



CAOT | ACE

Supporting Truth & Reconciliation

Highlighting areas of improvement for Land Acknowledgements in Canada

Research, report & presentation by Morgan J Campbell (B.H. Sc)

Artwork: “*Wisdom of the Universe*” by Christi Belcourt, a Métis visual artist of the Cree-speaking community of Manitou Sakhigan, Alberta ⁽¹⁾



CAOT | ACE

I would like to acknowledge my presence on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin, Anishinaabe, & Mohawk Nations.

Table of contents

CAOT | ACE

01 The research process

- Purpose of research
- Preparing for interviews

02 The research findings

- Key literature findings
- Key interview findings

03 Guidance & recommendations

- Key guidance & recommendations based on collective findings

01

The research process

A brief overview of project creation & execution



Artwork: Unnamed artwork by Autumn Smith, a self-taught Ojibway artist who resides on Magnetawan First Nation ⁽³⁾

Purpose of research



- Project direction recommended by OT TRC Task Force
- Three main project objectives:
 1. Identify current themes within academic & grey literature
 2. Identify perspectives of 3-4 Indigenous interview participants
 3. Compare findings to identify key themes, limitations, & guidance



02

The research findings

An overview of academic and grey literature findings alongside those of real-time interviews with Indigenous Elders and community members

Artwork: Unnamed artwork by Jay Soule, an Anishinaabe multimedia artists from the Chippewas of the Thames River First National in southwestern London, Ontario ⁽⁵⁾

Academic & grey literature findings 1

Improvement area #1: A lack of genuineness



Key concerns ⁽⁶⁾

- Institutional “box-tick” to fulfil commitments to TRC
- Reciting scripted statements
- Limited interaction with relevant material
- Failure to align actions with words

You are highly encouraged to read about real-life discrepancies & improvements relating to a lack of genuineness in land acknowledgements in the complete report on pages 12-13.

Real-time interview findings 1

Question #1: **Could land acknowledgements be more effectively approached by non-Indigenous populations?**



Albert McLeod

- **Land acknowledgements across Canada are diverse → reinstilling Indigenous practices**
 - *“Describes folklore, traditions & taboos”*
- **Opportunity for introduction & greeting**
 - Include discussion of original & current inhabitants
- **Beneficial tool for educating everyone**
 - *“Narrative and conversation about decolonization & recolonization”*

Real-time interview findings 1

Question #1: **Could land acknowledgements be more effectively approached by non-Indigenous populations?**



Michael Yellow Bird

- **Current land acknowledgements may only act as a “window dressing”**
 - “Need to go further” with depth of discussion surrounding history, truth, and reconciliation
- **Acknowledgement vs apology**
 - Historical promotion of “civilized vs uncivilized” → For example, what about history of the Catholic Church?
- **Acknowledgements of stolen land require unique criteria → 5 point action plan**
 - “But what are you going to do for me?”
- **Failure to “operationalize” institutional commitments**
 - Specific, personal “Reconciliation Statements”

Real-time interview findings 1

Question #1: **Could land acknowledgements be more effectively approached by non-Indigenous populations?**



Ann LaBillois

- **The simplest, clearest way might be the best way**
 - *"It's nice to hear them recognize that it was unsundered"*
- **The importance of recognition**
 - *"Indigenous Peoples are forgotten... at least now there is recognition and a way of honouring Indigenous Peoples"*
- **Lacking deeply-reflective discussions of gratefulness**
 - *"That is more heartfelt than memorising; to be grateful that you are able to come on this land"*



“The Creator places people on the land and that part of the land becomes their culture.

Food, medicine, clothing, and how they did their ceremonies **all had to do with the land on which they were placed.**

It is also important to remember that Peoples have existed here forever, as well [as the land].”

— *Ann LaBillios, Indigenous Elder*

Academic & grey literature findings 2

Improvement area #2: An attempt at settler innocence



Moves to settler's innocence are defined as strategies used by settler populations to “*absolve themselves from implication in the colonial project without having to make substantial changes*”

Key concerns⁽⁶⁾

- Failure to explain why land acknowledgements are necessary
- Attempting to erase/rewrite Canada's violent history
 - Situating settlers as guests on fairly submitted land

(ex. alluding to peaceful treaty negotiations by not accurately discussing history in Canada)

Real-life discrepancy^(6,8,9,10,11)

- Students within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reported land acknowledgements to be “*performative*”, “*box-ticking*”, “*heartless, robotic apologies*” that discuss Indigenous Peoples as “*victims*” & “*part of the past*”

“The erasure of Indigenous presence in the settler state is not a grand conspiracy.”



