

First Nation Spirituality

The "Planting the Seed" series is produced by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs and the Elders Advisory Committee.

**To learn more about Traditional Spirituality,
History and Culture,
please visit a First Nation community.**



Planting the Seed



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The "Planting the Seed Series" is sharing and teaching about First Nation culture. The tree represents a symbol of life and began as a seed. As the seed gets nourished the more it will flourish. Like the tree of life, a person will also flourish when cultural nourishment is given. It helps to grow the individual, family, community and nation. The sharing of this information helps to plant the seed that leads to a life long journey of learning.

Sharing - The First Nation Way.

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Sacred Medicines

There are many kinds of Sacred Medicines used, with the most common being Sweet Grass, Cedar, Sage and Tobacco. They can be burned or given as a sprinkle offering. When the herbs are burned, the smoke serves as a cleanser for the body and takes prayers to the Creator. When sprinkled, it is a sign of thanks to the Creator for all things, and acknowledges the gifts of the trees, plants, birds, animals, etc. Many use the Sweet Grass to help cleanse the body, mind and spirit. Cedar serves as a protector. Tobacco a sign of respect to the Creator and Sage protects against negativity.

Medicine Circle

The Medicine Circle, commonly known as the Medicine Wheel, refers to life's journey and teaches how the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of life are connected. Depending on the teachings and the use of the Circle, some will also include environmental as one of the aspects. Life's lessons are learned from the four directions, with the East being the starting point. Some people will craft a Medicine Circle to serve as a reminder of their journey and will vary in size, color and design.

Medicine Pouch

The Medicine Pouch is used to carry things that help a person have a positive connection to the Creator. It can be of various sizes, color and design and the medicines are a personal choose. For example, sacred herbs are commonly carried in the pouch, although the medicines can change depending on the reason the pouch is being used.

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Naming Ceremony

Traditionally the Grandmothers and Aunts of a community would gather at a birth of a new born. At this time the Grandmothers would give a special name to the child in relation to what they envisioned at that time. This practice is not as common today and most traditional people now receive their spirit names through a fasting ceremony where an Elder is asked to conduct a ceremony for receiving a spirit name. Another way to receive a name is to offer tobacco or other sacred gift to an Elder Grandmother who could conduct a ceremony to envision a spirit name for you. Grandmothers may conduct the ceremony differently and each are equally be respected.

Fasting

Fasting is a practice that can help others to learn more about cultural teachings. This ceremony should always be practiced under the direct guidance of an Elder and it is suggested that no one ever undertakes a Fasting Ceremony on their own. The Guidance of the Elder may vary depending on their teachings and beliefs and respect is shown to the Elder at all times. A Fasting Ceremony can take place from one to four days with a preparation period ranging from weeks to months. The Elder will select the Sacred area for the Fast and oversee the person Fasting. It is highly recommended that anyone wishing to learn more about Fasting should seek an Elder highly recommended by a traditional person.

Sunset & Sunrise Ceremony

At the start and end of each day a ceremony is shared giving thanks to the Creator for the blessings of the day and for during the night. Ceremonial practices during this time can vary depending on the First Nation and can include sharing such as the Sacred Pipe, Sweet Grass, Drumming, Prayer Time, etc.

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Talking Circle

The Talking Circle is a communication method used within a group setting. People sit in a circle and pass a Talking Stick, or other item, in a clockwise direction allowing everyone to have an opportunity to speak. Whoever holds the stick has the honor of speaking and all others show respect by listening. Talking Circles can be held anytime and anywhere for various reasons. Four important skills are learned through the use of a Talking Circle; Patience, Listening, Trust and Speaking.

Moon Time

Moon Time refers to when a woman is experiencing menstruation time. This is seen as a gift from the Creator that enables women to naturally purify their body. As a result, some people believe that women on their moon time do not have to participate in ceremonies that help to cleanse the body. It is always best to speak with an Elder before participating in traditional ceremonies as teachings and practices will vary.

