleaning, and even in building our homes. Clean water is something that all humans need and rely on, no matter where you live on the planet. On Turtle Island (or Canada), most large cities receive clean drinking water from nearby lakes, streams and rivers. This is not the case for many First Nations communities in this country.

Guiding questions

Use the following questions to introduce this topic to your students.

- What are the names of some water bodies near where you live and learn? How do you think they are all connected?
- Where is the source of your community's drinking water?
- What is the size of your community's water source?
- Which communities do you think are connected to your community's water source?

Lesson implementation

Activity #1: Learning about your local water supply

Have students research where their water supply is coming from in their area. Students can use local maps or online maps such as [Google Earth](#) to explore their community and the surrounding area. Ask students to make note of nearby communities that they believe are connected to their water source, as well as how the water moves and where it eventually goes (e.g., does it flow into an ocean, bay, or lake?). Allow time for students to share their findings with the rest of the class.

Activity #2: Creating a community map

Have students draw their own map of their community, highlighting their community's water source. Students can choose to select a small scale map (highlighting a larger area) or a large scale map (highlighting more of the local community). Have students indicate place names of forests, parks, conservation areas, and any other important nature areas surrounding their water source, as well as the direction of flow of the water. Remind students to make sure their map has all of the main features of a map, such as a legend, scale, compass, title and border. When all maps are complete, display students' work and host a gallery walk around your classroom for students to examine the maps of their classmates.

2

THE SOURCE OF OUR WATER

Using the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map

After completing the discussions and activities suggested above, set up the Giant Floor Map and allow time for students to explore the map. Next, locate your community on the Giant Floor Map. Using the coloured ropes provided, locate the local water source and map the direction of flow. Afterwards, explain to students that all water sources on Turtle Island are connected through a watershed. Streams flow into rivers or lakes, which eventually flow into the oceans. Highlight this connection using the path your students just traced on the Giant Floor Map. Once students have an understanding of how all water sources are connected to one another, have students explore other areas of the map and make more connections on how the flow of those bodies of water differ.

Taking action

Many communities have local organizations dedicated to raising awareness about the protection of their local watersheds. Encourage your students to get involved with these organizations and take action on protecting their local water source.

3 OUR RIGHT TO WATER

Overview

Learning objectives

In this activity, students will:

- Learn about and locate communities that do not have access to clean water.
- Identify barriers to accessing water and understand that water is a basic human right.
- Discuss how they can help make a difference.

Grades

6-12

Duration

Two to three 90-minute classes

Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective
- Spatial significance

Inquiry Process

- Formulate questions
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements
- Technology

Background information

Who has clean water, who doesn't? We all require safe and clean drinking water to survive, but not all of us have the same access to water as others. Although most large cities across Turtle Island have access to clean drinking water, there are dozens of Indigenous communities that are facing long-term boil water advisories. This means that the water in these communities is not safe to drink. People are often forced to purchase water to have access to potable water for drinking and cooking.

Guiding questions

Use the following questions to introduce this topic to your students.

- How do you use water in your everyday life? How do you access it? What is the source of the water you use (i.e., where does it come from)?
- How would your life be different if you didn't have access to fresh water?
- How would your life be different if your entire community did not have access to fresh water?
- Why might some communities not have access to clean drinking water?
- What needs to be done to solve the problem of not having access to clean drinking water? Who needs to be involved? How long do you think it would take to fix this issue?

Lesson implementation

Activity #1: Identify communities with boil water advisories

As a class, identify the various communities across Turtle Island that are facing boil water advisories. Using the following links and graphics, have students explore the locations of these communities.

- [Long-term drinking water advisories \(map\)](#)
- [Long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves \(map\)](#)
- [Ending long-term drinking water advisories \(infographic\)](#)

As students are exploring, have them consider the following questions:

- How long has each boil water advisory lasted?
- What are some of the reasons the water in those areas is unsafe to drink?
- What has the government promised in terms of providing clean drinking water to Indigenous communities with boil water advisories?
- How many communities have been provided with clean drinking water?
- How do you think this has been achieved?

Once students have had an opportunity to explore the maps and graphics, host a Think-pair-share activity and have students share what they have learned. Allow time for students to share their feelings about what they have just learned.

3 OUR RIGHT TO WATER

Activity #2: In the news

Now that students have learned about where communities without access to clean drinking water are located, have them select an individual community to learn more about. Ask students to find news articles or media about this community. Have students find a minimum of three sources.