— Joe Wark, Anishinaabe researcher⁽⁶⁾

Real-time interview findings 2

Question #2: Do you feel that land acknowledgements have been successful in supporting Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?



Albert McLeod

- **“Yes it is” → land acknowledgements fill in educational gaps for everyone**
 - *“People didn’t know they were living near reserves or a residential school”*
- **Indigenous Peoples may offer insightful perspectives on history in Canada**
 - *“Set history right” about World Wars, wrongful treaty assumptions, etc.*
- **Supports & recognition of Indigenous Peoples → “Canada’s rent”**
 - *“Canada’s future is allied with Indigenous Peoples”*
- **“Land acknowledgements facilitate the awakening”**
 - *A formal oration upon meeting different nations → “Offers space to apologize for times of colonization and commit to doing better”*

Real-time interview findings 2

Question #2: **Do you feel that land acknowledgements have been successful in supporting Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?**



Michael Yellow Bird

- **"I'm a data guy... I don't see it" → Continued disproportionate health outcomes**
 - *"Indigenous groups are not really seeing anything that has been gained"*
- **Land acknowledgements are not strong enough to enact necessary changes**
 - *"It's hard to get institutions to change their behaviours towards groups unless they get sued or get a court order and are forced to make changes"*
- **"Big picture items are huge" → Think about climate change**
 - *"The direct cause of these issues is humans, and the consequence is extinction. Does this do any good? All these aspects need to be a part of the equation"*

Real-time interview findings 2

Question #2: **Do you feel that land acknowledgements have been successful in supporting Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?**



Ann LaBillois

- **“Unfortunately not... the adoption of land acknowledgements is very new”**
 - *“I believe it is helpful in promoting recognition, but to say it has been successful, I can’t do that because it is too new”*
- **Canadian institutions are not allowing space to deeply understand material**
 - *“There is a lot about the truth that needs to be talked about, but what are you really trying to say?”*
- **“Credentials after a name do not mean that someone has worked on themselves and found peace within themselves”**
 - *“We must support the students with language and focus on healing the staff of these institutions”*

Academic & grey literature findings 3

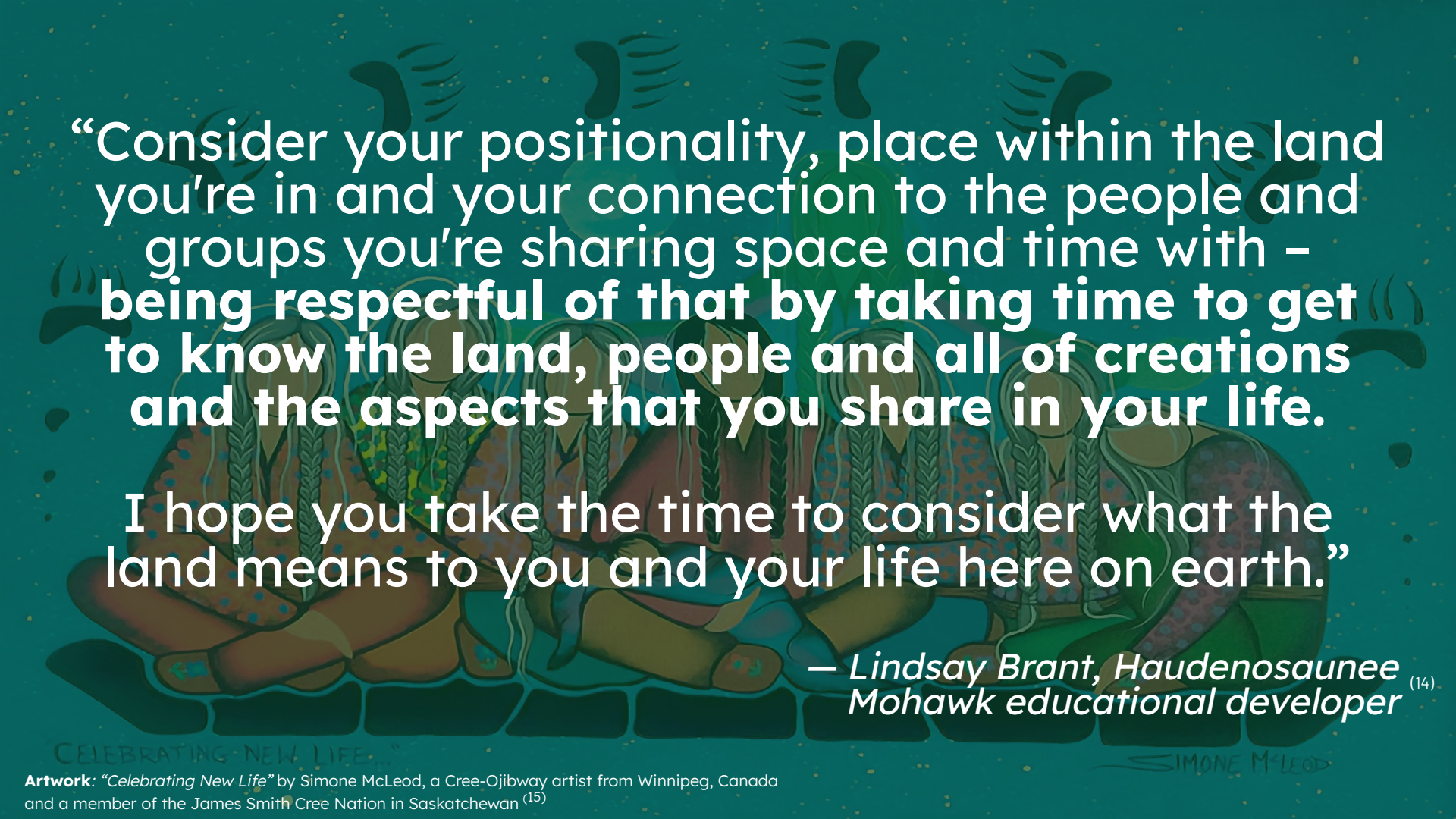
Improvement area #3: A lack of traditional Indigenous practice



