



SKY WOLF'S CALL

THE GIFT OF
INDIGENOUS
KNOWLEDGE

ELDON YELLOWHORN
& KATHY LOWINGER

From the award-winning authors of
What the Eagle Sees

SKY WOLF'S CALL

THE GIFT OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Indigenous people are the subjects of this book. Although everyone has a name for their own culture, we use this phrase to be inclusive. In the past, writers used names such as Indian, Native, First Nations, and Aboriginal. Canadian law still uses the term “Indian” in the Indian Act, so we have left this name intact. “Canada” and “the United States” and the current names of towns and rivers overshadow the borders, place names, and geography that Indigenous people once knew. Although they are recent we use modern maps here to help you locate the places we describe.

You’ll see we use the terms “nation”, “band”, and “tribe.” Here’s what they mean. Nation refers to a group of people who are identified with a particular territory. A band is a small, self-governing group that bases its membership on family connections. In Canada a band has a legal meaning as a political unit occupying an “Indian reserve,” though we now call them First Nations. Tribe describes a collection of bands connected by kinship, politics, and language. The United States has a legal definition for a political unit associated with an “Indian reservation.”

Blackfoot and Blackfeet are political names. We call ourselves *Niitsitapi* and our language is *Niitsi’poyisin*, but Canadians know us and our language by the name “Blackfoot.” “Blackfeet” is the name used in Montana. Today Blackfoot, which comes from the word *siksika* (it means “black foot”), is a language in danger of falling silent, but it is our mother tongue whether we are called Blackfoot or Blackfeet.

Sky Wolf's Call

The Gift of Indigenous Knowledge





Heiltsuk First Nation students from the Bella Bella Community School SEAS program explore the estuary of a nearby salmon stream.

THE SKY WOLF'S CALL: The Gift of Indigenous Knowledge

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The United States recognizes 573 tribes, and Canada shares the land with about 600 First Nations. We practice diverse cultures, and we speak many languages.

Indigenous knowledge comes from years of practices, experiences, and ideas gathered by people who have a long history with the natural world. Indigenous knowledge comes from many distinct communities, but it braids together these ideas:

Everything is connected.
The world is a gift.
The sacred is a vital part of knowing.
We are always learning.

How do these ideas, or principles, turn into action?

Tree of Life, by Donald Chrétien (Anishinaabe), acrylic on canvas



Everything Is Connected

Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread within it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect.

—Chief Seattle, Suquamish and Duwamish
Chief, Washington State, 1786-1866



Everything is connected: Plants grow from the soil and support all creatures whether they are two-legged or four-legged, or have wings or crawl on the ground. They are all braided together into the web of life.

Let's follow one of countless threads of connection—the one that joins pecans and squirrels. Squirrels love pecans, even though they have hard shells. Pecans are rich in protein, fat, and vitamins and are perfect winter food for hungry squirrels. In some years, pecan trees produce lots of nuts, and in other years, very few. If a squirrel spends a lot of time on a tree branch gnawing through the pecan shell, it is easy prey for a hawk. Storing pecans softens the shells, and the squirrel can safely feed on them in its nest.

The pecans help squirrels, and by storing the nuts, squirrels help pecan trees. If every pecan were to begin a new tree, they would crowd each other and none would survive. Those pecans left on the forest floor after squirrels have gathered what they need will have plenty of room to start healthy new trees that will produce more pecans. By following this one thread, we can see that the well-being of the trees, the forest, and the squirrels are intertwined.



This World Is a Great Gift

The Potawatomi people, who live on the Great Plains, the upper Mississippi River, and the Western Great Lakes, call the land *emingoyak*, which means “that which has been given us” in their language. Indigenous knowledge teaches us that the world is a gift.

You know how to act when someone gives you a gift. You say, “Thank you.” You take special care of it. And the time comes for you to give a gift in return. That is how we should act when we receive the earth’s gifts: with thanks, with care, and by giving back. This is the belief that preserves the Menominee Forest.



Potawatomi Gathering is hosted each year by one of the nine bands of Potawatomi, providing an opportunity for members of all bands to come together and celebrate their Potawatomi heritage.

The lands of the Menominee Nation once covered 4 million hectares (10 million acres) in what is Wisconsin and Upper Michigan today. Now the people live on the 95,100-hectare (235,000-acre) Menominee Reservation in northeastern Wisconsin. At the heart of the reservation is a forest. In 1854, the Menominee bought a small sawmill to cut and process lumber.

The Menominee take good care of the forest. They allow some trees to reach full maturity before they are cut down for the sawmill. Other trees are never cut down so that thriving stands of old-growth white pine and sugar maple remain. Some white pine stands are more than two centuries old, and the hemlocks are even older. The

Menominee make sure that the forest is diverse. At least thirty different kinds of trees, including white pine, hemlock, Canada yew, sugar maple, aspen, oak, and hickory, grow there. And they never chop down more trees than necessary, so future generations will always have a supply of timber.