Once students have found their media sources, ask them to comment on the message of each media piece/article. What is being discussed? What is the tone? Is a solution provided? Ask students to create a word web of words and messages they see in their selected sources and share their word web with the class.

Example articles:

- 'Spirits of our ancestor': Shoal Lake 40 is rectifying a century of hardship
- Children of the poisoned river
- Dozens of Canada's First Nations lack clean drinking water

Using the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map

After completing the discussions and activities suggested above, have students write the names of communities that do not have access to clean drinking water on scrap pieces of paper, cue cards, or sticky notes. Each card can include additional information, such as the province/territory in which the community is located, the traditional land this community is located on, nearby bodies of water or communities, etc. For an additional challenge, ask students to research the latitude and longitude coordinates of the communities and put that on the cards as well. Next, unroll the Giant Floor Map and have students work together to locate these communities on the map by placing their card in the correct location. Once all communities have been mapped, ask students to stand around the map's border and examine the patterns and trends that they see regarding the location of these communities.

- Where are most of the communities located?
Which areas have none? Why do you think this is?
- What patterns and trends do you notice about the location of these communities?
- How do you think the needs of the community will differ based on their location?

Taking action

Not having access to clean drinking water is a big issue in today's society and action needs to be taken. There are several organizations that are working to address this issue. Have students research local or national organizations they can get involved with. Some examples include:

- Water First
- The Council of Canadians
- True North Aid
- David Suzuki Foundation

4 WATER PROTECTORS

Learning Objectives

In this activity, students will:

- Develop a sense of responsibility toward the land and water.
- Research Indigenous women who are water protectors and water walkers.
- Arrange their own community water walk to raise awareness of the importance of water.

Grades

6-12

Duration

Two 90-minute classes

Connections to the Canadian Geography Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective
- Spatial significance

Inquiry Process

- Formulate questions
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements

Background information

In Indigenous cultures, women are referred to as water carriers because they carry new life into the world in the waters of their wombs and they intimately understand the vital importance of water to our very survival and the survival of Mother Earth. Their deep knowledge and relationship with water means that as water protectors they have always stood up to resist the exploitation and pollution of our lands and waters.

Guiding questions

Use the following questions to introduce this topic to your students.

- Why is it important to protect the water?
- What are some of the ways Indigenous women are working to protect water for everyone?
- Who is responsible for the water? Who owns it?
- How can water be protected?
- What can individuals and communities do to protect water?
- Why is it important to involve everyone in the protection of water?

Lesson implementation

Activity #1: Water protectors

Explain to students that water protectors are individuals who pledge to protect the water of their local environment. They are activists, community members, and cultural workers who focus on defending the world's water systems. There are several Indigenous women water protectors on Turtle Island. Have students choose one of the women listed below to learn more about them. Ask students to consider the following questions in their research:

What has this woman done to change the way we share, protect and care about our water?

How can we support the efforts of Indigenous women to protect the water for all living things on the planet and for future generations?

Women water protectors:

- **Judy DaSilva, Grassy Narrows First Nation, Water Protector**

Judy Da Silva is a Grassy Narrows community member and mother to five children, including artist Iruwa Da Silva. Her children help her to have the positive energy to continue to look for justice and for a solution to the mercury poisoning of their river system in Grassy Narrows.

Judy Da Silva, Michael Sattler Peace Prize Winner/Water Protector - Short Documentary

Justice for Grassy Narrows - Interview with Judy Da Silva and information on community water protection efforts

4 WATER PROTECTORS

- **Josephine Mandamin, Anishinaabe First Nation, Water Walker/Water Protector**

Josephine Mandamin was an Anishinaabe First Nation grandmother, elder and founding member of the water protectors movement. She was a survivor of the Canadian Indian residential school system and the founder of the Mother Earth Water Walkers. Mandamin walked 17,000 kilometres to bring attention to protecting and caring for the water.

[Video - The Anishinaabe woman who walked for water rights](#)

[Water Docs article about Josephine Mandamin](#)

- **Autumn Peltier, Wiikwemkoong First Nation, Youth Water Protector**

Autumn Peltier is a young water advocate from the Wiikwemkoong First Nation. She has travelled around Turtle Island and the globe to raise awareness about the clean water issues Indigenous people living in Canada are facing. Peltier has spoken at the United Nations World Water Day event and has been honoured by the Assembly of First Nations as a water protector.