Key concerns ^(6,13)

- Failure to appropriately consider traditional Indigenous practices
 - Seen as an attempt to colonize or appropriate Indigeneity
- Non-Indigenous obsession with “using the right words”

You are highly encouraged to read about understanding traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements and potential recommendations regarding a lack of traditional practice among land acknowledgements in the complete report on pages 16-18.



“Consider your positionality, place within the land you’re in and your connection to the people and groups you’re sharing space and time with – **being respectful of that by taking time to get to know the land, people and all of creations and the aspects that you share in your life.**”

I hope you take the time to consider what the land means to you and your life here on earth.”

— *Lindsay Brant, Haudenosaunee Mohawk educational developer* ⁽¹⁴⁾

Real-time interview findings 3

Question #3: Is there anything else you would like to share about land acknowledgements, Indigenous culture or the ways Canadian institutions support Truth & Reconciliation?



Albert McLeod

➤ Indigenous culture vs Colonization

- Colonization has *"compromised the future of everyone"* due to its ability to *"move forward with no plan"*

➤ Colonization: the **"suppression of knowledge and intoxication of technology"**

- Indigenous Peoples have lived alongside the land through use of healthy, respectful, traditional practices → should be **used alongside science & tech**

➤ **"A marriage" is necessary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous practices**

- Without Indigenous consultation & respect for traditional wisdom, colonialism may not know its own limits → *"just because we can"*

Real-time interview findings 3

Question #3: **Is there anything else you would like to share about land acknowledgements, Indigenous culture or the ways Canadian institutions support Truth & Reconciliation?**



Michael Yellow Bird

- **Identifying the need to develop a “critical mass”**
 - *“Change can happen within a generation, but it is not currently happening at school-age levels. Kids should be studying this and the history, and should be rewarded for coming up with solutions”*
- **Repeated exposure: “When there is a critical mass, corporations start to change”**
 - *Reflecting on the murder of George Floyd: “People do a lot with emotion”*
- **Getting “lost in consumerism” → “There is so much that blocks us”**
 - *Must use mindfulness to “reconcile through compassion and conversation”*
 - *“Practicing mindfulness – and not just talking, can lead to huge rises in human compassion”*

Real-time interview findings 3

Question #3: **Is there anything else you would like to share about land acknowledgements, Indigenous culture or the ways Canadian institutions support Truth & Reconciliation?**