Regalia

Originally, there were many traditional Native clothing and each First Nation had their distinctive style. First Nations could be even be identified by their style clothes, headdress, or symbols. For example, in the throughout the Atlantic Provinces, men wore breechcloths and leggings, leather shirts and moccasins. Women wore leather dresses with leggings underneath and moccasins. Today's traditional dress for Pow-wows and ceremonies varies because of the adopted styles from other Nations such as Grass, Jingle, Fancy, Shawl, Traditional dress, etc. Dances and regalia are often seen at Pow-wows and are explained to the viewers.

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Medicine Bundle

The Medicine Bundle consists of many sacred items related to the cultural teachings learned from an Elder. Items are gathered upon participating in ceremonies such as Fasting, Sweat-lodge, Sunrise, Sunset, Healing, etc. The bundle can consist of a Sacred Pipe (earned through fasting), Drum, Rattles, Eagle Feathers or other types of feathers, Medicines such as sweetgrass, sage, cedar, tobacco, etc., Stones, Wampum, Shell used for smudging, matches, and many other gifts given to the bundle carrier.

Dream Catcher

The dream catcher teaches about the connection to the dream world. Many people use it to encourage good dreams and prevent bad ones. The circle represents life and weave teaches about the connection with all things. Teachings of the dream catcher will vary among First Nations.

Drum

Traditionally, Water Drums were used by First Nations and made from gutting out a tree and stretching animal skin across the opening. Using a smaller size drum stick create a unique sound. Today, the Big-Round Drum played by several people, and the individual Hand drum are more commonly known. The beat of the drum represents the Heartbeat of Mother Earth, the giver of life. Drums are played during ceremonies and celebrations.

Sacred Pipe

The Sacred Pipe is a sign of respect and friendship and is a connector to the Great Spirit. It is designed in two parts representing the female and male and balance of life. A person receives the honor to become a Pipe Carrier by learning the cultural teachings from the Elders. Sacred Pipe ceremonies are performed in different ways depending on the teachings of the Pipe Carrier.

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Sacred Fire

The Sacred Fire is symbolic to the sun heating Mother Earth. It is a time for healing and used for many reasons. Respect is shown to the fire and the surrounding grounds at all times. A Sacred Fire is normally lit for 4 days and nights with a Fire Keeper in attendance at all times. Stones usually form a circle around the fire with four openings representing the four directions. Sacred Fires will be unique in its teachings and an Elder or Fire Keeper is always available to help share the teachings.

Pow-Wow

The Pow-Wow is referred by different names depending on the First Nation's language. Pow-Wows will vary in their celebration activities, but traditionally it is an opportunity for people to gather and share in cultural celebrations like drumming, dancing, feasting and sharing of gifts. Other ceremonies such as sunrise and sunset ceremonies, sacred fire, talking circles, sweat lodge, pipe ceremonies, etc., will also be part of the celebrations.

Eagle

The Eagle with its ability to soar highest in the sky, serves as a messenger for prayers to and from the Creator. Its abilities show great courage, strength and vision, skills that are important to First Nation culture. The Eagle is a reminder of a person's connection the Creator, and is respected during sacred ceremonies. To be presented an Eagle Feather is a great honor and is normally given for cultural knowledge, respect and wisdom. Eagle Feathers are also passed on to others who are able to carry on the honor for which the Feather was presented to another person.

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Sweatlodge

Sweatlodges are dome shaped structures used for prayer time and cleansing the body, mind and spirit. Heated rocks are placed in the lodge and water is sprinkled throughout the ceremony to help create the steam used in the cleansing ceremony. Sweat Lodge Keepers receive the honor to lead ceremonies by learning the cultural teachings from the Elders. A Sweat Lodge can belong to a community or individual, and is used by men, women and children.

Songs

Traditional songs are included during ceremonies and other celebration gatherings. The singing of songs is a form of prayer and shows respect to the Creator by acknowledging and celebrating all life. First Nations usually have a signature song that represents their Nation.

Dance

Dancing is a time for celebration and is a sign of respect given to the Creator and all creation. Dances are also viewed as being a form of prayer and respect for the dancers and dances is shown by everyone. It also serves as a way to tell a story of cultural teachings and is reflected through the dance steps and in some cases, outfit design.

Elder

Elder is the name used for showing respect to older-aged people. Elders are respected for their wisdom gained throughout life's journey and that wisdom is shared in various ways. The title, "Respected Elder", is reflective of an Elder that is active in cultural ceremonies and celebrations.