[Video - Autumn Peltier, water advocate, addressing the United Nations](#)

[Canadian Geographic interview with Autumn Peltier](#)

Activity #2: Arrange your own water walk

Plan a class-wide or school-wide water walk. Review the background information and tips below to help organize and arrange your own water walk.

- **Background information**

The idea behind a water walk in Indigenous cultures is to understand that water is sacred. A water walk shows our care and responsibility to the water, and as we carry the water we turn our thoughts to our commitment to preserve and protect the water for our community and for future generations.

During a water walk, water is carried in a copper vessel or pail; copper is believed to clean, heal, and amplify our reverence for the water. The water is generally carried by the women as they are the water carriers and water protectors. Men and boys are invited to walk with the water carriers in support of the water.

- **Planning a water walk**

- ▶ **Making connections**

To create a water walk for your school, it is recommended that you reach out to Indigenous community members in your area that have knowledge around water teachings and ceremonies. Ask your school division for contacts of local Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers and/or cultural advisors in your area.

4 WATER PROTECTORS

► Supplies

- Copper pail or vessel
- Water from a local lake, river or community water source, or (if access to these places is limited) from your home or school water source
- Blue cloth (optional)
- Students' poems/letters/lyrics from lesson 1
- Posters created by students about water protection

■ Considerations/organization

The water walk would ideally take place outdoors and/or near a local body of water (weather permitting). An alternate location could be an indoor gym or a large community space.

Map out the length and walking route of your water walk, ideally at least half an hour of walking in and around your community.

Students will walk in a group or a line, with one young woman or girl leading and carrying the water. Women and girls in the group may pass the water to one another every 10-20 minutes to allow all to have a turn being the water carrier.

■ Preparation

- Students can cut long pieces of blue cloth to represent the water and each participant can receive a piece of blue cloth to show their commitment to the water and to carry on the water walk.
- Messages to the water could be written on the cloth.
- Fill the copper vessel with water from a local water source.
- Have signs and posters for water protection made and ready to take with you on the water walk.

■ Opening

Gather students from the class or several classes to an outdoor location (ideally near a local water source), bringing their posters and blue cloth ties.

Gather in a circle around the copper vessel with the water in it.

Have students share aloud the poems or songs they wrote for water in lesson 1.

■ Water walk

One young woman or girl can begin to lead the walk, carrying the water (with a teacher supervisor), as all the other students follow behind (or alongside) with their posters and blue ties.

Switch out water carriers every 10-20 minutes to share the responsibility.

Have fun!

4 WATER PROTECTORS

■ Closing/post-walk activities

Have students reflect on their experiences after participating in the water walk.

Create a video of the water walk and all of the things your school and community are doing to protect the water.

Document the water walk and water activities you are doing with your community through photography, storytelling, or create a social media campaign highlighting your school's work to protect the water!