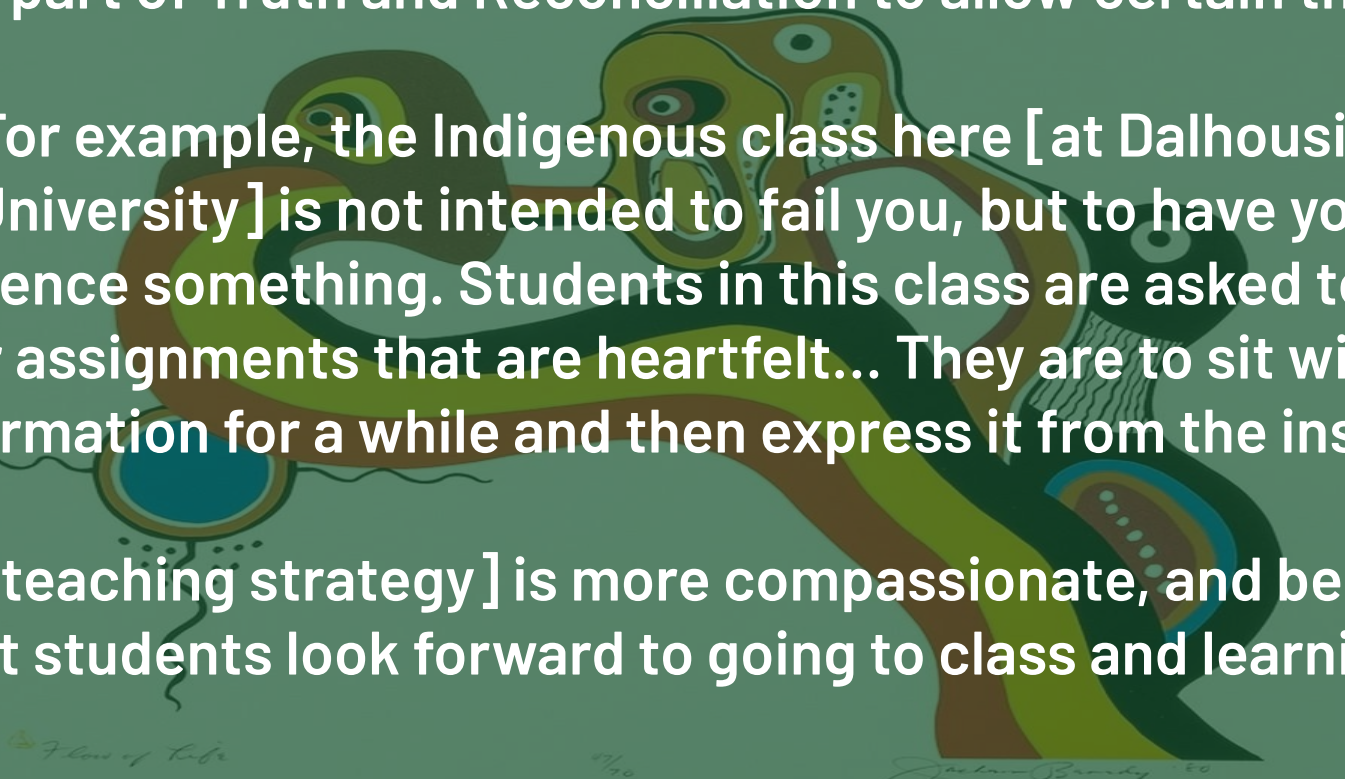
Ann LaBillois

- **The concept of “waiting”**
 - *“The academic world does not have a lot of empathy and compassion... I want to know what I am learning but at this fast pace, I can only memorise and get through exams”*
- **“People need to really experience the information”**
 - People must be allowed space to learn, freely ask questions, reflect, & share
- **“We don’t need answers... we just need to release to feel things clearly”**
 - *“We need to learn to truly listen, and to see beyond what is directly in front of us”*
- **“Canadian institutions must heal themselves”**
 - *“In life there is time for everything, but the world seems to chop time up”*

“It is a part of Truth and Reconciliation to allow certain things...

For example, the Indigenous class here [at Dalhousie University] is not intended to fail you, but to have you experience something. Students in this class are asked to write paper assignments that are heartfelt... They are to sit with the information for a while and then express it from the inside.

