



Lenapehoking Climate Curriculum and Outdoor Activity Guide

These lessons and activities arrive on the heels of an exciting project led by The Lenape Center and Columbia’s Teacher College to “Decolonize Thinking and Teaching for Lenape Sovereignty”. The Teacher’s College project focuses on correcting the myths and misconceptions upheld by the NYS Social Studies curriculum regarding the indigenous people of Lenapehoking, “unsettling” colonial ways of thinking, and uplifting Lenape wisdom. In conversation with the Lenape Center and Teacher’s College, The Trust for Public Land began deepening the ways that Indigenous ways of knowing can be explored in the over 220 student-designed Community Schoolyards we’ve transformed across what’s now known as New York City. We approach this evolving project as students ourselves, ready to learn from and center the Indigenous voices throughout the Lenape community and diaspora.

In discussion with Hadrian Coumans and Joe Baker at the Lenape Center, we heard two priority areas of learning to uplift in our outdoor education and activities. The first centers on re-storying and truth telling. We have a responsibility in acknowledging the cultural erasure, forced removals, diaspora, and continued presence of the Lenape. By exploring the teachings students bring with them to the schoolyard, we have a chance to correct these false narratives. The topics we already center in our environmental lessons offer the perfect frames within which to move students towards rethinking what they know about the original people of Lenapehoking. These topics include: the history and current troubles of land use, past and present water systems, public accessibility to nature, community, stewardship and reciprocity, nature-based climate change solutions, the plant and animal species we relate to and depend on, gardening and growing food, trees and tree care, and storytelling-through-art. We also found opportunities to integrate the garden and tree care activities that we train and support schoolyard communities on throughout our program.

The second priority we heard from The Lenape Center focused on native “survivance”, an emphasis of the presence, continuance, and endurance of Indigenous peoples. Native survivance is to “create a sense of native presence over absence, nihilism, and victimry.” (Vizenor, 2008) Since the Lenape diaspora

includes five federally recognized nations in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Ontario, our National Schoolyards Initiative, including our newest Tribal Schoolyards program, has the potential to speak not only to the Lenape culture indigenous to this region, as revealed through the very maps of New York City from Canarsie to Inwood Park, but also to connect schoolyard teachings across the Lenape diaspora. We heard from the Lenape Center that survivance also means reading and speaking the Lenape language, a vital piece of protecting a Lenape culture. We will gratefully rely on the incredible [Lenape Talking Dictionary](#), with a special emphasis on words that help us connect to nature, express gratitude, ask questions, and join together.

“Native Scholar Greg Cajete has written that in Indigenous ways of knowing we understand a thing only when we understand it with all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit.” (Kimmerer, 2013). In this guide, we aim to include inroads for all four of these ways of knowing in each schoolyard activity, beginning with an experiential “five minute feel” to ground us in the emotional experience of being connected to nature with presence, awe, or wonder. Each activity also includes a sensory exploration, a movement activity or game, an introduction to a relevant Lenape story including vocabulary in Lenape, and a way to share and connect with nature and each other. We believe that the outdoor schoolyard classroom is perfectly suited as a place to joyfully explore indigenous wisdom because, as often emphasized by Native elders, Haki, our Earth, is our greatest, original teacher.

We’ve incorporated some of these teachings in our [annual schoolyard Stewardship Workshop](#), and received an enthusiastic response from our schoolyard communities that they’re eager to learn more. So many teachers are experiencing burnout and frustration from the test-heavy, Eurocentric education model that often keeps them indoors, bound to requirements and offered less time for play and connection to themselves and others.

Lenape teachings not only enrich our environmental education teachings, they also center our community work in values of compassion. In *Myth of the Purchase of Manhattan*, Joe Baker, Hadrien Coumans, and Chelsea Kimura remind us of the 8 Lenape laws that “have proven to be all the more relevant as a solution to mitigate our existential threat in the looming climate catastrophe”, Each lesson in this curriculum centers one of the following laws.:

1. Everything in nature has a spirit, and should be given thanks, gifted and asked permission before taking from it.

2. Take care of our Mother Earth
3. Mother Earth gives us all we need to live.
4. We are all relatives. Respect all relations.
5. Take care of our relatives.
6. Think good thoughts when we speak.
7. Everyone has an ability to heal.
8. Don't be greedy. Do not take more than necessary to live.

These lessons are not only being taught across Lenapehoking, but they will also be adapted to other Tribal Lands in our Community Schoolyards program.

We're especially excited to adapt these lessons to TPL's emergent Tribal Schoolyards program. Jan Santry, the program's Director says, "We are quickly learning that Tribal schoolyards are seeking culturally significant structures like longhouse classrooms, woven sunshades crafted by Indigenous artists, restored meadows and places for students to dig, build, and create outside. Design infused with arts and culture will deepen knowledge of Native languages and customs. Edible landscapes will help to revitalize ancestral foodways. And natural climate solutions, like trees and rain gardens, will buffer communities on the frontlines from flooding, heat waves, and drought." We hope these lessons will enrich long-term activation and learning in these Tribal Community-designed spaces.

Enjoy these lessons and please let us know how you use them!