Using the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map

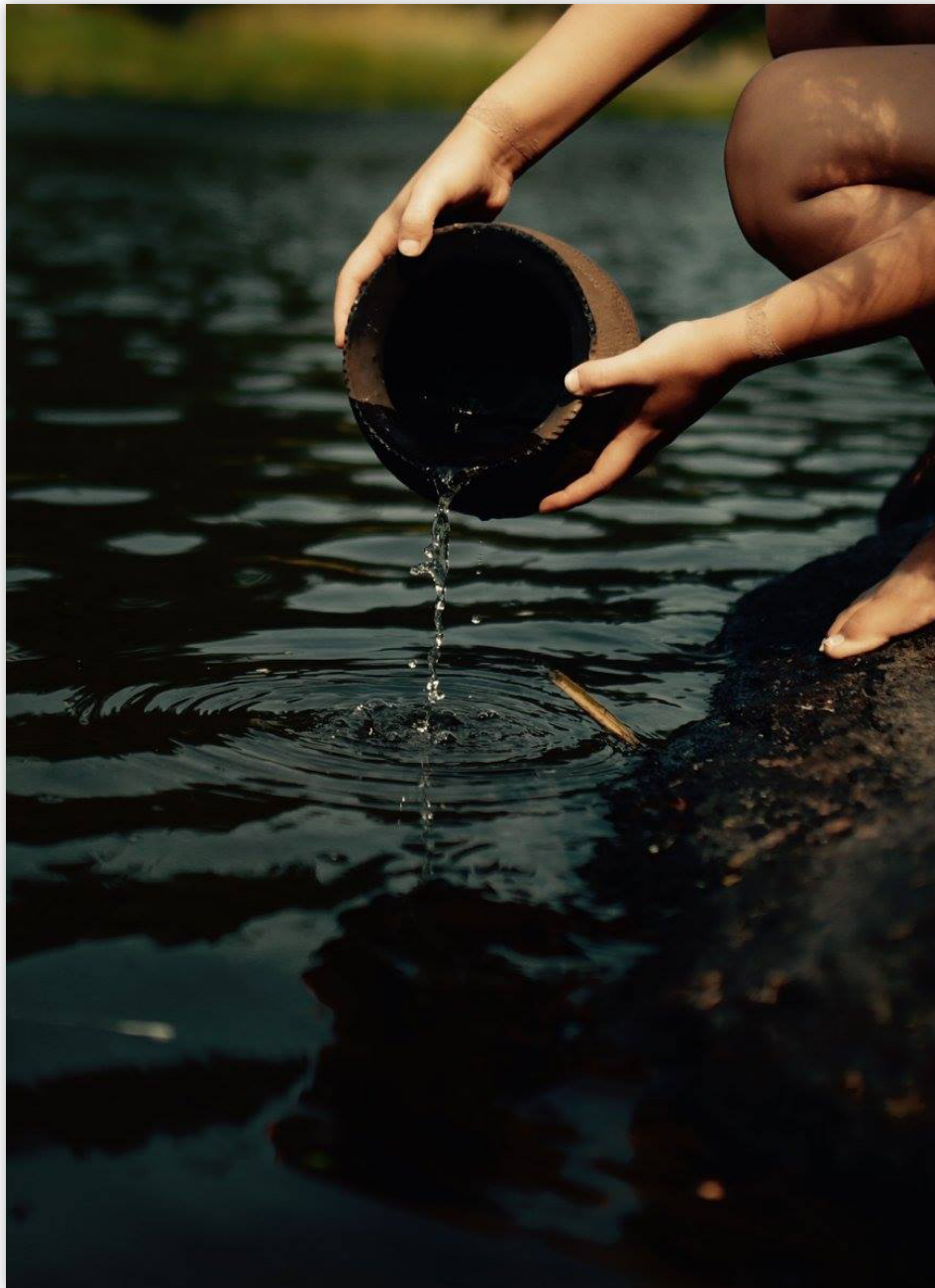
After completing the discussions and activities suggested in this lesson, locate the traditional territories of the water protectors the students researched. Ask students to explore the surrounding land around where these women are from and how water affects the lives of their communities.

Learn more about other notable Indigenous individuals who are taking action (or have taken action in the past) to raise awareness of issues Indigenous people are facing. The lesson titled "Notable people" included with the teacher's guide is a great way to extend this activity and keep the students engaged in learning more about Indigenous individuals making a difference. Conclude the lesson by having students connect with their local Indigenous community to learn more about individuals raising awareness or taking action on local issues.

Taking action

The arranging of a water walk, listed in activity #2 of this lesson, is an excellent way students can take action in their community. Once you have successfully organized your water walk, reach out to community members to get involved. If possible, try to make it an annual event.