[This teaching strategy] is more compassionate, and because of it students look forward to going to class and learning”



Artwork: “Flow of Life” by Jackson Beardy, an Ojibway-Cree artist born in Garden Hill First Nation who was a founding member of the of the Professional National Indian Artist Inc in 1972 (16,17)

— Ann LaBillois, Indigenous Elder

03

Guidance & Recommendations

Guidance & recommendations drawn from non-Indigenous reflection on Indigenous perspectives across literature & real-time interviews





Recommendation #1: Allowing space to address “*the suppression of knowledge & intoxication of technology*”

(6,8)

- **Allowing space to reflect on the harmful nature of both historical and modern-day colonialism**
 - How have knowledge suppression and technological intoxication impacted truth, history, health and wellbeing in Canada? How do they continue to impact society today?

- **Reflect on & release yourself from fears of discussing the truth**
 - “*We must look at things differently*”; it is only through facing uncomfortable realities that your “*waiting*” period may resolve

- **Understanding colonial tendencies of expectation & explanation**
 - Land acknowledgements are an opportunity for growth on a personal and institutional level → we must first address uncomfortable truths within ourselves to create positive external change



Recommendation #2: Allowing space to “*experience the information*” ⁽¹³⁾

- **Offer space for individuals to learn about Truth and Reconciliation in slow-paced, safe environment that encourages inquiry and centralizes deep understanding across both non-Indigenous & Indigenous Peoples**
 - To truly “*facilitate an awakening*” information on the past & present must be presented accurately, early in one’s development & alongside opportunities for genuine reflection
- **Addressing colonial barriers to empathy → To reduce fears of making a mistake among their members, Canadian institutions must promote the removal of expectations surrounding land acknowledgements**
 - Feelings of safety, opportunity, and judgement-free learning may reduce “blind compliance” by encouraging compassionate, deeply-rooted participation in discussions of Truth and Reconciliation



Recommendation #3: Allowing space for “*the critical mass*” ^(6,13)

- **Encourage opportunities to transform Truth & Reconciliation efforts from words to measurable action that directly benefits the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples in Canada**
 - May promote mass reflection of uncomfortable realities through facilitation of emotional connections by compassionate individuals using technology & social media → creates a critical mass willing to take action
- **“Reconciliation statements” & 5-point action plans: Reflecting on uncomfortable realities may encourage the creation of feasible, clearly-measured steps a person or institution may take in support of Truth & Reconciliation**
 - Institutions should be excited to engage with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities that want to see actionable change → allowing space to share uncertainties and further develop worldviews may promote trust between people & institutions (OT leadership organizations have the power to create a critical mass!!!)



I would like to acknowledge the land on which I am able to thrive:

CAOT | ACE

The lands of Ottawa were originally cared for by the Algonquin, Anishinaabe, & Mohawk Nations. Today, we continue to reside on their unceded territories.

- **The Algonquin Nation** → traditionally maintained utmost respect for their lands by changing locations within their family territory every few winters to allow regrowth of nature in previously inhabited regions, and would spend time in summer months drying meats, collecting berries, and cultivating or collecting different plants and natural medicines to maintain their lifestyles in winter months ⁽¹⁹⁾
- **The Anishinaabe Nation** → created the Three Fires Confederacy between the Boodiwaadmi, Ojibwe & Odaawa Nations prior to the first arrival of Europeans, wherein Boodiwaadmi ensured the strength of all three groups, Ojibwe acted as knowledge keepers for all groups, & Odaawa focused on creating relationships with settlers (upon their arrival) to facilitate the trading of goods ⁽²⁰⁾
- **The Mohawk Nation** → traditionally lived across southeastern Ontario through upstate New York before & during the 1700's, and their engagement in fur trade & agricultural practices supported settler populations during harsh climate transitions upon the first arrival of Europeans ⁽²¹⁾

A moment of thanks, to

Interview participants

Elder Albert McLeod
Elder Ann LaBillois
Michael Yellow Bird

OT TRC Task Force Co-Chairs

Angie Phenix
Kaarina Valvaara

Placement supervisors

Monique Lizon
Candice McEwen

CAOT & Staff

Justine Jecker
Vicky Lafortune
& all others!

Artwork: Unnamed artwork by Jessica Somers, an Indigenous artist of Odanak Abenakis and Métis decent ⁽²²⁾



Thank you for listening!