APPENDIX



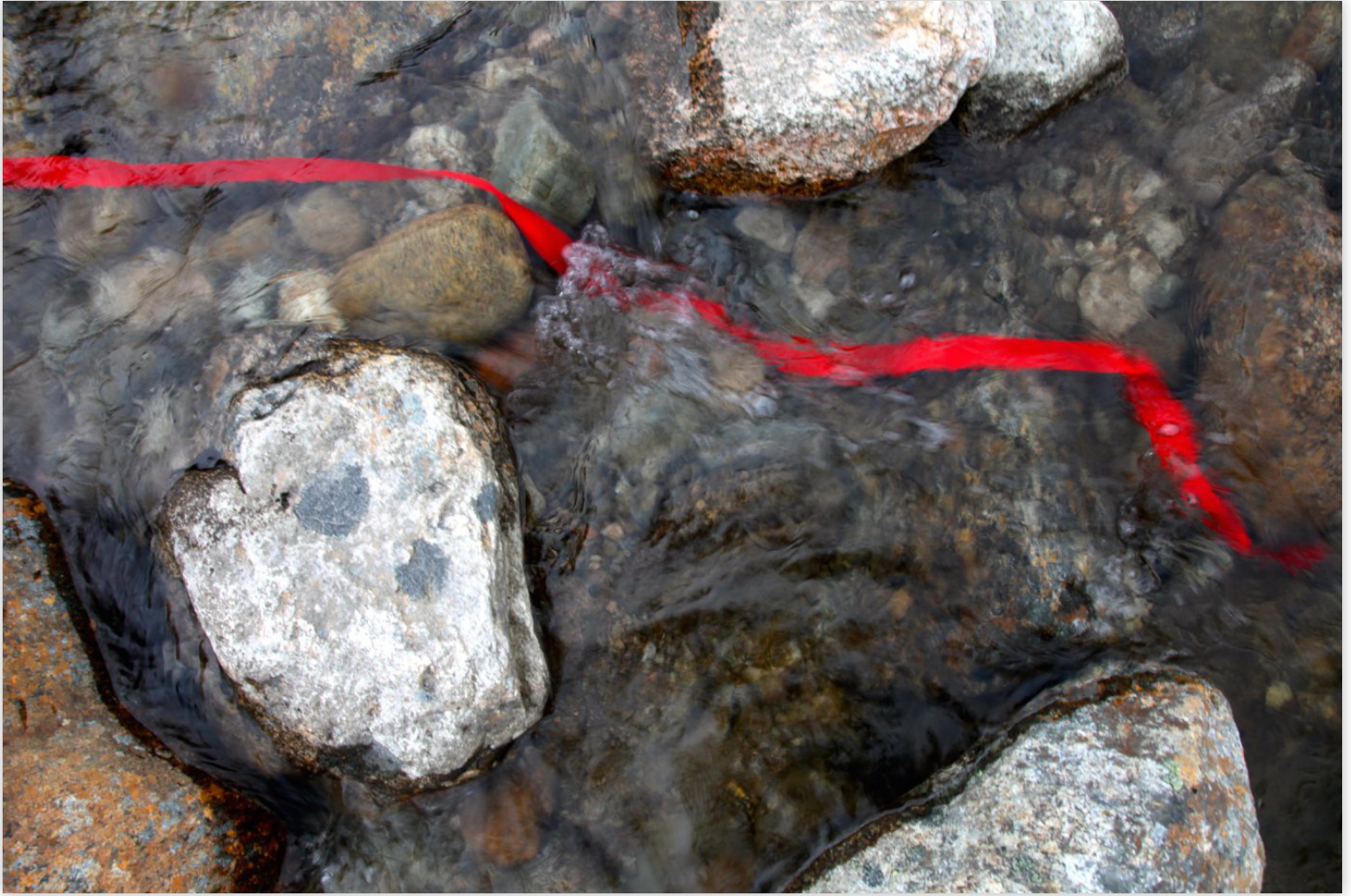
BE LIKE WATER

Year: 2017

Artist: Jaime Black

Image credit: Jen Doerksen

Image description: Artist KC Adams by the river at the sacred site of the Bannock Point Petroforms in Manitoba. KC has learned the ancient techniques of making clay vessels, as used by her ancestors, the Cree and Anishinaabe people from this area thousands of years ago. The vessels were used for cooking and carrying water.



BLOOD TIES

Year: 2016

Artist: Jaime Black

Image description: *Blood ties* shows the interconnection between our veins and the veins of the Earth — the rivers and waterways. The water carries the memory of how our people have lived on the land for millennia, just as our blood carries the history and memory of where we came from.



INTERCONNECTIVITY

Year: 2021

Artist: Jaime Black

Image credit: Niklas Konowal

Image description: We are tied to the land and to the waters. We must nurture and protect that connection.



WATER CARRIER

Year: 2017

Artist: Jaime Black

Image credit: Jen Doerksen

Image description: Youth activist Breanna Johnnie gathers water in a clay vessel at the Bannock Point Petroforms sacred site in Manitoba. This work acknowledges the role of youth in leading the way in fighting to protect our lands and waters.

APPENDIX



WATER SISTERS

Year: 2017

Artist: Jaime Black

Image credit: Jen Doerksen

Image description: Artist KC Adams and Jaime Black are featured in this work, which acknowledges the powerful interconnections between women and water and the role of women working together as water protectors and water carriers.