If you would like to discuss further following personal reflection, feel free to email me at morgancampbell.school@gmail.com

Artwork: “Androgyny” by Norval Morrisseau, a world renowned artist and member of the Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek First Nation who is often referred to as the *Mishomis*, or grandfather of contemporary Indigenous art ⁽²³⁾

References

1. Hogue, T. (2017, June). Walking softly with Christi Belcourt. *Canadian Art*. <https://canadianart.ca/features/walking-softly-with-christi-belcourt/>
2. Lanouette, C. (2022, July 7). Chantal Lanouette. *Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada*. <https://indigenousartscollective.org/chantal-lanouette/>
3. IACC (2022, February). Autumn Smith - Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada. *IACC*. <https://indigenousartscollective.org/autumn-smith/>
4. College of Liberal Arts & Sciences - University of Illinois. (2023). Land acknowledgment. *Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at Illinois*. <https://criticism.illinois.edu/about/land-acknowledgment>
5. Sacred Fire Productions. (2023). Jay Soule. *Les Productions Feux Sacrés*. <https://www.sacredfireproductions.ca/artists/jay-soule/>
6. Wark, J. (2021). Land acknowledgements in the academy: Refusing the settler myth. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 51(2), 191-209.
7. Dorion, L. (2023). Artwork. *University of Alberta*. <https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/artwork.html>
8. Fitzsimmons Frey, L. V. (2018). "Heartless robotic apologies": Indigenizing Toronto education. *In:cite Journal*, 1(1), 62-75. <https://doi.org/10.33137/incite.1.28910>
9. Canadian Association of University Teachers. (2019). Guide to acknowledging first peoples & traditional territory. *CAUT*. <https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditionalterritory>
10. Asher, L., Curnow, J., & Davis, A. (2018). The limits of settlers' territorial acknowledgments. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(3), 316-334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2018.1468211>
11. Janzen, M. (2019). Breathing life into the territorial acknowledgment. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, 16(2), 74-81.
12. Alberta Native News. (2014, March 23). Featured artist for March, 2014: Maxine Noel. *Alberta Native News*. <https://www.albertanativenews.com/featured-cover-art-march-2014/>
13. Reys, S. (2022). Deliver an Acknowledgement of Country that Really Means Something. YouTube, *TEDxSydney*. https://youtu.be/zxo18_7BDt4
14. Brant, L. (2020). Meaningful Land Acknowledgements. YouTube. *Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University*. <https://youtu.be/btmU25mtAT8>
15. Kultrun Market. (2023). *Art cards by Simone McLeod, Kultrun Market*. <https://www.kultrunmarket.com/products/simone-mcleod-art-cards>
16. Mutual Art. (2022, August). Jackson Beardy - Flow of Life (80). *Jackson Beardy | Flow of life (80) | mutualart*. <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Flow-of-Life/84573A370DFEAF6260514A2A4887BD13>
17. MacKenzie Art Gallery. (2020, June 11). Jackson Beardy: Balance in nature. *MacKenzie Art Gallery*. <https://mackenzie.art/jackson-beardy/>
18. Monague, W. (2022, March 31). William Monague. *Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada*. <https://indigenousartscollective.org/william-monague/#gallery>
19. Anishinabention.ca. (2016). Nomadisme / Gathering. *The Tribal Council / Conseil Tribal*. <https://www.anishinabention.ca/nomadisme/>
20. Anishinabek Nation. (2023). Who are the Anishinaabeg? *UNION OF ONTARIO INDIANS*. <https://www.anishinabek.ca/education-resources/gdoo-sastamoo-kii-mi/who-are-the-anishinaabeg/#:~:text=The%20Anishinaabeg%20are%20a%20large,Oklahoma%20up%20through%20to%20Ottawa>
21. First Voices. (2022). About The Kanien'kehá:ka people. *First Voices*. [https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Kanehsat%C3%A0:ke/Mohawk/Kanien'k%C3%A9ha%20\(Mohawk\)%20Eng](https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Kanehsat%C3%A0:ke/Mohawk/Kanien'k%C3%A9ha%20(Mohawk)%20Eng)
22. Somers, J. (2021, January 21). Jessica Somers. *Indigenous Arts Collective of Canada*. <https://indigenousartscollective.org/jessica-somers/>
23. Government of Canada. (2012, November 29). Indigenous perspectives on the life and work of Norval Morrisseau. *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council*. https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/society-societe/stories-histoires/story-histoire-eng.aspx?story_id=299